

2015-2020

VA Health Services Research and Development Service (FOP 15-463) & Henry Jackson Foundation (Consortium of Private Foundation Funding).

The Veterans Metrics Initiative: Linking Program Components to Post-Military Well-Being.

Total Costs: \$7,100,000. Role: **Lead Co-PI**

Background: Active-duty military service members and activated Reserve/National Guard (RNG) may face challenges when transitioning out of the military to reintegrate into civilian life. For active-duty troops, leaving the military may mean becoming solely responsible for structuring life and work for the first time. For RNG, returning from activated status may mean coping with deployment-related stressors that are alien experiences to friends and family. For both active-duty and RNG, reintegration may be complicated by mental and physical injuries sustained during military service. Many programs developed by the Departments of Defense or Veterans Affairs and countless private or community entities seek to help those veterans having difficulties with transition and reintegration. Whether these transition and reintegration programs are helpful is unknown.

Objective/Hypothesis: The purpose of the proposed project is to assess the well-being of 9500 veterans from just prior to separation from military service to within three years thereafter. This study will document and evaluate the transition and reintegration programs they use. It will analyze the components of those programs and determine which components are associated with better or worse outcomes. It is hypothesized that many programs used by transitioning new veterans share common components, that some components are associated with better outcomes (improved well-being) than others, and that this relationship varies both by the domain of well-being and also by the sub-group of veterans accessing the program. That is, not all veterans derive benefit from all components of programs they use, and some program components do not improve outcomes at all.

Specific Aims: (1) Document veteran well-being through the transition period in four key domains: vocation, finances, mental and physical health, and social relationships; (2) Characterize programs veterans use as they reintegrate into civilian life and distill the programs into their common components; and (3) Examine the link between common program components and veteran well-being throughout the transition process.

Study Design: This project has assembled The Veterans Metrics Initiative (TVMI) team, a uniquely qualified cadre of research collaborators from the Department of Defense, academic medicine and social sciences, private research enterprise, and the Veterans Health Administration, united through the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine. Ideally using personnel lists from the Department of Defense, the TVMI team will survey 7,500 individuals who are within 90 days of leaving the military (baseline). Follow-up surveys will occur every six months beginning six months after separation for a total of six assessments. The Veterans Survey sample will include 1,500 persons from each of five groups: Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and RNG, randomly sampled from within branch. Veterans will be surveyed regarding their demographic and military characteristics, well-being in four domains (e.g. mental and physical health, vocation, finances, social relationships), and use of veterans' transition and reintegration programs. TVMI team members will then survey directors of identified programs and use information obtained to distill programs into their common components. Common components are techniques, strategies, or features of a program,

including: (a) knowledge (e.g., problem solving and coping skills); (b) process (e.g., mode: online or face-to-face; method: direct instruction); (c) barrier reduction (e.g., tangible support); and (d) sustainability components (e.g., referrals). Data on programs will include descriptors such as federal or local, target domains, target audience (e.g., women or veterans with disability), categorization on the spectrum of intervention (e.g., universal prevention), size, geographic reach, duration and quality. Finally, common components will be merged with Veterans Survey data to assess association of common components with well-being.

Relevance: The TVMI project will generate novel information about the transition from military to civilian life and identify program components associated with measures of well-being in multiple domains. Program common components associated with better outcomes can then be identified by program developers, stakeholders and funders to help them design/use/fund programs likely to be most helpful. The significance of this study lies in: (1) an improved understanding of veterans' well-being as they reintegrate into civilian life; (2) the identification of common components across programs that are associated with better and worse veteran well-being; and (3) generation of a public-use dataset to encourage additional research in this important area.