

Our CHOIR VERG mission: To engage Veterans as partners to identify, design, implement and disseminate high quality, relevant and trustworthy health services research. [Learn more!](#)

Welcome to our first issue!

Veteran Engagement in Research



Welcome to the inaugural newsletter for the VA CHOIR Veteran Engagement in Research Group! We envision this newsletter as an accessible, concise, and easy-to-digest quarterly update on Veteran Engagement activities going on here at Boston, Bedford, and beyond. Among other things, the newsletter will highlight major stories of interest, spotlight some of our active Veteran Consultants, share updates from the CHOIR Veteran Engagement Stakeholder Council meetings, and more.

One of our core goals is to be inclusive of, and responsive to, community feedback. Is there something (or someone) you think should be spotlighted in the newsletter? A feature or type of news that you would like to see? Please email your suggestions to [Chitra Anwar](#), our newsletter point of contact.

We look forward to bringing you more news about VERG and Veteran Engagement across the VA, in the coming months!

Stakeholder Meeting Highlights

- Our most recent meeting focused on COVID and its impact on Veteran populations, both inside and outside VA.
- CHOIR researchers are leading 16 new studies on the impact of the novel coronavirus on Veterans, providers, and the VA health care system as a whole. There was a research spotlight on a study looking at COVID vaccine hesitancy.
- Stakeholder Council members provided feedback on ways COVID has impacted their work and made suggestions on how to address vaccine hesitancy in the Veteran community.

[Read more notes from the stakeholder meeting.](#)

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

We recently held our second ever Best Practices event, which featured a panel of research teams sharing their experiences working with Veteran consultants. The team is currently in the process of planning our next event.

Contact: [Lauren Gaj](#)

Stakeholder Council

Our last meeting focused on the impact of COVID on Veteran's health, including new research into vaccine hesitancy. Our next meeting is scheduled for summer 2021.

Contact: [Katelyn Marchany](#)

Veteran Consultant Network (VCN)

The VCN Veterans' Research Conference was held in April, where Drs. Gemmae Fix, and Drs. Lynn Garvin and Keith McInnes presented their grant ideas for input from Veteran consultants. The VCN is also working on ways to build a diverse network and is open to your suggestions and input.

Contact: [Juliet Wu](#)

Veteran Consultant Spotlight: Dave Crocker

As a Veteran Consultant on four research projects, Dave Crocker is pretty busy. The former Navy electronics technician is involved in research projects examining shared decision making in lung cancer screening, penicillin allergy validity, community care billing issues, and the value added when Veteran Consultants are on research teams. Through these projects, Dave contributes his unique perspective to the development of proposals, interview guides, and promotional materials. Read more about Dave's experiences:

What motivated you to participate in the Veteran Consultant Network?

I'm an engineer by education and so I like technical things. I have a fairly extensive background as a participant on a number of different research studies, so I thought this was a unique opportunity to see research from the other side of the table. It also gave me an opportunity to be of service to others, which is important to me.

What have you enjoyed about your experience?

The ability to explore deeper than I normally would by myself, specific subject areas that are of interest to me. One of the nice things is you can choose to say no if you're asked to be a consultant, and you go back on the waiting list for the next project to come up.

What would you tell other Veterans interested in becoming a Veteran Consultant?

You get to meet and interact with a very diverse and experienced group of individuals. Some are Veterans, some aren't. Lots of different backgrounds and experiences, just interesting people. And you're there for a common reason, the project that you're on, so you've got a focal point. It's nice to have that interaction—community, I guess, would be one term I would use. That feels good.



Dave during his Navy days.



Dave and his wife, Vivian, in Maine.

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

Happening Elsewhere in Veteran Engagement

Our Milwaukee colleagues are also collaborating with Veterans. Their decade-long work was recently highlighted in a special issue of the [Journal of Humanistic Psychology](#) on Veterans' health and well-being (Franco 2020).

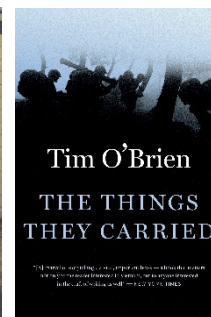
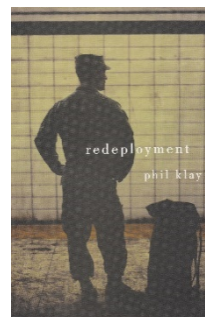
The work of Dr. Jeff Whittle, a physician and investigator at the Milwaukee VA, is included in the article. He has partnered with [Dryhootch](#), a nonprofit organization formed by combat Veterans to help Veterans in their return home, since 2010. First, he helped them to collect data from Veterans about the community services they would like and the reasons they may not engage with VA-based services; they prepared a report that was shared with stakeholders. Now Dryhootch is actively engaged with VA

programs to provide peer support, readjustment support, legal help, family support and more. Read about this and other Milwaukee programs in the [linked article](#).



Civilian mental health providers receiving experiential education on the experiences of active duty military during Wisconsin Operation Immersion at Fort McCoy. Photo courtesy of the Dryhootch Partnership for Veteran Health.

Featured Reading



The VCN Book Club is currently reading *The Things They Carried* and *Redeployment*. Book groups are held monthly on the 3rd Thursday, February – May, from 5:00pm – 6:00pm EST. To join, or to learn more about future VCN book club meetings, email Abby Herbst at Abigail.herbst@va.gov.