

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

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please email Hannah Bailey (Hannah.Bailey2@va.gov).

C2CARE Progress: developing community partnerships to advance equitable, patient-centered care for Black Veterans.

Since the [January newsletter update](#), the C2CARE (CHOIR-Community Collaborative to Advance Research Equity) project team has made progress and are well on their way toward setting up an infrastructure to develop research partnerships with community organizations that serve Black Veterans. The project team has been working with key informants to develop a vision for the collaborative. The approach to working together entails:

- Regular meetings throughout the year to discuss topics of importance to Black Veterans, as prioritized by the collaborative.
- Leaders from relevant community organizations will be matched with CHOIR investigators who also have experience with the topic.
- The collaborative will guide and support these partners as they pursue research funding.

Topics important to key informants include mental health and suicide prevention, educating VA clinical teams about Black Veteran culture, and ensuring access to preventative care such as cancer screenings. The team will brainstorm research opportunities for these topics and many more as the collaborative progresses.

Several weeks ago, CHOIR research teams met and provided feedback on C2CARE. This feedback is being incorporated into a draft charter for C2CARE, which will soon be returned to the development team. The first meeting of this group is tentatively scheduled for October 2023.

If you know of an organization or individual in the community who is involved in improving healthcare for Black Veterans, please give them the contact information for the C2CARE team. Their input would be greatly appreciated in the following areas: the collaborative's structure, who should be involved, and research priorities. C2CARE is also looking for organizations to join the collaborative and/or consider partnerships on future research.

Please contact Anna Barker (Anna.Barker@va.gov) and Renda Wiener (Renda.Wiener@va.gov) for more information.

2023 CHOIR Picnic

This year's CHOIR Picnic took place on July 14th on the Bedford VA campus. A potluck lunch and a CHOIR-created Art Exhibit encouraged folks within the department to share their culture, background, heritage, and identity. VERG members were in attendance!



CHOIR staff and Veterans gather for a group photo at the 2023 annual CHOIR Picnic.



Picnic-goers were encouraged to decorate CHOIR signs by adding a handprint or design over black tape letters, later removed to reveal the outline.

Spotlight on March 2023 VCN Research Conference and June 2023 Stakeholder Council

VCN Research Conference

The bi-annual Veterans Consultant Network (VCN) Research Conference spanned two sessions this Spring. Several CHOIR researchers presented their work and received feedback from Veterans during the second session on April 11th.

Dr. Karen Mitchell and **Dr. Kelly Harrington** discussed diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders (EDs) within the VHA. Veterans' experience indicated a need for medical teams to include primary care and mental health providers, as well as a nutritionist to accurately address the underlying factors. Other recommendations included questionnaires on dietary habits and the use of newsletters for dissemination of educational information.

Dr. Terri Pogoda engaged conference participants in a discussion about her grant proposal, which aims to examine the question "Are Veterans who have diagnosed traumatic brain injury and/or posttraumatic stress disorder concerned that employment will impact benefits?" Discussions indicated that there is a lack of transparency in how service-connected disability ratings are assigned by the VBA. Veterans also discussed the importance of disability compensation when annual and sick leave is exhausted. The discussion highlighted that researchers must communicate to Veterans involved in research that participation will not impact service-connected disability ratings.

Stakeholder Council June 2023 Meeting Highlights

The Stakeholder Council provides valuable feedback to help inform CHOIR's strategic priorities, map new directions for CHOIR research, and ensure work is relevant to the Veteran communities we serve. See [full meeting highlights](#) for more details.

- We welcomed a new member, David Duren!
- Dr. Amy Rosen provided an overview of her research comparing quality of care between VA and Community Care.
- The Stakeholder Council had an insightful conversation on quality of care. Members shared the word "quality" is often conflated with access. However, they are distinct: Many Veterans are confident in the *quality* of care they receive, but don't have the opportunity to *access* it as often or as easily as they would like.
- Stakeholders recommended examining how information about quality and access is communicated. They also advised focusing on military cultural competence, providing education on the VA and services available, and empowering Veterans to be self-advocates for their care.

VERG Subcommittee updates

Stakeholder Council: The Stakeholder Council last met on June 14th and plan to meet again in the Fall. Contact Katelyn Marchany (Katelyn.Marchany@va.gov) for additional information or to get involved.

Evaluation Subcommittee: The Evaluation Committee is currently analyzing data on Veteran engagement in CHOIR research grants and considering various next steps for our committee. If you are interested in joining the Evaluation Committee or have questions, please contact Eileen Dryden (Eileen.Dryden@va.gov).

Best Practices Subcommittee: The Best Practices subcommittee is reviving and going to meet in mid-September. Contact Justeen Hyde (Justeen.Hyde@va.gov), Anna Barker (Anna.Barker@va.gov), and Alexandra Howard (Alexandra.Howard@va.gov) for more information.

Veteran Consultant Network (VCN): The 10th VCN Veterans' Research Conference is planned for early October - please contact us if interested. Please also contact Shawn Dunlap (Shawn.Dunlap@va.gov) if you are or know a Veteran who would like to learn more about becoming a Veteran consultant!

