ABOUT CIH
• CIH consists of products and practices that are not currently part of mainstream, conventional medical practice.
• CIH emphasizes patient empowerment, self-activation, preventive self-care, and wellness, often in conjunction with traditional medical treatment or in other alternative treatment settings. These approaches may be considered complementary (i.e., used in place of or along with standard medical care). Integrative medicine refers to care that blends both mainstream and alternative practices.
• The boundaries between CIH and conventional medicine are not absolute, although most CIH approaches fall into one of two subgroups: natural products (e.g., herbs, vitamins and minerals, and probiotics) and mind and body practices (e.g., yoga, meditation, massage therapy, acupuncture, and relaxation techniques).
• More than 30 percent of American adults and about 12 percent of children use health care approaches developed outside of mainstream conventional medicine, according to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.
• In VA, CIH approaches are most commonly used to improve Veterans’ mental health, manage pain, and promote general wellness. More specifically, these approaches are often used to treat PTSD, depression, back pain, headache, arthritis, fibromyalgia (long-term pain throughout the body), and substance abuse.

VA RESEARCH ON CIH: OVERVIEW
• One of the greatest challenges in CIH is critically examining the effectiveness of approaches that have not been rigorously tested through formal research. VA researchers remain committed to addressing these scientific gaps.
• VA is studying a wide variety of CIH approaches. Researchers are studying natural products, such as using probiotics to treat Gulf War illness, fecal transplants for C. difficile infections, and fish oil to slow the progression of Alzheimer’s disease. Others are researching how mind and body practices such as meditation, yoga, and exercise can be used to treat conditions ranging from PTSD and depression to diabetes and chronic pain.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS
2006 - Demonstrated that glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, taken either alone or in combination, do not reduce pain effectively in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee
2011 - Reported that 90 percent of VA facilities offered CIH therapies, or referred Veterans to licensed practitioners
2014 - Found that vitamin E, an inexpensive treatment, can significantly delay functional decline among patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease
2015 - Learned that mindfulness therapy may be more effective than standard group therapy in treating PTSD
2017 - Determined, along with other researchers, that meditation can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease
2017 - Partnered with other federal agencies to fund $81 million in new research on non-drug treatment of pain for military personnel and Veterans
2017 - Observed that yoga may help back pain and reduce reliance on opioids

(Continued on back)
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