

# VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI)

Research Advisory Committee Meeting on  
Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (RACGWVI)  
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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development



# Closing the research-to-practice gap

- It can take 17 years for 20% of scientifically-supported treatments to reach patients
- QUERI was established in 1998 to accelerate research findings into routine care to ensure Veterans benefit from research discoveries
- QUERI's quality improvement efforts touch all **18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs)** and have helped support **>26,000** providers to make care improvements for **over 5.3 million Veterans**



## MISSION

Improve Veteran health by accelerating evidence into health care practice and policy



## VISION

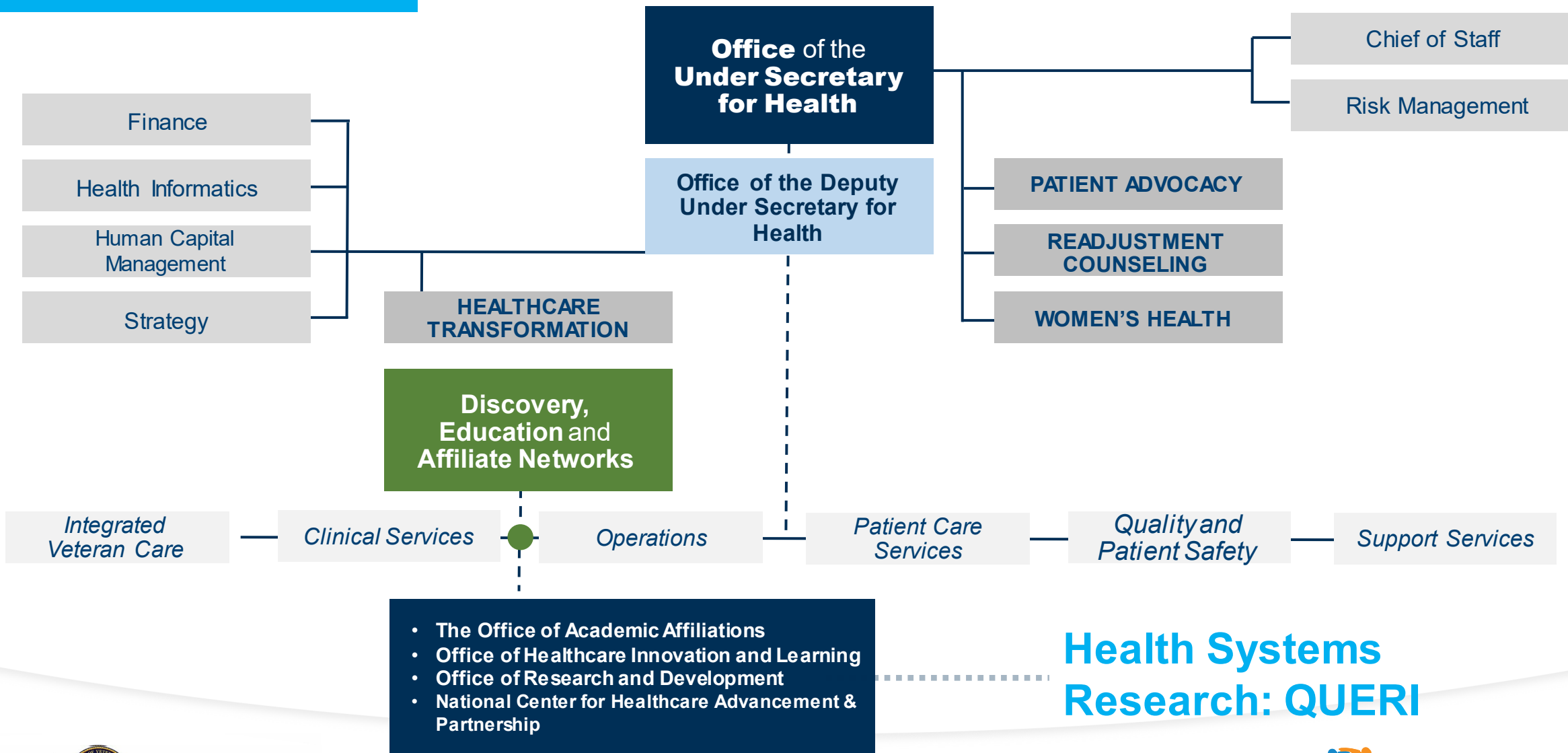
Become a trusted purveyor of evidence, implementation, and quality improvement (QI) methods across VA, supporting frontline providers in deploying effective practices that transform Veteran care



## VALUES

Excellence, Commitment, Partnerships, Rigor, Resilience, Flexibility

# QUERI is organized under VA Research but funded through VHA clinical operations to enable investigators to conduct implementation and evaluation projects aligned with VA priorities



## Health Systems Research: QUERI

# Celebrating 25 Years of QUERI

- Since 1998, QUERI has grown from 10 to 50+ **Centers**, from \$12M to **\$26.2M** in direct funding
- Evolved from implementing disease-focused practices to **complex interventions** that cut across conditions and settings
- **Expanded the pipeline** of implementation, QI, and evaluation leaders, early career investigators, and staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences
- **Thought leader** in promoting rigorous implementation science methods to ensure programs and policies work for Veterans (and the providers who care for them)
- Embedded in the [VA 2022-28 Strategic Plan](#) and **VHA leadership governance** to support fulfillment of the **Evidence Act**, which requires agencies use evidence to justify budgets

# QUERI's unique role in VHA

- QUERI funds over **200 VA-employed scientists and staff** across the US to partner with VA providers, leaders, and Veterans in implementing effective research discoveries nationally (e.g., [2020 GAO report](#))
- QUERI scientists and staff train the **VA workforce** in implementation, quality improvement, and evaluation strategies to improve translation of effective treatments for Veterans
- Since 2019, QUERI has managed VHA's response to the Evidence Act (US PL 115-435), including national evaluations to ensure practices and policies work at the clinic level for Veterans (e.g., PACT, Hannon Acts)



**100**  
health care  
practices



**100+**  
national and  
regional  
partnerships



**>\$50M**  
partnered  
funding and  
resources



**27,000+**  
VA  
employees  
reached

# QUERI Goals and Strategic Plan

*Accelerating and sustaining care improvements across the US*



# QUERI: Why It matters

An effective treatment or practice is only as good as how and whether...

- It is adopted?
- Practitioners are trained to use it?
- Trained practitioners choose to use it?
- Eligible populations/patients benefit from it?

If we assume 50% threshold for each step... even with perfect access, adherence, dosage, and maintenance....

**Clinical Impact:  $50\% \times 50\% \times 50\% \times 50\% = 6\%$  benefit**

From David Chambers and Gila Neta, PhD, NCI



# Partner or Perish: Health Care is Changing

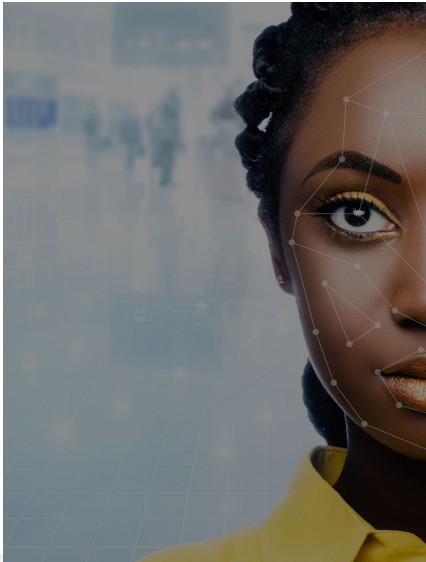
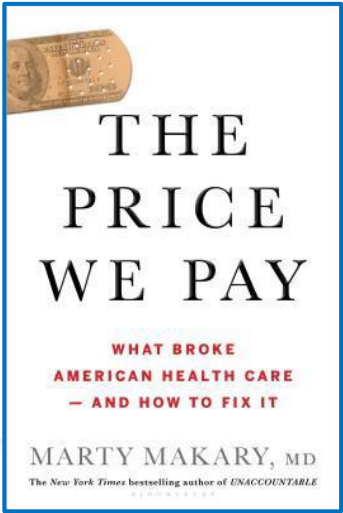
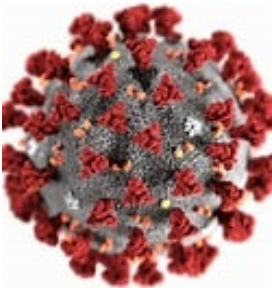
- Social Determinants
- Consumer-Driven
- Beyond the Academy
- Information Technology
- Unknown-unknowns
- Systemic challenges



**THE PATIENT WILL SEE YOU NOW**

FOR ADDRESS  
Rx  
REFILL  
PHYSICIAN'S SIGNATURE  
ADDRESS

Why Visibility, Patient Experience, and Digital Marketing Are Key to Helping Medical Practices Thrive





# QUERI FY 2021-2025 Strategic Goals

1. Reduce unwanted clinical & service variation across VA
2. Build capacity to respond quickly to national and regional developments
3. Deepen and expand partnerships across programs, geographic regions, and service lines
4. Drive a culture of rapid learning for VA's transformation to HRO and Learning Health System
5. Empower employees to move the needle on quality of care

Aligned with VHA High-reliability and Long-Range planning goals, e.g., 3.1: learning organization, knowledge translation



# QUERI Impacts in Strategic Goal Areas: FY2021-2023



## 1. Moving the needle on quality of care

- 14 **QUERI Programs** and 3 multi-VISN **Partnered Implementation Initiatives** scaling-up, spreading, and sustaining 40+ effective practices addressing cross-cutting priorities



## 2-4. Aligning QI and evidence-based policy

- VHA Evidence-based Policy **Subcommittee**: Learning Agenda, Annual Evaluation Plans
- **PEPReC** Strength of Evidence Checklist: 300+ legislative/budget proposal reviews
- QUERI Communication Strategy: Evidence-based Policy-Learning Health System Lifecycle in **VA Strategic Plan**



## 2-4. Optimizing programs and policies

- 6 national **Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers**
- 35+ **Rapid Response Team** projects
- 36 **Partnered Evaluation Initiatives**



## 5. Empowering our workforce in a changing world

- 15 **Advancing Diversity** in Implementation Leadership (ADIL) awardees
- 80+ early career investigators/staff receiving **mentoring**
- 9 Implementation Practice **Learning Hubs**
- **CEIR** Evaluation Guide
- **Implementation Planning Assessment Tool**

# QUERI Measures of Success: National Performance Goals

## QUERI ACTION Impact Framework

Domain	Measures
<b>A</b> lignment	Priorities, metrics, partners
<b>C</b> ommitment	Shared operational resources and financial support, evidence-based strategies and products
<b>T</b> ailoring to local context	Implementation sites, # providers using effective practice, # Veterans/family members/caregivers served
<b>I</b> nforming the field	Briefings with key decision-makers, publications, scale-up and spread across VA and beyond
<b>O</b> bserving healthcare change and generating <b>N</b> ew projects	Sustainability, quality of care and health outcomes, policy, culture, employee engagement and new projects requests

[Braganza, Kilbourne, JGIM, 2020](#)

# QUERI Projects are Non-Research

- QUERI projects are non-research projects because of the **funding source** (special purpose, medical administration funds) and their focus on **improvement** within VA.
- Protocols involving data collection are non-research if the **data are fed back to providers or operations leaders** to directly improve care and/or other VA processes. The activity does not meet the definition of research.
- In situations when a QUERI project wants to collect additional data above and beyond what is needed for informing improvement within VA, a determination should be sought as to whether the project's activities constitute research.

**CyberSeminar: Everything You Need to Know About VHA Non-research Protocols**

[Link to Recording](#)

**CyberSeminar: Everything You Need to Know About QUERI Non-research Protocols**

[Link to Recording](#)

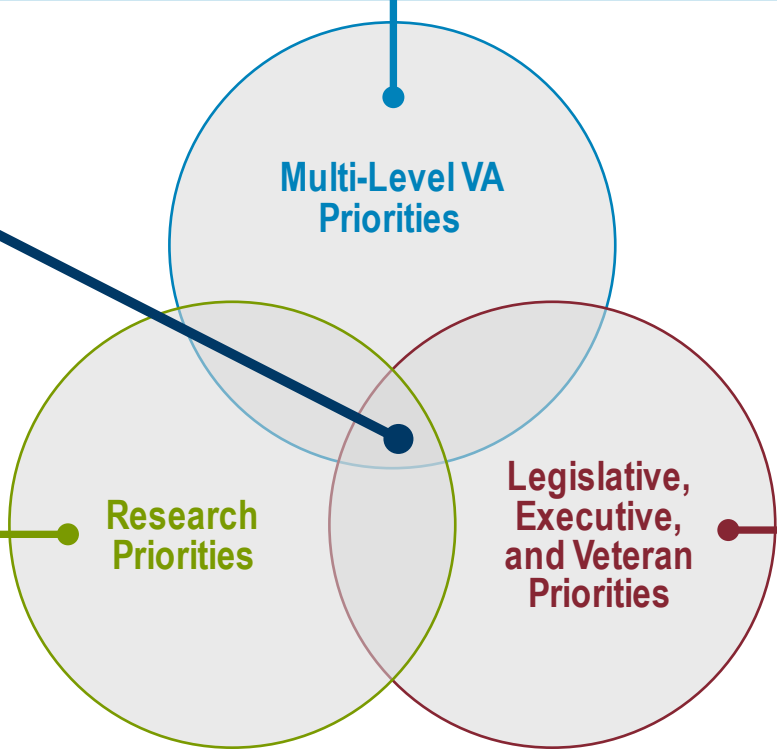
# QUERI Addresses Multi-Level Priorities

**QUERI Strategic Methodology**

1. Implement
2. Evaluate
3. Disseminate and Sustain

- National Priorities: VHA Leadership, SecVA Goals
- VA National Program Offices
- Veterans Integrated Service Networks
- VA Medical Centers
- Service Lines

- VA Office of Research and Development
- QUERI Strategic Plan priorities:
  1. Reduce unwanted clinical and service variation across VA;
  2. Build capacity to respond quickly to national and regional developments;
  3. Deepen and expand partnerships across programs, geographic regions, and service lines;
  4. Drive a culture of rapid learning in support of VA's transformation to a High-Reliability Organization and Learning Health System; and
  5. Empower employees to move the needle on quality of care.



- Veterans' and their caregivers' needs
- Frontline provider capacity
- Veterans Service Organizations
- Congressional Priorities
  - Megabus/NDAA
  - Hannon Act
  - VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act)
  - Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018
  - Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA)
  - 21st Century Cures Act
  - Hannon Act
  - STRONG Veterans Act
  - PACT Act, etc.
- Presidential Executive Orders

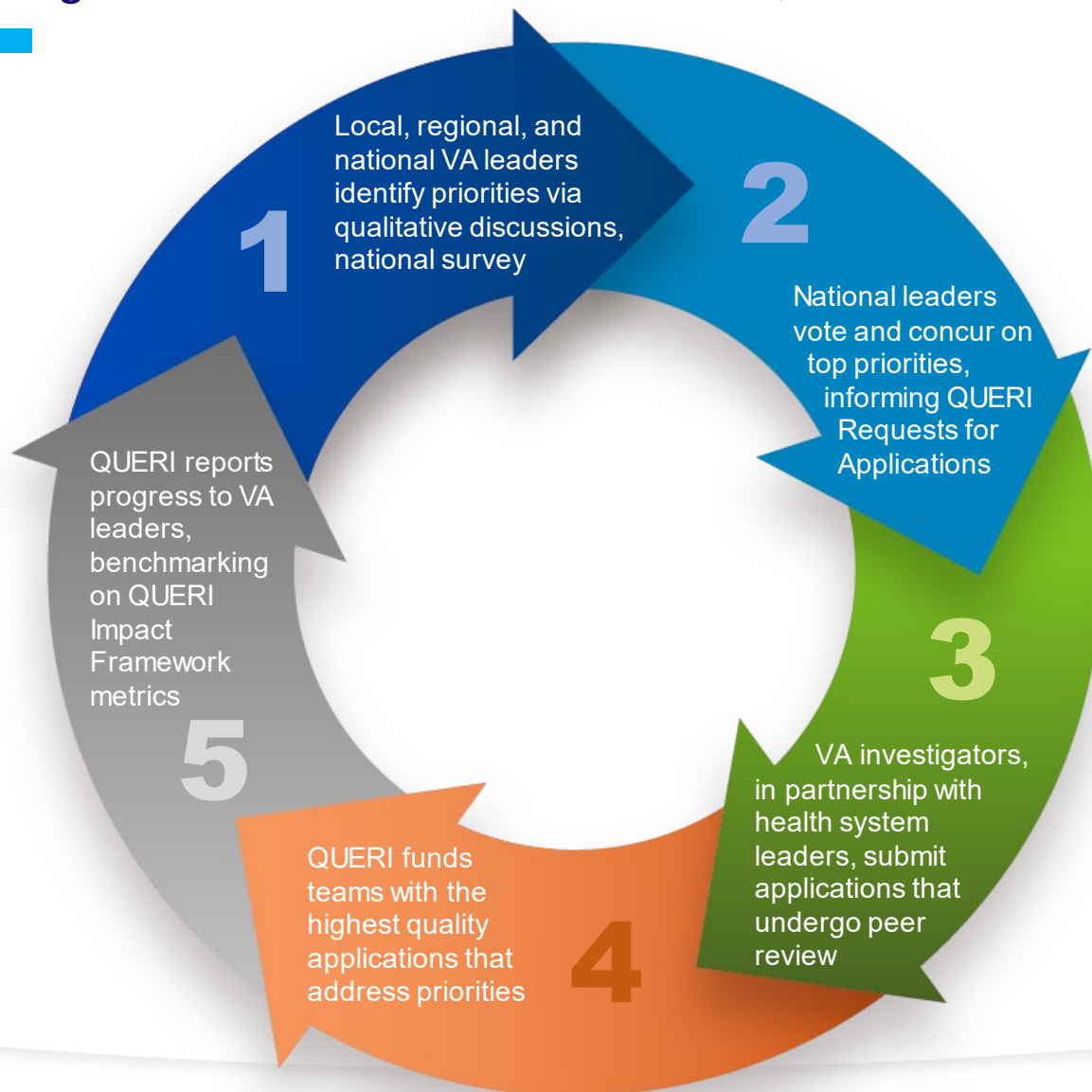


# VA Strategic Plan: QUERI Process to Ensure VA Programs & Policies Work for Veterans

## Identifying Priorities, Funding Initiatives to Address Priorities, Communicating Results and Impacts

### Evidence Act is Law (US PL 115-435)

- ✓ Influences agency budgets
- ✓ Requires public annual evaluation plans on top priorities that inform policies and resource allocations
- ✓ QUERI review of VHA legislative and budget proposals for level of evidence
- ✓ QUERI conducts annual evaluations, responds to emerging legislative mandates



### Priorities inform QUERI support for:

- ✓ Evidence Act Evaluation Plans (1 year)
- ✓ Rapid Response Team Time-sensitive projects (3-9 month)
- ✓ Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL) fellows (2 years)
- ✓ Partnered Evaluation Centers and Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers Evaluations of programs and policies (3+ years)



# QUERI Elicits Multi-Stakeholder Input on How to Address VA Priorities

VA Priority	QUERI FY23 Deep-Dive Priority Survey
Hire faster and more competitively	1. <b>Workforce recruitment, onboarding, and retention*</b> 3. Employee and trainee experience and burnout 8. Virtual work*
Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care	2. <b>Clinical care and organizational efficiency*</b> 4. In-person, virtual, and community care services 6. Health disparities
Serve Veterans with military exposures	7. Toxic exposure/PACT Act
Accelerate our journey to high reliability	5. Culture of safety, learning, and knowledge translation 9. EHR implementation
Support Veterans whole health, their caregivers, and survivors	Ongoing QUERI activities
Prevent Veteran suicide	Ongoing QUERI activities

\* indicates Network Director Top Priority

# QUERI Funds VA Investigators to Address National Short, Medium-, Long-term Veteran Goals

<1 Year

Rapid Response Teams, Center for Evaluation and Implementation Resources (CEIR) Consultation

Time-sensitive national evaluation requests

Example: COVID vaccine rollout among VA employees and Veterans

1-2 Years

Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership, Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers, VISN Partnered Implementations

Support performance improvement through implementation of evidence-based practices

Example: Medications for opioid use disorders

>2 Years

Partnered Evaluation Initiatives

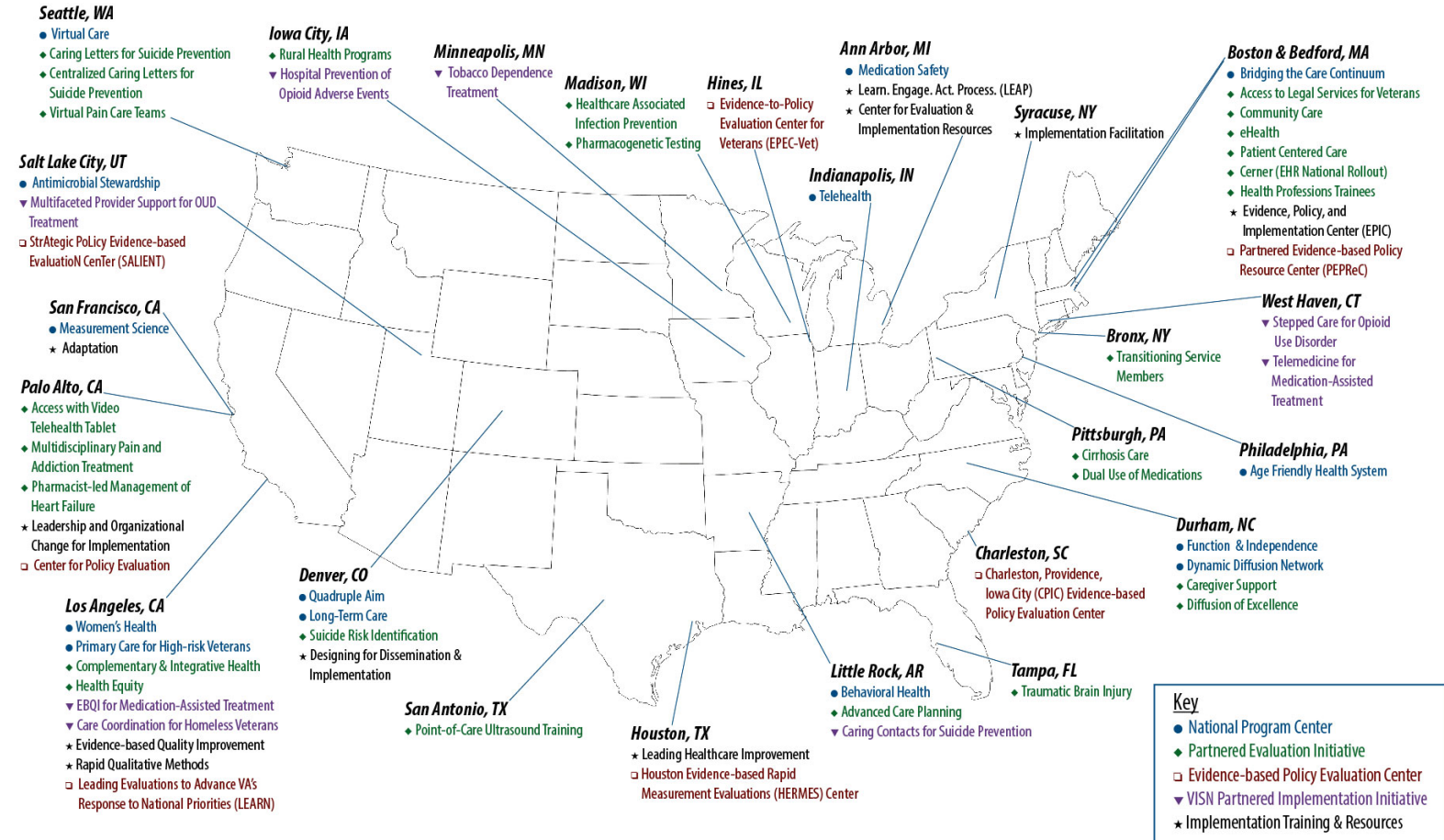
Evaluation centers co-funded by operations partners

Example: Caring letters for suicide prevention

Informs evidence-based policy and new scientific directions in VA

# QUERI leverages VA Research scientific capacity to enable further translation of effective practices across the US to address Veteran priorities

- ✓ Field-based research offices and HSP centers of excellence provide support for 50+ QUERI centers
- ✓ ORD/HSP investigators develop many of the interventions, strategies, and tools QUERI utilizes
- ✓ QUERI initiatives undergo rigorous scientific merit review, following ORD's processes and utilizing existing research systems and databases



# Examples of QUERI-Partnered Impacts

## Suicide prevention:

- Caring Letters reached **over 200,000 Veterans**
- Caring Contacts implemented in **19 sites across 9 VISNs**, reaching **3,400+ Veterans** at risk of suicide

## Opioid/Pain treatment:

SCOUTT: Stepped Care for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment

- **267% increase** in patients receiving evidence-based OUD treatment

CONDUIT: Consortium to Disseminate and Understand Implementation of Opioid Use Disorder Treatment

- **6 effective practices implemented across 62 sites, 11 VISNs**, over 1,900 VA providers, 4,832 Veterans

## Caregivers (Diffusion Marketplace Practices):

Caregivers FIRST reached **125 sites, 3,200 caregivers** of Veterans

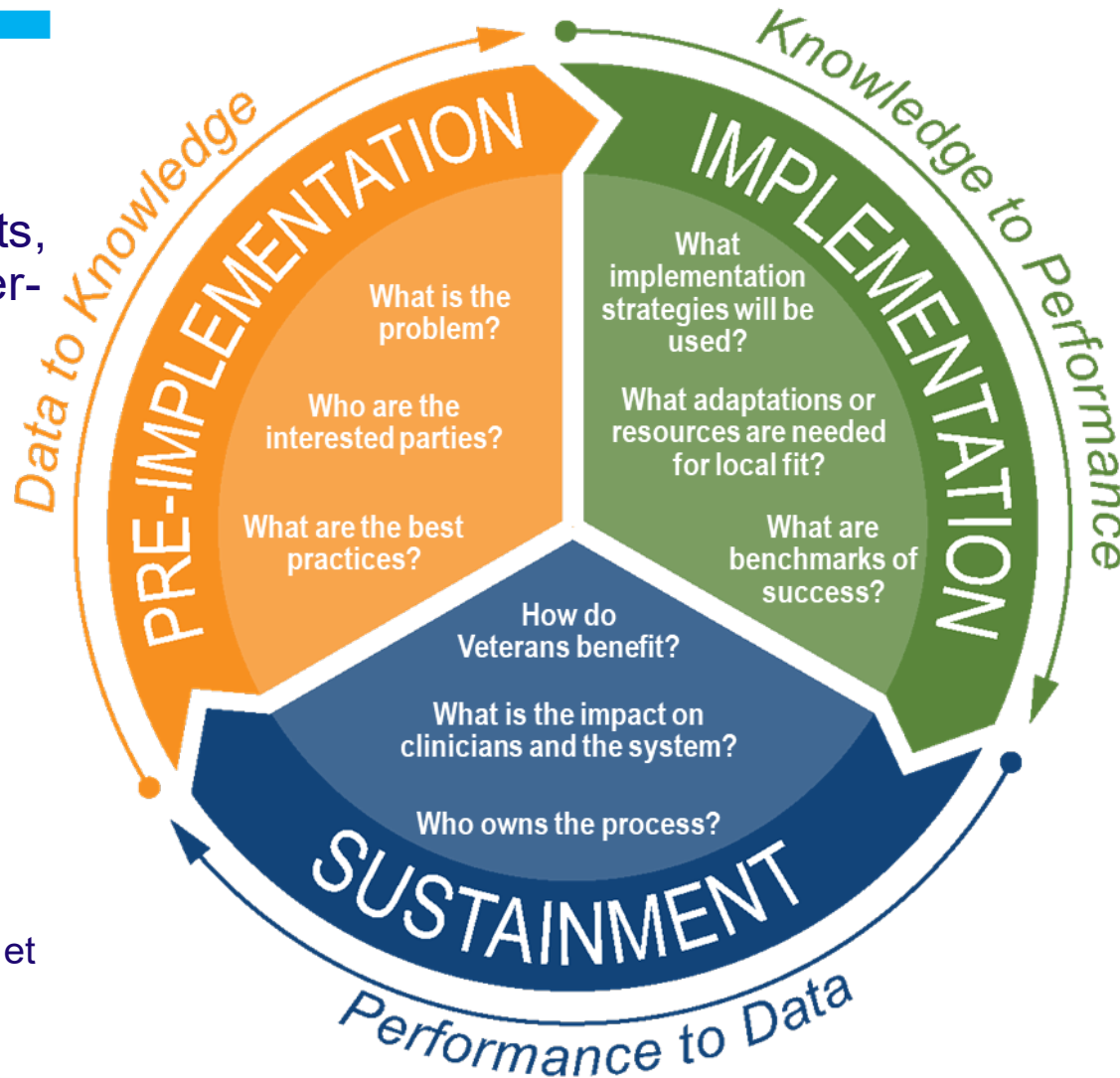
Advanced Care Planning via Group Visits: **75 sites, 955 providers, 28,000 Veterans** served

“I think [Caregivers FIRST] is the most wonderful outlet for somebody that is doing caregiving, because first of all it gives them some time to be able to meet with other individuals [caregivers], and it may be the only time they have to do that. It gives them an outlet that they wouldn't have otherwise.”

— Veteran Caregiver

# QUERI Implementation Roadmap

- **Problem-focused:** multi-level operations input
- **Infrastructure:** data cohorts, interdisciplinary teams, peer-review
- **Agile:** rapid AND rigorous
- **Research & QI** protocols coexist
- **Investigator and staff** training opportunities
- **Sustainment** (partner ownership)



**CyberSeminar: The QUERI Implementation Roadmap: A Framework to Guide Partnered Implementation and Quality Improvement Efforts in a Learning Health System**

[Link for recording](#)  
[Link for slide deck](#)

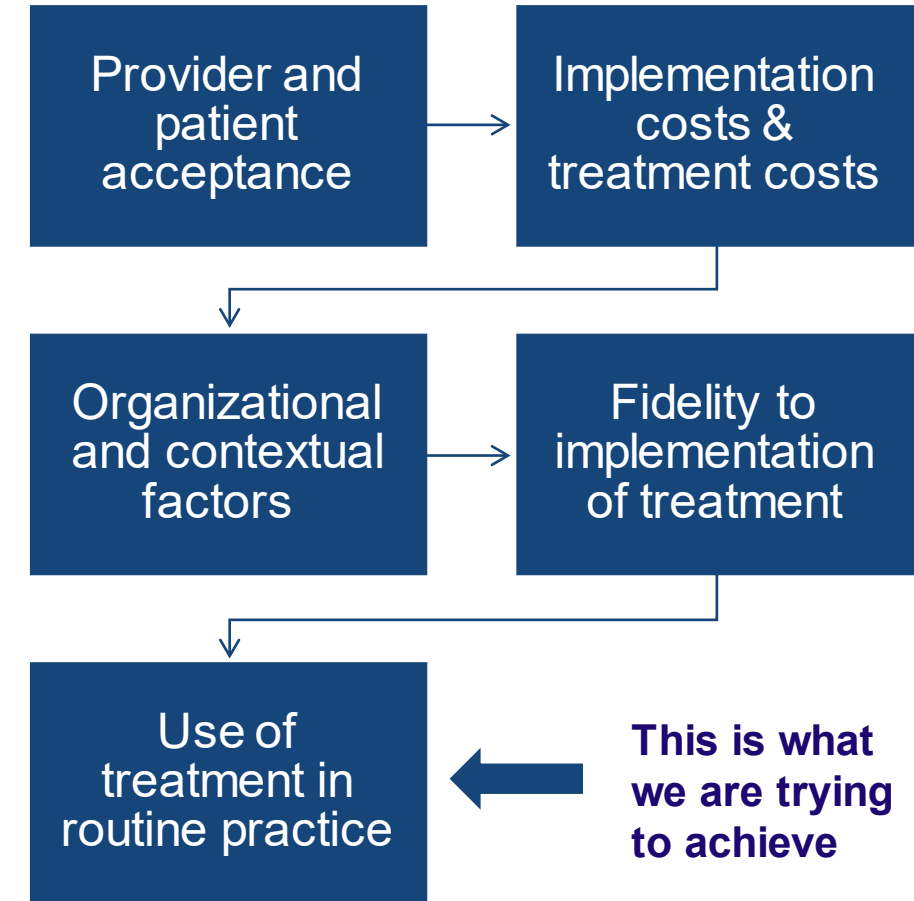
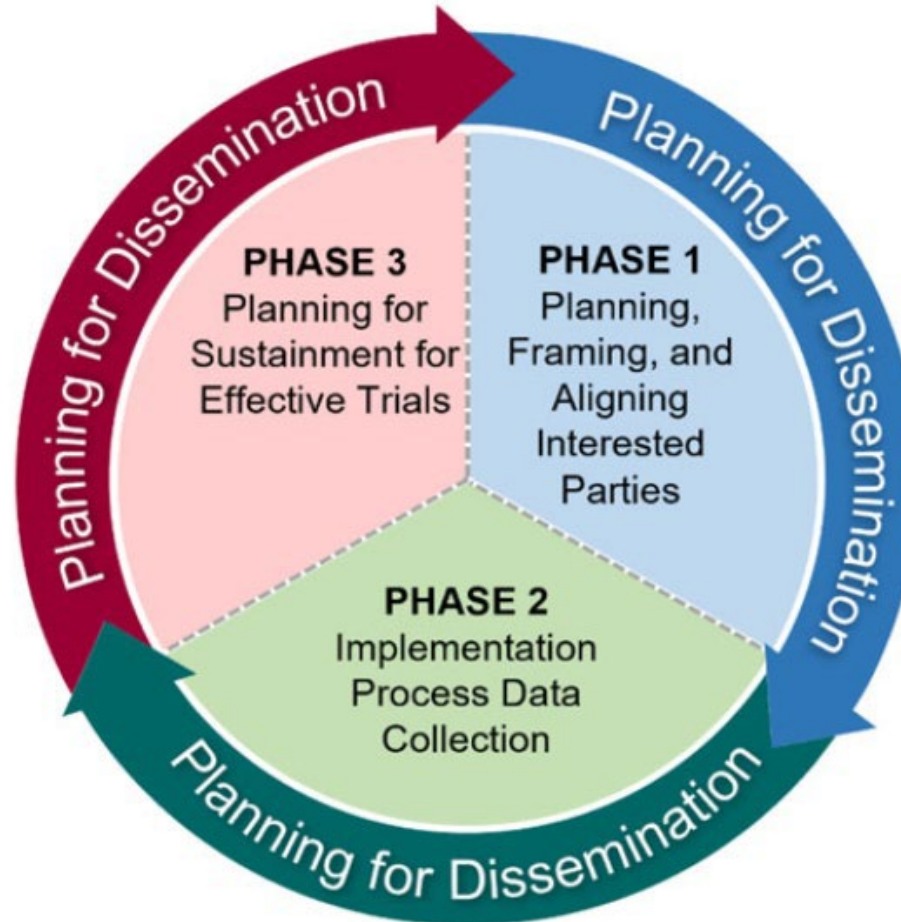
Kilbourne et al, 2019, 2022; Goodrich et al 2020

[Link for QUERI Implementation Roadmap Guide](#)



# Implementation Planning Assessment Tool

- Supports implementation planning in research protocols to accelerate post-trial implementation of treatments found to be effective
- Grounded in implementation science
- Learn more: [Introducing the Implementation Planning Assessment Tool](#)



[Kowalski et al, JCTS 2022](#)



# QUERI Implementation Science Center

- **Evidence, Policy and Implementation Center (EPIC)** led by Allen Gifford, MD (Boston, MA); A. Rani Elwy (Bedford, MA), PhD; Sara Landes, PhD (Little Rock, AR)
- Promote the use of state-of-the-art implementation science frameworks, measures, and methods **across the translation spectrum** to accelerate the translation of research discoveries into routine care in VA
- Enhance implementation science training capacity, promoting the development of a long-term, sustainable, and **diverse implementation science and evaluation workforce** in VA

# QUERI Implementation Strategy and Methods Learning Hubs

- Train VA employees in specific **implementation strategies and methods** to ensure evidence-based practice sustainment
- Strategies and methods supported by **evidence and theory**
- More information can be found on the [QUERI website](#)



# Designing for Dissemination and Implementation (D4D&I)

- Multifaceted strategy combines methods that help consider the influence of multi-level contextual factors in diverse settings
- Faculty mentoring throughout the 21-week program
- Peer-to-peer virtual learning collaborative sessions
- Six, 2-hour didactic learning sessions
- For more information and to sign up for this training, contact: [deisy.hernandez-lujan@va.gov](mailto:deisy.hernandez-lujan@va.gov).



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RN



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LCSW, CDIS



**Designing for Dissemination  
and Implementation**  
*QUERI Training Hub*

# Evidence-based Policy Efforts

*Driving the use of high-impact evidence across VA*



# QUERI Evidence-based Policy (EBP) Highlights

- QUERI supports VA's fulfillment of the **Evidence Act**, which requires agencies to use evidence and evaluation to justify budgets and shape policies
- Go-to for evaluation expertise and support for national legislative evaluations
- **Evidence-based Policy Subcommittee (EBPS)** under VHA governance
  - Principal point of contact for VHA USH to fulfill OMB Evidence Act requirements
  - Co-chaired by VHA Chief Strategy & Finance Office, direct report to VHA leadership
  - Membership across VA (OEI, VBA, NCA, VHA)
  - EBPS commissions and approves VA-wide evaluations aligned with national priorities
  - Reports updates to the VA-wide Evidence-based Policy Council (EBPC)
- **QUERI Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers** support EBPS, managed by PEPRReC



# QUERI Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center

- Led by Melissa Garrido, Austin Frakt, Steve Pizer, Elsa Sites at VA Boston
- Supports VHA's response to the Evidence Act, reviews legislative and budget proposals, and provides rigorous data analysis to support the development and sustainment of policy, planning, and management initiatives
- Coordinates six QUERI Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers, routes evaluation requests, identifies cross-VA collaborations

## PEPReC

*Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center  
A VA QUERI Center*

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development





# Features of QUERI Evidence-based Policy Evaluation Centers



Interdisciplinary teams embedded in the VA health system



Academically affiliated centers with access to 170+ investigators



Unique data access and expertise



Practical rigorous implementation, evaluation, and QI methods



Veteran-centered, commitment to health equity



Training diverse investigators and staff in partnered evaluation work



Expertise in key VHA clinical and policy priority areas



30+ national and regional partnerships



Innovative approaches

# VHA Evidence Act FY25 Evaluation Plan Scope



## Access to Care

MISSION 401 (underserved facilities)

Virtual care

PTSD access

**\*Military toxic exposures (Camp Lejeune)**

**\*Clinic workflows, clinic efficiency, and burnout**



## Opioids + Substance Use Disorder

- Post-incarceration engagement
- Rural access to buprenorphine
- Homeless overdose prevention (opioid education, naloxone distribution)
- **\*Make v. buy in mental health care**



## Mental Health + Suicide Prevention

National Sponsorship Program for Transitioning Servicemembers

Suicide risk screening (Risk ID)



## Evaluation Topics in Development

Military toxic exposure

Women's health

Workforce, e.g., Clinical Reminders

Homelessness (VA-wide)

**\*new in FY25**

# VA FY2024 Evaluation Plan: Military Exposures

- To what extent have toxic military environmental exposures harmed Veterans during their period of service, especially regarding latent or chronic adverse health effects?
- What is the impact of the collaborations across the different federal agencies on the implementation of programs and policies related to military exposures experienced by Veterans?
- What are the best strategies to implement state of the art evaluation and care models to provide effective care for Veterans exposed to airborne hazards and other military exposures?
- Additional evaluation questions to be generated from an analysis of PACT Act implementation

# Empowering all VA employees to move the needle on quality of care

*Fostering QUERI teams reflecting a variety of backgrounds and experiences*



# Key Component of QUERI Strategic Plan

- Core value: commitment to ensuring that all QUERI employees feel respected, valued, and connected
- Fostering teams reflecting a variety of backgrounds and experiences
- Creating an environment where all employees have an equal opportunity to fully utilize their talents to make a meaningful impact on health care.

## To further this strategic goal, QUERI is:

- Striving to recruit a diverse group of implementation science leaders that represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives → **Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL)**
- Expanding mentorship opportunities → **national network of QUERI Program Mentoring Cores, Evidence-based Policy Centers**
- Creating peer learning forums → **EPIC-led ADIL virtual monthly forum, CEIR-led virtual mentee forum**
- Expanding in-person opportunities at conferences → **Early Career Investigator/Staff Meeting, TA Workshop**



# QUERI Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL)

- **Objective:** grow a pipeline of implementation, quality improvement (QI), and evaluation expertise from populations that reflect the diversity of the Veterans VA serves
- **Anticipated Impacts:** promote VA as a national leader in applying high-reliability, learning organization and evidence-based policy methods to improve health care, especially for underserved populations



## MISSION

Improve Veteran health by accelerating evidence into health care practice and policy



## VISION

Become a trusted purveyor of evidence, implementation, and quality improvement (QI) methods across VA, supporting frontline providers in deploying effective practices that transform Veteran care



## VALUES

Excellence, Commitment, Partnerships, Rigor, Resilience, Flexibility

# Advancing Diversity in Implementation Leadership (ADIL) Awardees

Alexis Barrett (Pittsburgh, PA)

Evan Carey (Denver, CO)

Jacqueline M. Ferguson (Palo Alto, CA)

Joshua Hamer (Houston, TX)

Melissa Harris (Durham, NC)

Taylor Harris (Los Angeles, CA)

Kamal Henderson (Denver, CO)

Sarah Javier (Palo Alto, CA)

Tanya T. Olmos-Ochoa (Los Angeles, CA)

Talia Panadero (Los Angeles, CA)

Yuvaram Reddy (Philadelphia, PA)

Sonia Singh (Little Rock, AR)

Maria Venegas (Bedford, MA)

Geneva Wilson (Hines, IL)

Sarah M. Wilson (Durham, NC)

# VHACO QUERI Team and HSR&D/QUERI Resource Centers



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**PEPReC**

*Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center  
A VA QUERI Center*

**CEIR**

*VA QUERI Center for Evaluation  
and Implementation Resources*



**Health Economics Resource Center**



**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development





**Please contact us if you are interested in a  
QUERI opportunity**

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***Thank you!***