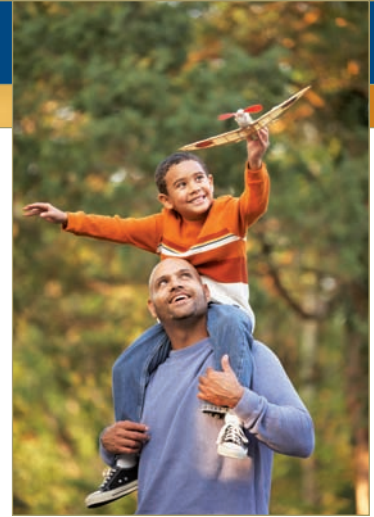




Mental Health

Major areas of focus for VA research on mental health include substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), adjustment and anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. Researchers are studying and testing new drug therapies, enhancing collaborative care models in the primary care setting, and further improving access to mental health care through telehealth and other innovative approaches.



Examples of VA Research Advances

'ESP' report on suicide prevention – A recent report from VA's Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP), "Strategies for Suicide Prevention in Veterans," analyzes which suicide-prevention strategies—for example, hotlines, outreach programs, peer counseling, treatment coordination programs, new counseling approaches—are backed by the strongest evidence and show the most promise for Veterans. It also outlines key questions to consider in future research. The report is available at www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications.esp.

Drug risk for seniors – Many older people have multiple prescriptions for drugs that act on the central nervous system, such as tranquilizers, antidepressants, or painkillers. But little research has looked at the risks from combined use of these drugs. Two recent studies by VA investigators in Pittsburgh and collaborators were among the first to examine this question. One study linked higher total daily doses of these drugs to recurrent falls. The other found that combined use of the drugs, especially at higher doses, may be tied to cognitive decline. The authors say clinicians should use the lowest possible combined doses of these medications, particularly when treating pain and psychiatric illness that occur together.

'Spouse Battlemind' – A team at the Memphis VA has been funded by the Department of Defense to adapt and expand the Spouse Battlemind program, designed to ease the transition home after deployments and prevent mental health problems. The new VA study will test a telephone-based version of the program. The focus will be on education, support, and skills-building.

Facts About Mental Health

Mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety are common in the United States, with more than a quarter of Americans suffering from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. Mental health is a major focus for VA's healthcare system. A recent health survey of 1.5 million Veterans enrolled in VA health care found that more than a third had at least one mental health diagnosis. Depression was the most common diagnosis, followed by anxiety disorders—including PTSD—and schizophrenia. Schizophrenia alone affects some 100,000 VA patients and accounts for nearly 12 percent of VA's total health care costs.

