

VA HSR&D Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion - Philadelphia Veterans Community Advisory Board By-Laws

Preamble

We are the Veterans Community Advisory Board (VCAB) of the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP), which is a US Department of Veterans Affairs Health Services Research and Development (VA HSR&D) Center of Innovation (COIN). Located at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Philadelphia (CMCVAMC) and at the Veterans Affairs Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS), CHERP is a dual site, cross-VISN 4 (Veterans Integrated Service Network) center, with investigators in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

Articles

Article I General

Section 1.01 Mission Statement:

“The Veterans Community Advisory Board’s (VCAB) mission is to advise, foster relationships, and contribute experience and input to CHERP Leadership and Researchers in order to promote health, healthcare, and health equity for the Veteran Community.”

Section 1.02 Board

The business of the CHERP VCAB will be conducted at monthly meetings by a membership of at least 7, and not more than 13 members. A simple majority of current members (half plus one) shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at monthly meetings.

The VCAB is instituted as a sounding board for proposals and research ideas, enabling Veteran experiences and opinions to have an influence in the kinds of studies promoted and developed by CHERP, while sustaining the center’s Veteran-centered efforts to improve the VA Health System.

The VCAB is designed to engage Veterans in discussion about their care experiences and health care preferences, and raise their awareness of the VA population and clinical research.

In addition, the VCAB will provide guidance on the communication of research findings and Veteran-centered best practices through:

- Identifying strategies to improve the spread and utilization of information among Veterans

- Evaluating products and informational materials to ensure they are relevant and useful to consumers.
- Pinpointing ways to measure the impact of CHERP communication efforts.

Section 1.03 Representation Policy

As representatives to the Veteran community, VCAB members shall not express their personal opinions in any way that might be construed as an official VA policy or position, where policy indicates VA regulations, rules or procedures or any policies, procedures, strategies, agendas related to CHERP or to CHERP's relationship with its investigators.

However, the power to commit the VCAB to a policy on matters outside of official VA business always rests with the membership of the VCAB. For example, the VCAB can set policies and procedures about how it will operate as a Board as long as those policies and procedures do not conflict with VA policy or Federal law, rules or regulations.

Additionally, the pursuit of consensus policy positions is a violation of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and must not be elicited in VCAB meetings. The expression of individual viewpoints, personal opinions, facts, anecdotes, challenges faced, and positive or negative health experiences is welcome, as is non-consensus advice or guidance about policy positions. Consensus policy recommendations about official VA policy or positions resulting from group deliberations are not expected and will not be solicited.

Section 1.04 Confidentiality Policy

All VCAB members are expected to be sensitive to, and respectful of, the confidentiality of any personal information they may learn in the course of participation on the VCAB. All CHERP VCAB members are required to abide by the VA Rules of conduct and training regarding the protection of sensitive information for research, especially personal health information (PHI), personally identifiable information (PII) and all health status information of patients in the VA's care.

Section 1.05 Conflict of Interest Policy

Members shall disclose any potential or actual conflict of interest by completing a Conflict of Interest Form annually. Such disclosures do not imply or preclude ethical impropriety. Members in a potential or actual conflict of interest situation are expected to recuse themselves from specific VCAB votes, discussions, and activities as necessary and appropriate.

Article II Membership

Section 2.01 General

The VCAB is a working board that is broad-based and created from a commitment to involving any and all segments of the Veteran community that have an interest in health, health care, and health equity research.

The VCAB membership is instituted as a sounding board for proposals and research ideas, enabling Veteran experiences and opinions to have an influence in the kinds of studies promoted and developed by CHERP, while sustaining the center's Veteran-centered efforts to improve the VA Health System.

The VCAB membership is designed to engage Veterans in discussion about their care experiences and health care preferences, and raise their awareness of the VA population and clinical research.

In addition, the VCAB membership will provide guidance on the communication of research findings and Veteran-centered best practices through:

- Identifying strategies to improve the spread and utilization of information among Veterans
- Evaluating products and informational materials to ensure they are relevant and useful to consumers.
- Pinpointing ways to measure the impact of CHERP communication efforts.

Section 2.02 Eligibility

The VCAB membership shall be inclusive, without regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, race, or ethnicity. VCAB membership must be limited to Veterans, their spouses and their direct caregivers. Membership shall include to the extent possible representation of the communities of Veterans vulnerable to disparities that form the core of CHERP's mission, such as:

- Women Veterans,
- Veterans with stigmatizing social, physical or mental conditions,
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Homeless Veterans
- Rural Veterans

In addition, at least (2) Veteran VA Employees who also represent CHERP's mission communities shall be among the VCAB's members.

Section 2.03 Application for Board membership

Application for membership shall follow the guidelines determined by the VCAB and implemented by the Nominations Committee.

Section 2.04 Term of Office

Members are elected for open-ended terms and may serve until resigning or having their membership terminated by the VCAB for reasons in accordance with these bylaws. Members may be elected on a timetable determined by the Nominations committee.

Section 2.05 Attendance

Members are expected to attend general meetings, health permitting, and serve on at least one VCAB committee. In case of an emergency, scheduling conflict, or other challenging circumstances, phone attendance is acceptable. Members who cannot attend a VCAB meeting shall notify the chairperson or staff administrator as far in advance of the meeting as possible.

Section 2.06 Voting Status

Meetings will be held according to Robert's Rules of Order. Voting status is granted only to elected members of the VCAB in good standing. If members miss three consecutive meetings without an excused absence, they are no longer considered in GOOD STANDING and their membership including voting status will be in jeopardy. However, for motions to pass, a majority of the members present will be needed to carry a motion forward.

Section 2.07 Representation

Members may represent the VCAB in public forums only with prior, voted VCAB authorization along with consultation from VCAB Administrator and CHERP's Communications Coordinator, and must report on their representation at the following general meeting. In the event time does not permit prior, voted VCAB authorization, the Chairperson in consultation with the VCAB Administrator may authorize a member to represent the VCAB at a specific meeting or function.

Section 2.08 Basic Member Responsibilities

Members shall strive to promote shared understanding and treat each other, staff, and volunteers respectfully at all times. If members miss three consecutive meetings without an excused absence, they will no longer be considered in GOOD STANDING and their membership is in jeopardy. All privileges will be suspended (reimbursement payments, voting status, travel assistance to conferences or meetings) and they will be asked to re-evaluate their continued participation in the VCAB. A member with suspended privileges will only become a member in GOOD STANDING again upon attending three subsequent consecutive VCAB general meetings.

Members shall obtain and maintain necessary VA Research education and training certifications such as CITI Program Good Clinical Practice, HIPAA and VA Privacy and Security Training. Members must also receive orientation in basic Research Methodology (Research 101) and in VA/CHERP's Research Mission, goals and priorities. If members allow their certifications to lapse for longer than 30 days, they will no longer be considered in GOOD STANDING and their membership is in jeopardy. All privileges will be suspended (reimbursement payments, voting status, travel assistance

to conferences or meetings) and they will be asked to re-evaluate their continued participation in the VCAB. A member with suspended privileges will only become a member in GOOD STANDING again upon completing required training and re-certification.

Section 2.09 Member Removal

Upon receipt of an allegation or complaint against a member, the Chairperson will consult with the Vice Chairperson, the CHERP VCAB Administrator and whomever the Chairperson deems appropriate to determine the worthiness of said allegation or complaint. The Chairperson, at their discretion, may then dismiss the matter as unfounded or determine the allegation has sufficient merit to be further pursued. If the latter is the case; the Chairperson will immediately inform the member of the alleged violation and that the VCAB will be voting on the termination of their membership at the next meeting (provided at least 10 days precede the next meeting). The Chairperson may temporarily suspend the person's membership pending the resolution of the matter.

Prior to their termination being voted, a VCAB member may provide the Chairperson with a written response to the complaint and may also request to attend the VCAB meeting to present their response directly to the membership.

For a substantiated violation of a VCAB policy contained within these bylaws (Confidentiality, Representation, Conflict of Interest, Attendance, Training or other substantial allegations), a member may be removed from the VCAB by a vote of the majority of the members present at a duly convened meeting, provided a quorum is present.

Article III General Meetings

Section 3.01 Frequency, Time and Place

The VCAB meetings will be held monthly at a time and site designated by the Chairperson and VCAB. Ten days in advance of the monthly meeting, the support staff for CHERP VCAB, in consultation with VCAB officers, will send members the meeting agenda, minutes of the prior meeting and other relevant information.

Section 3.02 Conduct of Meetings

Meetings will be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order. The order of business may be altered at any meeting by a majority vote of the members or at the discretion of the Chairperson.

Section 3.03 Meetings

To promote the mission of the VCAB, the monthly meetings will be open to any member of the CMCVAMC community, its affiliates and satellites, who wishes to attend. At its discretion, the Board may hold closed sessions to conduct business it deems confidential or inappropriate to be open to non-members of the VCAB.

Article IV Executive Officers, Committee Leaders and Elections

Section 4.01 Executive Officers

VCAB will have as executive officers a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson.

Section 4.02 Election of Executive Officers

The VCAB will have elections at the September 2017 meeting. Every two (2) years the membership will elect or re-elect its Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

Section 4.03 Election Protocol

The term for each officer will be two years.

Section 4.03A Special Protocol for Vacant Executive

Should the Chairperson position become vacant, the Vice Chairperson will become the Chairperson and serve the remainder of the term. A special election will then be held to elect a new Vice-Chairperson. In the unlikely event that both seats are vacant, the VCAB is empowered to elect interim officers.

Section 4.04 Executive Officer Removal

A motion of removal of an executive officer can be initiated by a CHERP VCAB member or Administrator. The removal of an executive officer from the CHERP VCAB, requires a vote of three quarters of the attending membership. An executive officer removed may retain membership on the VCAB.

Section 4.05 Duties of the Chairperson

The Chairperson shall preside at general meetings and have general chairperson responsibilities and specifically be responsible for:

- 1) Preparation of the agenda in consultation with the Vice-Chairperson and the CHERP VCAB Administrator and staff;
- 2) Directing the VCAB meeting including: acknowledging persons who wish to speak, encouraging discussion to proceed in a smooth and orderly fashion and stating all motions and putting them to vote.
- 3) Subject to a majority approval of the members in attendance at a general meeting, the Chairperson may assign priority tasks to the established VCAB work groups as deemed necessary.

Section 4.06 Duties of the Vice Chairperson

The Vice-Chairperson shall actively assist the Chairperson in maintaining the efficient working of the VCAB, and preside in the absence of the Chairperson.

Section 4.07 Executive Representation

The Chairperson shall have the authority to represent the VCAB within the CHERP

Research network as well as the COIN network and may delegate this function to the Vice-Chairperson or other VCAB member as necessary.

Section 4.08 Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the CHERP VCAB will include the Chair and Vice Chair of the CHERP VCAB, the CHERP VCAB Administrator (ex-officio) and all of the Chairs of the existing standing committees. The Executive Committee will meet quarterly to discuss the progress of each committee among other matters. The role of the Executive Committee includes being empowered to act on behalf of the CHERP VCAB between stated meetings with appropriate consultation with other members as well as the CHERP VCAB Administrator and CHERP Communications Coordinator when necessary and other duties assigned by the Chair.

Article V Committees

Section 5.01 Standing Committees

- **Education and Training:** Coordinate VCAB sponsored symposiums, community forums, community outreach and engagement and other projects.
- **Nominations/Membership:** Develop VCAB member application, set membership criteria, review membership demographics, interview new applicants.
- **Funds Management Committee:** manage grant applications and proposal development, external funding, research project participation, donations to VCAB.

Section 5.02 CAB's Committee Structure

Committee Chairs shall be appointed by the VCAB Chairperson. Committee Chairs shall report committee activities to the VCAB Chairperson in writing before the general VCAB meeting and also to the general membership at the VCAB meetings.

Section 5.03 Committee Meetings

Committee chairs are responsible for calling committee meetings as needed.

Section 5.04 Committee Failure to Perform

Should a committee chair not perform his/her duties, the VCAB Chairperson may discharge the committee chair and, subject to the approval of the VCAB, may appoint a new committee chair.

Section 5.05 ADHOC Committee Structure

In order to carry out the mission and achieve the goals of the VCAB, the Board accepts an AD HOC committee structure. The objective of this structure is to allow full participation by VCAB members in those activities that best fit their particular skills and interests. The VCAB may create AD HOC committees as necessary and appoint committee chairs and members for this committee. Such committees could include ones which plan and implement specific programs.

Article VI BUDGET

Section 6.01 Dues

The VCAB shall collect no membership dues.

Section 6.02 CAB Member Compensation

Officers and other VCAB members shall not receive financial compensation for their participation on the VCAB. However, VCAB members will be reimbursed for individual expenses such as travel, parking, etc.

In special circumstances and based on a recommendation received from the VCAB membership, the CHERP VCAB Administrator may facilitate a member to serve as a research team member for a specific study. The member will participate in proposal development with the project's Principal Investigator (PI) and will submit a written proposal for services to be rendered with a proposed budget to the VCAB Chairperson and to CHERP's Co-Director of Research Development. If the proposal is funded and becomes operationalized, the VCAB member shall forthwith become a VA Employee subject to all the principles, guidelines, policies, regulations and statutes governing VA Research and the Protection of Human Subjects in Research.

Officers and VCAB members will not serve as unpaid staff extenders or assistants to CHERP investigators or research consultants.

Section 6.03 Direct VCAB Support

Under the direction of the VCAB Administrator, the CHERP shall provide administrative support, including but not limited to: reasonable costs for meetings, such as travel, food, local advertising/promotion, telephone, photocopying, fax usage, postage, translation of materials into layman language, interpretation during meetings, and transportation. CHERP will consider funding for other VCAB activities, as long as those activities are directly related to health equity and aligned with current VA priorities for Veteran health. The VCAB is not prohibited from seeking external grant support of its self-directed research efforts. However, the guidance of the VCAB Administrator will be required for that effort.

Section 6.04 Solicitation of Donations for the VCAB

It is unlawful to solicit donations to VA in an official capacity as a federal VA WOC Appointee. However, as a private citizen, with no mention of a VA appointment, and with the prior approval of the CHERP VCAB Administrator, officers and members may solicit modest financial, pro bono and in-kind support from outside sources for VCAB activities. These items will become donations to VA, subject to receipt, approval and dispersal at the direction of the Administrative Officer of the CMCVAMC Research Office.

Do not solicit donations from persons who:

- 1) Are seeking official action by the VA;

- (2) Does business or seeks to do business with the VA;
- (3) Conducts activities regulated by the VA;
- (4) Has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the VCAB member's official duties;
- (5) Are candidates for partisan political office

Section 6.05 Reimbursements

Personal financial expenditures which are related to VCAB meetings by VCAB officer(s) shall be reimbursed by invoice with copies of bills for items such as photocopying, refreshments. With the approval from the VCAB Administrator and Chairperson, VCAB members can receive reimbursement for expenses related to their contribution to the VCAB work, which includes travel expenses to meetings or other expenses approved by the VCAB membership and the CHERP designated VCAB Administrator

Article VII Bylaws

Section 7.01 Amendment of Bylaws

These Bylaws may be amended by a three-quarters majority of the members present at a monthly meeting, provided that notice of the proposed change is given to each member via regular or electronic mail at least 21 days in advance of the meeting.

Section 7.02 Periodic Review of Bylaws

These Bylaws shall be formally reviewed by the VCAB at least once every two years. The majority of the membership of the CHERP Veteran Community Advisory Board adopted these By-Laws on *August 30, 2017*.

Andre H. Ford, VCAB Chairman

Harry L. Maxwell, VCAB Vice Chairman