

Pain/Opioid CORE

VA HSR&D

Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2023 Pain/Opioid CORE Rapid Start Funding Awardees

We are pleased to announce that six projects were selected to receive funding through our Rapid Start Funding program.

The awardees are:



Derrecka Boykin

Project Title: Piloting a Gender-Sensitive Brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Group Treatment for Women Veterans with Chronic Pelvic Pain

Principal Investigator: Derrecka Boykin, PhD

VA Location: Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, Houston, TX

Senior PI* & Co-Investigators: Jeffrey Cully, PhD*; Lilian Dindo, PhD; and Mackenzie Shanahan, PhD

Project Summary: Chronic pelvic pain (CPP) is a debilitating pain condition that disproportionately affects women veterans (30% vs. 16% of nonveteran women vs. 3% of men). Pain intensity and disability are further exacerbated by psychosocial factors (such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic distress) that may not be fully addressed through pharmacological and surgical interventions. In this pilot randomized trial, we will test the feasibility and acceptability of

a brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) group treatment for women veterans experiencing CPP. ACT is recognized as a first-line nondrug treatment for pain conditions and, as a transdiagnostic psychotherapy, provides a unified approach to the treatment of co-occurring medical and psychiatric disorders. This pilot study builds on our previous work adapting an empirically supported one-day ACT workshop to the specific pain needs and care preferences of women veterans based on their feedback. This work also aligns with priorities to expand women's health services within the Veterans Health Administration.



Joseph Frank

Project Title: Feasibility and Acceptability of Group Pain Reprocessing Therapy for Veterans with Chronic Back Pain

Principal Investigator: Joseph Frank, MD, MPH

VA Location: VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, Aurora, CO

Co-Investigator: Yoni Ashar, PhD

Project Summary: Pain Reprocessing Therapy (PRT) is a novel psychological treatment with promising results from an initial clinical trial among civilians with chronic back pain. This study will assess the feasibility and acceptability of group-delivered PRT for Veterans with chronic back pain in the context of an interdisciplinary VA pain management team. We will deliver an 8-session, weekly group intervention to 4 groups of Veterans using a wait-list control design. We will conduct a mixed-methods evaluation with brief structured surveys and focus groups.



Alice S. Kehaya

Project Title: Exercise-Induced Hypoalgesia in Women Veterans with Chronic Musculoskeletal Pain: A Comparison of Low, Medium and High Intensity Interval Training

Principal Investigator(s): Alice Schmidt Kehaya, MD

VA Location: VA Portland Health Care System, Portland, OR

Senior PI* & Co-Investigator: Travis I. Lovejoy, PhD, MPH* and Kerry Kuehl, MD, DrPH

Project Summary: This study will compare various intensities of bicycle interval training in women Veterans with chronic musculoskeletal (MSK) pain. The project will harness the phenomenon of Exercise-Induced Hypoalgesia – a short-term reduction in pain sensitivity after exercise – and measure acute and delayed effects of exercise on various measures of pain. The goal of this feasibility study is to inform a larger, future trial that will elucidate the optimum “dose” of interval exercise to minimize both short- and long-term pain and promote adherence to exercise.



Erin Reilly



Victoria Ameral

Project Title: Feasibility and Acceptability of an Online Acceptance and Mindfulness Based Program for Chronic Pain and Substance Use

Principal Investigators: Erin Reilly, MEd, PhD and Victoria Ameral, PhD

VA Location: VA New England Healthcare System, Bedford, MA

Senior PI: Megan Kelly, PhD

Project Summary: Chronic pain is a debilitating condition that disproportionately impacts Veterans, who are diagnosed at particularly high rates (47 - 56%) and with a 40% greater rate of severe pain than non-Veterans. Co-occurring substance use disorders are also common among Veterans with chronic pain and exacerbate both the intensity and life interference of chronic

pain issues. Evidence-based interventions for chronic pain that target transdiagnostic processes of relevance for substance use, such as mindfulness and acceptance, hold particular promise for this population. Unfortunately, less than half of Veterans receive such therapeutic interventions, despite rising rates of co-occurring chronic pain and substance use among Veterans. This proposed project will provide an online acceptance and commitment therapy-based intervention, Veteran ACT for Chronic Pain, using seven weekly modules to improve pain-related functioning and quality of life for Veterans with chronic pain and comorbid substance use disorder. We will make revisions to existing website content and conduct a Stage IA feasibility pilot of the modified website, with primary outcomes including ease of recruitment, retention, treatment receptivity, sustained participation, and the assessment process (n=20 total).



Maria Silveira

Project Title: Buprenorphine Rotation to Reduce LTOT in Veterans with Chronic Cancer Pain

Principal Investigator(s): Maria Silveira, MD, MA, MPH

VA Location: Ann Arbor VA Medical Center, Ann Arbor, MI

Co-Investigator: Karleen Giannitrapani, PhD

Project Summary: There is little evidence that opioids work for chronic cancer pain; indeed, most cancer survivors on opioids report their pain is inadequately controlled. Despite this, many Veteran cancer survivors continue opioids indefinitely. There is an urgent need for mitigating the risks of long-term opioid therapy (LTOT) without jeopardizing pain management for cancer survivors at the VA. Our long-term objective is to determine if rotation from opioids to buprenorphine, can achieve the same outcomes in Veterans with chronic cancer related pain as it does in those with chronic musculoskeletal pain (reduced long term opioid use without worsening pain). Our objective

in this application is to investigate the feasibility of a multisite, randomized controlled trial (RCT) that will examine the effectiveness this approach in comparison to opioid tapering.



Jessica Wyse

Project Title: An Exploratory Investigation of VA Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) Policy

Principal Investigators: Jessica Wyse, PhD, MPP

VA Location: VA Portland Health Care System, Portland, OR

Senior PI* & Co-Investigator(s): Travis Lovejoy, PhD, MPH*; and Adam Gordon, MD, MPH*; and Allison Lin, MD, MS

Project Summary: The COVID-19 pandemic initiated the first major federal reform to opioid treatment programs (OTPs) in decades, substantially relaxing the attendance requirements and expanding access to telehealth. Emergent research suggests that these policy changes dramatically lowered the barriers for patients to receive methadone and have thus far not been shown to have negatively impacted patient outcomes. While research conducted outside of VA has shown significant variation in adoption of relaxed guidance across states and facilities, response among VA

OTPs remains unknown. This mixed methods study will elucidate variation in OTP treatment practices through two Aims. **Aim 1** will conduct interviews with medical directors of VA OTPs to identify a) national variation in OTP treatment practices, b) explanations for decision-making regarding adoption and c) perceptions and beliefs regarding proposed federal regulatory changes. **Aim 2** will use CDW paired with operational data to describe the characteristics of VA OTPs that adopted relaxed guidance and test for differences across facility and patient characteristics.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Research Translation: Cooperative Pain Education and Self-Management Program (COPEs) Funded for Clinical Use

Heapy A, Higgins D, Goulet J, LaChappelle K, Driscoll M, Czapinski R, Buta E, Piette J, Krein S, & Kerns R. **Interactive Voice Response-Based Self-management for Chronic Back Pain: The COPEs Noninferiority Randomized Trial.** *JAMA Internal Medicine.* 2017;177(6):765-773. [[PubMed Link](#)]

Heapy A, Tankha M, Higgins D, Driscoll M, LaChappelle K, Goulet J, Buta E, Piette J, Kerns R, Krein S. **Incorporating walking into cognitive behavioral therapy for chronic pain: Safety and effectiveness of a personalized walking intervention.** *Journal of Behavioral Medicine.* 2021; 44: 260-269. [[PubMed Link](#)]

Current recommendations for chronic pain emphasize the importance of including nonpharmacological treatments. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been identified as a low-risk, successful treatment option for chronic pain. However, access to CBT has been a barrier for some individuals, specifically attending the sessions in-person. To address this barrier, **Alicia Heapy and colleagues** designed a comparative effectiveness trial of Cooperative Pain Education and Self-management (COPEs), an interactive voice response-based CBT (IVR-CBT) for treating chronic back pain, and in-person CBT. Results from this study show that patients who received IVR-CBT did just as well as on reported outcomes as those who received in-person CBT, indicating that IVR-CBT is an effective, low burden method of providing CBT to chronic pain patients.

After completion of the trial, researchers continued to review the program's strengths and implementation barriers as well as identify ways to increase patient uptake of the treatment program. COPEs is currently being implemented into nine VA sites to be further evaluated through an ongoing pragmatic effectiveness trial.

Based on the success of the program, VA's Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PMOP) office is funding a clinical rollout of COPEs, which will be available to patients in VISN 1 and previous COPEs study sites starting in FY2024.

COPEs study results will be used to create the next Pain/Opioid CORE patient-facing infographic. Find more [information about COPEs on the HSR&D website.](#)

Using AI and Mobile Health Tools to Provide Patient-Centered Pain Care

Piette J, Newman S, Krein S, Marinec N, Chen J, Williams D, Edmond S, Driscoll M, LaChappelle K, Kerns R, Maly M, Farris K, Higgins D, Buta E, & Heapy A. **Patient-Centered Pain Care Using Artificial Intelligence and Mobile Health Tools: A Randomized Comparative Effectiveness Trial.** *JAMA Internal Medicine* 2022 Sep 1;182(9):975-983. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2022.3178

Winner of one of [HSR&D's Best Research Paper of the Year Awards](#), **John Piette and colleagues** published results from their randomized effectiveness trial investigating if AI-based CBT could provide similar benefits in pain-related outcomes when compared to standard CBT. In this study, researchers found that AI-based CBT could achieve equivalent pain outcomes when compared with standard CBT. Further, using AI to provide this type of care to patients was found to significantly reduce the resources required, with therapists spending less than half the time providing this care than before, indicating that integration of AI could significantly increase access to evidence-based, non-pharmacological treatment options for pain management.

Pain/Opioid CORE Workgroup Highlights

Career Development in Pain/Opioid Research Workgroup

Chair: Matthew Bair, MD, MS

Earlier this year, the workgroup staff took proactive steps to raise awareness about the Career Development workgroup among pain/opioid researchers throughout OR&D. They extended invitations to all current CDA recipients who are conducting research on pain/opioid topics but were not yet members. The Career Development workgroup will continue to welcome early career researchers from HSR&D, CSR&D, and RR&D, fostering a collaborative environment for all interested individuals.

The Career Development workgroup is currently taking a summer break; meetings will resume in September. Contact Matt Bair (Matthew.Bair@va.gov) or Malloree Argust (Malloree.Argust@va.gov) with questions or to join the VA Career Development in Pain/Opioid Research Workgroup.

Medication Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) in Perioperative Care Workgroup

Co-Chairs: Thomas Hickey, MD & William Becker, MD

The Perioperative MOUD Workgroup focuses on the use of MOUD, specifically buprenorphine, in the perioperative care setting. A priority interest is in the safe and optimal use of MOUD during the preoperative, operative, and postoperative care periods. Throughout the workgroup's duration, the co-chairs and members engaged in meaningful discussions and collaborated on a recently published paper on this topic: [Perioperative Management of Extended-Release Buprenorphine: A Narrative Review and Case Series](#), published in the April 2023 issue of *Substance Abuse* and authored by Thomas Hickey, Thomas Meeks, Heather Oxentine, Dong Chan Park, Audrey Abelleira, Ellen Edens, Adam Gordon, and Gregory Acampora.

Contact Thomas Hickey (Thomas.Hickey3@va.gov) or William Becker (William.Becker4@va.gov) with questions.

Infographics Initiative: Translating Research into Information for Patients

One of the Pain/Opioid CORE's goals is to share progress related to pain/opioid research with patients and their caregivers. To address this, the CORE launched an initiative to produce a series of one-page "infographics" which summarize results from a health services research study that is relevant to patients with chronic pain, opioid use, or opioid use disorder.

All current infographics are [posted on our website](#). The CORE is also collaborating with the VA Veterans Health Library (VHL) to share the infographics more broadly with Veterans and their caregivers. VHL posts "HealthSheets" for patient education about a wide variety of health conditions, treatments, and general well-being. VHL plans to develop a HealthSheet based on each CORE infographic - the first one is [now available online!](#)

Nominate a study!

Help us identify studies that would make meaningful patient-facing infographics. Send nominations to Malloree.Argust@va.gov and include a sentence about why you think the results are important to patients.

CORE Veteran Engagement Panel: New Opportunities for the Panel

The Pain/Opioid CORE Veteran Engagement Panel (VEP) continues to meet regularly to offer valuable insights and feedback to VA researchers. Veteran members consist of a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including students, retirees, and current workers with varied military, volunteer, and professional experiences. Since its inception in 2020, the panel has consulted on over 40 different projects, offering feedback on everything from study design to dissemination.

Panel members have also had the opportunity to contribute their expertise to national VA program offices. For example, feedback from the panel was incorporated into the 2023 VA PACT Pain Champion Conference, a jointly sponsored event of the VA PMOP (Prescription Monitoring and Opioid Safety Program Office) and Primary Care Program Offices. Four VEP members were recorded sharing some of the successes and challenges they have encountered seeking treatment through VA for chronic pain, opioid use disorder, or both, with an emphasis on Primary Care experiences.

The VEP also assisted in the first research priority-setting process for an ORD actively managed portfolio (AMP). QUERI (Quality Enhancement Research Initiative) designed and implemented a rapid priority-setting process for the Pain/Opioid AMP (POp AMP) that included input from numerous stakeholder groups, including front-line providers and Veterans. VEP staff worked with QUERI to design and facilitate meetings with three different Veteran panels, including the Pain/Opioid CORE VEP. During panel meetings, Veteran members reviewed a list of unranked VA pain/opioid research priority areas across the translation spectrum, which had been identified by the QUERI team using existing VA reports, strategic plans, and VA and non-VA reviews of current research. After discussing the priority areas, panel members added to the list and shared feedback on their top priorities, based on their lived experiences and those of Veterans they know.

For more information about the CORE VEP meeting process and answers to common questions related to Veteran Engagement, review the [FAQ on our website](#). Contact Tracy Sides at Tracy.Sides@va.gov with questions or to schedule a consultation with the VEP. [Learn more >>](#)

Featured Events

SAVE-THE-DATE: July 20, 2023, 12-1 ET | HSR&D Complementary and Integrative Health Cyberseminar Utilizing Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA) to Treat Chronic Pain in Homeless/at Risk Veterans in the VA

During this presentation, Cathy St. Pierre will discuss the preliminary findings of a convenience sample of Veterans housed vs. unhoused being treated with BFA for chronic pain. [Register for this cyberseminar on the HSR&D website](#).

Recording Now Available | HSR&D Consortia of REsearch Cyberseminar

Comparative Effectiveness and Outcomes of Telehealth Interventions: VA Studies in Neurology and Substance Use Disorder Treatment

Pain/Opioid CORE Internal Leadership Committee member, Lewei (Allison) Lin, and colleague, Linda Williams, presented at the recent HSR&D CORE Cyberseminar. During their presentation they discussed measured outcomes, barriers, and facilitators of telehealth implementation within neurology and substance use disorder treatment and the comparative effectiveness of telehealth modalities vs in-person care. [Watch the recording on the HSR&D website](#).

IASP NeuPSIG 2023 International Congress on Neuropathic Pain Sept 7 - 9, 2023

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) Neuropathic Pain Special Interest Group (NeuPSIG) will host an International Congress on Neuropathic Pain in Lisbon, Portugal this September. The NeuPSIG 2023 International Congress is the leading meeting for the latest research and developments in understanding mechanisms, assessment, prevention, and treatment for neuropathic pain and will bring together stakeholders from the area to discuss, network, and strengthen scientific collaboration within the area. For more information and to register, visit the [IASP website](#).

**NAADAC 2023 Annual Conference**

This year's NAADAC 2023 Annual Conference will be held in Denver, CO from October 6 – 12, 2023. The NAADAC Annual Conference is a seven-day event for addiction professionals and researchers that will include keynote sessions, panel discussions, breakout sessions, poster presentations, networking opportunities, and more. Learn more about the conference, review the schedule, and register for the event [on their website](#).



Pain/Opioid CORE

[More information and updates on the Pain/Opioid CORE >>](#)

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