Office of Connected Care (OCC) and VA Virtual Care Consortium of Research
FY 2022 Rapid Project Funding

Overview: VA’s Office of Connected Care (OCC) is responsible for the health care system’s digital health strategy and focuses on improving care through technology that engages Veterans and VA care team members outside of traditional encounters. The Office is comprised of multiple programs, including VA Telehealth Services, which aims to improve convenience for Veterans by supporting access to care at a distance; VA Mobile, which develops and supports different mobile apps intended for use by Veterans and VA care team members; and My HealtheVet, VA’s online patient portal which for 18 years has provided tools for Veterans to communicate with their VA care team members and conduct transactions with the VA health care system. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has driven rapid adoption of many technologies in the OCC portfolio, implementation challenges are still pervasive, and evidence for their effectiveness in specific contexts of care and with specific subsets of the Veteran population is still needed. The OCC has dedicated FY 2022 funds to support rapid quality improvement (QI) and evaluation projects that align with their priorities and can help advance their mission to enhance the accessibility, capacity, and quality of VA health care and the Veteran’s experience through the use of virtual care technologies that integrate into the daily lives of Veterans and the daily clinical work of VA care teams.

Request for Proposals: The OCC, in collaboration with the Virtual Care Consortium of Research (VC CORE), is soliciting proposals for rapid QI, evaluation, and partnership development projects. It is expected that proposals will focus on existing OCC technologies and/or rigorous evaluations of interventions and innovative programs in the field that are important to OCC.

Rapid QI and evaluation projects

The requirement for Non-Research Designation: Because the OCC program office has allocated the available funds, projects must be designated as non-research. Before a project can be initiated, investigators will need a letter from OCC, or another operations partner as appropriate, designating the work as non-research and/or quality improvement (VC CORE leadership will help investigators attain signatures after funding decisions are made). In some cases, local institutional review boards (IRBs) will also need to review projects to secure this non-research determination. More information about conducting projects with non-research determinations within the VA can be found on the VC CORE Sharepoint.

Projects: The OCC will prioritize funding for projects that meet their needs for FY22. Current OCC project needs include:

- Understanding the acceptability (among providers and patients) of the new VA Video Connect (VVC) feature to assess vital signs via smartphone or other internet capable devices and to detect clinically meaningful events compared to standard devices. (Partner: Leonie Heyworth)

- Value of patient generated health data (PGHD)* from patient and provider perspectives (Partner: John Murphy)
*PGHD is health-related data created, recorded, or gathered by or for patients (or family members or other caregivers) to promote health and wellness or to help address a health concern. PGHD may include remote device-generated consumer collected clinical data, health history, treatment history, biometric data, symptoms and other types of patient-reported outcomes, perceived quality of life data, and patient goals, values and lifestyle choices. Health-related PGHD are distinct from data generated in clinical settings. Patients are primarily responsible for capturing and/or recording these data, and patients explicitly decide to share these data through some form of authorization or consent process, or by voluntarily sending or transmitting their data.

Examples of PGHD data sources can include website or patient portal applications, mobile applications, tablet or kiosk applications or forms, wearable devices or sensors, medical devices issued to or acquired by the patient, other home monitoring devices or technologies, surveys and questionnaires, and text messaging. In addition, PGHD may be aggregated via internal or external data integration services. Our definition excludes data collected by the provider or other members of the healthcare team during a medical encounter, and surveys and questionnaires specifically designed to measure patient satisfaction or elicit patient feedback on their experience of care.

Supplemental Materials about OCC’s PGHD strategy and use cases are available here:

- [VA OCC PGHD Strategy Phase 1_appendix E.pdf](#)

**Investigator Eligibility:** Project teams must include at least one investigator who is currently funded by HSR&D, RR&D, or CSR&D and has meaningful scientific involvement in the proposed project. If the project lead is a fellow or other trainee, a mentor with current funding from HSR&D, RR&D, or CSR&D must serve as the PI or MPI.

**Project Duration:** Applicants may propose one or two year projects (must be completed by 9/30/2023). If multi-fiscal year (FY22 and FY23) proposals are submitted, projects will be evaluated at the end of the first fiscal year and continued funding will be decided by OCC based on their priorities.

Importantly, project funds provided to support work within a given fiscal year must be spent within that fiscal year. See the budgetary details below.

**Budget:** Budgets should adhere to the following

- Total costs for FY22 cannot exceed **$150,000** and must be spent by September 30, 2022, at the latest. Final project budgets for FY22 will be determined by OCC based on the number of suitable projects identified in this RFA.
- For FY23, budgets should not exceed **$150,000**. Funds for FY23 are contingent on meeting project milestones for FY22, OCC priorities, and the availability of funds.
- For multi-year projects, the total proposed budget cannot exceed $250,000
Requests for budget waivers will not be accepted. If appropriate, project teams can apply for supplementary funds from other program offices and VA funding sources.

Proposed projects exceeding more than one year in duration will undergo a review process at the end of each fiscal year to assess their progress and alignment with OCC priorities.

Allowable Costs: PI and co-investigator effort, personnel (e.g., research assistant, project coordinator, statistician), transcription, supplies, or other items that can be obtained within the funding timeline.

**Deadlines and Timeline**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/1/2021</td>
<td>Request for proposals (RFA) released</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office Hours: Q&amp;A session with VC CORE leadership and OCC representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/13/2021</td>
<td>Application Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/13-1/7/2022</td>
<td>Review of Applications</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/12/2022</td>
<td>Funding announcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/1/2022</td>
<td>Interim report deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/1/2022</td>
<td>FY23 Funding decision announced. For one year projects, final reports will be due 11/1/2022.</td>
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**Application/Review Process:** Proposals should be submitted to the VC CORE Sharepoint. Please see the [Funding Opportunities page](#) and link to submit your proposal.

Proposals will be reviewed by representatives from the OCC. Ratings and comments will be shared with OCC leadership, who will make final funding decisions.

**Application Submission Requirements (Deadline: 11:59 PM EST, 12/13/2021):**

- Saved as a pdf with the title: VC_LOI_Lastname_Firstname
- Please format with Arial, 11 point font, 0.5” margins
- Cover sheet, including project title, PI and co-investigator names and affiliations, requested funding amount for FY22 and FY23 (budget justification will be required post award), PI email/contact information
- 3 pages with the following elements:
  - Brief background and rationale
  - Prior experience and expertise in the priority area. Reference to any recently completed work that is relevant
  - Specific aims
  - Project design/methodology
  - Impact of proposed project
  - Timeline and deliverables table
- Biosketch (5-page NIH format) for project lead (and mentor, if project lead has not been PI of a VA-funded research proposal, such as a CDA, IIR, or QUERI). Use the personal statement section to connect relevant prior experience to this proposal.
Proposal Review Criteria: Proposals will be reviewed by OCC based on the following criteria:

1) **Significance, including alignment with OCC priorities:** Does this proposed project address a significant problem related to Virtual Care? Is it aligned with OCC’s vision: “The accessibility, capacity, and quality of VA health care and the Veteran’s experience will be enhanced by information and communication technologies (virtual modalities) that effectively integrate into the daily activities of Veterans and VA staff.”? Will project results affect care or outcomes for Veterans?

2) **Methodological Approach:** Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, well-reasoned, and appropriate to the project's aims? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative approaches? Does the approach utilize available/common data elements when applicable (e.g., Corporate Data Warehouse data for VA Video Connect, My HealtheVet, Interoperable standards)?

3) **Feasibility, including timeline and investigator qualifications:** Is it feasible to complete study activities within the proposed timeline? Do the investigators have appropriate training and experience to carry out this work? If the applicant is an early career investigator, is there an engaged senior researcher/mentor? Can the work be conducted as QI (non-research?)

Award Requirements:
- Given the time-sensitive nature of this funding opportunity, project activities should begin as soon as possible and no longer than one month following award notification.
- Investigators are expected to communicate regularly with their OCC liaisons and/or other operations partners.
- PIs will provide the OCC and CORE leadership with an interim (6-month) report later in FY22 in the form of a quad chart summarizing activities, progress, and challenges encountered.
- PIs of multi-year projects will provide OCC with an updated project plan for year 2 to inform continued funding decisions.
- A final report summarizing project results and impacts within 3 months of the project end date will be required along with a brief slide presentation appropriate for OCC leadership summarizing key project findings, lessons learned, and implications for practice.
- Project teams may be asked to contribute to data dictionaries and other resources that the Virtual Care CORE is developing to support research and evaluation activities focused on VA virtual care technologies.

Contact Information:
Please contact VHAVirtualCareCORE@va.gov with any questions about this funding opportunity or to be added to the mailing lists for the Virtual Care CORE.