

# Mental Health Challenges Facing Military Veterans

Earlier this fall, the Veterans Outreach Program hosted a continuing education webinar for New York-area social workers and other clinicians, designed to enhance their understanding of the mental health challenges facing military veterans. The webinar included a presentation by Dr. Lauren D'Mello, Executive Director of Community Mental Health for New York City's Department of Veteran Services, followed by a panel discussion,

"The main focus of the webinar was to educate our provider partners in the community—particularly those who work with veterans—on the unique mental health issues facing veterans," explains Contessa, Director of the Veterans Outreach Program. "At the same time, we're making providers aware of our program and how it can support their patients."

As valuable as this type of community outreach is, Contessa's team spends the bulk of their time working individually with veterans who have been admitted to programs including Home Care, Hospice, Personal Care, Care Management and Health Plans—in all, well over 1,000 veterans and their families each year. The program is available to anyone who served in the military, and our clinicians are encouraged to refer any eligible patient in their care.

"Our goal is to improve the overall quality of life for veterans and their families," says Contessa, who is a military veteran

herself. “That includes making sure veterans are getting the care they need, and connecting them with all the veteran’s benefits due them.” Most veterans who enter our care have never applied for VA benefits, she adds. “They and their families are often surprised at the many types of support available to them, which can include financial assistance. Our team helps them navigate the VA system and apply for these benefits.”

The Veterans Outreach Program also connects veterans to behavioral health care services and helps them and their families link with other resources as well. In addition, as part of its community outreach, the program cultivates relationships with a wide range of local organizations, including New York City’s Department of Veteran Services and numerous community-based organizations that advocate for veterans.

“Anyone who works with veterans is a potential partner of ours,” says Contessa. “We want everyone to know that VNS Health is a veteran-centric organization, and that we’re here to help.”

*\*The patient’s name has been changed for privacy.*