OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES RELEVANT TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR OEF/OIF/OND VETERANS

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Committee on Evaluation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services
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Accurately diagnosing and treating mental illness requires comprehensive efforts focused on specific disorders and populations.

Specialized Centers of Excellence create environments that stimulate innovation and accomplishment.
VA Mental Health Centers of Excellence (MH CoEs): Mission

- To generate new knowledge about the causes and treatments of mental disorders through research, apply new findings to model clinical programs, and widely disseminate new findings through education to improve the quality of Veterans’ lives and their daily functioning in their recovering from mental illness.

- To reduce the time from scientific discovery to implementation by creating an environment with concentrated expertise integrated across research, education, and clinical programming domains.

- Each Center addresses a specific mental illness or illnesses across the spectrum of Veteran mental health.

http://www.mirecc.va.gov
Mental Health Center of Excellence Timelines

• National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD) authorized by Public Law 98-528 (1984).

• Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs) were authorized by Public Law 104-262 (1998).

• 3 MIRECCs were added specific to OEF/OIF era Veterans, including the Mid-Atlantic (VISN 6) MIRECC, each with a specific area of focus (2005).
  • VISN 6 MIRECC focuses on post-deployment mental health in OEF/OIF/OND Veterans.
MIRECC: Peer Review and Renewal Process

- **Renewal mechanism:** MIRECCs and CoEs undergo external peer review process every 5 years. Criteria for continuation: service to country and VISN, generation of new research, generation of external funding, number of publications, and overall fidelity to its theme.

- **Method of selection:** Each MIRECC was awarded through a competitive peer review process that assessed arrangement with:
  - an accredited medical school with psychiatry training.
  - an accredited graduate program of psychology.
  - an accredited school for nursing, social work, counseling or other allied health receiving training in mental health and
  - ability to attract scientists with demonstrated achievement in research for the development of innovative approaches to the design of mental health services or into the causes, prevention, and treatment of mental illness.
  - geographic placement in relation to access to the clinical component.
## MIRECCs: Public Law 104-262, FY 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Purpose/focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VISN 1, West Haven, CT</td>
<td>Substance Abuse Disorders, Peer Support, Serious Mental Illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 3, Bronx, NY</td>
<td>Serious Mental Illness, Recovery, Suicide Prevention, Psychopharmacology</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 4, Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Mental Health Primary Care, Addiction, Family Therapy, Homelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 5, Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>Schizophrenia, Serious Mental Illnesses, Recovery, Health Services Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 6, Durham, NC</td>
<td>OEF/OIF, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Biomarkers, Community Outreach, Women Veterans, Families</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 16, Little Rock, AR</td>
<td>Education interventions, Family education, Telemedicine, Rural health</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 19, Denver, CO</td>
<td>Suicide Prevention, Traumatic Brain Injury, Evidence based assess/treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 20, Seattle, WA</td>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Mild Traumatic Brain Injury, Dementia</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 21, Palo Alto, CA</td>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Neuroimaging, Aging and Cognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISN 22, Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>Recovery in Serious Mental Illness, Schizophrenia, Psychopharmacology</td>
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VISN 6 MIRECC: Multi-site Center—VISN Wide

- Richmond, VA
- Hampton, VA
- Salisbury, NC
- Durham, NC
- Salem, VA
VISN 6 MIRECC 2014 Collaborations Map

VA Collaborations  Government Collaborations  Academic Collaborations
MIRECC Innovations & Interventions

• Research: projects to—
  • Develop & evaluate treatments for post-deployment mental illness.
  • Investigate candidate biomarkers for mental illnesses, predictors of therapeutic response and novel pharmacological interventions.

• Clinical: programs to—
  • Help families connect Veterans to services.
  • Provide bridges across treatment domains.
  • Enhance sustainability of change practices.
  • Facilitate state and community partnerships.

• Education: programs to—
  • Overcome stigma to accessing MH care.
  • Facilitate bi-directional sharing of knowledge between VA and community providers.
  • Train the next generation of VA mental health clinical researchers.
Research Core

Neuroimaging

Genetics

Health Services

Interventions & Metabolomics

Neurocognition

Neuroscience
Selected MIRECC Research Projects

1. VISN 6 OEF/OIF/OND Multi-site Post-Deployment Mental Health Study, Data Warehouse and Bio-Repository (*Pl: Fairbank*)
   - Nearly 3,000 OEF/OIF/OND Veterans enrolled to date across Mid-Atlantic.
   - Assesses participants for PTSD, SUDs, Depression, TBI; risk and protective factors; biomarkers (neuroimaging, neurochemical, and genetic) of mental illness.
   - Supplies data to all VISN 6 MIRECC research labs.
   - Serves as a recruitment source for labs to maximize enrollment in other studies.
   - Provides links to care engagement for study participants.

2. National surveys on Veteran barriers to, and preference for, care engagement (*Elbogen et al., 2013; Crawford et al., in progress*).

3. VIO-SCAN - Screening tool for violence risk (*Elbogen et al., 2014*).

4. Multifamily Group TBI Treatments
   a. for Veterans with TBI and Their Families (*Straits-Troster et al, 2013*).
   b. for Reducing Marital Conflict for Veterans with Mild TBI (*Perlick et al., 2013*).
5. **Mobile Interventions (Telehealth) for Vulnerable Populations To Increase Access to Care**
   - Abstinence Reinforcement Therapy (ART) for Smoking Cessation in **Rural Veterans** *(Current VA Merit Review, HSR&D, Calhoun)*.
   - Abstinence Reinforcement Therapy (ART) for **Homeless Veteran Smokers** *(Current VA Merit Review, RR&D, Beckham)*.

6. **Neurosteroid interventions that target PTSD, TBI, Pain & Schizophrenia** *(Marx et al., 2014)*. Examination of pharmacological interventions in subthreshold PTSD *(Naylor et al., 2013)*.

7. **Biomarker investigations: e.g., amino acids as biomarker candidates for suicidality** *(Szabo et al., 2014)*.

8. **Genetic factors associated with PTSD risk** *(Liu et al., 2014)*.

9. **Neuroimaging studies of compromised white matter in blast-exposed Veterans with & without symptoms of mild TBI** *(Taber et al., 2014; Morey et al., 2013)*.
Selected MIRECC-based Clinical Program Projects

1. Practice-Based Implementation Network
   • Collaboration with DoD, NC-PTSD, and Mental Health-QUERI

2. Learning Collaborative Initiatives Integrating Smoking Cessation with Care in:
   • PTSD Specialty Clinics, 7 VAMCs nationally
   • VISN 6 Homeless Program providers
   • Partnership between VA Office of Public Health, Duke University, & VA Puget Sound Healthcare System

3. Clinical Demonstration Projects
   • Mindfulness Treatment for Tobacco Cessation
   • SmokefreeVET
     • Evaluating Smoking Cessation Texting Program

4. National Monthly Clinician Group Supervision Call
   • Improve clinical outcomes by reducing provider burnout
Selected State & Community Clinical Program Partnerships

- NC Governor’s FOCUS

- North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and Citizen Soldier Support Program (CSSP) training partnerships (www.ahecconnect.com/citizensoldier)
  - Military culture
  - Deployment stress
  - Deployment-related mental health concerns
  - Military families
  - Women Veterans
Selected MIRECC-Hosted National Clinical Programs

1. **Coaching into Care**
   - Collaboration with VISN 4 & 22 MIRECCs

2. **Clinical Demonstration Projects**
   - HOME Project

3. **National Rollouts of Evidence-based Psychotherapies**
   - Support training and supervision for 6 EBPs

4. **National Mental Health and Chaplaincy Program**
   - Integrate mental health and chaplain services in VA and DOD
Selected MIRECC Education Programs

1. Advanced Mental Health Post-Doctoral Fellowships:
   - Durham, Salisbury and Richmond VAMCs

2. Windows to the Brain Series on the Neuropsychiatry of TBI and Co-Morbidities
   (http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/TBI_education.asp)

3. Teaching Cases and Pocket Cards

4. Virtual Mild TBI Patient to Train Clinical Evaluation Skills:
   - The MIRECC Education Core is collaborating with Richmond Polytrauma and PM&R to develop a virtual standardized patient with mild TBI.
Selected MIRECC Education Programs

5. Mental Health and Chaplaincy Program
   • The Mental Health and Chaplaincy Program collaborates with the VA National Chaplain Center and the Defense Centers of Excellence on training initiatives for chaplains and mental health providers in VA and DoD.

   • The Family Focus Group collaborated to develop a module on Promoting Positive Parent-Child Communications: http://militaryparenting.t2.health.mil/index.php

7. CBOC Mental Health Rounds
   • Collaborate with VISN 16 MIRECC to disseminate their CBOC mental health rounds for continuing education to wider audience of providers in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern VA regions.

8. Community Mental Health Summits
## Summary of Selected Programs & Projects

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<th>Program or Research Project</th>
<th>Challenge Targeted</th>
<th>Process Stage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching into Care</td>
<td>Accessing VA--Knowledge</td>
<td>Pending Practice or Use</td>
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<td>Parenting Course for Service Members &amp; Veterans</td>
<td>Provider Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBOC Mental Health Rounds</td>
<td>Assessment/Screening Need</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Doctoral Training (for PhDs and MDs)</td>
<td>Implementation Challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIO-SCAN for Violence Risk</td>
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<td>Practice-Based Implementation Network</td>
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<td>Mental Health &amp; Chaplaincy Program</td>
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<td>Provider Support for Compassion Fatigue</td>
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<td>Community Provider Training</td>
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<td>Windows to the Brain: Neuropsychiatry of TBI</td>
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<td>National EBP Training Support</td>
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<td>HOME Project</td>
<td>Continuity of Care Service for Homeless</td>
<td>Testing/Collection</td>
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<td>Integrated Smoking Cessation in Homeless Programs</td>
<td>Geographic Barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobile Interventions for Smoking Cessation</td>
<td>PTSD Tx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neurosteroid Interventions for PTSD, TBI, Pain, &amp; Schizophrenia</td>
<td>Complex Comorbidities Tx</td>
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<td>Biomarkers of Suicidality</td>
<td>Effects on Families/Marital Rel.</td>
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<td>Post-Deployment Biorepository</td>
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<td>Multigroup Family Tx of Marital Conflict in mTBI</td>
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<td>Virtual Mild TBI Patient</td>
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Priorities: Women & Family Workgroups

**Composition:** junior and senior level researchers and clinicians.

**Training:** mentor/mentee model supporting research, clinical, and education projects.

**Short-term Goals:**
- Supporting family-focused CDAs and pilot research and clinical projects
  - Family assessment of TBI (Richmond and Durham support of CDA)
  - Web-based parenting training
    - [http://militaryparenting.t2.health.mil/](http://militaryparenting.t2.health.mil/)

**Long-term Goals:**
- Treatment intervention studies
- Assessment studies
- Partnering to expand research
Emerging Evidence: Challenges to Care Engagement

“Are Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Using Mental Health Services? New Data from a National Random-Sample Survey” (Elbogen et al., 2013)

- Mental health utilization did not differ between men and women with probable PTSD or depression; however, female Veterans were more likely than male Veterans to seek mental health care in general.
- Veterans with mental health needs who did not access treatment were more likely to believe they had to solve problems themselves and medications would not help.
- Those who had accessed treatment were more likely to express concern about being seen as weak by others.