

Improving Veteran care and outcomes through rigorous partnered evaluation.

As a result of the 2018 Evidence Act (P.L. 115-435) Veterans Health Administration offices and programs are now required to demonstrate that their policies and budgets are supported by evidence and evaluation. EPEC-Vet will assist these VA operations offices by conducting rigorous and timely evaluations of high priority VA programs and policies.

AIMS

1. Establish and sustain a robust evaluation center that conducts at least two evaluations per year to address questions on the impacts of VA programs or policies on Veterans' care and outcomes.

2. To conduct rigorous evaluations that use innovative methods, data collection and/or analytic strategies, including a set of common evaluation criteria (e.g., economic impact, equity, unintended consequences) across evaluations, and track common themes and lessons learned.

3. Employ state-of-the-art knowledge translation methods to effectively disseminate evaluation results to key VA stakeholders and broader policy and research communities, and to facilitate the use of new evidence into VA policies, programs, and practice.

Partners and Collaborators

EPEC-Vet includes a team of investigators with expertise in multiple methods areas:



Biostatistics



Qualitative Methods



Health Policy



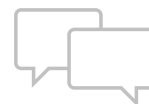
Economics



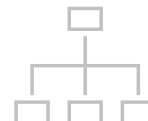
Databases



Community-based



Dissemination



Clinical Trials



Implementation

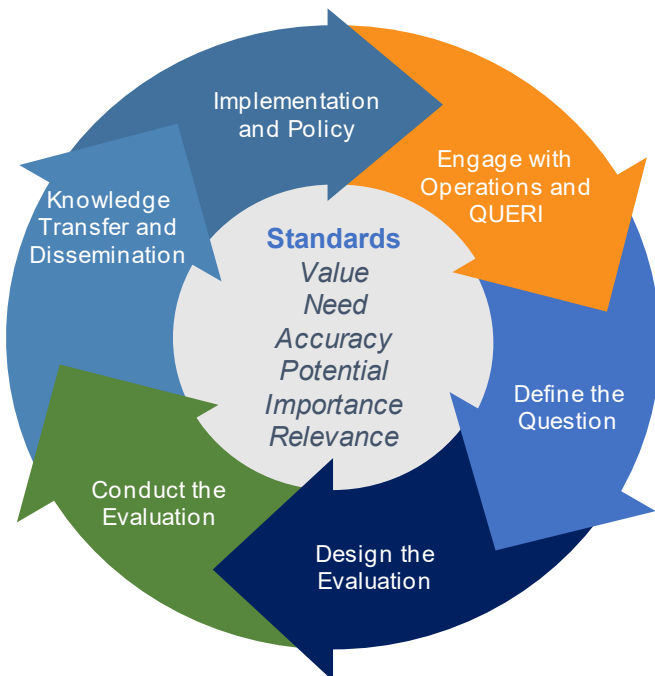


Figure 1. EPEC-Vet Conceptual Model¹

EPEC-Vet uses this model to engage with VA operations partners to define the program or question, design the evaluation using state-of-the-art research methods and study designs, conduct the evaluation while providing regular feedback to our partners, disseminate findings and publish results, and identify needs for implementation of programs or development of policies to match the evidence.

¹ Modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) evaluation framework. CDC Framework for program evaluation in public health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11)

Current Evaluations

Assessing the Impact of Military Toxins Legislation on Veterans Healthcare

Main Objective:

- Assess the impact of legislation related to military toxin exposures on Veterans access and use of health care and disability claims.

Policy Relevance:

- Veterans have been exposed to various toxins as a result of their military service. Congress has approved legislation to address various exposures related to these toxins by increasing access to care, and identify conditions that are associated with these exposures for which veterans can submit claims for disability.
- Our evaluation will examine the impact of legislation related to the toxic exposures related to water contamination at Camp Lejeune (CL), and the recent PACT Act legislation that addresses exposures to toxins from conflicts occurring since the 1990s forward.

Mixed-methods Design:

- Examination of VA administrative data related to use of VA healthcare, submission of disability claims and prevalence of presumptive and associated conditions at CL and Veterans eligible due to the PACT Act.
- Surveys to assess Veterans' experiences managing their health care associated with toxin exposure.
- Qualitative interviews with a small group of Veterans exposed to toxins.
- Identify unintended consequences and potential equity issues related to toxin-related legislation.

Assessing the Value of VA Vocational Rehabilitation/ Employment Programs

Main Objective:

- Assess Veterans' outcomes (in terms of healthcare use and cost) and providers' experiences (in terms hiring and maintain staff) from the provision of vocational rehabilitation/employment programs for Veterans with significant mental health, SUD, or physical disabilities.

Policy Relevance:

- Many Veterans experience difficulties seeking and obtaining employment after military service. Physical and mental health issues are significant contributors to difficulties in obtaining and maintaining employment.
- The VHA offers programs to educate and assist Veterans to obtain employment. Employment status is a VA Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning performance metric for mental health.
- Employment has several benefits, including reductions in social isolation, and economic instability, which if not addressed often results in homelessness, SUD relapse, or suicidal ideation, and such outcomes are pertinent informing future policy.

Mixed-methods Design:

- Using a variety of data sources to examine utilization, identify vocational rehabilitation program types and employee information, and determine direct program costs compared to healthcare utilization.
- Online surveys of leadership at each site asking about program type and size, along with their ability to hire and maintain vocational rehabilitation staff.
- Identification of a small number of highly successful and struggling VA facilities will be selected for telephone interviews to better understand variation, facilitators, barriers, and behaviors or practices utilized across sites.

Anticipated Impacts



Enhance implementation efforts by identifying common factors that promote or inhibit implementation of policies.



Support the 2018 Evidence Act (P.L. 115-435) and facilitate changes to high priority VA programs and policies through evaluation and dissemination of findings to key VA stakeholders.



Improve Veteran care and outcomes through enhancement of VA programs and policies.

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