

# Overview of VA Data, Information Systems, National Databases & Research Uses

October 6, 2014

Presented by:

Denise M. Hynes, MPH, PhD, RN

Center Director, VIREC

# Session Objectives

- **Introduce VIREC**
- **Introduce the Database & Methods Cyberseminar Series**
- **Provide an Overview of VA Data Sources**

# VA Information Resource Center



[www.virec.research.va.gov](http://www.virec.research.va.gov)



The Researcher's Guide to VA Data  
VA Information Resource Center

- VIReC Home
- About Us
- ▶ VIReC Resources
- Support
- ▶ Research in the VA
- ▶ VHA Links



### Assisting VA Researchers

VIReC provides guidance essential for helping VA researchers use data and information systems.

[Learn more »](#)

Search VIReC's Site

Go

VA Health Services Research & Development Service



- Assisting VA Researchers
- Education
- Publications

Welcome to our new Internet website.

Looking for VIReC's resources for VA researchers? Visit our Intranet site. [Learn more...](#)

#### Who We Are

VIReC is an HSR&D funded resource center. Our mission is to improve the quality of VA research that utilizes databases and information systems.

#### What We Do

VIReC conducts research and collaborates with experts in the field to create a knowledge base of factual and evaluative information. VIReC shares this knowledge with

#### Upcoming Events

October 6: Overview of VA Data, Information Systems, National Databases and Research Uses

October 21: Developing a Chemotherapy Ordering Management

# What VIREC Does

- **Creates a knowledge base of factual and evaluative information about data.**
- **Shares knowledge with VA researchers.**
  - **Intranet website**
  - **VHA Data Portal (collaboration with NDS, VINCI and Data Quality)**
  - **Cyberseminars (hosted by CIDER/HSR&D)**
  - **Tutorials and documentation**
  - **HelpDesk (virec@va.gov)**



# Database & Methods Series Objectives

- **To provide information about:**
  - **Different types of VA data and information systems**
  - **Uses of VA data in past research and new applications**
  - **Limitations of secondary data use**
  - **Resources to support use of VA data**

Poll Question #1: I am interested in VA data primarily due to my role as \_\_\_\_\_.

- Research investigator
- Data manager
- Project coordinator
- Program specialist or analyst
- Other (specify)

# Topics for Today

- **Overview of VA data sources and databases**
- Data processing platforms and EHR (read-only) access portals
- Policies governing data access
- Where to go for more help

# Common Sources of VA and VHA Data

Administrative /  
Operations Data

Financial  
Recordkeeping

Clinical Care /  
Patient Records  
Data

Veteran  
Population  
Surveys

Data from Other  
Agencies

Performance  
Measurement  
Data

# Overview: Levels of Data

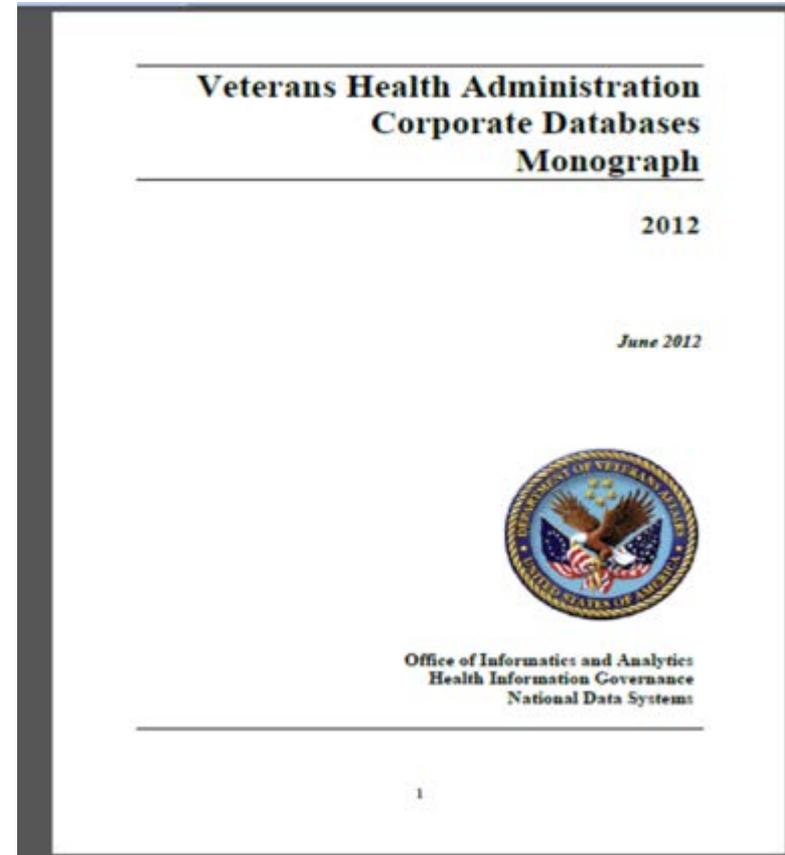
- Local facility data
- VISN level data
- Corporate (national) level

# Orienting to VA Data

- **A few resources that will help you get an overview of VA data and how to use it...**

# VHA Corporate Databases Monograph

- Produced by Office of Informatics and Analytics (OIA), National Data Systems
  - Includes 139 databases and information systems
  - Available via VHA Data Portal



## VA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER (VIReC)

- [VIReC Home](#)
- [VA/CMS Home](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [New Users of VA Data](#)
- [Data Transition to CDW](#)
- [News & Updates](#)
- [FAQs](#)
- [Acronyms](#)
- [HelpDesk](#)



**Learn about calculating a comorbidity index for use as a risk adjustment in observational healthcare studies. [More...](#)**

[Data Issues Brief, August 2014](#)

[Upcoming Cyberseminar](#)

**[New: Risk Adjustment Tutorial](#)**

[Real SSN Data Request Process](#)

[VA REDCap Project](#)

### At a Glance

[How VIReC Can Help](#): Introduction to resources VIReC develops for researchers using VA data.

[Data Issues Brief](#): News and updates about VA data and information systems.

[HSRData-L Listserv](#): Virtual community of VA researchers sharing knowledge about VA data and database use.

[VA/CMS Data for Research Project](#): VIReC serves as the data custodian for Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) data for research use in the VA.

[Journal Supplements](#): Collaborations with peer reviewed journals on VA data and informatics research topics.

### Resources for Researchers

[Data Sources & Data Topics](#): Select a specific data source or data topic described by VIReC.

[Research User Guides](#): Detailed descriptions of select VA data sources, including variable descriptions.

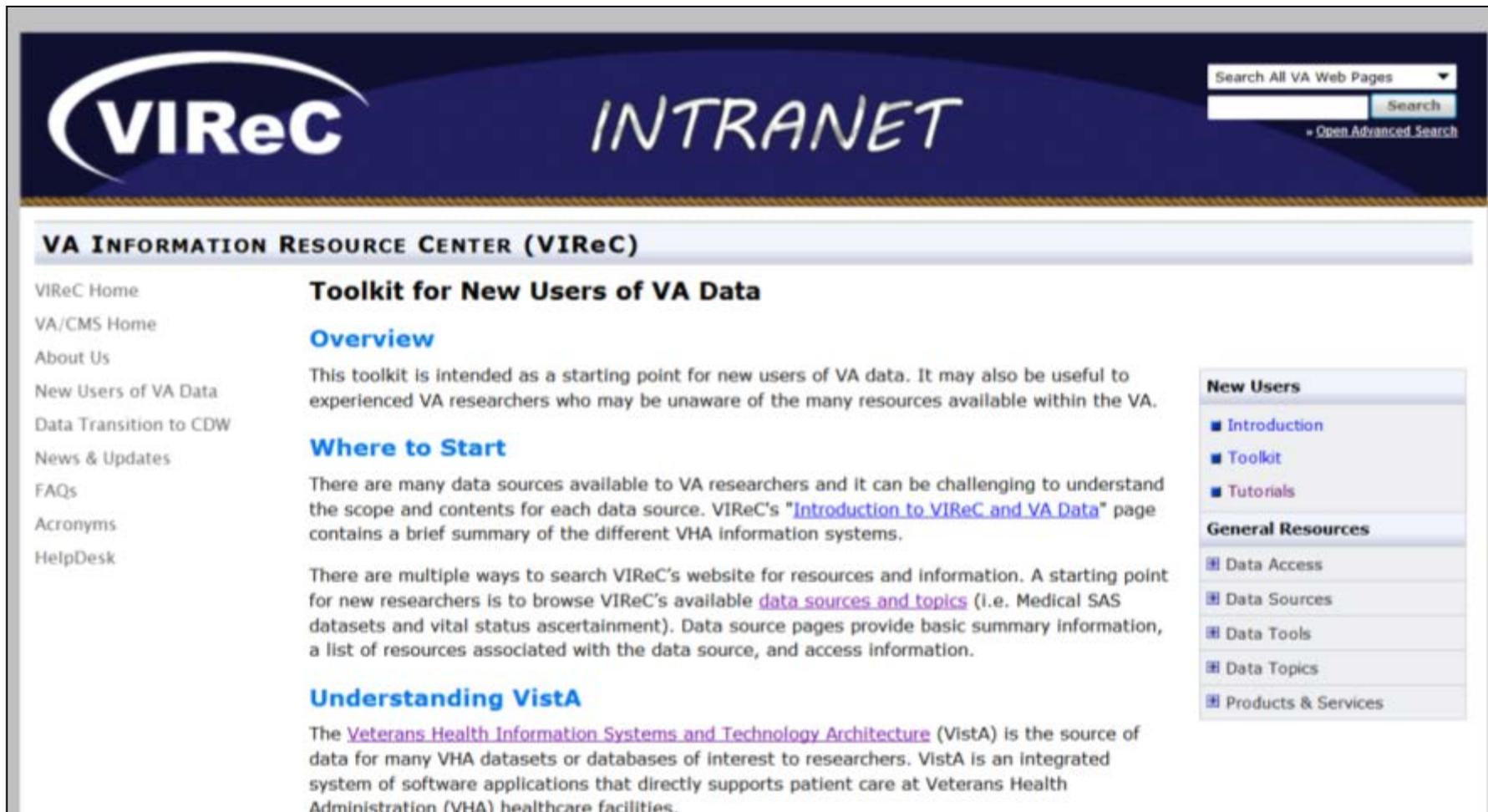
[Data Reports](#): Technical reports, data investigations, and data quality updates.

[Summary Information](#): Current and historical information about dataset variables, counts, frequencies, and more.

[Publications](#): A complete list of peer reviewed articles and journal supplements published by VIReC.

[VHA Data Portal](#): A one-stop-shop for information about VHA data including details on requesting data access.

# Toolkit for New Users of VA Data



The screenshot shows the VIREC Intranet homepage. At the top left is the VIREC logo, and to its right is the word 'INTRANET' in a stylized font. In the top right corner, there is a search bar with the text 'Search All VA Web Pages' and a 'Search' button, with a link to 'Open Advanced Search' below it. Below the header is a navigation menu with the following items: VIREC Home, VA/CMS Home, About Us, New Users of VA Data, Data Transition to CDW, News & Updates, FAQs, Acronyms, and HelpDesk. The main content area features the title 'Toolkit for New Users of VA Data' and an 'Overview' section. The 'Overview' text states: 'This toolkit is intended as a starting point for new users of VA data. It may also be useful to experienced VA researchers who may be unaware of the many resources available within the VA.' Below this is a 'Where to Start' section, which explains that there are many data sources and it can be challenging to understand them, and that VIREC's 'Introduction to VIREC and VA Data' page provides a summary. It also mentions that data source pages provide basic summary information, a list of resources, and access information. A 'Understanding VistA' section follows, stating that VistA is the source of data for many VHA datasets and that it is an integrated system of software applications that supports patient care at VHA healthcare facilities. On the right side of the page, there is a 'New Users' sidebar with links to 'Introduction', 'Toolkit', and 'Tutorials', and a 'General Resources' sidebar with links to 'Data Access', 'Data Sources', 'Data Tools', 'Data Topics', and 'Products & Services'.

**VA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER (VIREC)**

VIREC Home  
VA/CMS Home  
About Us  
New Users of VA Data  
Data Transition to CDW  
News & Updates  
FAQs  
Acronyms  
HelpDesk

## Toolkit for New Users of VA Data

### Overview

This toolkit is intended as a starting point for new users of VA data. It may also be useful to experienced VA researchers who may be unaware of the many resources available within the VA.

### Where to Start

There are many data sources available to VA researchers and it can be challenging to understand the scope and contents for each data source. VIREC's "[Introduction to VIREC and VA Data](#)" page contains a brief summary of the different VHA information systems.

There are multiple ways to search VIREC's website for resources and information. A starting point for new researchers is to browse VIREC's available [data sources and topics](#) (i.e. Medical SAS datasets and vital status ascertainment). Data source pages provide basic summary information, a list of resources associated with the data source, and access information.

### Understanding VistA

The [Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture](#) (VistA) is the source of data for many VHA datasets or databases of interest to researchers. VistA is an integrated system of software applications that directly supports patient care at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) healthcare facilities.

**New Users**

- [Introduction](#)
- [Toolkit](#)
- [Tutorials](#)

**General Resources**

- [Data Access](#)
- [Data Sources](#)
- [Data Tools](#)
- [Data Topics](#)
- [Products & Services](#)

# The VHA Data Portal...

- Links to multiple data resources
- Information about how to apply for access to data
- Pointers to data documentation pages

The screenshot displays the VHA Data Portal homepage. At the top, the Department of Veterans Affairs logo and the text "Department of Veterans Affairs VHA Data Portal" are visible. A navigation bar includes links for Home, Data Sources, Data Access, Tools, Resources, Training, About Us, and Support. A search bar is located in the top right corner.

The main content area features a "Welcome to the VHA Data Portal!" message, followed by the tagline "The one-stop-shop for data users' needs." Below this, a paragraph explains the portal's collaborative nature. A bulleted list highlights key components: VHA National Data Systems (NDS), VA Information Resource Center (VIReC), VA Informatics and Computing Infrastructure, and VHA Data Quality Program. A mission statement follows, emphasizing knowledge-sharing and user experience.

A dropdown menu for "Data Sources" is open, listing various data systems such as AITC Mainframe, BIRLS Death File, CDW, MCA (formerly DSS) NDEs, MCA (formerly DSS) Web Reports, Medical SAS Inpatient & Outpatient Data Sets, NPCD, OEF/OIF/OND Roster, PTF, VA/CMS Data, VETSNET, Vital Status File, and VSSC Web Reports.

On the right side, a blue banner titled "RESOURCES:" encourages users to browse the Resources Overview. Below this, there are three small thumbnail images representing different data access or resource categories.

The bottom of the page is divided into three columns: "News" (featuring a "Change in Real SSN Research Data Request Process" article), "Upcoming Events" (listing "VIReC Cyberseminars" and "VINCI Happy Hour"), and "Popular Links" (including "Data Access" and "Resources" sections with various links and logos).

# VA Databases and Data Sources

VA Inpatient  
and Outpatient  
Data (MedSAS)

VA CMS Data  
for Research

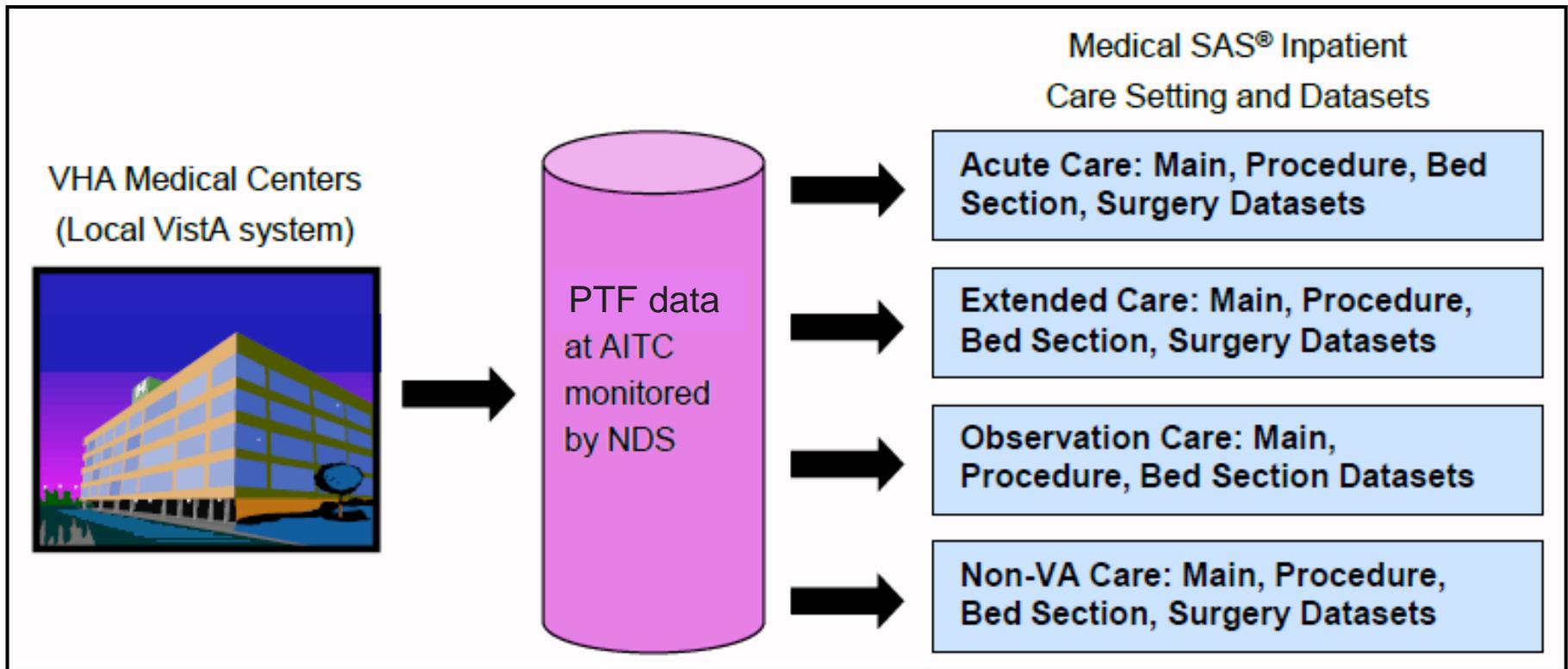
VA DSS  
National Clinical  
Data

VA Vital Status  
File

VA Pharmacy  
Data

VA Corporate  
Data Warehouse  
Data

# MedSAS Inpatient, Overview



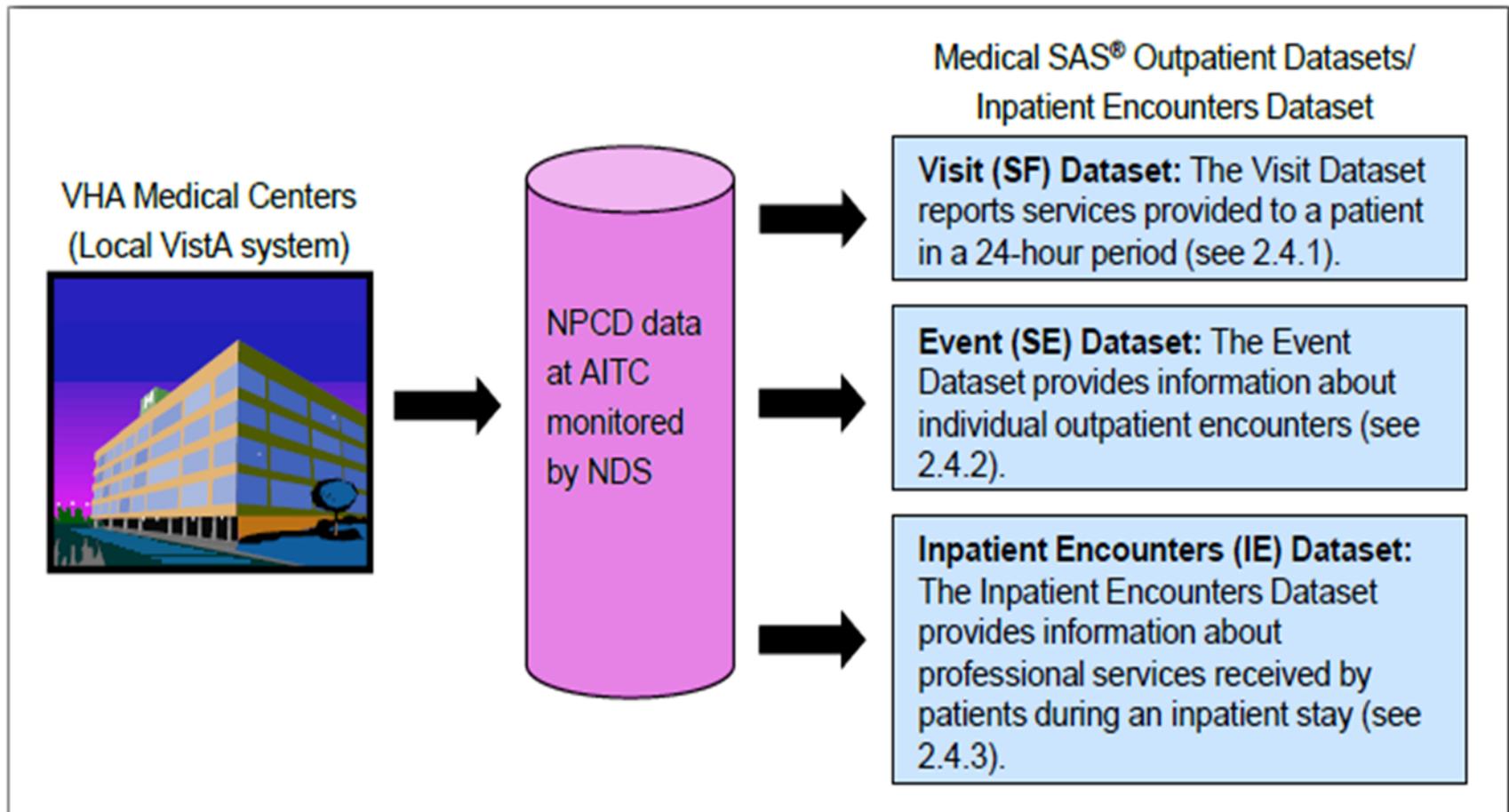
Patient Treatment File (PTF)  
 Austin Information Technology Center (AITC)  
 National Data Systems (NDS)

# MedSAS Inpatient Data

- Data element examples
  - Patient demographics
  - ICD-9 procedure/ surgery codes
  - ICD-9 diagnosis codes
- Data steward:
  - National Data Systems (NDS)
- More information: MedSAS Research User's Guide on the VIREC Intranet



# MedSAS Outpatient, Overview



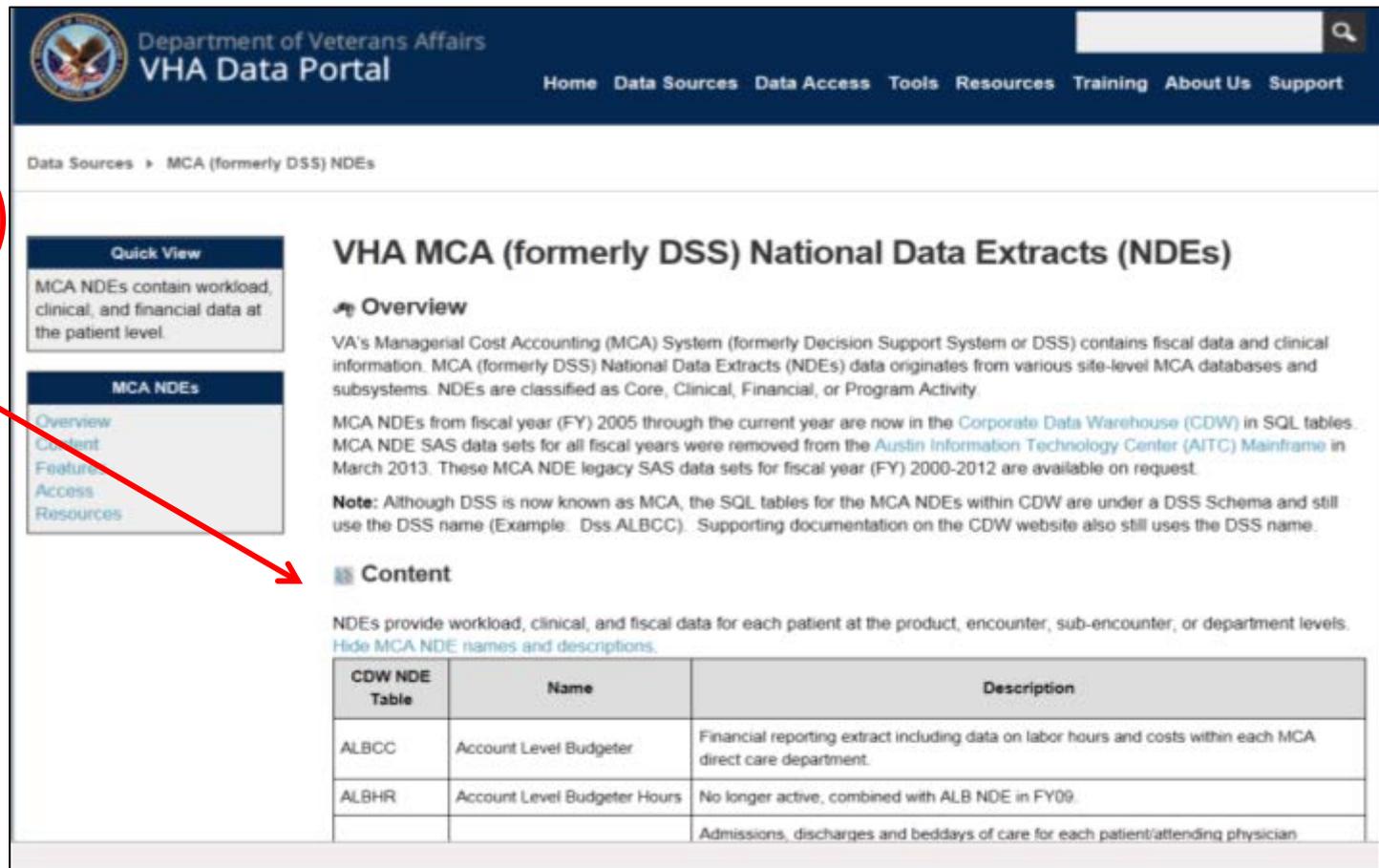
# MedSAS Outpatient Data

- **Data element examples:**
  - Patient demographics
  - CPT4 procedure codes
  - ICD-9 diagnosis codes
- **Data steward:**
  - National Data Systems (NDS)
- **More information: MedSAS Research User's Guide on the VIREC Intranet**



# VA Managerial Cost Accounting (MCA) System National Data Extracts (NDEs)

List of  
NDEs



Department of Veterans Affairs  
VHA Data Portal

Home Data Sources Data Access Tools Resources Training About Us Support

Data Sources > MCA (formerly DSS) NDEs

**Quick View**  
MCA NDEs contain workload, clinical, and financial data at the patient level.

**MCA NDEs**  
Overview  
Content  
Features  
Access  
Resources

## VHA MCA (formerly DSS) National Data Extracts (NDEs)

### Overview

VA's Managerial Cost Accounting (MCA) System (formerly Decision Support System or DSS) contains fiscal data and clinical information. MCA (formerly DSS) National Data Extracts (NDEs) data originates from various site-level MCA databases and subsystems. NDEs are classified as Core, Clinical, Financial, or Program Activity.

MCA NDEs from fiscal year (FY) 2005 through the current year are now in the [Corporate Data Warehouse \(CDW\)](#) in SQL tables. MCA NDE SAS data sets for all fiscal years were removed from the [Austin Information Technology Center \(AITC\) Mainframe](#) in March 2013. These MCA NDE legacy SAS data sets for fiscal year (FY) 2000-2012 are available on request.

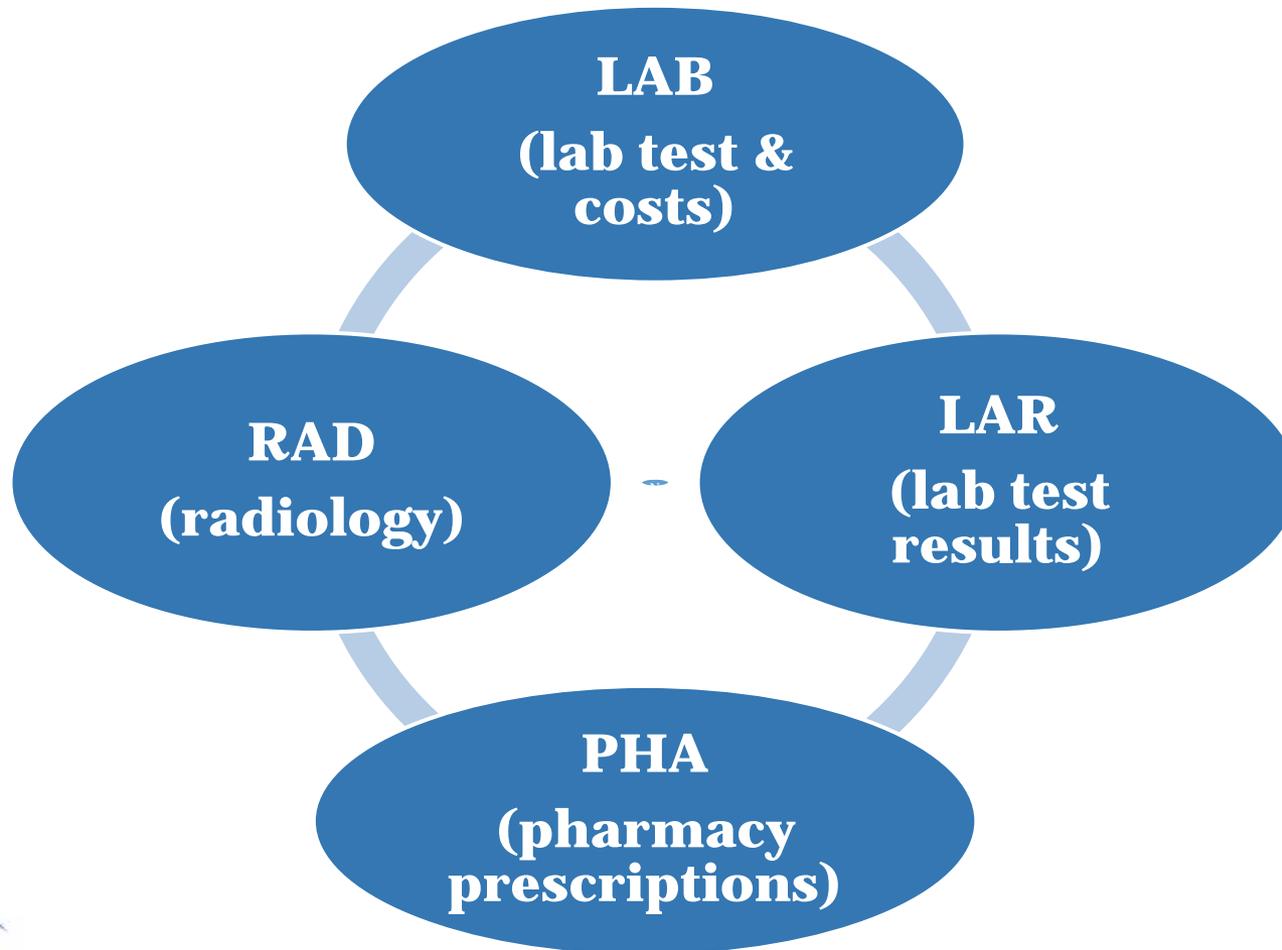
**Note:** Although DSS is now known as MCA, the SQL tables for the MCA NDEs within CDW are under a DSS Schema and still use the DSS name (Example: Dss.ALBCC). Supporting documentation on the CDW website also still uses the DSS name.

### Content

NDEs provide workload, clinical, and fiscal data for each patient at the product, encounter, sub-encounter, or department levels. [Hide MCA NDE names and descriptions.](#)

CDW NDE Table	Name	Description
ALBCC	Account Level Budgeter	Financial reporting extract including data on labor hours and costs within each MCA direct care department.
ALBHR	Account Level Budgeter Hours	No longer active, combined with ALB NDE in FY09.
		Admissions, discharges and beddays of care for each patient/attending physician

# VA MCA (formerly DSS) NDE - Clinical Data



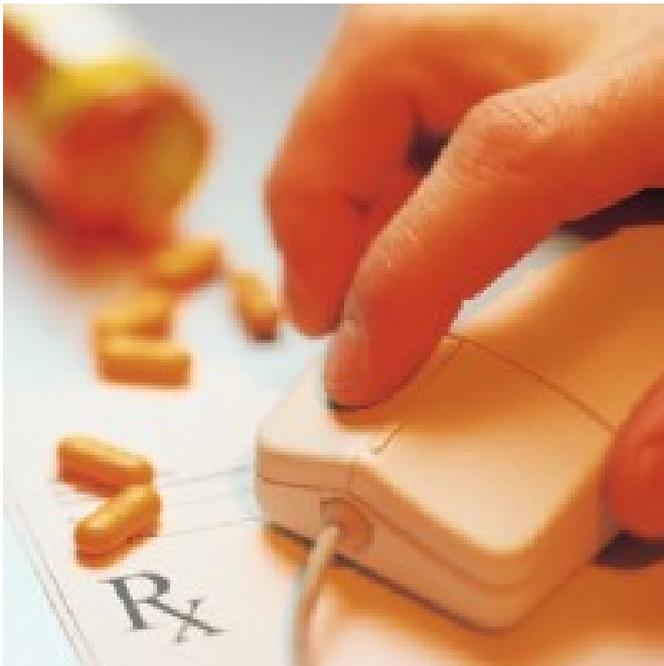
# VA MCA National Clinical Data

- **Data Element Examples:**
  - Date
  - Test results
  - Ordering provider
  - Costs
- **Data Steward:**
  - **VHA Managerial Cost Accounting Office (MCAO)**
- **More information: Research User Guide: VHA Decision Support System Clinical Data Extracts, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (VIReC Intranet)**



# VA Pharmacy Data

- Medications dispensed from VA pharmacies



## Three Sources

- Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM)
- VHA Managerial Cost Accounting (MCA) NDE
- CDW Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA) /Outpatient Pharmacy Domains

# VA Pharmacy Data

- **Data element examples:**
  - Generic drug name, days supply, VA drug class, Cost etc.
- **Data Steward**
  - PBM: Fran Cunningham, PharmD
  - MCAO: Managerial Cost Accounting Service
  - NDS: National Data Systems
- **More information: VIREC Research User Guide: VHA Pharmacy Prescription Data, 2nd Edition**

# VA Vital Status File

- **Multiple sources of mortality information**
  - **VA Workload Data**
  - **BIRLS Death File**
  - **Medicare Vital Status File**
  - **SSA Death Master File**
- **Two files: Master and Mini**

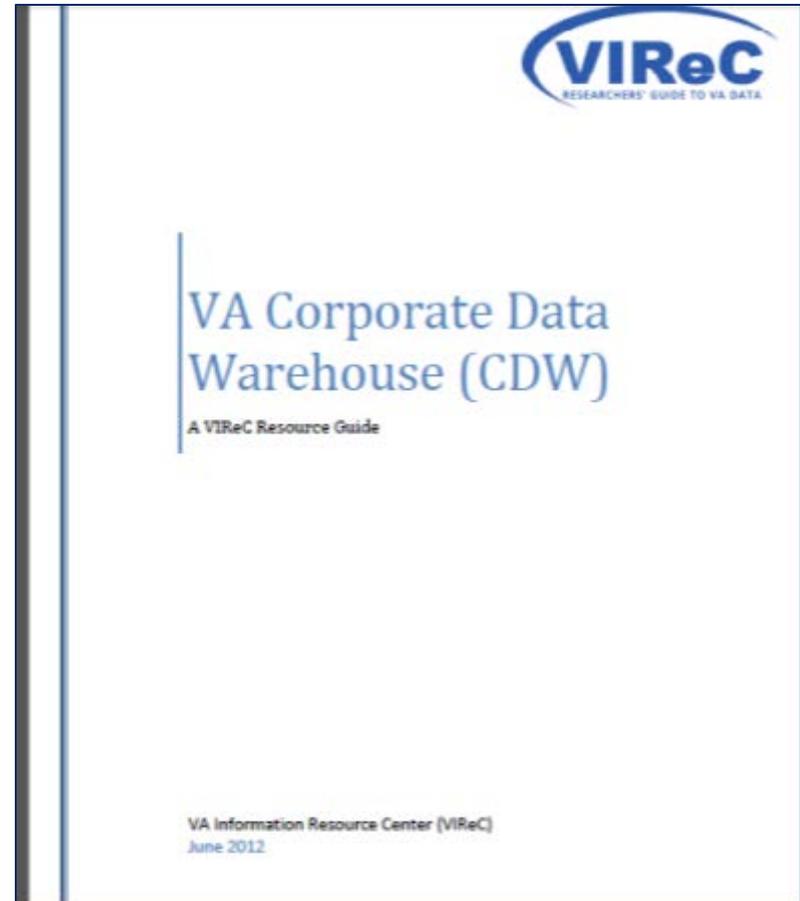
# VA Vital Status File

- Data element examples:
  - Date of death (variables from the different sources and value selected as “best”)
  - Last healthcare utilization date
- Data Steward:
  - National Data Systems
- More information: “Vital Status Overview” page on VIREC Intranet



# Corporate Data Warehouse Data

- National repository of VHA administrative and clinical data
- Relational database organized into data domains
- Data available from 1999 to present



# Corporate Data Warehouse Data

- **CDW Domain Examples**
  - Patient
  - Staff
  - Vital Signs
  - Allergies
  - Immunization
  - Health Factors
  - Lab Chemistry
  - Pharmacy Outpatient
- **Data Steward:**
  - National Data Systems
- **For more information:**
  - VIREC Intranet
  - CDW SharePoint
  - VINCI data descriptions

## VA/Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Data

**Contain data on services received outside the VA and paid for by Medicare or Medicaid**

Medicare enrollment and claims data

Medicaid enrollment and claims data

Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS)

Long Term Care Patient Assessment Data

United States Renal Data System (USRDS)

# VA/Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Data

- **Data element examples:**
  - Medicare and Medicaid enrollment
  - ICD-9 and CPT4 procedure codes
  - ICD-9 diagnosis codes
  - Charges and payments
- **Data steward:**
  - [VIReC's VA/CMS Data for Research Project](#)
- **For more information**
  - [VIReC Intranet-VA/CMS Data for Research Home Page](#)

# Topics for Today

- Overview of VA data sources and databases
- **Data processing platforms and EHR (read-only) access portals**
- Policies governing data access
- Where to go for more help

# Processing Platforms

- **Austin Information Technology Center Mainframe (AITC)**
  - Centralized computer processing center under VA Office of Information and Technology (OI+T)
  - For more information: VIREC Intranet or VHA Data Portal
- **VINCI**
  - Secure computing environment for VA researchers
  - For more information: VINCI Central site

# EHR Data Portals - Compensation & Pension Data Interchange (CAPRI) & VistAWeb

## CAPRI

Requires special software and access/verify codes

Data viewed from one healthcare site at a time

Includes search function

Direct access to VistAWeb

## Both

Read-only access to EHR one patient at a time

Require real SSN

Approval for one, many, or all VA sites

Submit requests to DART

## VistAWeb

VA Intranet web portal accessed through local VistA

Data consolidated from all sites in single chronological view

VistA Imaging available

# Topics for Today

- Overview of VA data sources and databases
- Data processing platforms and EHR (read-only) access portals
- **Policies governing data access**
- Where to go for more help

Poll #2: I need VA data for \_\_\_\_\_ projects.  
(select all that apply)

- Research
- Operations
- Quality Improvement
- Administrative
- Other (specify in chat box)

# Criteria for Use of VA Data in Research

- **Employment status**
- **Proposed use**
- **Data Steward requirements**
- **Sensitivity of data**
- **Physical location of data**

# Approval for Research Data Access is Multi-Departmental

VHA Local  
Management

CUPS\* Point of  
Contact or ISO

Data Steward

VIReC on behalf  
of VHA ORD  
(Real SSN)

VHA Privacy  
Office

VHA Security  
Liaison Office



\*Note: CUPS = Customer User Provisioning System

# Data access for research

- General requirements include submission of
  - Description of data needed
  - Access form(s) for specific data source(s)
  - Research approval documents
    - Protocol (or summary)
    - IRB approval letter
    - R&D approval letter
    - HIPAA and Informed Consent documents
    - Real SSN Access Request (where applicable)
- Specific access forms vary by resource
  - See VHA Data Portal “Access Overview” page

## Data access for operations - including quality improvement

- Submission of description of data needed, justification and signature of supervisor and ISO
- Specific access forms vary by resource, examples:
  - **VA Form 9957 for scrambled SSN data on Mainframe**
  - **VHA NDS Healthcare Operations Form**
- See VHA Data Portal Operations Access page for details by data source.

# Data Request Processes (VHA Data Portal)



Department of Veterans Affairs  
VHA Data Portal

Home Data Sources Data Access Tools Resources Training About Us Support

## Welcome to the VHA Data Portal!

*The one-stop-shop for data users' needs.*

The VHA Data Portal is a collaborative effort among the following program offices to provide a central gateway to information about VHA data:

- VHA National Data Systems (NDS)
- VA Information Resource Center (VIReC)
- VA Informatics and Computing Infrastructure (VINCI)
- VHA Data Quality Program

Our mission is to promote a knowledge-sharing culture that supports the needs of VHA data users. The portal integrates information from multiple sources into a common format and single location to promote a comprehensive knowledge base and to facilitate a positive end-user experience.

- Data Access Overview
- Operations Access
- Preparatory to Research Access
- Research Access
- Medical Advisory Opinions Access
- Veterans Service Officers Access
- Business Associate Agreements
- Data Use Agreements
- VHA Data Sharing Agreement Repository

**Data Access:**  
Visit the  
Access Section  
to learn about  
requesting access  
to VHA Data



## News

### Change in Real SSN Research Data Request Process

ORD has instituted a change in the approval process for researchers' requests for data with

## Upcoming Events

### VIReC Cyberseminars

September 16: IVR-Based Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Chronic Low Back Pain

## Popular Links

### Data Access

- DART Overview and Forms

# Data Access Requirements are Determined by the Data Steward

- On the AITC Mainframe
  - **Local CUPS Point of Contact**
    - ADUSH Enrollment
    - MedSAS -scrambled SSN
    - MedSAS -real SSN for local facility
    - MCA & VSSC Web Reports -scrambled SSN
  - **National Data Systems (NDS)**
    - MedSAS -real SSN for VISN & National
    - MCA & VSSC Web Reports – real SSN
    - Vital Status File

# Data Access Requirements (2)

- National Data Systems (NDS)
  - In the Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW)
    - CDW Domain Data
    - MCA (formerly DSS)
    - Text Integrated Utility (TIU) Notes
    - Vital Status Data
  - Other Data Venues
    - MedSAS Files (copies in SAS)
    - BIRLS
    - CAPRI/VistAWeb
    - Homeless Registry
    - OEF/OIF Roster File

## Data Access Requirements (3)

- VA Information Resource Center (VIREC)
  - VA/CMS Data
- Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) Services
  - PBM Data
- Patient Care Services (PCS)
  - PCS Data

# Data Source Specific Access Information

## Data Source Request Processes

Expand a data source in the list below to view an outline of its data request process.

### ADUSH Enrollment Files

Level of Access	Identifier	Functional Task Code	Data Source Location	Data Format	Type of Access	Request Process
National	Scrambled SSN	110NN01	AITC Mainframe	SAS	Direct	<a href="#">Local CUPS POC Request Process</a>
VISN	Scrambled SSN	110NN01	AITC Mainframe	SAS	Direct	<a href="#">Local CUPS POC Request Process</a>
Local	Scrambled SSN	110NN01	AITC Mainframe	SAS	Direct	<a href="#">Local CUPS POC Request Process</a>

 [AITC Mainframe](#)

 [BIRLS Death File](#)

 [CDW Data](#)

 [MCA \(formerly DSS\) NDEs](#)

 [MCA \(formerly DSS\) Web Reports](#)

 [Medical SAS Inpatient & Outpatient Data Sets](#)

 [Non-VA Medical Care \(formerly Fee Basis\) Files](#)

# Access to VA Data by Non-VA Researchers

**Data containing Protected Health Information (PHI) restricted to VA researchers**

## Exceptions

**Collaborate with a VA Researcher**

**Obtain permission from  
VA Under Secretary for Health**

**Obtain HIPAA authorization from Veterans  
to use their data**

# Topics for Today

- Overview of VA data sources and databases
- Data processing platforms and EHR (read-only) access portals
- Policies governing data access
- **Where to go for more help**

# New User to VA Data?

**VIREC** INTRANET

Search All VA Web Pages   [» Open Advanced Search](#)

**VA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER (VIREC)**

VIREC Home  
VA/CMS Home  
About Us  
New Users of VA Data  
Data Transition to CDW  
News & Updates  
FAQs  
Acronyms  
HelpDesk

**Introduction to VIREC and VA Data**

**Overview**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is structured into three main service lines, each providing specific services based on Veterans' eligibility.

- [Veterans Health Administration](#) (VHA)
- [Veterans Benefits Administration](#) (VBA)
- [National Cemetery Administration](#) (NCA)

Health services research in the VHA is supported by the Office of Research and Development (ORD), Health Services Research & Development Service (HSR&D). [HSR&D's](#) website provides an excellent overview of health services research.

**VIREC's Role**

The VA Information Research Center (VIREC) develops resources and provides guidance to VA researchers using VA data. Our mission is to improve the quality of VA research that utilizes databases and information systems.

VIREC products and services enable VA researchers to access and learn about VA data and information systems. VIREC:

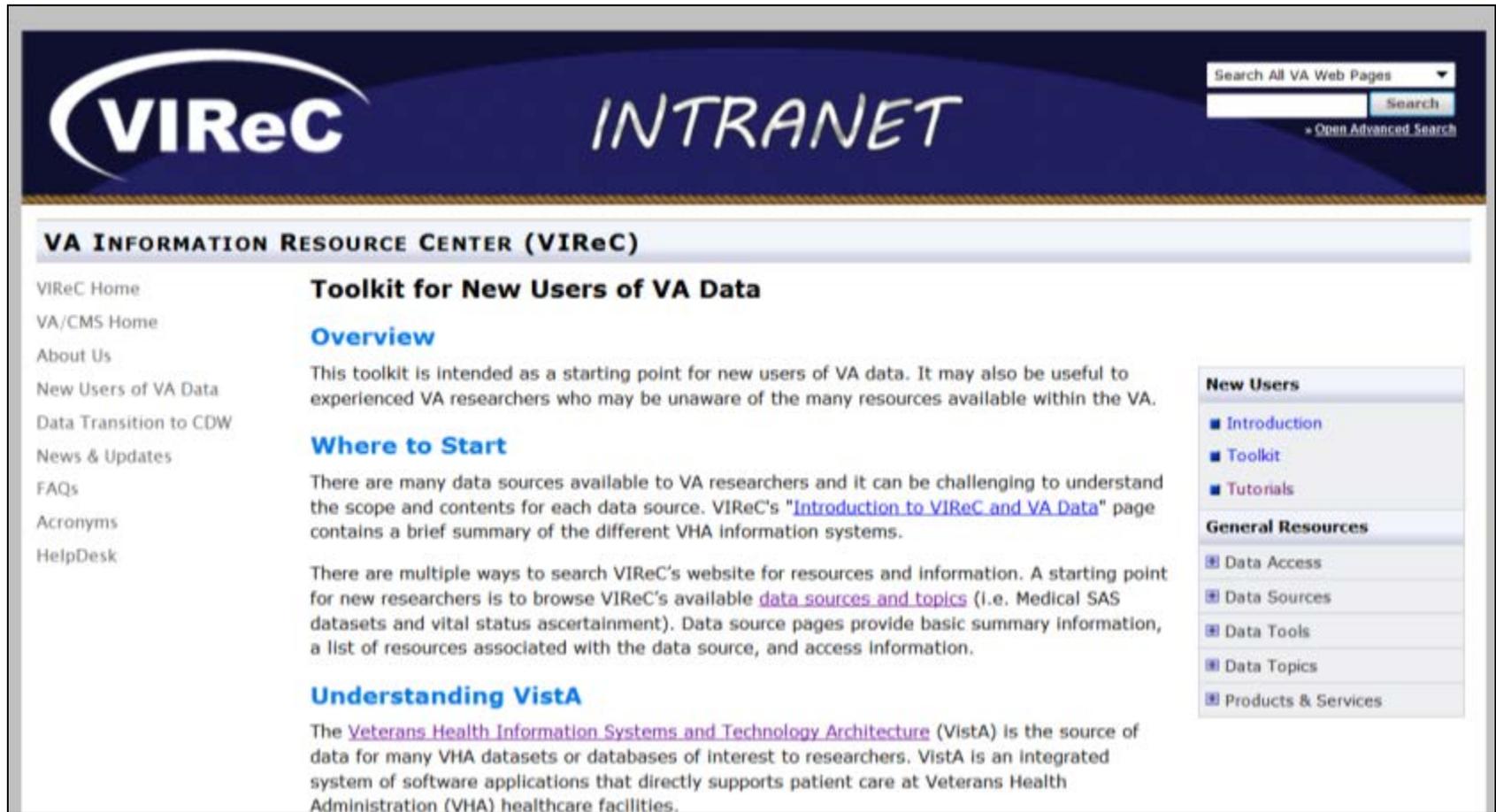
**New Users**

- [Introduction](#)
- [Toolkit](#)
- [Tutorials](#)

**General Resources**

- ▣ [Data Access](#)
- ▣ [Data Sources](#)
- ▣ [Data Tools](#)
- ▣ [Data Topics](#)
- ▣ [Products & Services](#)

# Toolkit for New Users of VA Data



The screenshot shows the VIREC INTRANET website. At the top left is the VIREC logo, and to its right is the word 'INTRANET' in a stylized font. In the top right corner, there is a search bar with the text 'Search All VA Web Pages' and a 'Search' button, with a link to 'Open Advanced Search' below it. Below the header is a navigation menu with the following items: VIREC Home, VA/CMS Home, About Us, New Users of VA Data, Data Transition to CDW, News & Updates, FAQs, Acronyms, and HelpDesk. The main content area features the title 'Toolkit for New Users of VA Data' and an 'Overview' section. The overview text states: 'This toolkit is intended as a starting point for new users of VA data. It may also be useful to experienced VA researchers who may be unaware of the many resources available within the VA.' Below this is a 'Where to Start' section, which explains that there are many data sources available and it can be challenging to understand them. It mentions that VIREC's 'Introduction to VIREC and VA Data' page provides a summary of VHA information systems. It also notes that there are multiple ways to search the website for resources and information, and that new researchers should browse VIREC's available 'data sources and topics' (i.e. Medical SAS datasets and vital status ascertainment). The 'Understanding Vista' section follows, stating that the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (Vista) is the source of data for many VHA datasets or databases of interest to researchers. The footer of the screenshot shows the VIREC logo and the tagline 'RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA'.

**VA INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER (VIREC)**

VIREC Home  
VA/CMS Home  
About Us  
New Users of VA Data  
Data Transition to CDW  
News & Updates  
FAQs  
Acronyms  
HelpDesk

## Toolkit for New Users of VA Data

### Overview

This toolkit is intended as a starting point for new users of VA data. It may also be useful to experienced VA researchers who may be unaware of the many resources available within the VA.

### Where to Start

There are many data sources available to VA researchers and it can be challenging to understand the scope and contents for each data source. VIREC's "[Introduction to VIREC and VA Data](#)" page contains a brief summary of the different VHA information systems.

There are multiple ways to search VIREC's website for resources and information. A starting point for new researchers is to browse VIREC's available [data sources and topics](#) (i.e. Medical SAS datasets and vital status ascertainment). Data source pages provide basic summary information, a list of resources associated with the data source, and access information.

### Understanding Vista

The [Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture](#) (Vista) is the source of data for many VHA datasets or databases of interest to researchers. Vista is an integrated system of software applications that directly supports patient care at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) healthcare facilities.

**New Users**

- Introduction
- Toolkit
- Tutorials

**General Resources**

- Data Access
- Data Sources
- Data Tools
- Data Topics
- Products & Services

# Obtaining Help – HSRData-L Listserv

- Join at VIREC's Intranet Web site
- Exchange of current information, ideas, questions, and answers about data and **information systems** issues affecting VA research
- Discussion among  $\approx 950$  VA-only researchers, data stewards, managers and other users
- Searchable archive of past discussions

# Obtaining Help – Online Data Resources

- **Health Economics Resource Center (HERC)**
  - <http://www.herc.research.va.gov>
- **VA Informatics and Computing Infrastructure (VINCI)**
  - [http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/for\\_researchers/vinci/](http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/for_researchers/vinci/)
- **VIReC Cyberseminars:**
  - <http://www.virec.research.va.gov/Resources/Cyberseminars.asp>

# Obtaining Help from VIReC

- **VIReC Intranet site**
  - **Research User Guides (RUGs)**
    - Variable-level information
  - **Technical Reports**
  - **Web-site “Toolkit for New Users of VA Data”**
  - **Monthly Data Issue Briefs**
- **HelpDesk**
  - [virec@va.gov](mailto:virec@va.gov)
  - (708) 202-2413

# Contact Information

**Denise Hynes, PhD, MPH, RN**

**VA Information Resource Center**

**Hines VA Hospital**

**[VIReC@ va.gov](mailto:VIReC@va.gov)**

**708-202-2413**

# Planned FY15 Database & Methods Cyberseminars

- Requesting Access to VA Data for Research or Operations
- Assessing Inpatient and Outpatient VA Health Care Use
- Measuring Veterans Health Services Use in VA and Medicare
- Examining Veterans' Pharmacy Data Use
- Assessing Race and Ethnicity
- Measuring Laboratory Use and Results Using the VA DSS National Lab Data
- Applying Comorbidity Measures Using VA and Medicare Data
- Improving Mortality Ascertainment
- Extracting Data from the EHR Using CAPRI and VistAWeb
- Using Data in the CDW

*Questions?*

Next session:  
November 3, 2014

---

## **Requesting Access to VA Data for Research & Operations**

Linda Kok, MS