

# VA Health Systems Research/Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

## 2023 Program Impact

VA's Health Systems Research (HSR) designs, tests, and implements innovative strategies and practices that address VA healthcare and policy challenges to transform healthcare for Veterans and the nation. Using a Learning Health System approach, HSR leverages its unique expertise and extensive experience with implementation science, engagement science, data science, systems science, and policy analysis to develop Veteran-centered solutions that enhance access, equity, quality, and experience for Veterans and support the VA workforce.

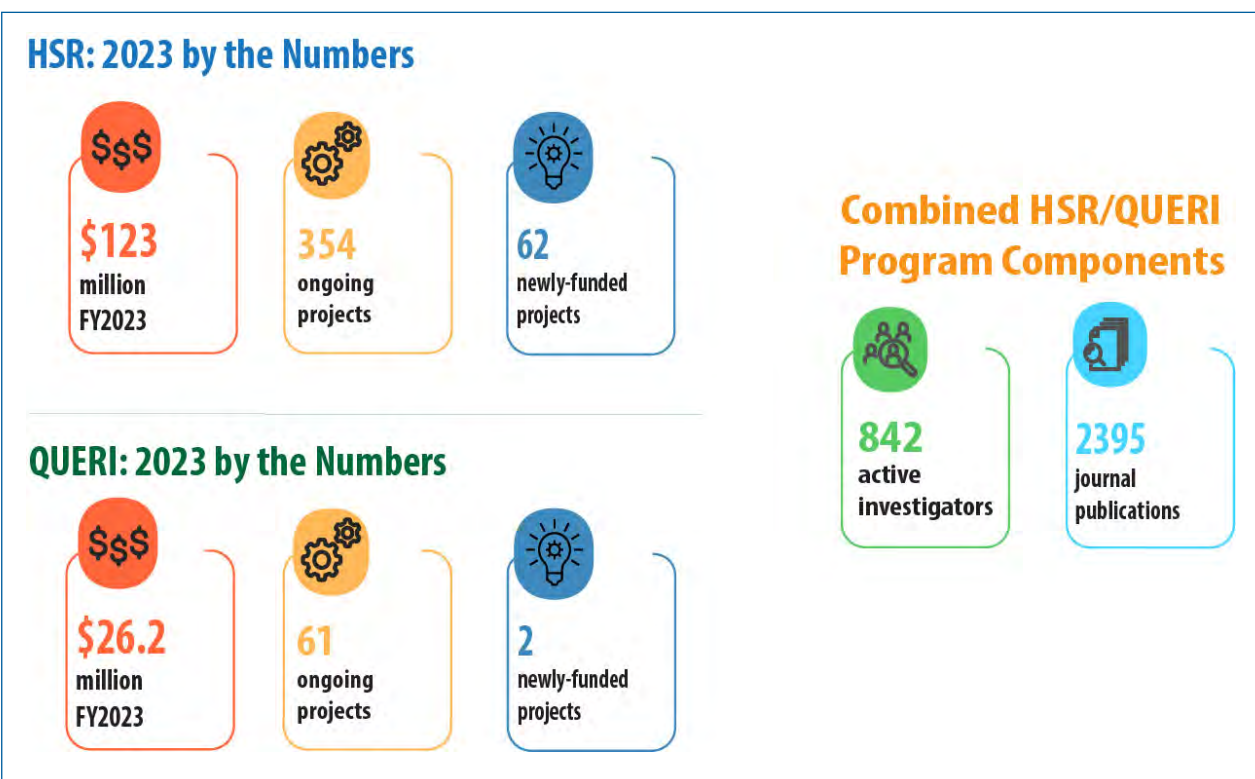
As the implementation practice arm of HSR, the Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) partners with VA leaders, providers, and Veterans to scale-up, spread, and sustain promising innovations and evidence-based practices—and to accelerate system-wide improvements.

Together, HSR and QUERI are driving the use of high-impact evidence across the organization and helping to shape VA programs and policies that address current VA priorities:

- Hire faster and more competitively.
- Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care.
- Promote a culture of safety, learning, and knowledge translation.
- Prevent Veteran suicide.
- Serve Veterans with military and environmental exposures.
- Reduce homelessness among Veterans.

*"[We have] worked closely and collaboratively with HSR/QUERI for years. The collaborations have helped us to span the scope of our surveillance projects focused on safety to positively impact Veteran care."*

—VA National Program Office Leader



(cont'd)



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Health Systems Research

<https://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov>

# VA HSR/QUERI 2023 Program Impact

## Key Achievements

- **Designing and executing more than 20 national evaluations** addressing VA priorities, including the Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving ([REBOOT](#)) and other workforce initiatives; military exposures, including implementation of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics ([PACT](#)) Act; mental health and suicide prevention; homelessness; pain/opioid use disorder; access; and intimate partner violence.
- **Launching over 10 new Rapid Response Team (RRT)** projects to address time sensitive national priorities, including suicide prevention and legislative mandates.
- **Supporting VA's compliance** with the Foundation for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, including management of the VHA Evidence-based Policy Subcommittee, development of the FY2024 VA Annual Evaluation Plan, and review of 139 FY2025 legislative and budget proposals for their strength of evidence.
- **Informing VA efforts related to community care** with the "VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care: A Living Systematic Review" and findings from [other HSR/QUERI studies](#).

## Key Highlights and Research Findings

HSR strives to impact Veterans' health and care based on the Quintuple Aim: improve outcomes, increase access, ensure equity, improve value, and support the VA workforce. Following are some findings that had important impacts over the past year.

### Highlights

#### **[Understanding the Short- and Long-term Effects of Open Burn Pit Exposure](#)**

HSR investigators developed an exposure assessment method that determines the presence of a burn pit, an incinerator, and waste segregation methods for specific military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. They found that 86% of the Veterans in this study, nearly 475,000, had been deployed at some time to bases with burn pits. With this information and follow-up, it is possible to assess health outcomes over an extended length of time following deployment. This will offer a better understanding of potentially long-term health effects of burn pit exposure so appropriate care can be provided for affected Veterans.

#### **[Integrating Equity into Quality Improvement Activities within VA Primary Care](#)**

The VHA Primary Care Equity Dashboard ([PCED](#)) is a multi-faceted tool developed in partnership with the VA Office of Health Equity (OHE) to integrate equity into quality improvement activities within VA primary care settings. HSR investigators led the development and spread of the PCED to help identify and address racial differences in key healthcare metrics, such as immunizations and management of chronic diseases. Since its release, PCED has achieved phenomenal reach, **increasing from approximately 850 unique users at the end of FY2022 to more than 2,800 unique users in FY2023**.

#### **[Reaching More Veterans with Depression to Reduce Suicide](#)**

Through a series of multisite clinical trials supported by HSR, a team of investigators, in collaboration with clinical and operational partners, developed and tested a brief cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach for depression. Marketed as MyBrief CBT for Depression, the program was rapidly adopted. Thus far, the MyBrief CBT program has **trained more than 80 providers across 40 facilities and 4 VISNs**. Providers have delivered MyBrief CBT to **over 800 Veterans**.

#### **[QUERI-Innovation Ecosystem: Partnering to Implement Promising Practices Across VA](#)**

Since 2017, QUERI and the Innovation Ecosystem ([VHA IE](#)) have collaborated to scale-up, spread, and sustain evidence-informed practices – and to measure the multi-faceted impact of these efforts on Veterans and their families, VA employees, and the health system. The impacts of this productive partnership were highlighted at the VA [2023 Innovation Experience \(iEX\) Conference](#) last Fall. As of 2023, QUERI teams have developed methods and tools to promote the national implementation of **20 Diffusion Marketplace practices, including 6 National Diffusion Practices** that have been prioritized for implementation across the VA healthcare system, such as the FLOW 3 Prosthetics Ordering System, STRIDE Walking Program for Veterans, and TeleWound care for Veterans far away from VA facilities.

In addition to promoting the uptake of Diffusion Marketplace practices, QUERI teams provided broader evaluation support to the Innovation Ecosystem, such as conducting rigorous evaluations of the overall Diffusion of Excellence and Innovators Network programs and developing products to enhance their impact. For example, the QUERI [Spreading Healthcare Access, Activities, Research and Knowledge \(SHAARK\) Partnered Evaluation](#) showed that **99%** of VHA parent health systems/facilities have submitted **3,281** Shark Tank applications, and **88** Promising Practices have been adopted over **1,440 times** and sustained at **56%** of facilities.

# VA HSR/QUERI 2023 Program Impact

## Key Highlights and Research Findings (con'td)

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### Key Findings

- A recent national evidence review, [VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care: A Living Systematic Review](#), showed that VA provides the same or better quality of care compared to VA-paid community care—or non-VA care—provided to the general public.
- Most Veterans support integration of Standardized Suicide Risk Assessment into routine VA primary care visits. (Denneson et al., [JGIM](#))
- Based on research presentations and discussion facilitated by HSR, a set of seven VA reproductive health research priorities were developed to address knowledge gaps and provide research evidence to inform policy and practice. (Katon et al., [Women's Health Issues](#))
- Deployment of medical scribes improves provider productivity and wait times in cardiology and orthopedics. (Palani et al., [JGIM](#)).
- Weight-based dosing with pharmacy-led stewardship could reduce cancer drug spending by millions. (Bryant et al., [Health Affairs](#))

## HSR/QUERI National Meeting and State-of-the-Art Conferences

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### National Meeting

[Advancing Health Equity through Research, Implementation Science, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) was the theme of the 2023 VA HSR/QUERI National Meeting that was held February 8-10, 2023, in Baltimore, MD. The theme emphasized VA's commitment to improving the quality, safety, and equity of healthcare for Veterans – and empowering its healthcare workforce through innovations in informatics, implementation science, and Veteran engagement, with strong Veteran participation. HSR was honored to have VA Under Secretary for Health [Shereef Elnahal, MD, MBA](#); Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks (DEAN) [Carolyn Clancy, MD](#); and VA's Chief Research and Development Officer [Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD](#), attend and present at the meeting.

### State of the Art Conferences

HSR held two state-of-the-art conferences. Co-hosted by VA's [Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation](#), the [Measuring What Matters Most: Whole Person Outcomes](#) SOTA discussed the potential value of patient-reported measures that capture a broader set of physical and psychological health outcomes, health-related quality of life, and well-being—key to providing whole health. Co-hosted with VA's [Office of Nursing Services](#), [Nursing Research Agenda](#) SOTA focused on developing a research agenda that can optimize nursing practice and strengthen the nursing workforce to inspire an industry leading culture in VA. Post-conference products are being developed to disseminate findings and recommendations throughout the VA healthcare system and beyond.

HSR also helped facilitate the “Psychedelic Treatments for Mental Health Conditions” SOTA, which was co-hosted by VA's [Office of Research and Development](#) and the [Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#) to better understand the current state of scientific evidence and to identify a strategic framework to consider future psychedelic treatment research for select mental health conditions. SOTA attendees also sought to determine the necessary next steps for potential VA system-wide clinical implementation for psychedelic compounds for possible future use.

# VA HSR/QUERI 2023 Program Impact

## HSR Awardees



**Sanjay Saint, MD, MPH, MACP**, received the [2022 Under Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Services Research](#)—the highest honor for a VA health services researcher. Dr. Saint has been a pioneer in generating new knowledge related to preventing hospital-acquired

infections *and* translating that knowledge to improve the health of Veterans.



**Laura Damschroder, MS, MPH**, earned the [2022 HSR Health System Impact Award](#) for research related to system-wide implementation of quality improvements in Veterans' healthcare. Her work has also changed how researchers conduct health services research.



**Sarah L. Krein, PhD, RN**, received the [2022 HSR&D Daniel Deykin Award for Outstanding Mentor](#). Dr. Krein has produced a body of highly impactful work in patient safety, in addition to conducting influential work in diabetes care, implementation science, and pain management. She currently advises 16 mentees.

[2022 HSR Best Research Paper of the Year Award](#) was shared by the following recipients:



**Kritee Gujral, PhD** for [Mental health service use, suicide behavior, and emergency department visits among rural U.S. Veterans who received video-enabled tablets during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).



**David Oslin, MD** for [Effect of pharmacogenomic testing for drug-gene interactions on medication selection and remission of symptoms in major depressive disorder: The PRIME Care Randomized Controlled Trial](#).



**John Piette, PhD, MSc** for [Patient-centered pain care using artificial intelligence and mobile health tools: A randomized comparative effectiveness trial](#).

## Future Directions

HSR/QUERI will continue to work closely with VA leaders, Veterans, providers, and other frontline staff and managers to:

- Identify Veteran-centric priorities to inform the FY 2026-30 VA-wide Strategic Plan;
- Launch cross-cutting studies and new partnerships to address current VA priorities and support the uptake of novel technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence);
- Build infrastructure and capacity to foster more real-time evidence-informed decision-making; and
- Empower interdisciplinary teams of investigators and staff to leverage opportunities across VA research and operations.

Finally, in the coming years HSR is poised to advance VA as a Learning Health System through stronger researcher, clinical, and Veteran partnerships, especially in the following strategic methodology areas:

1. **Implementation Science.** Discover and optimize strategies to get effective treatments to Veterans faster and sustain their use in real-world practice.
2. **Data Science.** Design, validate, and apply data science tools for improving Veteran care.
3. **Engagement Science.** Novel approaches for engaging end-users, e.g., Veterans, providers, and communities that support improved outcomes.
4. **Systems Science.** Design new systems science methods to improve Veteran provider workforce effectiveness, satisfaction, diversity, and retention.
5. **Policy Analysis.** Develop, assess, and improve VA and national policies for Veterans, with a focus on underserved populations.

