



A monthly newsletter dedicated to informing and strengthening the VA Research Community - October 2021

Message from the CRADO

Dear VA Research Community,

This year, the [Million Veteran Program](#) (MVP) is celebrating its 10th anniversary. If you have not heard of it, MVP is a ground-breaking research program that uses genetic, electronic health record, and demographic information to understand how genes affect health and illness. MVP is a marvelous example of what we can do when we act as an enterprise. It is one of the largest genetic research programs in the world, and since its launch in 2011, it has enrolled more than 850,000 Veteran volunteers. This feat has only been possible because of the incredible willingness of Veterans to volunteer, as well as the collaboration among VA researchers, clinicians, and administrative staff across the country. Together, our goal is to reach 1 million volunteers by Veterans Day 2022.



One of MVP's key strengths is the size and diversity of the volunteer pool. About 25% of MVP participants are nonwhite. Because MVP reflects the demographics of our Veterans, only 9% of volunteers-to-date have identified as women. We are working hard to increase the number of women Veterans represented in MVP by launching a women's campaign, and several women in VA leadership lent their support. Since the launch of that campaign, MVP has enrolled 3,000 new women. You may have seen one of the many engaging blogs and social media ads the MVP team has created, such as [this one](#).

More than 300 VA researchers are accessing MVP data. This has led to more than 65 studies published in high-impact journals. For example, an [MVP study](#) led by Dr. Dan Levey of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System shed light on the genetic basis of anxiety. This study was picked up by multiple mainstream news outlets, including [CNN](#).

MVP also has huge potential to bridge gaps that exist in racial and ethnic minority populations and make research relevant across the board. MVP recently launched a custom-designed tool that promises to speed breakthroughs to benefit Black and Hispanic Veterans, as well as other groups typically underrepresented in genetic research. Researchers have



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developed a “[DNA chip](#)” to test for more than 750,000 genetic variants, including over 300,000 that are more common in minority populations. The tool will help VA researchers learn more about health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease in diverse groups, and to develop targeted treatments.

Like many studies of all sizes, MVP enrollment has been impacted by the pandemic. Fortunately, just before the onset of the pandemic, they had launched an [online enrollment](#) pilot. In addition to making the program more resilient, it opens up opportunities for Veterans who don’t live close to one of the scores of enrollment sites to participate. While the online enrollment portal continues to pick up steam, nearly all in-person enrollment sites are back to welcoming new volunteers.

We know that Veterans volunteered so that researchers could make discoveries that benefit the broader population of Veterans. A key step in fully realizing that commitment is to enable a broad range of qualified researchers to analyze MVP data. From the listening sessions ORD conducted across the country a few years back, I know that VA researchers are eager to be a part of that. Here in ORD, we have been laying the groundwork to increase access to MVP data, while still protecting Veterans’ personal information. We’ve also been working to make the data more research-ready by launching [CIPHER](#), VA’s centralized phenomics library, which has tools to facilitate data curation.

MVP does all of this without losing sight of the mission to improve care for Veterans. Building a pipeline to translate MVP research into clinical practice is a priority in FY2022.

I’ll close by offering my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Sumitra Muralidhar, MVP director, along with the many, many teammates who are part of the MVP community. As MVP shows, there is no limit to what we can accomplish together.

Sincerely,

Rachel

Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD
Chief Research and Development Officer (14RD)
Department of Veterans Affairs



Policy/Admin Updates

Clinical trial application deadline— For investigators interested in submitting a clinical trial application for the spring 2022 review round, an approved letter of intent (LOI) is required. The LOI deadline is Nov. 1, 2021. They must be submitted by the local research office to clin-review@va.gov. Instructions and templates for clinical trial LOIs are located on the ORD resources [website](#).

Nonprofit corporation report—Eighty VA-affiliated nonprofit research and education corporations (NPCs) have submitted reports to Congress about their 2020 activities. Over the past 10 years, after paying their own administrative expenses, the NPCs have administered \$2.4 billion of VA research funds brought in by VA researchers. The NPCs employed 2,500 people, supported 2,100 principal investigators, and administered 3,700 research projects. NPCs began 304 cooperative research and development agreements in 2020.

VAIRRS News

Below are updates concerning the VA Innovation and Research Review System ([VAIRRS](#)).

CITI Integration Update + VAIRRS Wizard Completion Campaign—VAIRRS has achieved Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) integration across 101 different VA medical centers, leaving just seven sites to be completed. This process enables researchers to link their IRBNet profiles to CITI, where their completed trainings are available. Once sites have completed trainings at VA, they are pulled in and automatically accepted on a nightly basis.

For more information, visit the "[Link to CITI Account](#)" [guide](#)" on the VAIRRS SharePoint site.

As VAIRRS 2.0 ramps up, the upcoming phase of the VAIRRS program involves leveraging the dataset and continuous training. So far, over 4,700 project cover sheets have been completed for about 25% of active projects. The VAIRRS team asks that you help close the gap by completing the project cover sheet for all active and new studies by Dec. 15, 2021.



Resources and Opportunities

Research in Action call for submissions—All VA research is intended to ultimately contribute to the health and well-being of Veterans. VA [Research in Action](#) highlights examples of how VA research has been translated into everyday health care within VHA or in medical care generally.

We are looking for VA projects to highlight, from recent years or from a historical perspective, that have had substantial, lasting impact on health care within VA or across the country and globe. If you know of a VA accomplishment—from your VAMC or elsewhere—that you think would be a good candidate for this feature, please contact Tristan.horrom@va.gov with details.



Vets First Podcast—The VA Iowa [Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Vision Loss](#) has kicked off season 2 of the [Vets First Podcast](#). Vets First is a research-based podcast that focuses on the VA health care system and its patients. The hosts, Dr. Levi Sowers and Brandon Rea, work to bridge the gap between the state-of-the-art research being performed at VA and the Veterans themselves in an easy-to-understand manner. They interview doctors, experts, private organizations, and Veterans covering topics such as blind Veterans, PTSD, addiction, and mental health. Past episodes of season 1 are also available for those interested in listening.

CHERP seeks associate director in Pittsburgh—The Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion ([CHERP](#)) is seeking a new associate director for the Pittsburgh site. A key member of the local and cross-site leadership teams, the associate director provides scientific and administrative leadership of the Center, mentors post-doctoral fellows and junior investigators, facilitates partnered research and collaborations with academic affiliates and community organizations, and responds to special projects and inquiries from VA Central Office and operational partners, while advancing an independent VA research program. Interested candidates are invited to submit a CV and letter of interest to Michael.Fine@va.gov and Mary.Walsh3@va.gov.

New CIPHER web page available—A new [web page](#) for VA's Centralized Interactive Phenomics Resource (CIPHER) is now available on the VA Research website. CIPHER is a catalog and knowledge-sharing platform of VA electronic health record-based phenotype algorithms, definitions, and metadata that aims to optimize Veterans' health data, drive collaborative research, and improve clinical operations. The web page contains information on the program and links to help researchers contribute to and access the platform.

Employment

- (10/08/21) [Project Manager \(VA-DOD Study\)](#)- Seattle, WA
- (09/30/21) [Health Science Research Specialist/Coordinator for VA-DOD Study](#)- Seattle, WA
- (09/29/21) [Project Manager](#)- Hines, IL
- (09/29/21) [Quality Management Specialist](#)- Hines, IL
- (09/27/21) [Research staff positions \(Women's Health Sciences Division \(WHSD\) of the National Center for PTSD\)](#)- Boston, MA
- (09/23/21) [Health Sciences Research Assistant/Research Coordinator, Core Team](#)- Seattle, WA
- (09/21/21) [Assistant/Associate/Full Professor \(Geriatrics\)](#)- Durham, NC
- (09/20/21) [Program Specialist - IRB](#)- Hines, IL
- (09/20/21) [Health Science Officer](#)- Location Negotiable After Selection, United States
- (09/13/21) [Detail Opportunity for Research Administrator](#)- Washington, DC

More VA Research opportunities can be seen on the [ORD website](#). Members of the VA Research community who are interested in advertising their available positions here can submit requests to ORD.Web@va.gov.



Noteworthy Publications

Below is a small sampling of noteworthy studies published by VA researchers within the past month. This list is intended to reflect the broad spectrum of VA research, but is in no way inclusive of all VA researcher topics or projects. Visit the [VACO Library](#) website to sign up for alerts on published VA studies on many different topics.

[Efficacy and safety of baricitinib for the treatment of hospitalised adults with COVID-19 \(COV-BARRIER\): A randomised, double-blind, parallel-group, placebo-controlled phase 3 trial.](#) Marconi VC, Ramanan AV, de Bono S, Kartmen CKrishnan V, Liao R, Piruzeli ML et al. Although there was no significant reduction in the frequency of disease progression overall, treatment with baricitinib in addition to standard care had a similar safety profile to standard care alone, and was associated with reduced mortality in hospitalized adults with COVID-19. *The Lancet. Respiratory Medicine*. 2021 Aug 31. Online ahead of print.

[Prognostic value of polygenic risk scores for adults with psychosis.](#) Landi I, Kaji DA, Cotter L, Van Vleck T, Belbin G, Preuss M Loos RJ, Kenny E et al. Schizophrenia polygenic risk score did not improve the performance of predictive models. *Nature Medicine*. 2021 Sep;27(9):1576-1581.

[Effectiveness of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine among U.S. health care personnel.](#) Pilishvili T, Gierke R, Fleming-Dutra KE, Farrar JL, Mohr NM, Talan DA, Krishnadasan A et al. The mRNA vaccines were highly effective under real-world conditions in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 in health care personnel. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Sep 22. Online ahead of print.

[New creatinine- and cystatin C-based equations to estimate GFR without race.](#) Inker LA, Eneanya ND, Coresh J, Tighiouart H, Wang D, Sang Y, Crews DC et al. New eGFR equations for estimating kidney function that incorporate creatinine and cystatin C but omit race are more accurate and led to smaller differences between Black and non-Black participants than new equations without race that used either alone. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2021 Sep 23. Online ahead of print.

[Prognosis associated with luminal and basal subtypes of metastatic prostate cancer.](#) Aggarwal R, Rydzewski NR, Zhang L, Foye A, Kim W, Helzer KT, Bakhtiar H et al. Metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancers can be classified as luminal and basal tumors, which helps suggest the best courses of treatment. *JAMA Oncology*. 2021 Sep 23. Online ahead of print.

[Global, regional, and national burden of stroke and its risk factors, 1990-2019: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019.](#) GBD 2019 Stroke Collaborators. The annual number of strokes and deaths due to stroke increased substantially from 1990 to 2019. The highest death rates were in low-income areas. The fastest-growing risk factor for stroke was high body mass index. *The Lancet. Neurology*. 2021 Oct;20(10):795-820.

[Haemodynamic-guided management of heart failure \(GUIDE-HF\): A randomized controlled trial.](#) Lindenfeld JoAnn, Zile MR, Desai AS, Bhatt K, Ducharme A, Horstmanshof D, Krim A et al. Hemodynamic-guided management of heart failure did not result in a lower composite endpoint rate of mortality and total heart failure events. However, impact analysis indicated a possible benefit, primarily driven by lower hospitalization rates. *The Lancet*. 2021 Sep 11;398(10304):991-1001.



Media Buzz

Social Media Highlights

- On Sept. 15, the main VA Twitter account tweeted to its over 600,000 followers about a VA study that showed meditation can effectively help treat PTSD.



A VA study has found course of loving kindness meditation was just as effective as one of VA's front-line treatments for treating PTSD.



blogs.va.gov

Loving kindness meditation proves effective for PTSD - Vantage Point

A VA study has found course of loving kindness meditation was just as effective as one of VA's front-line treatments for treating PTSD.

4:30 PM · Sep 15, 2021 · Salesforce - Social Studio

23 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 49 Likes

If you would like to submit a post to go on the VA Research Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram pages, please do so via email at ORDMedia@va.gov.

Please include the following information:

- Desired platform: Facebook, Twitter (240 character max), or Instagram
- Post content
- Image

- [Link](#)

After the above are submitted, the request will be forwarded to the ORD Communications team for approval and scheduling. Posts may also be added to a library of potential stories to be picked up by other VA social media accounts, such as the main VA pages.

VA Research in the News

“[Two meds better than one for many with high blood pressure: Study](#)” from *U.S. News & World Report* on Oct. 5 gives the results of a study of more than 178,000 VA patients with high blood pressure. Researchers found that taking two smaller doses of blood pressure medication a day led to slightly larger reductions in blood pressure, compared with taking one large dose. However, patients were more likely to adhere to their medication when only taking one dose a day. Both courses of medication led to lower blood pressure. The study was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Research Photo of the Month



Veterans receive battlefield acupuncture treatment at the Washington DC Medical Center. An eye mask and soothing music in the background help create a relaxing environment. A [recent VA study](#) discusses the promise and challenges of the treatment. (Photo by Robert Turtill)

Do you have photos of VA researchers in action or interesting science images from your lab? Share them with us! Send your photos to ORD *Field Update* editor Tristan Horrom at tristan.horrom@va.gov.



Upcoming Events

- The next ORD Monthly Field Call will be held on **Oct. 18, 2021**, at 1:30 EST on Microsoft Teams.



Achievements and Milestones

We are looking for VA researchers who served in the military to feature in a series called [VA Researchers Who Served](#). The profiles explain the critical work that VA researchers do for the Veteran community and at the same time highlight and recognize their military service.

If you know a VA researcher who would be a good candidate for this series, please contact Mike Richman (Michael.richman1@va.gov).

Awards

Dr. Ron Triolo name DAV's Outstanding VHA Employee—Dr. Ron Triolo, executive director of the Advanced Platform Technology Center at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center in Ohio, was [named](#) the Veterans Health Administration Employee of the Year by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) for his work in restoring movement and sensation for Veterans with paralysis and limb loss. This award honors VA employees whose actions are exceptional examples of DAV's core values of service, quality, integrity, and leadership. "Dr. Triolo's scientific work is as charitable as it is revolutionary," said DAV National Commander Stephen "Butch" Whitehead. "He's a pioneer in the field of the development of systems that allow individuals with spinal cord injury, stroke, or multiple sclerosis not only to stand again, but to thrive." The winners were formally recognized on Aug. 1 during the 2021 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Tampa, Florida.

Dr. John Blosnich earns NIH Director's Innovation Award—A research health scientist with HSR&D's [Center for Health Equity and Promotion](#), Dr. **John Blosnich** received the National Institutes of Health Director's [New Innovator Award](#) from the NIH Common Fund's [High-Risk, High-Reward Research program](#). The award, of \$1.5 million disbursed in the first year of the 5-year project period, "supports **exceptionally creative early career investigators** who propose innovative, high-impact projects in the biomedical, behavioral, or social sciences within the NIH mission." The specific goal of Dr. Blosnich's proposal is to shift the paradigm of suicide prevention research by prioritizing social determinants through broad but strategic partnerships with industries outside of mental health care.

History Corner



Groundbreaking heart surgeon—Few Americans have had as great an impact on heart care as Dr. Michael E. DeBakey (1908–2008). The top surgery consultant for the Army during World War II, DeBakey led or played a major role in the development of many life-saving surgical techniques and devices, including open-heart surgery, arterial grafts, and the artificial heart. He also helped develop the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, or MASH, and helped lay the groundwork for the expansion of VA research after World War II. One medical historian described him as the greatest physician of the 20th century. The VA medical center in Houston, Texas, is named in DeBakey’s honor.

Anyone interested in receiving general news updates about VA research is invited to [sign up](#) for our VA Research Currents and VA Research Spotlight monthly emails.



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