Supplemental Funding Opportunity for Research Related to COVID-19

**Purpose.** Clinical Science Research & Development Service (CSRD) is announcing a funding opportunity for eligible VA investigators to request support for efforts related to better understanding, preventing, diagnosing, and treating COVID-19. This opportunity is intended to jump start research efforts on this topic prior to the timing when our standing funding mechanisms will be available, e.g., the Fall 2020 review round. This supplement may take the form of smaller short-term pilot projects or planning efforts that are intended to support researchers in building collaborative partnerships, developing capacity, and conducting the foundational work necessary to support larger research studies after this initial rapid response as well as data analyses, etc. The goal is to quickly position investigators and teams for moving clinical research forward on efforts related to COVID-19. This effort will be highly coordinated with the national portfolio of research. Scientific proposals beyond the scope of this opportunity may be discussed separately with CSRD.

**Background.** Breakthroughs in the prevention, treatment, and management of COVID-19 will come from research. In addition to providing leadership and support to national research efforts in collaboration with other funders, VA researchers may be well-positioned to study issues focused on (1) understanding and addressing the current COVID-19 pandemic and (2) improving responses to future infectious disease outbreaks. For example, VA researchers may have access to centralized samples and/or data from epicenter facilities, facilities dealing with isolated cases, and all other facilities preparing for possible impacts.

To leverage these opportunities in a timely and targeted manner, applicants may request funds to support efforts such as preparatory-to-research activities, planning support for collaborative efforts, or small short-term pilot or data analysis projects where execution is possible within the current research constraints. This effort is intended to jumpstart future research that may extend to further studies via existing investigator-initiated mechanisms, or service directed research. This opportunity is intended for projects that could be internally reviewed at a quick pace within CSRD, and in coordination with activities within the national portfolio of activities on COVID-19. Any extensive project beyond the parameters of this announcement can be discussed with CSRD to determine ways forward. Standing funding mechanisms may be also be used for COVID-19 related research.
Questions of potential interest related to COVID-19 include:
- Screening
- Diagnosis
- Isolation & Monitoring
- Treatment & Care Strategies

CSRD is committed to ensuring that the research activities funded with this opportunity does not interfere with the mission critical work of VA clinical and operations partners addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, applicants must comply with the following directives:
- **Do NOT reach out to, or solicit letters of support from, VA clinical operations leaders or national program offices as part of the application.**
- Proposed projects should be discussed with the local facilities, including the Associate Chief of Staff for Research (ACOS-R), to ensure that the project will not interfere with clinical activities or impose meaningful burdens on clinicians who are involved in specific aspects of the COVID-19 response. A formal letter of support is NOT required.

**Mechanism.** Successful applicants will receive CSRD funds for a duration of up to approximately 9 months. The goals of the supplement should describe activities that can be started quickly. Planning funds should be used for the non-research or preparatory to research activities necessary to support a developed program of research related to COVID-19 (e.g., evidence review or meta-analysis; partner and expert convening; initial analyses of existing data, feasibility, infrastructure, assessments; etc.). A final progress report will be due at the end of the award, and outcomes may include future research applications, strategic plans such as a roadmap that can be implemented, publications, etc.

**Timeline for Submission and Review**
CSRD will offer a rolling submission calendar and accept applications at any time up until July 1, 2020.
- **Applications for the first round of review are due by April 6, 2020.** CSRD will announce initial awards no later than May 1, 2020; projects are expected to start as soon as feasible after award (CSRD will discuss and work to address any concerns or barriers).
- **Applications will continue to be accepted on a rolling basis after the initial submission deadline** and will be reviewed on a monthly basis, with awards announced prior to the end of the subsequent month (e.g., review of applications submitted by April 30, 2020 will be completed and awards announced by May 31, 2020).

**Application Requirements.**
Applications, in the form of concept papers, must be submitted by the PI’s local VA Research Office via email to VHABL RD-CSRD@va.gov with a
statement confirming the applicants VA eligibility (current number of VA eighths) and availability of VA space to engage in the proposed research. Concept papers should not exceed 3 pages, excluding references (not to exceed two pages total) and budget information, and should conform to formatting requirements (single-spaced, 11-point Arial font, with at least 0.5-inch margins).

Any questions regarding this call for concept papers and funding mechanism should be submitted to: VHABLRD-CSRD@va.gov

Concept papers should provide an overview of the objectives, approach and outcome for the project. A description of how the work will be conducted to support the intended outcome, and any unique characteristics that the project will contribute to the overall program of research needed to make progress on COVID-19. Suggested format and length:

1. **Background (~.5 page)**. Describe the project significance and contribution to advancing understanding, prevention, diagnosis, treatment issues related to COVID-19, including potential impact for Veteran health.

2. **Specific Aims and Approach (~.5 page)**. Describe the objectives and the specific activities and approaches that will be carried out to meet these objectives (including addressing potential challenges). Describe the anticipated outcomes and their unique contribution to further our overall COVID-19 research portfolio.

3. **Research Team and Relevant Experience (~.5 page)**. Describe the key members of the research team (co-investigators and organizations) and their relevant expertise and experience in this area of research and/or evaluation.

4. **Data Sources (~0.5 page)**. Describe the existing sources of data or specimens relevant to the project, availability of these data sources, and the research team’s experience with them.

5. **Timeline (~0.5 page)**. Provide a brief description (or a Gantt chart) outlining the projected timeframe for key project activities and outcome.

6. **References**: not to exceed 2 pages

7. **Budget (NOT included in the 5-page limit)**. Provide a summary budget table and budget justification for the rapid response project. The budget may be up to 9 months for a minimum of $25,000 and should be only be used for the work needed to accomplish the specified objectives and outcomes. Please describe what funds will be obligated by fiscal year (FY20 and FY21).

**General Criteria for Review and Scoring of Concept Papers**
Concept papers will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

1. Alignment with priorities related to COVID-19
2. Validity and feasibility of the proposed approach(es)
3. Unique contribution of the concept to overall priorities
4. Investigators’ experience, expertise, and capacity to conduct the work within the stated timeline

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