

**HSR&D Call for Concept Papers: Time-Sensitive Projects on Implementation and Evaluation of VHA Community Networks**

**DUE DATE: January 30, 2017 to [VHACOHSRD.CMTYCARERFA@va.gov](mailto:VHACOHSRD.CMTYCARERFA@va.gov)**

**Maximum 7 pages; Application details are provided below.**

**Purpose.** The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) announces an opportunity for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities to compete for up to three service directed research (SDR) projects supported by the Health Services Research & Development Service (HSR&D) to support the design, methods, and initial analysis of a comprehensive program of research related to the implementation of VHA Community Care. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is undergoing major transformations in the way it provides care, most notably with the passage of the Veterans Choice Act, and expansion of an integrated and seamless system of quality care. These policy changes are based on major recommendations from key stakeholders as well as the VHA [Commission on Care](#) (Choice Act Section 202).

**Background.** This call for concept papers intends to support evaluation planning and ultimately a national program of research on the implementation of the Choice Act and community care networks. **We are especially interested in applications that acquire and analyze near real-time data from non-VA sources across regions and nationally, in order to more comprehensively assess impacts of Community Care utilization, on access, care coordination, health care costs, care experience, and implementation of best practices among Veterans.** Planning activities are expected to coincide with the establishment of new contracts for community care across the different VHA regions, and hence, such activities should be conducted in **active partnership with VHA's Office of Community Care**. It is expected that the planning activities will also involve implementation of data and evaluation infrastructures required to assess the quality, cost, outcomes, and care experience among Veterans receiving care in community networks. Key research topics include: 1) factors associated with use of Choice Act services and use of community providers, 2) factors affecting make vs. buy decisions by the VA, 3) scope, function and geographic characteristics of community provider networks and their impact on patient care and outcomes over time, 4) role of community provider networks and Choice Act use on access, wait times, cost, and outcomes of care, and 5) development and implementation of best practices in coordinated care and care management between the VHA and its community networks. Among these topics, special consideration will be given to proposals that assess the impact on the Choice Act and community networks on wait times for appointments for medical and hospital care, studies that assess the impact of the Choice Act on use of coordinated care over the long-term, and identification of performance metrics for value based purchasing. Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center (PEPRc), a new HSR&D/QUERI resource center designed to provide timely, rigorous data analysis to support the development of high-priority policy, planning, and management initiatives and quantitative program evaluations to improve the quality and efficiency of VA health care, is currently working on wait time metrics and could guide awardees in this area.

**Mechanism.** Successful applicants will receive HSR&D planning funds of up to \$400,000 over two years – up to \$150,000 and \$250,000 in fiscal year (FY) 17 and FY 18, respectively. Up to three projects will be funded at these levels. Planning funding should be used for non-research activities including rigorous evaluation planning, methods and infrastructure development, and initial analyses (including feasibility and infrastructure assessments) to inform development of full proposals to be submitted to eRA commons for full HSR&D support as a SDR project with

funding up to \$350,000 per year. Concept paper awardees will be required to submit quarterly reports during the planning period on progress of their proposed activities.

**Concept papers are due January 30, 2017. Concept papers should not exceed 7 pages, excluding references (not to exceed two pages total) and budget information, and be single spaced, 11 point Arial font, with at least 0.5 inch margins. Send concept papers to [VHACOHSRD.CMTYCAREFA@va.gov](mailto:VHACOHSRD.CMTYCAREFA@va.gov).**

**Concept papers should provide an overview of the implementation and evaluation plan that includes each of the following sections (page number distributions are suggested):**

1. **Background (~1 page)** Briefly describe the project significance and potential impact on VHA services and Veteran health
2. **Specific Aims (~0.5 page).** Briefly describe specific objectives of the proposed evaluation.
3. **Methods/Evaluation Plan (~2.5 pages)** This section should also include a description of feasibility and infrastructure assessments to take place during the planning phase.
4. **Partnerships/Data Sources (~1 page).** Describe prior and current experience with VA operational partners and availability/expertise with existing VHA data sources relevant to the project.
5. **Deliverables and Timelines (~0.5 page).** Provide a brief description of products and analyses to be accomplished during the first and second year funding periods.
6. **Research Team and Relevant Experience (~1 page):** In this section describe the key participants (co-investigators and organizations) and their relevant prior experience with partnered evaluations and capacity to conduct the work.
7. **Management Plan (~.5 page):** Describe the project management plan including roles and tasks of each member of the investigative team and how the work will be coordinated with all involved parties. Clearly define which investigators will conduct what aspect of the evaluation and implementation planning. In addition, describe local resources available at your facility that will contribute to your team's ability for success, including any proposed collaboration with institutions or investigators outside the principal investigator's facility.
8. **Budget for Planning Phase (NOT included in 7-page limit):** On a separate page, list anticipated expenses for the planning phase. The budget may be for up to \$150,000 and \$250,000 in FY17 and FY18, respectively and should only be used for non-research activities including rigorous evaluation planning, methods development, and initial analyses to inform development of full proposals for scientific peer review. It should also include administrative support for IRB submission after the full evaluation plan is written.

Letters of support are **NOT** required from the Office of Community Care or any other VHA Office. **Any questions regarding this call for concept papers and funding mechanism can be addressed at the Open Conference Call scheduled with HSR&D and the Office of Community Care on January 13<sup>th</sup> (call information found in Key Dates section below).**

### **General Criteria for Review and Scoring of Concept Papers**

Concept Papers will be peer-reviewed and selected based on the following criteria:

1. Alignment with Community Care and VHA goals,
2. Validity and feasibility of evaluation methods (including use of appropriate data sources and metrics as well as ascertainment of individual/regional, provider, and system factors), and
3. Investigators' prior experience with partnered evaluations and capacity to conduct the work.

### **Key Dates for the HSR&D Time-Sensitive Projects on Implementation and Evaluation of VHA Community Networks SDR Review Process:**

**December 13, 2016: Call for concept papers released**

**January 13, 2017, 12:00 (noon) – 1:00PM Eastern: Open Conference Call with HSR&D and Office of Community Care** to discuss call for concept papers and funding mechanism.

**VANTS: (800) 767-1750; dial 90981#**

**January 16, 2017: Inform HSR&D if planning on submitting a concept paper.** Send an email to the HSR&D Community Care RFA mailbox ([VHACOHSRD.CMTYCARERFA@va.gov](mailto:VHACOHSRD.CMTYCARERFA@va.gov)) by January 16, 2017, if you plan on submitting a concept paper. Please note in your email if you are collaborating with any other institutions/sites.

**January 30, 2017: Concept papers due**

**February: Concept Paper Review**

**March 2017: Administrative review, planning awards made**

**Selected Concept Paper awardees will be invited to submit full SDR proposals for the Summer 2017 cycle:**

June 12, 2017: Selected Summer cycle Full Proposals due in eRA Commons

August 2017: Review of full proposals

August 2017: Funding decisions made