**VA / STARRS-LS Researcher-in-Residence Program**

Introduction: The Office of Research and Development (ORD), through the Suicide Prevention Research Impact NeTwork (SPRINT), intends to continue its established VA / STARRS-LS Researcher-in-Residence Program which allows VA investigators to examine predictors of suicidality and related outcomes using data collected as part of the Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Service – Longitudinal Study (STARRS-LS). This opportunity is contingent upon funding support each fiscal year.

Description of STARRS-LS data: Army STARRS was designed to comprehensively investigate risk and protective factors for suicide, suicide-related behavior, non-suicidal self-injury, and other mental/behavioral health issues in Army Soldiers. It is the largest research study of mental health risk and resilience ever conducted among Army personnel. STARRS-LS extends the original Army STARRS effort through follow-up of Soldiers during their careers in the Army as well as during their transition from the Army to civilian life (<https://starrs-ls.org/#/list/publications>). To date, approximately 60% of the STARRS-LS survey cohort have transitioned to Veterans status, and therefore, data collected in this research study has significant relevance studying for examining longitudinal predictors of suicide in Veterans.

STARRS-LS datasets include the following administrative, survey, and biospecimen data:

* Historical administrative data from 50 Army and DoD sources involving more than 3.2 million Soldiers on active duty from 2004 to 2019, with more data being added each year.
* Survey and performance-based data obtained directly from 72,000 active-duty Soldiers (including regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve Soldiers) from 2010 through 2014. Additionally, approximately 14,500 individuals from the full sample participated in multiple follow-up surveys and consented to administrative data linkage.
* Administrative data from 2011 through 2019 from Army and DoD sources for Soldiers who completed questionnaires and provided consent to link their Army STARRS data to their Army and DoD administrative data.
* Approximately 77,000 tubes of blood from approximately 52,000 Soldiers, and 24,000 genetic and other laboratory assays for biomarkers using DNA, RNA, and plasma from blood samples.

**VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program**

Aims: The VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program seeks to support VA investigators who are interested in using STARRS-LS data to study suicide risk in Veterans and service members transitioning to civilian life. The program is interested not only in understanding suicide risk factors for Veterans who have and have not utilized VA healthcare. All projects should have a focus on improving our understanding of suicide risk or developing interventions to prevent suicide. The research products from the residency should inform suicide prevention endeavors in VA. The exact topic of study will be jointly determined by the resident and the VA / STARRS mentorship team prior to commencement of the residency. Examples of potential projects include:

* Understanding how employment factors and economic state at both enlistment and discharge influence Veteran suicidality.
* Investigating the role of legal investigations and disciplinary actions in post-discharge suicide, suicide attempts, and other self-harm behaviors.
* Studying the association between poor sleep and suicide ideation and attempt, as well as the extent to which sleep interventions reduce risk.
* Identification of risk factors present upon entry into VHA care that influence risk for future suicidal behavior.
* Identification and replication of novel biomarkers associated with increased risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors among service members and Veterans.

Residents will work as part of ongoing STARRS teams. Residents will have opportunities to develop data analytic skills necessary for research that involves large data sets and will have opportunities to establish a suicide prevention research portfolio that will be useful for other funding opportunities. Residents will serve as co-authors with STARRS investigators and other VA collaborators on scientific publications resulting from the residency.

In addition to developing a program of study using STARRS data, residents will have opportunities to: (1) participate in web-based presentations and trainings that explain the content of STARRS data sets and the processes for obtaining access to STARRS data, (2) assist SPRINT and ORD in refining processes to recruit and future applications for the VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program, (3) assist in the creation of linkage strategies for VHA and STARRS data, and (4) respond to requests by the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) to use STARRS data for suicide prevention programming.

Residency Process: This residency program is remote and can occur at any VA facility. The resident will be paired with a VA investigator (SPRINT or other approved VA suicide prevention investigator) and a member of the STARRS-LS investigational team which include:

* Robert J. Ursano, MD (Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences)
* Murray B. Stein, MD, MPH (University of California, San Diego)
* Ronald C. Kessler, PhD (Harvard Medical School)
* Matthew Nock, PhD (Harvard College)
* James Wagner, PhD (University of Michigan).

The resident will be added to the key personnel list of STARRS-LS Institutional Review Board protocol, allowing full access to STARRS data. Training on the STARRS data will be provided by the collaborating STARRS investigator and an assigned data analyst. The resident will attend regular meetings with STARRS and VA mentorship team. The resident and mentorship team will jointly determine the appropriate research and administrative goals for the first year of the residency. Residents will be evaluated on the degree of success in obtaining residency goals and in contributing to the research and administrative effort of the VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program. Successful residents will receive a second year of support.

Funding amounts: Funding commitment from ORD is designed to support 50% effort per year. This is a two-year residency with residents eligible for the second year of funding contingent upon the support of the mentorship team and successful completion of Year 1 residency goals. Residents are eligible for annual travel support for one in-person consultation with the mentorship team and one scientific meeting that involves presentation of research results. ORD will provide a maximum of $100,000 per year for each residency.

**VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Eligibility**

The VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program is an intramural research training program and interested candidates must meet all eligibility criteria for VA research support ([DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GUIDE 1200.15: (va.gov)](https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/ProgramGuide-1200-15-Eligibility-for-VA-Research-Support.pdf)). VA-salaried investigators at VA medical centers or VA-approved sites are eligible for consideration. Additionally, the applicant should hold an MD, PhD, or equivalent advanced degree and have at least a 5/8ths VA appointment. Also required is a letter of support from the applicant’s local Associate Chief of Staff for Research (ACOS/R) indicating that the ACOS/R will serve as the VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence sponsor at the station, the ACOS/R will be responsible for facility management of ORD funds sent for the VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program, and the applicant will have sufficient time and onsite resources to allow for participation in the program.

**Applications Requirements**

1. A Face page (Appendix A).
2. A Budget page (Appendix B).
3. Confirmation of 5/8ths VA appointment and letter of endorsement from local ACOS/R.
4. One-page personal statement describing:
   1. Prior experience working in suicide prevention or mental health research, including any skills in analyzing large data sets and experience with statistical software,
   2. Long term research interests, and
   3. What the applicant hopes to get out of the residency.
5. One-page research proposal.
   1. This proposal will be used to assess applicants general understanding of how large, longitudinal data sets can be used in suicide prevention research. The research proposal should include general research ideas and interests as well as methods and data analytic strategies necessary to pursue those research aims, but the applicants are not expected to be fully aware of all components contained in STARRS-LS data sets. The specific VA / STARRS projects examined during the residency will be jointly determined by the resident and the VA / STARRS mentorship team.
6. Curriculum vitae (CV).
7. Mentor letter (if appropriate). A letter from proposed VA mentor should be included. The letter should describe the historical nature of the mentor/applicant relationship and mentor’s planned role in the supervision of residency activities. Applicants should work with the SPRINT team to determine an appropriate VA mentor. For consultation on VA mentors, please contact Dr. Brian Marx at [brian.marx@va.gov](mailto:brian.marx@va.gov).

**Application –**- The applicant should include all required information into a single pdf document labeled LAST NAME\_FIRST NAME\_RIR.PDF. The application should be ordered in the following manner: Face Page (See Appendix A), Budget (See Appendix B), Confirmation/Support letter from ACOS/R, Personal Statement, Research Proposal, CV, and Mentor Support Letter. The single PDF document should be e-mailed to Annabelle Rynerson (at SuicidePreventionRes@va.gov) by the submission deadline.

**Timeline and Key Dates**

June 14, 2024 Full proposals due from applicants.

* Note: Submissions must be received by 8:00PM ET on due date.

July 15-31, 2024 Highest ranking candidates will be interviewed by VA/STARRS team. Potential first

year projects will be discussed during the interview.

August 1, 2024 Review committee convenes for selection decisions.

August 16, 2024 SPRINT sends funding decisions to applicants.

October 1, 2024 Residency commences.

**Review Process and Criteria –** The VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence applications will be reviewed by one or more non-conflicted investigators from the SPRINT network and one STARRS investigator. Review criteria include:

* **Applicant Qualifications:** Does the applicant have experience working with large data sets? Is the applicant well trained and well suited to carry out the work required for the residency? Does the applicant have broad statistical and data management skills?
* **Applicant interest in a Suicide Prevention research career:** Does the applicant have a history in suicide prevention research or related topics? If this is a new area of study, does the applicant make a strong case explaining change in research direction.
* **Potential for Subsequent Funding or Impact:** Is the applicant likely to lead to a competitive application for funding from federal funding agencies (e.g., VA, NIH, SAMSHA), private foundation (e.g., Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), or VA Operations? Are the applicant’s research interests relevant to Veteran care and Veteran suicide prevention? How likely will this resident be able to write articles that would be published in high impact journals?
* **Research Creativity:** Does the applicant’s research proposal reflect creative and critical thinking about how STARRS-LS data can be used to address issues relevant to Veteran suicide prevention?

Applications will be scored using the 9-point scale shown below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Impact** | **Score** | **Descriptor** | **Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses** |
| **High** | 1 | Exceptional | Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses |
| 2 | Outstanding | Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses |
| 3 | Excellent | Very strong with only some minor weaknesses |
| **Medium** | 4 | Very Good | Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses |
| 5 | Good | Strong but with at least one moderate weakness |
| 6 | Satisfactory | Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses |
| **Low** | 7 | Fair | Some strengths but with at least one major weakness |
| 8 | Marginal | A few strengths and a few major weaknesses |
| 9 | Poor | Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses |

**Resubmissions** – Applications for residency will be accepted annually. Those who apply and are not accepted are encouraged to re-apply the following year.

**VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program**

**FACE PAGE – APPENDIX A**

1. **Researcher-in Residence:**

Name:

VA Affiliation and Title:

VA Effort (8ths):

University Affiliation and Title:

Telephone:

Email Address:

1. **Total amount requested:**
2. **New Suicide Prevention Investigator:**

**[ ] Yes**

**[ ] No**

1. **Investigator Signature(s):**

Researcher-in-Residence Applicant: Date:­

VA Mentor (please consult with SPRINT prior to completion): Date:

1. **Facility Research Office Approval (ACOS for Research or equivalent):**

I have reviewed the proposed application and support the conduct of the research if funded.

Signature:

Date:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Expense Category** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Resident** | **Degree** | **Site** | **Role** | **Grade** | **Step** | **%  Effort** | **Year 1** Salary+ Fringe | **Year 2** Salary +Fringe |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | 50% |  |  |
| **Project Total for Personnel** | | | | | | |  |  |
| **Project Travel** |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **TOTAL** | | | | | | |  |  |

**VA / STARRS Researcher-in-Residence Program**

**BUDGET PAGE – APPENDIX B**

**BUDGET JUSTIFICATION**