



Our CHOIR VERG mission: To engage Veterans as partners to identify, design, implement and disseminate high quality, relevant and trustworthy health services research.

Have feedback or suggestions for the newsletter? Please email Aishwarya Khanna at Aishwarya.khanna@va.gov

VCN research conference



Kelly A. O'Malley
September 30, 2021

Transforming Trauma-informed
Care in VA Community Living
Centers

Following the conference, one Investigator shared that they received appreciative feedback for the work proposed at the conference. This was incredibly moving for the Investigator as that Veteran went on to serve as a regular Veteran consultant on the project. Overall, Investigators appreciated the candor of the Veterans' responses, insight, and humor to move the grant submissions forward. The Veteran Consultant Network Research Conference has been a rewarding experience over the years for both Investigators and Veterans.

Interested in presenting at the next VCN Research Conference?

Email Juliet Wu:
Juliet.wu2@va.gov

The Veterans Consultant Network conducts bi-annual Research Conferences where Investigators have an opportunity to share their grant submission objectives and receive live feedback from Veterans to improve submission materials and streamline grant themes. This Fall, two Research Conferences were held by four Investigators and their teams. Key observations by the Investigators included an appreciation for the multiple experiences shared by the Veterans and gaining Veteran insight in an organized team setting.

Stakeholder council meeting highlights

- Stakeholders shared their priorities for improving Veteran's health and well-being:
 - The MA Department of Veterans Services: suicide prevention/the Governor's Challenge
 - Lowell Vet Center: managing demand, expanding Telehealth access
 - VA Boston Peer Support Specialists: offering military competence training for clinical staff
 - VHA Readjustment Counseling Service Office: innovation, suicide prevention, quality & consistency, talent management, and modernization
- Provided feedback on a new grant idea for the WISDOM Lung Cancer Screening team
[More in the meeting highlights](#)

IN MEMORIAM

Ray Gendreau, Vets Participate co-design team member and US Navy Veteran, enjoyed fishing, playing golf, and rooting for local sports teams. He brought humor to our co-design sessions and never missed an opportunity to show his appreciation for our work. Ray passed away in August 2021. We miss him dearly.

Subcommittee updates

Evaluation subcommittee

We are currently tracking Veteran involvement in grants submitted by CHOIR researchers to look at trends in use of Veteran consultants and subsequent grant outcomes.

Contact: [Eileen Dryden](#)

Best practices subcommittee

Hosted a lunch and learn **Wednesday, Dec. 17**, on *Engaging Veterans in Co-Design*. Slides from this event will be of interest to investigators and staff who have used co-design or are interested in learning strategies to effectively engage Veterans in their work.

Contact: [Lauren Gaj](#)

Stakeholder council

Contact: [Katelyn Marchany](#)

Veteran Consultant Network (VCN)

Two Veterans' Research Conferences have been held this autumn. We have solidified the Veteran payment process, and a new VCN recruitment flyer has been approved for distribution.

Contact: [Juliet Wu](#)

Veteran consultant spotlight: Rich Barbato

One of the many hats Rich Barbato wears in service to his fellow Veterans is councilmember at the VERG Stakeholder Council Meetings. The Ipswich, MA native offers his unique lens as an Army Veteran, social worker, and VA employee to the research projects presented. Read more about his experience and perspective:

What has been your personal highlight of working with the VERG Stakeholder Council?

Seeing the physical reaction of the researchers when the Veteran perspective is pulled in – knowing that the feedback is valued, that it's caused them to take a step back and look at what they've done and what they're working on in a different manner is tremendously beneficial for me. Seeing that there is impact, it's valued, and it's not just spinning the wheels or checking the box.

What is the value, for Veterans and researchers, of engaging Veterans in research?

I think most Veterans want to be part of the solution. It is ingrained in us from day one that selfless service is where it's at. When you take the uniform off, you're asking folks to transition from selfless servers to self-serving individuals, and that's a big leap. So, getting Veterans to help with the cultural side, to make sure things factor in aspects that, unless you've had that lived experience, it's hard to know – Veterans want to be part of it. The more that you do that, the better things are when programs and benefits are rolled out. [For researchers] just because you get something past the Institutional Review Board (IRB), doesn't mean you'll get it past the [Veteran] community. If you try to bring something into the community and you do it in the wrong way or something is phrased in a way that might be offensive, but you might not know that because of lack of military cultural competency, that is an opportunity to get Veterans involved. We're all in this together, we all want to help our nation's Veterans.



Rich, left, raiding a site with suspected weapons of mass destruction in Karbala, Iraq.



Rich at his old unit at Fort Bragg doing Veteran outreach for VHA RCS / Vet Center.

Interested in becoming a Veteran Consultant? Contact Shawn Dunlap at Shawn.Dunlap@va.gov to learn more!

Happening elsewhere in Veteran engagement



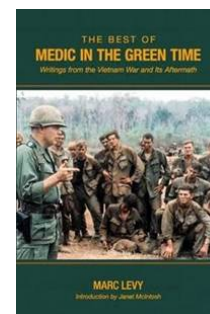
Dr. True and part of the research team at a photovoice exhibit.

Down in New Orleans, our colleagues have engaged Veterans on a participatory action research study that used photovoice to explore and convey experiences of community reintegration after traumatic brain injury (TBI). Their work was recently published in the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*.

Over the course of several years, Dr. Gala True and her research team partnered with 45 Veterans with TBI and 26 of their family caregivers. As co-researchers, they participated in most phases of the study, including the generation of knowledge by documenting, reflecting on, and communicating their experiences through photos; the identification of themes in the data; and the dissemination of findings.

A participant-identified priority is to raise awareness about TBI among Veterans and military caregivers. As such, the research team has developed a traveling exhibit that includes photo narratives from every contributing Veteran and caregiver. [Read more about this study.](#)

Featured reading



The VCN Book Group will be reading [The Best of Medic in the Green Time: Writings from the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath](#). Sessions will be held monthly December – February, with the next meeting Dec. 14, 5 – 6 p.m. To join, to get copies of the reading materials, or to learn more about future meetings, email Anna.Barker@va.gov.