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CONTACT

Lara Cooper

lara@cstrategies.com

USDA Recognizes VNA Health Care for Excellent Breastfeeding Support

At visit to Aurora clinic, USDA presented VNA with Gold Breastfeeding Award of Excellence

Aurora, IL - Today, the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) awarded VNA Health Care the WIC Breastfeeding Gold Award of Excellence. Agencies who receive the gold award demonstrate excellence in breastfeeding practices and support. VNA is one of only four Illinois clinics earning this recognition this year.

VNA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women; infants; and children under five years old by providing breastfeeding support, nutritious foods to supplement diets, nutrition counseling, referrals to health care, and more. VNA has built its program based on inclusivity, outreach, and compassionate expertise. Housing two peer counselors, two International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) and three Certified Lactation Specialists (CLSs) who desire to educate and support the breastfeeding moms of their community, the clinic has a current caseload of about 4,500 people in southern Kane County. In the third quarter of 2023, 11.2% of infants served at VNA locations were exclusively breastfeeding infants, compared to the statewide average of 10.1%.

"We are honored to be recognized by the USDA for this work! Breastfeeding has many important benefits for infants and their parents and we look forward to continuing to provide this critical support for our clients," said VNA President and CEO Linnea Windel.

USDA-FNS Midwest Region Supplemental Nutrition Division Director Nancy Ranieri and Illinois Department of Human Services WIC Director Stephanie Bess visited VNA's Highland Avenue clinic in Aurora today to present the award to staff and leadership. They toured the VNA facility and heard from clients who had received breastfeeding support from VNA.

"USDA celebrates VNA Health Care for an exemplary breastfeeding program with the Gold Award in Breastfeeding Excellence," said Nancy Ranieri, USDA-FNS Midwest Region Supplemental Nutrition Division Director. "Breastfeeding has been shown to improve the lives of infants and children as they grow, and breastfeeding support is an important part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This award celebrates the impressive work done by VNA Health Care in guiding individuals through their breastfeeding journeys."

Each year, the USDA recognizes organizations nationwide who have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, exemplary processes in breastfeeding support and education with the goal of motivating local agencies to bolster their own programs in order to increase the rates of initiation and duration of breastfeeding among WIC participants.

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About VNA Health Care

VNA Health Care is the largest Community Health Center (also known as a Federally Qualified Health Center) in suburban Chicago. VNA provides care for more than 75,000 patients annually and is committed to improving health equity and decreasing disparities. VNA has served people regardless of insurance status or ability to pay for more than 100 years and 2022 marked its 20th Anniversary as a Community Health Center. To learn more, visit www.vnahealth.com.