

Learn more about the CHOIR Veteran Engagement in Research Group (VERG) initiative.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please email Alexis at Mary.Greenan@va.gov

Developing community partnerships to advance equitable, patient-centered care for Black Veterans



CHOIR seeks to address health inequities for Black Veterans through Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), a collaborative approach that involves community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process.

Ms. Anna Barker and Dr. Renda Wiener are currently leading efforts to develop partnerships between CHOIR and local community organizations that serve Black Veterans, building mutual trust and commitment that is crucial for the success of CBPR. Their project aims to develop the infrastructure needed for future CHOIR CBPR focusing on improvement of equity and patient-centeredness in VA care for Black Veterans. The project team is in the process of conducting outreach visits with potential partners to:

- Learn about potential partner's mission and community served
- Share information about CHOIR and its mission
- Brainstorm how CHOIR can help meet needs through research

If you or your organization are interested in hearing more about these efforts, please contact Anna Barker (anna.barker@va.gov) and Renda Wiener (renda.wiener@va.gov).

Stakeholder Council December 2022 meeting highlights

The Stakeholder Council provides valuable feedback that can help inform CHOIR's strategic priorities, map new directions for CHOIR research, and ensure our work is relevant to the Veteran communities they serve.

- We welcomed many members of our Stakeholder Council to the first in-person meeting we have had since 2019! It was great to see those who could make it in person as well as those who participated virtually.
- Stakeholders discussed some of the issues they are seeing that need attention, including lack of awareness among community-based agencies about the services and resources that VA offers. Participants also noted concerns about important VA programs and services that may not be implemented as intended, such as Whole Health Coaching. Feedback regarding training and preparation for Whole Health peer coaches was important for quality improvement.
- We learned of some great programs/events in the community including the Expiration Term of Service (ETS) project and an upcoming 20-year reunion for OEF1 Veterans at Fort Bragg.
- Stakeholders provided feedback on a new grant aiming to advance equitable, patient-centered care for Black Veterans and suggested organizations and people for CHOIR to partner with.

Anyone interested in getting involved with the Stakeholders Council should contact Katelyn Marchany (katelyn.marchany@va.gov). See full meeting highlights for more details: [VERG December 2021 Highlights \(va.gov\)](#)

Subcommittee updates

Evaluation Subcommittee

The Evaluation Committee is reaching out to CHOIR research teams that recently submitted grants to confirm details related to Veteran compensation, successful grant funding, and Veteran engagement in research. Look for an email from Eileen Dryden (eileen.dryden@va.gov) with more information.

Best Practices Subcommittee

The Best Practices Committee organizes periodic small events – like lunch & learn sessions – to share what we have learned about Veteran engagement in research, from pragmatic to conceptual. Anyone interested in getting involved should contact Justeen Hyde (justeen.hyde@va.gov) & Anna Barker (anna.barker@va.gov).

Veteran Consultant Network (VCN)

The 7th VCN Research Conference was held on September 29th, where investigators Deborah Gurewich, Westyn Branch-Elliman, and Paul Monach presented research ideas for input from Veteran consultants.

The VCN is actively recruiting for Veteran consultants! Please contact Shawn Dunlap (shawn.dunlap@va.gov) if you are or know a Veteran who would like to learn more.

Spotlight on VCN Engagement

The Veterans Consultant Network (VCN) is an ongoing initiative of VA CHOIR's Veterans Engagement in Research Group (VERG), which allows for local Veterans to provide input and feedback towards upcoming VA research initiatives. Veterans are matched with projects that align with their stated experiences and interests, and they are compensated for their time.

Addressing Social Determinants of Health Among Rural Veterans

During the VCN Research Conference on September 29th, CHOIR Boston researchers requested feedback on a survey about unmet social needs of rural Veterans. Drs. Deborah Gurewich and Ida Griesemer presented the study, and VCN members provided feedback on:

- What social needs are the most relevant for rural Veterans (e.g., transportation, finances)
- The best way to encourage Veterans to complete the survey (both mail and electronic options)
- The benefits of a generic gift card (e.g., Visa card) over a specific store gift card as a thank-you for completing the survey

The research team used VCN members' feedback to make several changes to the survey before it is administered to 2500 rural Veterans this winter.

Dr. Gurewich also worked closely with VCN consultant Bob Bruno who agreed to test the survey and provide more specific consultation. Mr. Bruno met with study team members on October 24th, to provide feedback on his experience of taking the survey including the clarity of the cover letter inviting participation and the clarity of each survey question and response options. Based on Mr. Bruno's feedback, the study team were able to create a more compelling cover letter to Veterans; include additional branches of military service in a multiple-choice answer set; clarify a question about digital access; and expand response options for questions about legal needs to include "prefer not to answer".

Thanks to VCN, Dr. Gurewich and her team were able to improve their survey, which they plan to field in January. Results from the survey will not be available until later in 2023, but they expect a successful response rate thanks in part to VCN consultant feedback.



*Principal Investigator:
Deborah A. Gurewich, PhD*

Working with the Veterans Consultant Network: Making your voice heard



Jonathan Yee, a VA Boston employee and US Marine Corps Veteran, recently took part in a VCN discussion with researchers from the VA Portland Healthcare System who are studying reasons why Veterans may choose to pursue non-VA healthcare (such as community care or private providers) for traumatic brain injury. Mr. Yee stated, "I thought this was a great opportunity to give a Veteran-centric perspective to the Portland team as they get ready to launch their project. VCN is a unique and valuable way for Veterans to ensure that their experiences and points of view are both reflected in VA research projects, and understood by the researchers who run them."

The VCN continues to actively seek Veteran consultants. If you are interested in participating or learning more, contact Shawn Dunlap (shawn.dunlap@va.gov).