

# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)

## NASEM: VA Telehealth in Disability Examinations

Thursday, March 10, 2022

*Leonie Heyworth, MD, MPH  
Deputy Director for Clinical Services  
Office of Connected Care  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*



# Now: Right Care, Right Time, Right Place

At a VA Facility



At Home



On Any Device



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# Full Spectrum of Virtual Health Tools



## Video or Telephone Appointments

VVC enables Veterans and providers to conduct secure, real-time video visits in a virtual medical room using the camera on a phone, computer, or tablet.

[mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect](https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect)



## My HealtheVet:

My HealtheVet is VA's private and secure online patient portal, which allows Veterans to send nonurgent Secure Messages to VA providers, schedule and manage VA appointments, and refill prescriptions.

[myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home](https://myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home)



## Rx Refill:

Through Rx Refill, Veterans can request refills of their refillable VA-issued prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries and view VA prescription history from the convenience of their mobile device.

[mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill](https://mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill)



## Annie App:

Annie is an automated text message reminder service that promotes self-care for Veterans and allows clinicians to create care protocols for patients to submit their health readings.

[mobile.va.gov/annie](https://mobile.va.gov/annie)



## Home Telehealth:

Home Telehealth is the program that oversees in-home and mobile monitoring technologies. Care Coordinators work with Veterans and their families to ensure continued support.

[vawww.telehealth.va.gov/pgm/ht/index.asp](https://vawww.telehealth.va.gov/pgm/ht/index.asp)



## Patient-Generated Health Data

PGHD is health-related data that patients and their family members or caregivers create or gather outside of a clinical setting. PGHD is distinct from the data generated in clinical settings and through encounters with providers.

[dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhacc/sitepages/patient-generated-health-data.aspx](https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhacc/sitepages/patient-generated-health-data.aspx)



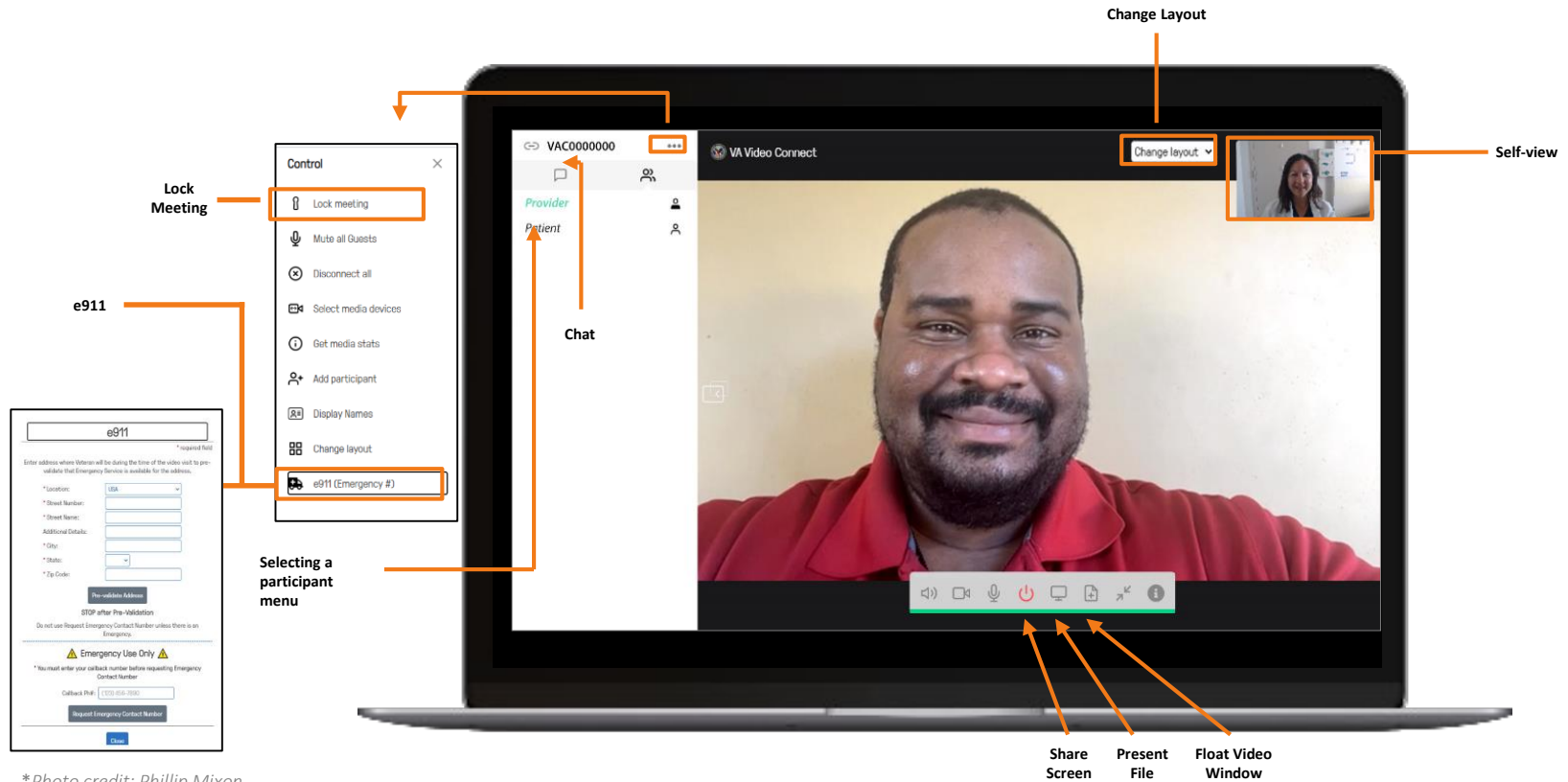
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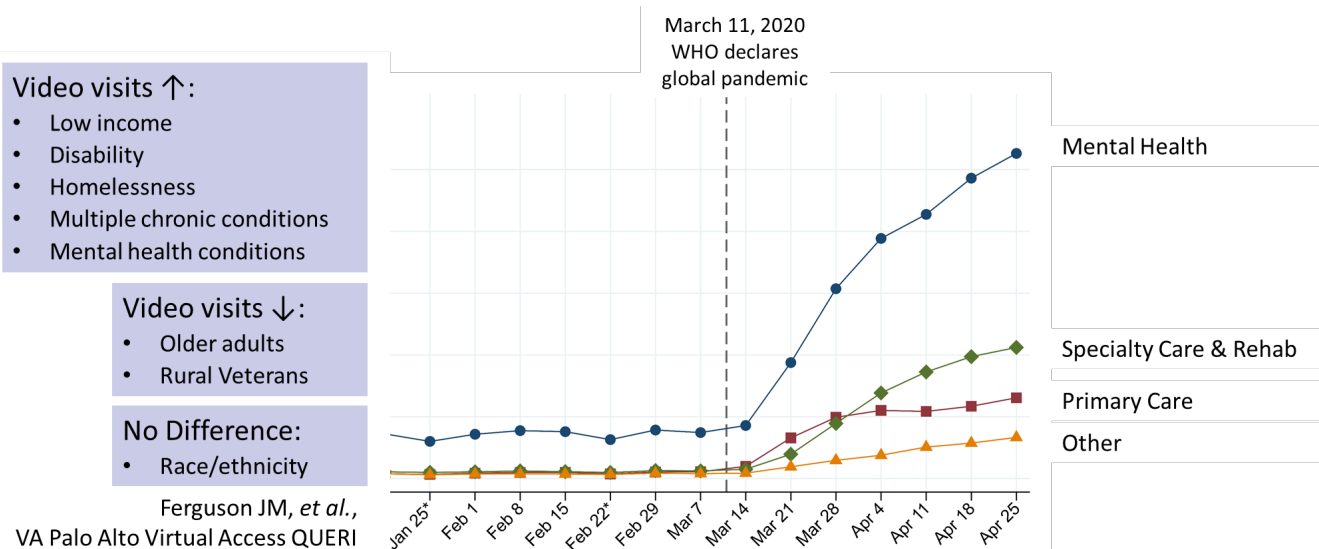
# VA Video Connect (VVC)



# VA Virtual Care Trends

## Early Covid Pandemic Trends in Video Use

- Uniquely, VA enrolls patients in areas where they may not be facilities
- Veterans are medically complex
- 25% rural Veterans; poor broadband
- 15% of Veteran households do not have an internet connection
- Women Veterans are a minority at ~12%



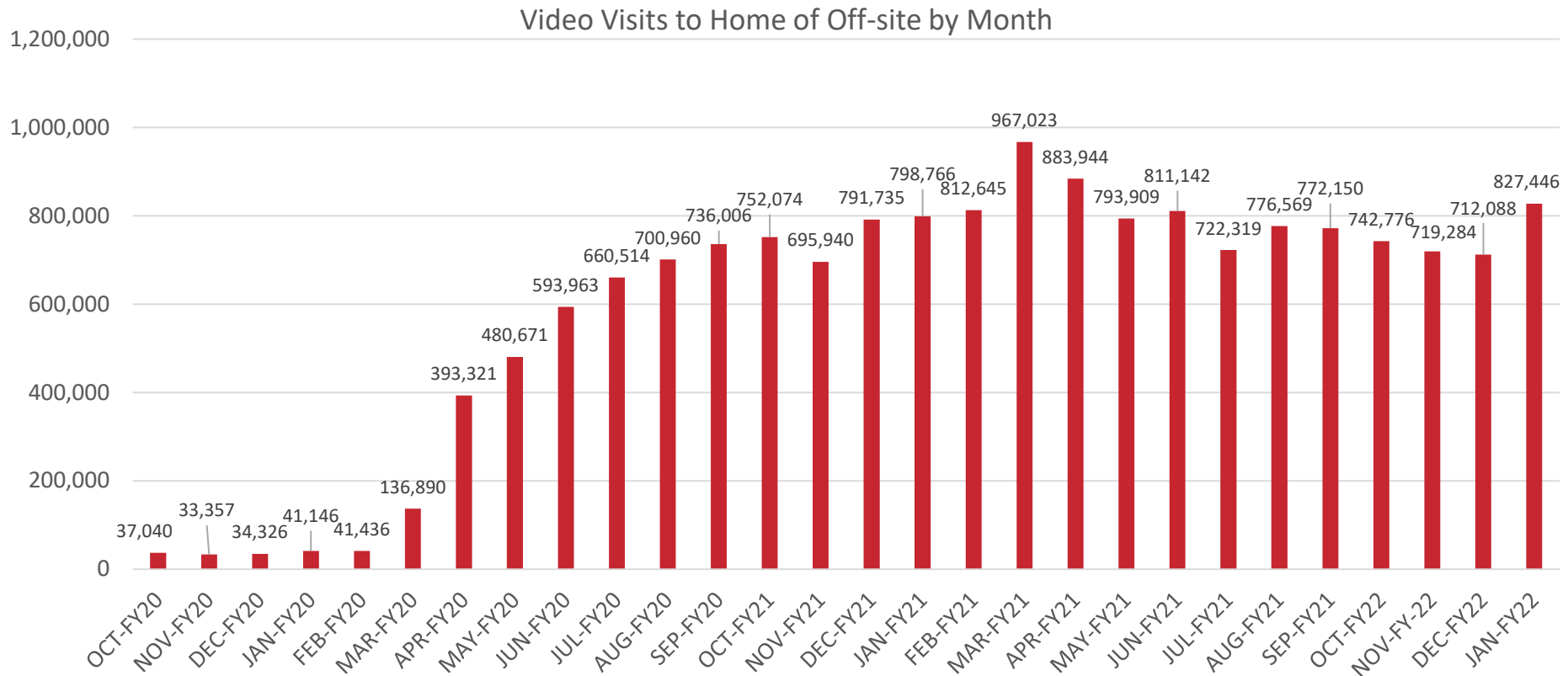
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# VA Video Connect to Home During COVID-19



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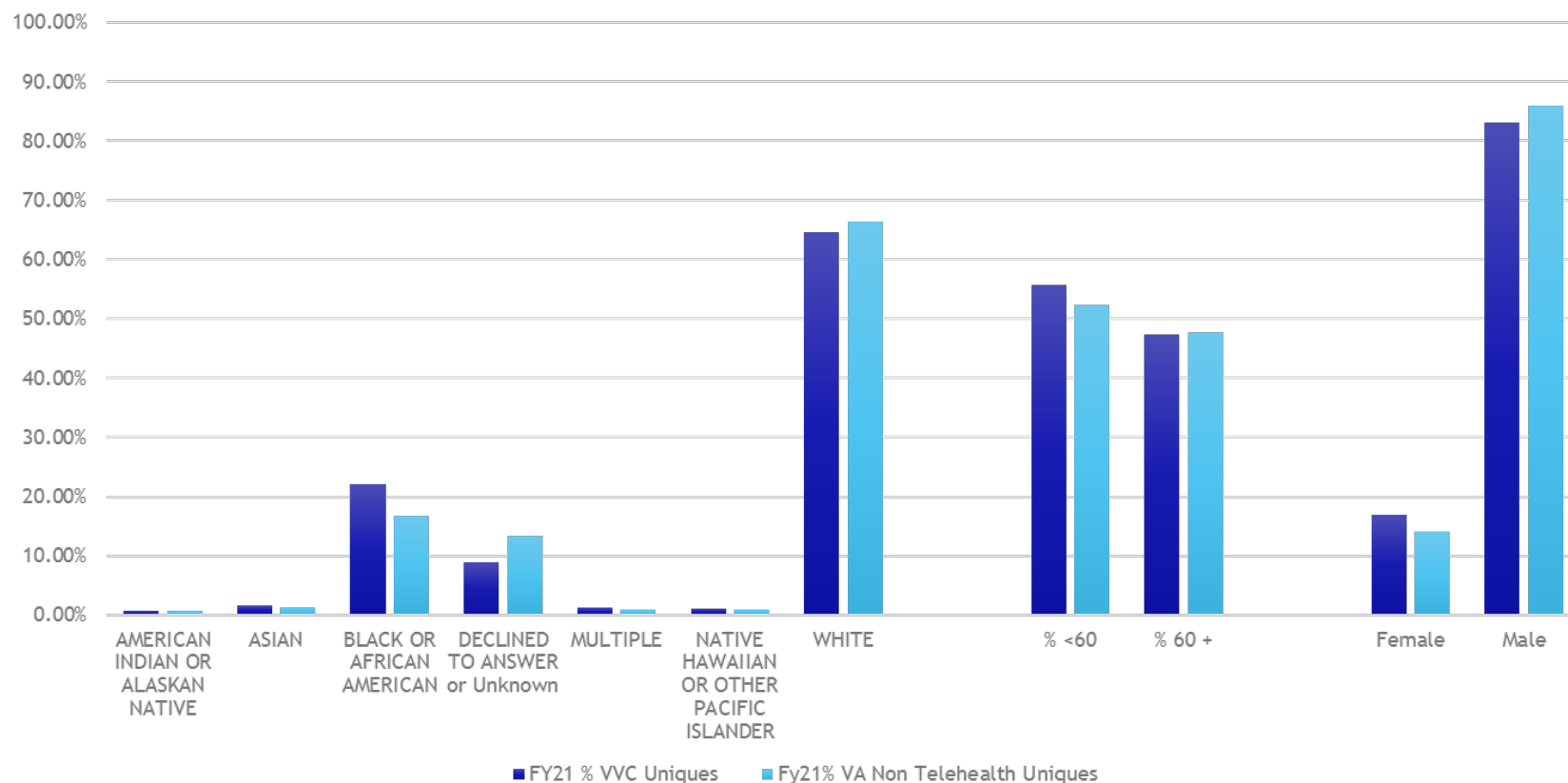
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# FY21 CVT Trends: Users vs. Encounters



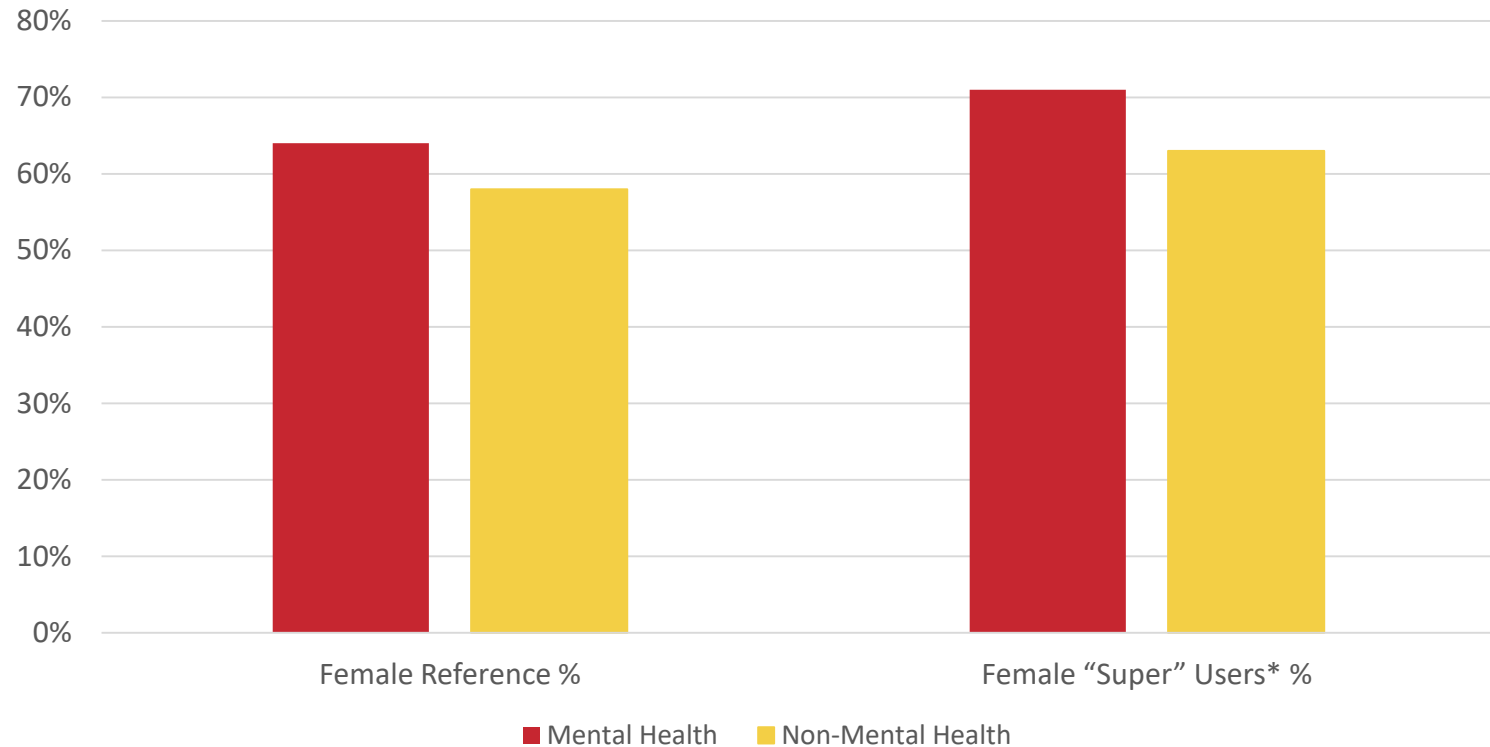
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# Video Adoption by VA's Female Providers

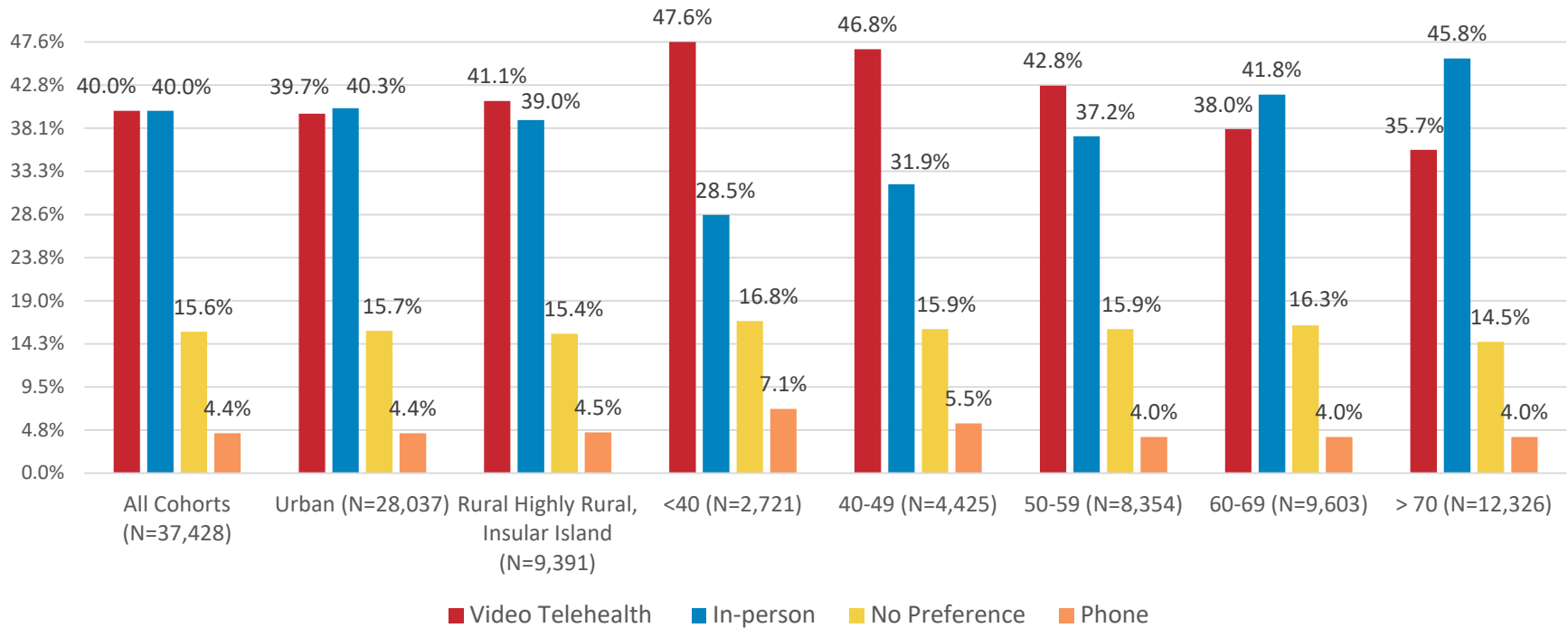


\*clinicians doing 23+ video visits from March 16, 2020 – January 31, 2022

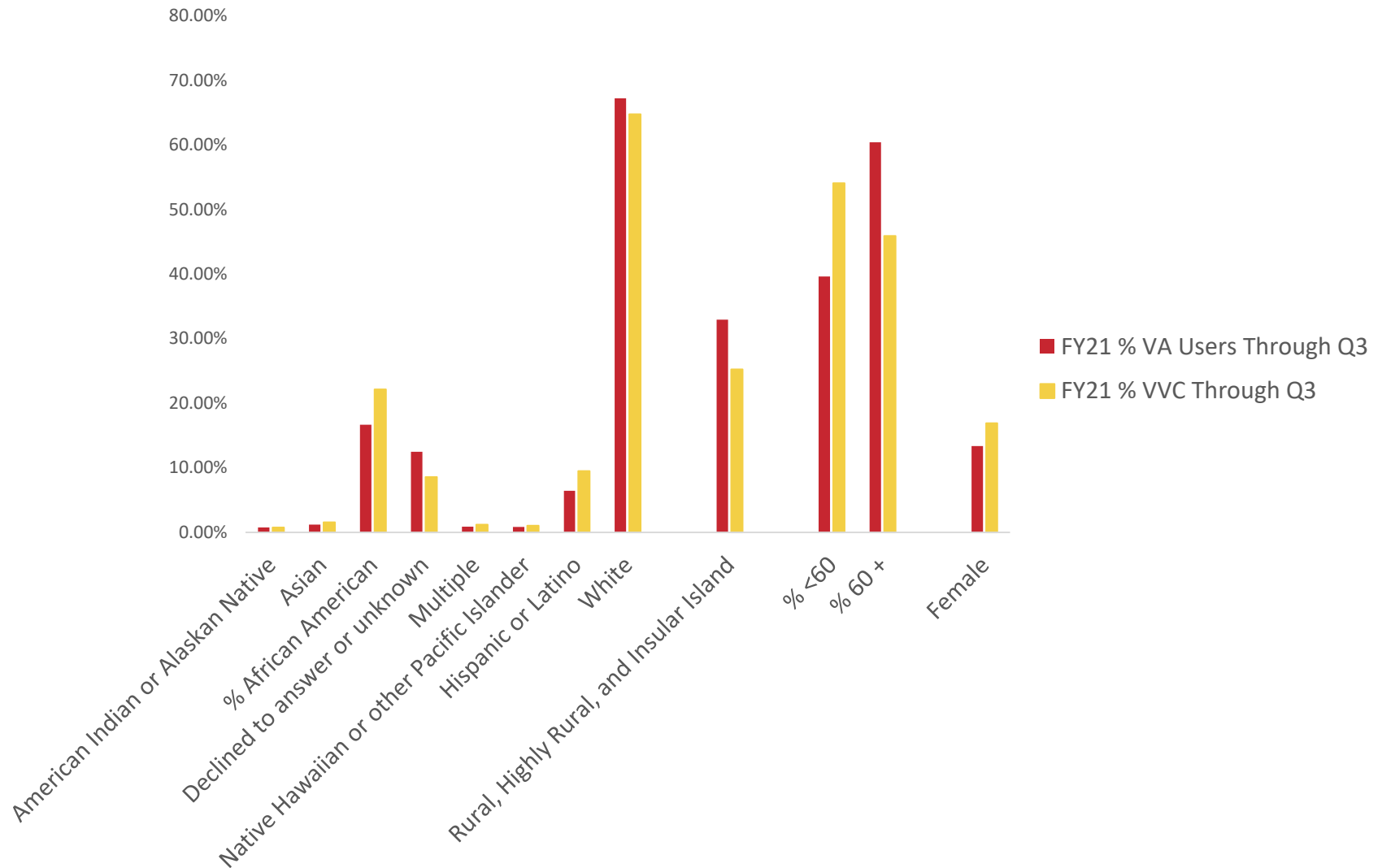
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2787595>

# Constant Focus on the Voice of the Veteran

## Veteran Preference for Care When Surveyed Following Video Telehealth Visits in Their Home



# FY21 User Demographics



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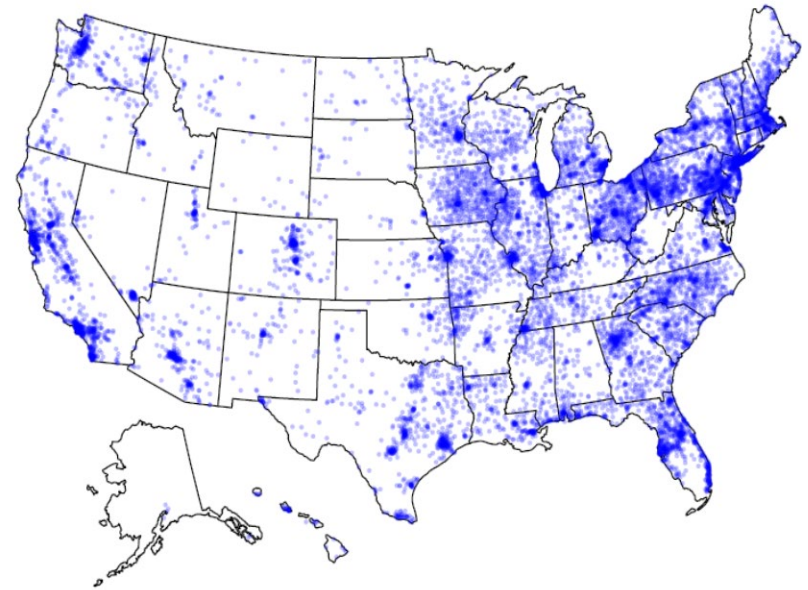


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# Digital Divide

# Digital Divide Initiatives

- Connected Devices: 2017 –
  - 100,000 + tablets in circulation
  - Shipment to State Veterans Homes, Community Living Centers
  - Homeless Veterans
- White Glove Service
- Video to home: co-pay free
- Zero Rating
  - Veterans have fewer worries about data fees associated with their video visit on AT&T, SafeLink by TracFone, Verizon and T-Mobile network
  - <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>



Tablet shipments in the period 3/11/2020-11/6/2020 by zip code. A single blue dot indicates one tablet recipient; deeper blue color indicates larger number of tablet recipients.

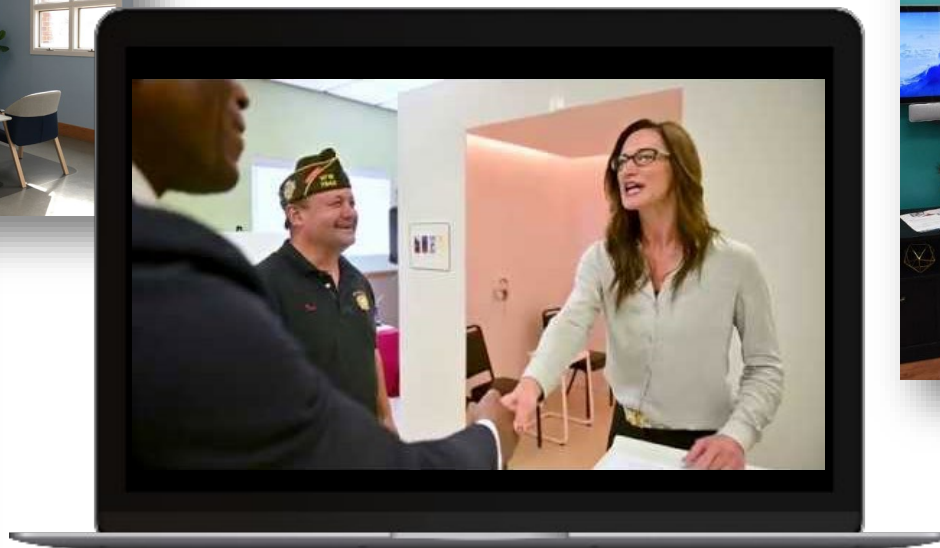
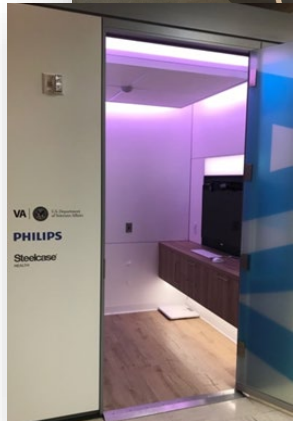
# Digital Divide Initiatives

- Digital Divide Consult: August 2020
- Connecting Veterans with federal/non-profit benefits for internet and phone subsidies
- Emergency Broadband Benefit
  - \$50/month internet subsidy
  - \$75/month internet subsidy on tribal lands
- FCC Lifeline
  - \$9.25/month internet subsidy
  - \$34.25/month internet subsidy on tribal lands
- EveryoneOn
  - <https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers>

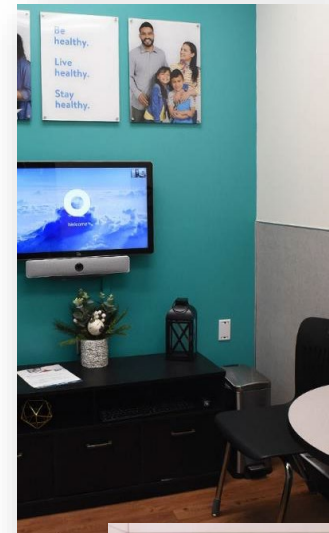




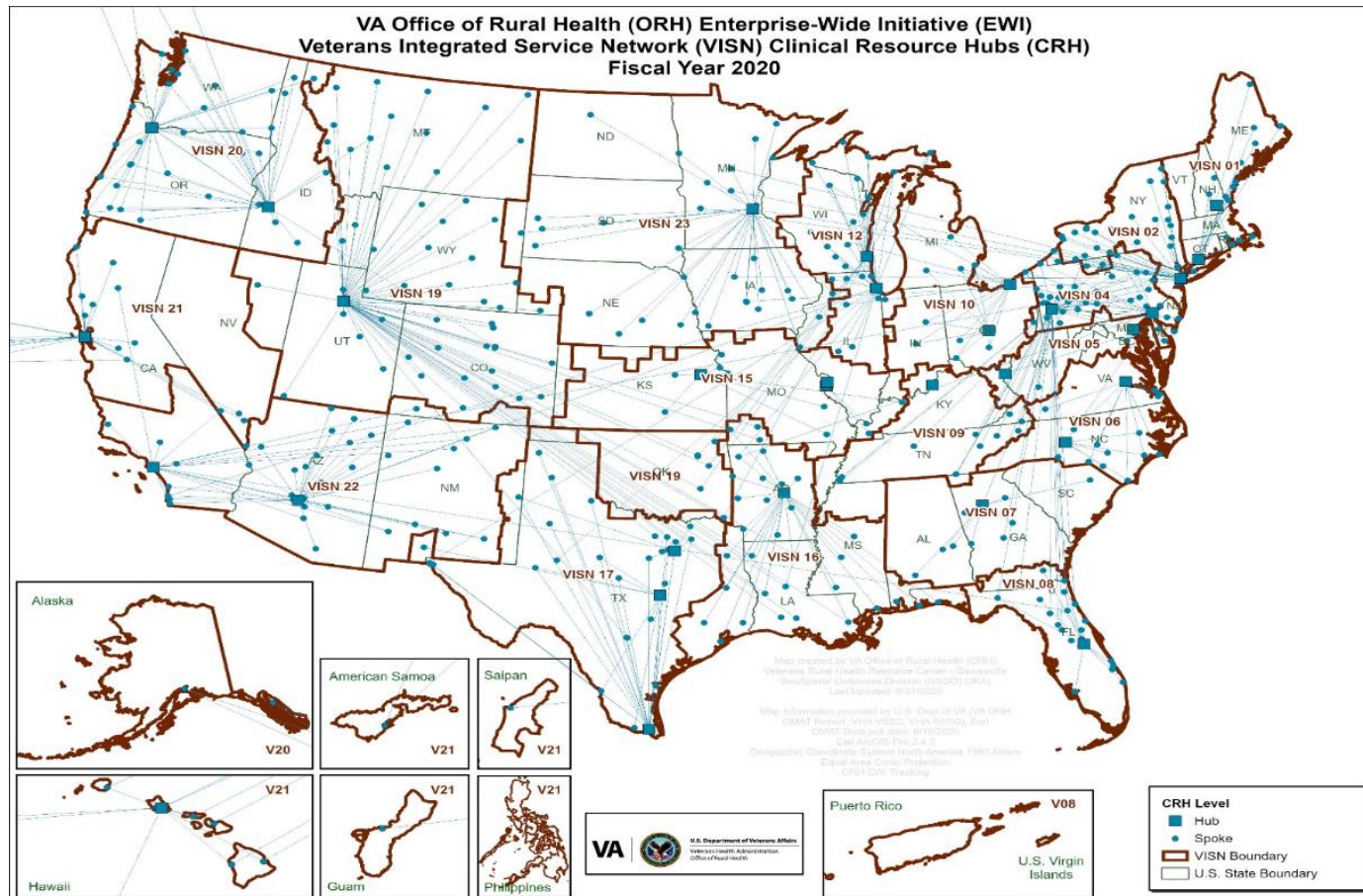
# ATLAS (Accessing Telehealth via Local Area Stations)



[youtu.be/h4KYplR5Kjc](https://youtu.be/h4KYplR5Kjc)



# Clinical Resource Hub Locations



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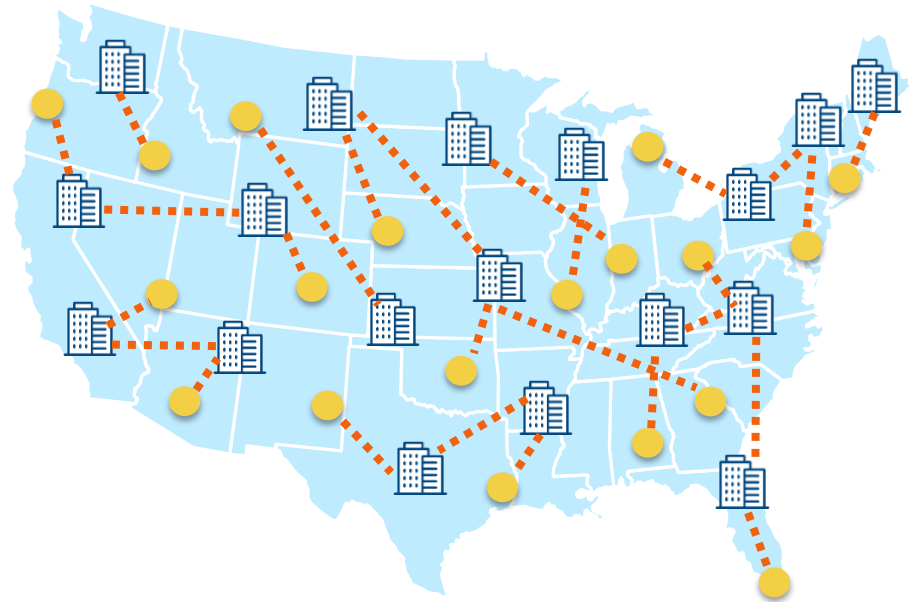
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# The Virtual Healthcare System

Where we were:



Where we're going:



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# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)

## Overview of VHA Disability Exams and Utilization of Telehealth

Thursday, March 10, 2022

*Provided to: National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine*

*Presented by: Jonathan Zivony, Associate Chief Officer,*

*VHA Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (DMA)*

# Definitions

## What is a VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) Disability Exam?

- A **C&P disability exam** is a medical evaluation that occurs after a compensation or pension claim is filed with the VA to document the clinical information needed to properly determine the existence and/or level of service-connected disability.

## What is a C&P Exam Request and a Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ)?

- A **C&P Exam Request** is initiated by VBA when additional medical evidence is needed to make a rating determination on the condition(s) associated with the Veteran's disability claim
- **Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs)** are used by disability examiners for completing a disability examination. They are disease and condition specific and are organized to be a documentation tool to provide the precise medical evidence needed by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) as part of adjudicating disability benefits claims.
  - DBQs conform to VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD)
  - The examiner is asked to complete the form and document only the questions posed in the DBQ.
  - All DBQs start with documenting the diagnosis; this allows for more efficient review by VBA claims adjudicators.

# Methods of Completing of Disability Exams

- **In-Person C&P Exam**

- Completed by trained VHA C&P examiner at a VA Facility
- VBA Medical Disability Exam Contractors

- **Tele-Compensation & Pension (Tele-C&P)**

- 33 DBQ's are suitable to be completed by telehealth modalities

- **Acceptable Clinical Evidence (ACE)**

- Medical Records review supplemented as needed with a Veteran interview (can be conducted by phone or VVC)
- Approximately 80 specific DBQ's are suitable to be completed by ACE

# Clinicians Conducting C&P Exams

- Compensation and Pension (C&P) Examiners must meet extensive training and certification requirements
  - Physicians (MD, DO)
  - Psychologists
  - Nurse Practitioners
  - Physician Assistants
  - Audiologists
  - Optometrists
  - Dentists



# Required VHA C&P Training

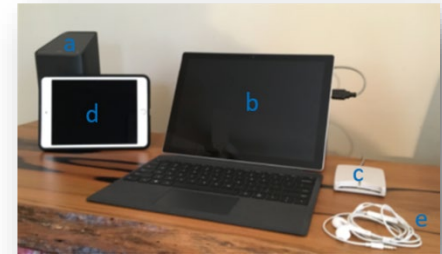
- **Registration and Certification**
  - VHA and VBA contracted C&P examiners must complete specific training modules and post-tests for certification prior to being allowed to perform any C&P disability exams
- **Specific Certifications:**
  - General—5 courses required for all clinicians performing C&P examinations
  - Mental Health Disorders
  - Initial Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Musculoskeletal—required for any clinician performing a bone, muscle or joint examination
  - Medical Specialists perform TBI, Audiology, Mental Health, Eye and Dental C&P exams
- **Additional Tele-C&P Specific Trainings Required Based on Role and Specialty**



# Tele C&P Background

**Overview:** TeleCompensation and Pension (Tele C&P) disability evaluations provide accurate, descriptive, face-to-face evaluations for Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) rating purposes via telehealth video technologies.

- **2011** – A memorandum between the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) was signed that recognized telemental health C&P examinations as adequate for rating purposes.
- **2013** – VHA and VBA agreed to expand utilization of telehealth technology to 16 DBQ's for which telehealth may be used to conduct disability examinations.
- **2018** – The VA MISSION Act was passed with widespread bipartisan support by Congress and signed into law with a primary focus on improving access to care for Veterans
- **2019** – DMA, VHA Leaders, and the VHA Office of Connected Care start creation of a revised plan (national Tele C&P supplement) to promote standardization in Tele C&P programmatic development across VHA Medical Centers
  - Standardized training requirements for provision of Tele C&P specifically
  - Service agreements with complimentary clinical services
  - Equipment and procurement practices
- **2021** – National Tele C&P Supplement is approved and released



# Tele C&P Background

**Locations:** TeleCompPen services may be offered at different locations using the modalities that are best suited to the Veteran's needs.

- VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) or Clinics
- Non-VA institutions
- The Veteran's home

## Telehealth Modalities:

- VA Video Connect (VVC)
- Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT)
- Store and Forward Telehealth (SFT)
- Mobile software applications (apps)



**Licensure:** The VA MISSION Act of 2018 (38 CFR 17.417) created authority to allow a covered health care professional to practice within the scope of their profession at any location in any state if the covered health care professional is using telemedicine to provide services to an individual Veteran.

*This Photo* by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

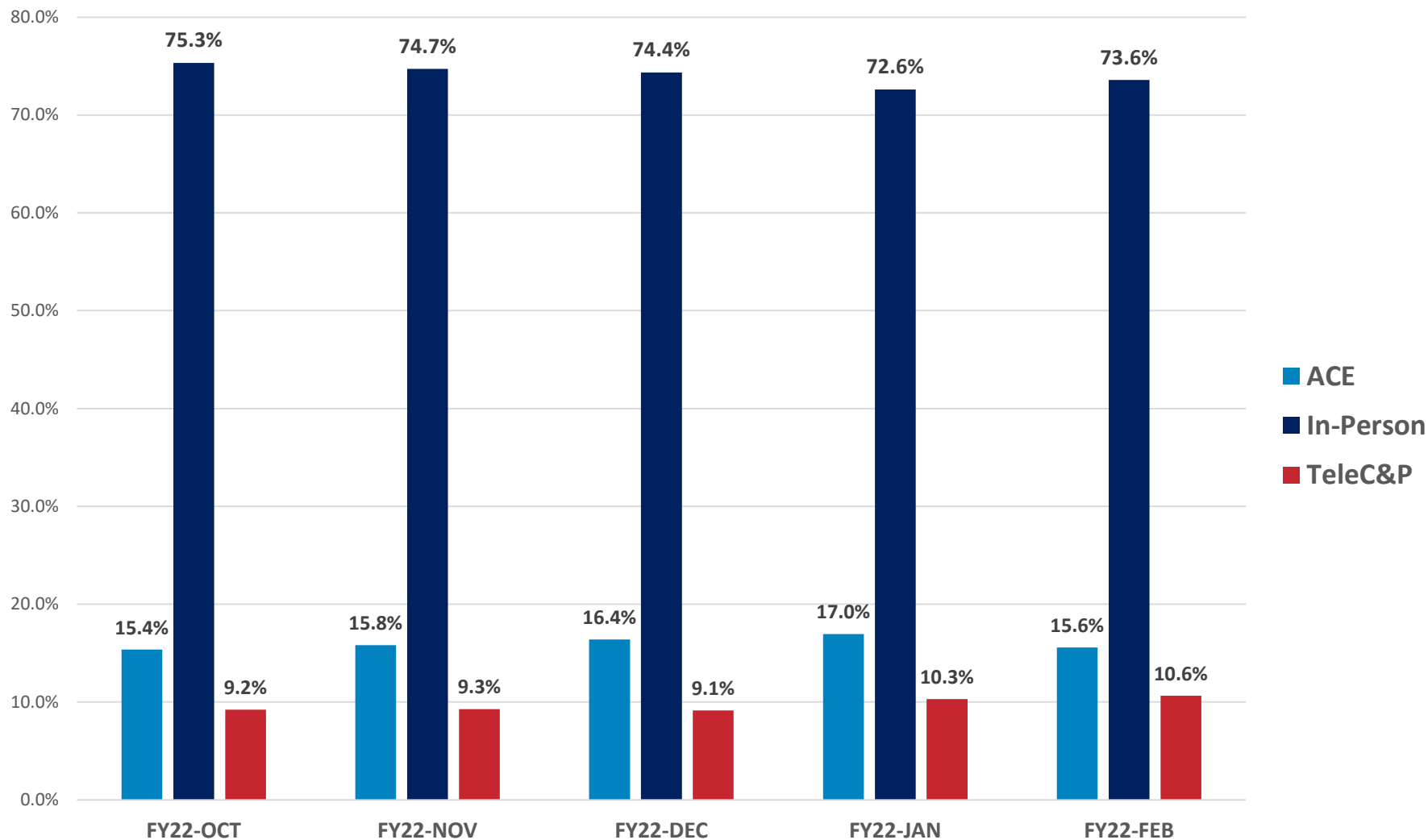
# Tele C&P Reference Information for Examiners

## TeleCompensation and Pension Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) Information

| DBQ                                                                                                                                    | TH Technology                                         | Exam Equipment                                                         | Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Additional Information                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AUDIO: Ear Conditions (including Vestibular and Infectious Conditions)</b>                                                          | Codec with pan, tilt, scan; Otoscope                  | light, measuring tape; otoscope                                        | Ear examination with otoscope; if bone loss of skull, measurement of area; TeleProvider to observe gait, head tilt, Romberg test, limb coordination test as necessary; measure scars if present                                              | Hearing loss DBQ conducted by Audiologist; see TeleAudiology Specialty Supplement |
| <b>AUDIO: Hearing Loss and Tinnitus</b>                                                                                                | Codec with pan, tilt, scan; TeleAudiology peripherals | n/a                                                                    | Assist Audiologist to complete tests as usual                                                                                                                                                                                                | completed by Audiologist                                                          |
| <b>CARDIO: Heart Conditions (including Ischemic and Non-Ischemic Heart Disease, Arrhythmias, Valvular Disease and Cardiac Surgery)</b> | Codec with pan, tilt, scan; Stethoscope               | light, measuring tape; stethoscope; Vital Signs (VS) equipment & scale | PE: heart rate, rhythm, Point of maximal impact (PMI), heart sounds, Jugular Vein distension (JVD), lung auscultation, peripheral pulses and/or edema, heart and lung sounds, BP; measure scars if present                                   | none                                                                              |
| <b>CARDIO: Hypertension</b>                                                                                                            | Codec with pan, tilt, scan; Stethoscope               | light, measuring tape; stethoscope; BP cuff                            | Vital Signs (VS) done prior to appointment; physical examination (PE): heart rate, Blood Pressure (BP), heart sounds, and auscultation; Measurement of scars if present                                                                      | none                                                                              |
| <b>DENTAL: Temporomandibular Disorders</b>                                                                                             | Codec with pan, tilt, scan                            | goniometer; light, tape measure                                        | measure Range of Motion (ROM), measure scars if present                                                                                                                                                                                      | none                                                                              |
| <b>DERM: Scars</b>                                                                                                                     | Codec with pan, tilt, scan                            | light, tape measure                                                    | Summary of scar findings: elevation, depression, adherence to underlying tissue, or missing underlying soft tissue. Head/neck: induration and inflexibility, abnormal texture, tender to palpation, measure scars; Color photographs if done | none                                                                              |



# VHA Fiscal Year 2022: Monthly DBQs by Modality



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# Other Considerations for Tele C&P

- Impact of COVID on availability of resources to complete C&P exams and limiting in person tele-presenter encounters
- Need for tele-presenters in majority of cases
- Internet Bandwidth in rural areas (potential utilization of 5G in future)
- Aging Veteran population less familiar with technology
- Workload capture-importance of accurate coding
- Cultural differences and attitudes toward technology



# C&P Services via Telehealth

- Specific DBQ's that could be completed using telehealth (*Telepresenter may be required in some cases*)

- |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) DBQ Hypertension                                                                         | 15) DBQ Respiratory Conditions (Other than TB and Sleep Apnea)                                                                                                | 26) DBQ Seizure Disorder (Epilepsy)                                      |
| 2) DBQ Nutritional Deficiencies                                                             | 16) DBQ Skin Diseases                                                                                                                                         | 27) DBQ Review Evaluation of Residuals of Traumatic Brain Injury (R-TBI) |
| 3) DBQ Ear Conditions (Including Vestibular and Infectious)                                 | 17) DBQ Diabetes Mellitus                                                                                                                                     | 28) DBQ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome                                         |
| 4) DBQ Loss of Sense of Smell and/or Taste                                                  | 18) DBQ Gall Bladder and Pancreases Conditions                                                                                                                | 29) DBQ Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and other Autoimmune Diseases |
| 5) DBQ Sinusitis/Rhinitis, and other Conditions of the Nose, Throat, Larynx, and Pharynx    | 19) DBQ Hepatitis, Cirrhosis and other Liver Conditions                                                                                                       | 30) Eating Disorders                                                     |
| 6) DBQ Endocrine Diseases (Other than Thyroid, Parathyroid, or Diabetes Mellitus)           | 20) DBQ Intestinal Conditions (other than Surgical or Infections including Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis, and Diverticulitis) | 31) Mental Disorders                                                     |
| 7) DBQ Esophageal Conditions (Including GERD, hiatal hernia and other esophageal disorders) | 21) DBQ Peritoneal Adhesions                                                                                                                                  | 32) PTSD Initial                                                         |
| 8) DBQ Kidney Conditions                                                                    | 22) DBQ HIV-Related Illnesses                                                                                                                                 | 33) PTSD Review                                                          |
| 9) DBQ Prostate Cancer                                                                      | 23) DBQ Infectious Diseases (Other than HIV-Related Illness, CFS, or TB)                                                                                      |                                                                          |
| 10) DBQ Urinary Tract (Including Bladder and Urethra) Conditions                            | 24) DBQ Persian Gulf and/or Afghanistan Infectious Diseases                                                                                                   |                                                                          |
| 11) DBQ Sleep Apnea                                                                         | 25) DBQ Headaches (Including Migraine Headaches)                                                                                                              |                                                                          |
| 12) DBQ Hematological and Lymphatic Conditions, Including Leukemia                          |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                          |
| 13) DBQ Tuberculosis                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                          |
| 14) DBQ Narcolepsy                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                          |
-   
DMA TH Fact Sheet
-   
DMA Stop Codes Fact Sheet

# Questions?



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