

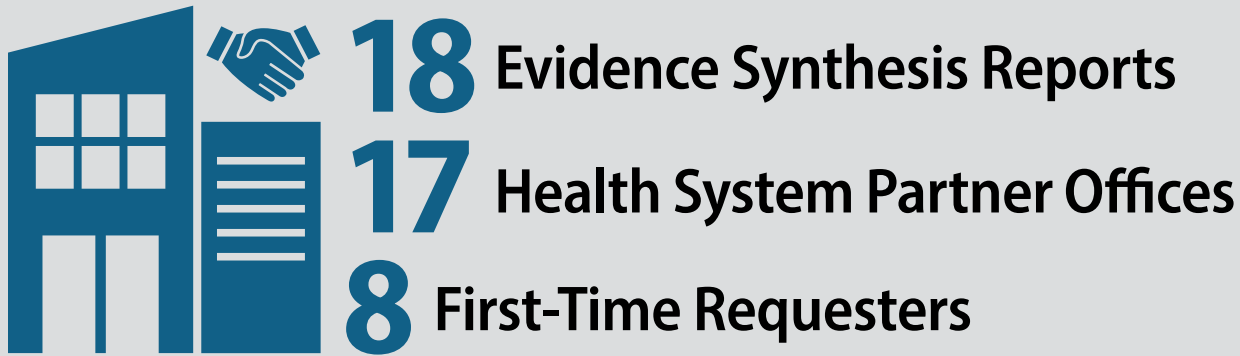
# VA Evidence Synthesis Program

2025 Program Impacts

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# VA Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP)

## 2025 Impacts by the Numbers



**85%** of requesters indicated they were likely to request another ESP report in the future

**100%** were satisfied with the reports and felt they met expectations

**15** National presentations of report findings, including HSR cyberseminars

**6** Articles published in high-impact journals



## ESP Supports VA National Goals and Initiatives



# 2025 ESP Reports and Partners



## Healthcare Quality and Safety

**Antimicrobial Stewardship Strategies and Programs in the Outpatient Setting**  
*National Antimicrobial Stewardship Taskforce and the VHA National Infectious Disease Service*

**VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care**  
*VHA Offices of Analytics and Performance, Integration and Integrated Veterans Care (IVC), Specialty Care Program Office/Hospital Medicine, and ORD Investigators, Scientific Review and Management (ISRM)*

**Comparative Effectiveness of Focused Ultrasound Therapy for Movement Disorders**  
*Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers*

**Safety of Ketamine in the Prehospital Setting**  
*National Emergency Medicine Office*

**Implementation of Age-Friendly Health Systems in Outpatient Settings**  
*Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care*

**Wearable Devices for Remote Patient Monitoring After Hospital Discharge**  
*Office of Research & Development*

## Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homeless Veteran Outreach

**ADHD and Substance Use Disorders in Adults**  
*Office of Mental Health*

**Moral Injury and Mental Health Among US Military Service Members and Veterans**  
*Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Integrative Mental Health Initiative*

**Integrated Mental and Behavioral Health Care**  
*Office of Mental Health*

**Engaging Veterans Experiencing Homelessness in VHA Health Care**  
*Office of the Assistant Undersecretary for Health, Clinical Services*

**Faith-Based Digital Applications for Mental Health and Well-Being**  
*Office of Research & Development*

## Preventive Medicine

**Shared Decision-Making for Lung Cancer Screening**  
*National Center for Lung Cancer Screening*

## Whole Health and Nutrition

**Massage Therapy and Acupressure for Non-Painful Health Conditions**  
*Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation, Integrative Health Coordinating Center*

**Tai Chi and Qigong: Update from 2014-2024**  
*Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation, Integrative Health Coordinating Center*

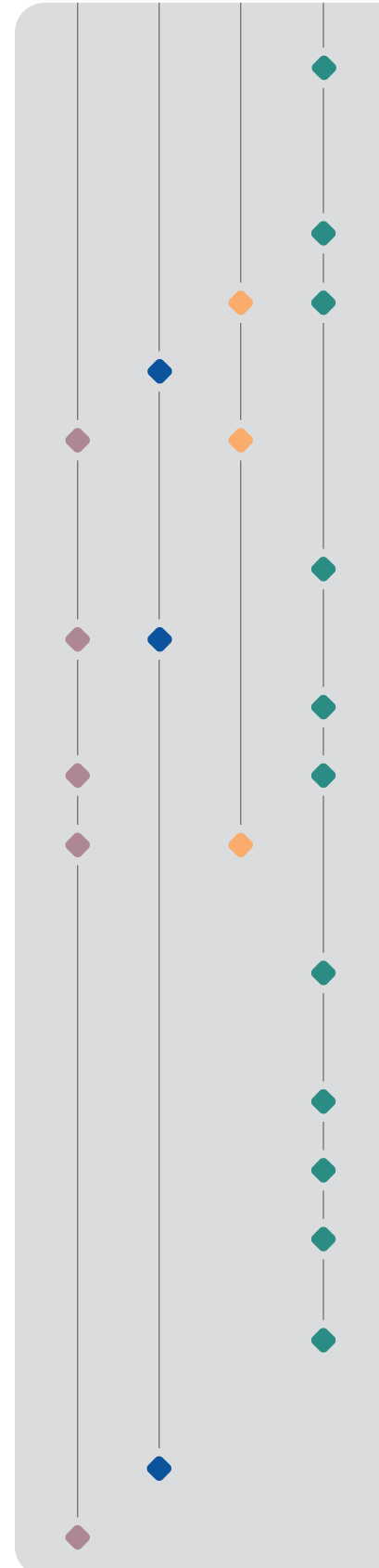
**Anti-Inflammatory Diet and Related Dietary Interventions for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Health Conditions**  
*Nutrition and Food Service Clinical Nutrition Committee, Integrative and Functional Nutrition Workgroup*

**Automated Nutrition Delivery**  
*Nutritional Field Advisory Board*

## Veteran and Staff Education

**Registered Nurse Transition-to-Practice Programs**  
*Office of Nursing Services*

**Effectiveness and Implementation of Teach-Back as an Approach to Patient Education**  
*National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*



# ESP in Action

Examples of VA national goals and initiatives supported by recent ESP reports



## Shaping a Research Agenda

Age-Friendly Health Systems (AFHS) State-of-the-Art (SOTA) Conference

In September of 2025, VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) and Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) convened with invited participants to identify priorities for future research in AFHS, which aims to improve care and outcomes for older adults. The conference focused on implementation, sustainment, measurement, research, and dissemination of AFHS in VA. As with previous SOTAs, ESP conducted a review in advance of the conference on [Implementation of AFHS in Outpatient Settings](#) to help participants identify existing knowledge gaps. An ESP investigator with subject matter expertise also helped to facilitate the conference.

Other SOTA conferences informed by ESP reports include:

- [Measuring What Matters Most: Whole Person Outcomes](#)
- [State of the Art Conference on VA Emergency Medicine \(SAVE\)](#)
- [Effective Management of Pain and Addiction: Strategies to Improve Opioid Safety](#)

“While this review focused on implementation in outpatient settings (where the largest number of Veterans potentially impacted are), there is opportunity for creating a pathway for operations to develop well-planned deployments of the program in other settings and researchers to craft strategies designed to capture structural and process factors to optimize program deployment and patient/system outcomes.”

*Marianne Shaughnessy, PhD, Director, Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center Programs, GEC*



## Addressing Urgent and Emerging Needs

ESP reports can provide timely insights about emerging clinical topics and novel interventions. When clinical or policy guidance is urgently needed, ESP can produce evidence synthesis reports on an accelerated timeline by adapting traditional systematic review methods. Recent examples include:

- [Safety of Ketamine in the Prehospital Setting](#)
- [Efficacy and Safety of Fibrin Intervertebral Injections for Back and Neck Pain](#)

“The ESP review will guide PMOP and IVC efforts to develop CDI’s and clinical practice guidance for the field. Very satisfied.”

*Tim Dawson, MD, Deputy Executive Director, Pain Management Opioid Safety and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PMOP)*



## Improving Quality and Safety of Healthcare

ESP helps VA achieve the Quintuple Aim for Health Care Improvement. ESP reports have directly informed VA efforts to ensure that Veterans receive high-quality, cost-effective, and individualized healthcare. For example, an ESP report on [Shared Decision Making for Lung Cancer Screening](#) helped the National Center for Lung Cancer Screening (NCLCS) better understand effective communication strategies so that Veterans can make informed and values-based decisions with their clinicians regarding lung cancer screening.

“Working with the ESP has been fantastic! Their team is thoughtful, professional, and very collaborative. Most importantly, their work is already helping to guide VA policy regarding lung cancer screening and shared decision making. Their work will improve Veterans’ health and ease unnecessary burdens for frontline clinicians.”

*Christopher G. Slatore, MD MS, Chief Consultant, NCLCS*



## Responding to Legislation and Congressional Inquiries

ESP reports are used to respond to legislation aimed at improving the understanding of health conditions impacting Veterans. Reports have helped characterize the state of the evidence on a given topic and identify key knowledge gaps. Recent examples include:

- [Moral Injury and Mental Health Among US Military Service Members and Veterans](#)
- [Effectiveness and Implementation of Teach-Back as an Approach to Patient Education](#)
- [Engaging Veterans Experiencing Homelessness in VHA Health Care](#)

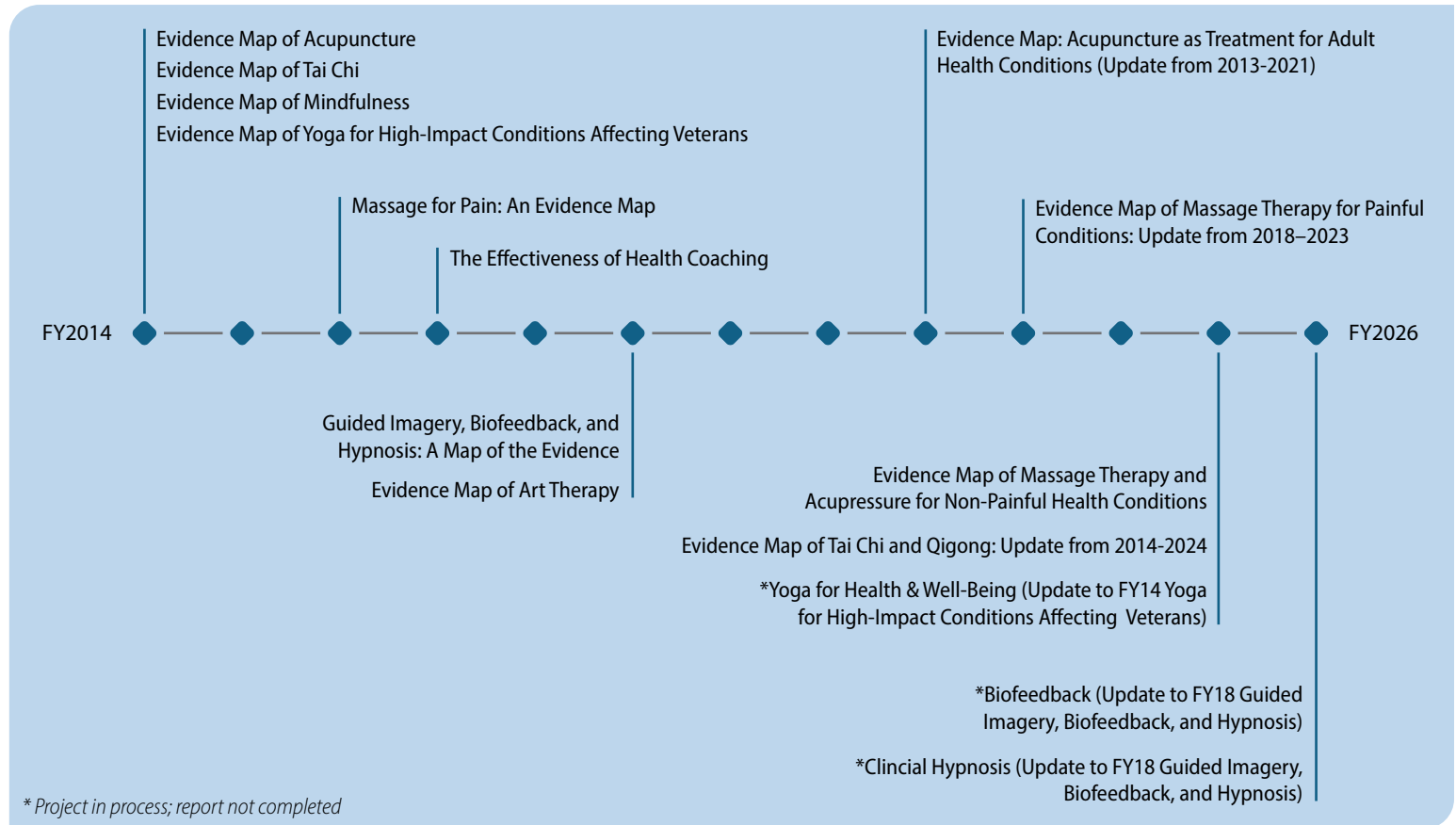
“The ESP report provided a very important neutral review of the information to date, which is especially helpful for a topic where different leading subject matter experts can sway opinions and thinking. The report helped identify areas for further clarification and research, which will help advance care provision for Veterans, and will be very helpful as part of continuing work on HR 6411 506a as well as more broadly help guide moral injury research priorities moving forward in VA.”

*Jason Nieuwsma, PhD, Associate Director, VA Integrative Mental Health*



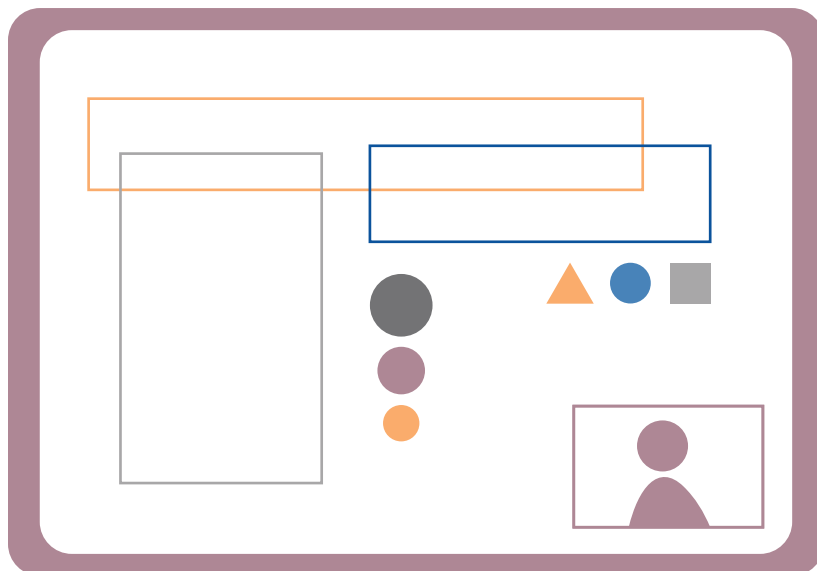
# Enhancing Veteran Well-Being and Whole Health

Whole Health is a patient-centered, whole-person approach to care that aligns with what really matters to the Veteran and supports their health and well-being. When the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCCCT) was tasked with implementing this approach, they came to ESP for help. Since 2014, ESP has supported the VA's Whole Health Initiative by producing 15 systematic reviews and evidence maps to inform program leadership and frontline clinicians. This longstanding partnership has resulted in VA leading the way globally in transforming healthcare delivery and improving health outcomes.



"I cannot overemphasize the importance of ESP program and reports generated especially as a tool to advance Whole Health for Veterans (and employees) - VA has led the way globally in improving health outcomes with the Whole Health/Complementary Integrative Health initiative transforming health care delivery - the support of the ESP program has been critical to that mission -- thank you!"

Sharon M. Weinstein MD, MT, FAAHPM, VA National Lead, Massage Therapy, OPCCCT



## Mapping the Evidence

OPCCCT promoted their experience working with ESP and the utility of evidence mapping in a recent Cyberseminar, "Health Evidence Maps: What's in it for me?" This interactive presentation provided an overview of the CIH evidence maps and guidance on how to apply their findings. The ESP team walked the participants through the various methodologies used in evidence map development, such as use of GRADE criteria and the reasons studies may be excluded, and OPCCCT presented examples of the different ways administrators and frontline clinicians could use the CIH evidence maps in support of their work related to the Whole Health Initiative. This effort highlights an innovative approach to knowledge translation and a novel strategy for disseminating ESP report findings and engaging VA audiences.

A purple spotlight beam shines from the top left corner of the page, illuminating the content below.

## ESP Report Spotlight: Improving the Veteran Experience

Teach-back is a strategy to promote patient and family understanding of health information that involves asking the recipient to repeat or redemonstrate information provided by a health care professional to ensure successful communication. An ESP systematic review on the effectiveness of teach-back helped the VA National Center for Prevention advance their efforts to help frontline clinicians improve Veteran health education. ESP investigators presented findings from their report to the VA Health Literacy Community of Practice and broader VA community through a [cyberseminar](#).



“The ESP program’s report on the teach-back method highlights its crucial role in enhancing healthcare within the VHA. Teach-back ensures Veterans fully understand their care plans, leading to better adherence and health outcomes. For providers, it improves patient communication and reduces misunderstandings. Overall, the method supports a more informed, engaged, and healthier Veteran population.”

*Dan Greenwood, PhD, RDN, National Program Manager for Patient Centered Learning*

“We will utilize this report to advocate for leadership support to implement strategies to enhance VA clinicians adoption and use of teach-back as a core communication and health education strategy.”  
*Michael G. Goldstein, MD, Associate Chief Consultant for Preventive Medicine*

## ESP Journal Publications During FY25

ESP reports are shared across the VA, and the majority are made publicly available. To further expand the program’s impact, ESP reports are often translated into journal articles. Many are published in high-impact medical journals and are frequently cited.

- **An Evidence Map of the Women Veterans’ Health Literature, 2016 to 2023: A Systematic Review** (JAMA Network Open, April 2025)
- **Using Google to search for evidence: how much is enough? One center’s experience** (Systematic Reviews, April 2025)
- **How an Evidence Synthesis Program’s Growth Has Supported Research Use and Learning Community Partnership Networks Within a Learning Health System: A Descriptive Analysis and Case Series** (Learning Health Systems, March 2025)
- **Strategies and Outcomes of Age-Friendly Health System Implementation in Outpatient Settings: A Systematic Review.** (Inquiry, February 2025)
- **Effectiveness of Synchronous Postdischarge Contacts on Health Care Use and Patient Satisfaction: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis** (Annals of Internal Medicine, January 2025)
- **Assessing Whole-Person Outcomes During Routine Clinical Care: A Rapid Scoping Review** (Medical Care, December 2024)

## Most Influential ESP Publications to Date

	Journal	Citations	Impact
Risk Prediction Models for Hospital Readmission: A Systematic Review	JAMA 2011	1459 +63	31.36 -2.53
Racial and Ethnic Disparities in COVID-19-Related Infections, Hospitalizations, and Deaths: A Systematic Review	Annals of Internal Medicine, 2021	888 +104	38.93 -1.45
What is an Evidence Map? A Systematic Review of Definitions, Methods, and Products	Systematic Reviews, 2016	444 +64	11.26 -0.01
Mental Health Conditions Among Patients Seeking and Undergoing Bariatric Surgery	JAMA 2016	422 +51	21.19 +0.28
Electronic patient portals: evidence on health outcomes, satisfaction, efficiency, and attitudes: a systematic review	Annals of Internal Medicine, 2013	389 +16	5.09 -0.05
Early Warning System Scores for Clinical Deterioration in Hospitalized Patients: A Systematic Review	Annals of the American Thoracic Society, 2014	303 +33	2.54 +0.13
The Effects of Pay-for-Performance Programs on Health, Health Care Use, and Processes of Care: A Systematic Review	Annals of Internal Medicine, 2017	293 +22	12.97 -0.05
Delivery of genomic medicine for common chronic adult diseases: a systematic review	JAMA 2008	277 +6	12.26 -1.59
Teledermatology for diagnosis and management of skin conditions: A systematic review	Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, 2011	251 +16	5.9 +0.03
Prevalence, Assessment, and Treatment of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Evidence	Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, 2011	250 +12	5.81 +0.04

**Impact** = Scopus Field-Weighted Citation Scores. +/- indicate change in citation counts or impact scores from 2023.

## Highly Viewed ESP Reports During 2025



**Massage Therapy for Painful Conditions** (2016, 2023 Update)



**Acupuncture as Treatment for Adult Health Conditions** (2014, 2022 Update)



**VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care: A Living Systematic Review** (2024)



**Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence Among Veterans** (2013, 2021 Update)



**Guided Imagery, Biofeedback, and Hypnosis** (2019)

Page Views	2,578	2,409	2,056	1,836	1,585
Downloads	352	603	299	261	245

# Can a synthesis of available evidence support your programmatic or research goals?

The **VA Evidence Synthesis Program** was established in 2007 to help VA fulfill its vision of functioning as a continuously learning health care system. ESP maintains this mission by providing timely, targeted, independent syntheses for VA leadership to translate into evidence-based clinical practice and to inform VA's research and program evaluation efforts. ESP investigators are recognized leaders in the field of research synthesis, and many are practicing VA clinicians. Together, they ensure ESP products are:



## **Innovative and Rigorous**

ESP makes use of time-tested synthesis approaches, and when necessary, adapts these methods to meet our partners' specific needs while preserving rigor and transparency.



## **Timely**

Requests are accepted year-round, with more urgent needs prioritized for rapid products. ESP product time frames range from weeks to 1 year from project initiation.



## **High Impact**

ESP tackles high-priority issues like Veteran homelessness, access to care, suicide prevention, and military toxic exposures.

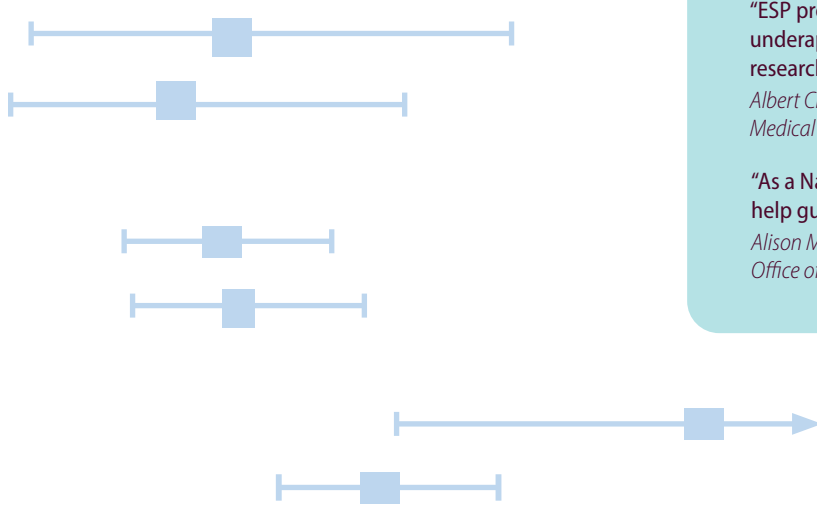


## **Relevant**

ESP investigators are embedded in the VA health care system and work to ensure reports are actionable for the Veteran population.

## Connect With ESP

ESP serves the entire VA system from centers located in Durham, NC, Los Angeles, CA, Minneapolis, MN, Portland, OR, and Providence, RI. Working with ESP begins by submitting a **topic nomination form** [↗](#). Once your topic is nominated, ESP staff work with you to determine the optimal review approach. If the topic meets prioritization criteria and is selected by HSR leadership, an ESP Center will be assigned to conduct the review. High-priority, time-sensitive needs can be addressed as capacity allows.



*"ESP provides high-level, high-quality systematic reviews and is a truly underappreciated and underutilized jewel in the VHA. Kudos to the researchers for the support of the VHA mission."*

*Albert Chen, MD, PhD, Chief of Radiotherapy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (Houston, TX)*

*"As a National Program Office, we have frequently used the ESP reports to help guide development of tools and to support policy and guidance."*

*Alison M. Whitehead, MPH, C-IAYT, National Integrative Health Program Lead, VHA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCCCT)*

Access completed ESP reports on the web [↗](#) or VA intranet [↗](#)

This report was developed by the ESP Coordinating Center, located at VA Portland Health Care System in Portland, Oregon. Questions about report content or the program can be directed to [esp.cc@va.gov](mailto:esp.cc@va.gov).



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs