

Live Whole Health.

VA's Commitment to Supporting the Whole Health of Veterans, Caregivers, Survivors, and Employees: Outcomes and Next Steps

M. Christopher Saslo, DNS, APRN-BC, FAANP

Assistant Under Secretary for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer

Benjamin Kligler, MD, MPH

Executive Director, Office Of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

Cynthia Gantt, PhD, FNP-BC, FAANP

Deputy Director, Office Of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

Disclosures

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Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. State at least two (2) positive outcomes experienced by Veterans who received Whole Health services compared to those who did not receive Whole Health services in the VA.
2. State at least two (2) positive outcomes experienced by VA employees engaged in Employee Whole Health activities compared to those who were not engaged in Whole Health activities.
3. State how transitioning service members can benefit from engaging in Whole Health services prior to discharge.

Moving from “What’s the matter with you?” to “What Matters to You?”

Whole Health is an approach to health care that **empowers** and **equips** people to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest.

Whole Health is “front and center” in Veterans Affairs 2022 – 2028 Strategic Plan

- **Strategic Goal 2.2:** “VA and partners will tailor delivery of benefits and customize **whole health care and services** for the recipient at each phase of their life journey.”
- **Strategy 2.2.2:** “(Whole Health) VA empowers employees to deliver high quality **whole health care** that equips Veterans and supports their **health and well-being** by addressing **what matters to them most**”.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Fiscal Years 2022-28 Strategic Plan



[va-strategic-plan-2022-2028.pdf](#)

Whole Health is further outlined in Veterans Health Administration's Long-Range Plan (Fiscal Years 2022-2025)



Veterans Health Administration

LONG-RANGE PLAN

FY 2022-2025



FISCAL YEAR 2022-2025 VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION Long-Range Plan Framework

JUNE 2023

This Framework outlines goals, objectives and strategies to establish and align VHA's efforts and resources over the next several years.

GOAL 1 Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships

- Objectives**
- 1.1 Understand and employ what matters most to the Veteran and their care team.
 - 1.2 Increase communications that promote the use of learning tools and the understanding of available resources to Veterans, employees and stakeholders.
 - 1.3 Increase national recognition of VHA as a provider of high-quality health care services.
- Strategies**
- 1.1.1 Enhance customer satisfaction and experience by providing high-quality care, ease of access and coordination.
 - 1.2.1 Improve outcomes and knowledge sharing by employing bi-directional communication with Veterans, their families and caregivers.
 - 1.3.1 Leverage media to spread VA's specialized knowledge and leadership in clinical outcomes within the health care landscape.

GOAL 2 VHA delivers high-quality, accessible and integrated health care

- Objectives**
- 2.1 Enhance Veterans' care by building an integrated delivery network with internal and external partners.
 - 2.2 Provide greater choice for care across the VA system at facilities and through virtual care, community care and collaborative opportunities.
 - 2.3 Tailor care to serve every Veteran, ensuring equity for those who are underserved.
 - 2.4 Increase access to and use of a broad spectrum of services that encourage and support lifelong whole health and wellness.
- Strategies**
- 2.1.1 Foster information exchange and organizational alignment with government and non-government partners to establish a high-performing integrated health care delivery network.
 - 2.2.1 Expand virtual care, giving Veterans the choice to receive appropriate care at home and in the community.
 - 2.3.1 Synergize outcomes for Veterans' mental health, suicide prevention, homeless and aging Veterans.
 - 2.3.2 Offer comprehensive women's health services.
 - 2.4.1 Empower and equip Veterans and employees to take charge of their health and well-being by utilizing VHA to live life to the fullest.
 - 2.4.2 Continue to improve the support, transparency and investment of caregivers and survivors of Veterans.

GOAL 3 VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation

- Objectives**
- 3.1 Fully transform VHA into a High Reliability Organization by deepening a culture of shared ownership, accountability, stewardship and collaboration.
 - 3.2 Integrate and leverage best practices and technological advances in health care into clinical practice and health professions education.
 - 3.3 Promote VHA as an authoritative thought leader in health care delivery and training by conducting clinical research and providing health care-related data that benefits Veterans and the general public.
- Strategies**
- 3.1.1 Cultivate a positive climate and foster a safety and improvement culture with movement towards zero harm.
 - 3.1.2 Provide tools, resources and experiences in support of employees in collaboration with the REBOOT task force.
 - 3.2.1 Drive ongoing improvement and innovation in health care quality, education, training and advancements in scientific research.
 - 3.2.2 Innovate through shared ownership, improved outcomes and cultural transformation.
 - 3.3.1 Set the industry benchmark in health care for Veterans', their families' and caregivers' resiliency, outcomes and quality of life.

GOAL 4 VHA optimizes assets across the enterprise

- Objectives**
- 4.1 Modernize and enhance business and health information systems and enterprise data.
 - 4.2 Evolve from a holding company to an operating company model.
 - 4.3 Optimize the use of physical resources and infrastructure modernization efforts.
 - 4.4 Provide comprehensive and robust human resource (HR) investments to acquire and develop diverse talent and engage employees from onboarding to retirement.
 - 4.5 Improve coordination, communication and transparency across VHA.
- Strategies**
- 4.1.1 Modernize electronic health records.
 - 4.2.1 Transform the supply chain and management of capital asset investments.
 - 4.3.1 Advance the alignment of health care infrastructure needs through the appropriate implementation of market assessment recommendations.
 - 4.4.1 Streamline and standardize HR processes for recruitment, increased retention and competitive employee incentives, development and recognition.
 - 4.5.1 Refine the governance structure and cooperative work across Program Offices and VISNs.

[FY-2022-2025-VHA-Long-Range-Plan_10B-Cleared-508.pdf](#)

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Veterans Health Administration Long Range Plan – One Example



Goal 1

Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships.

Objective 1.1

Understand and employ what matters most to the Veteran and their care team.

Page 13: “Our Whole Health System of Care is already profoundly impacting Veterans’ health and well-being.

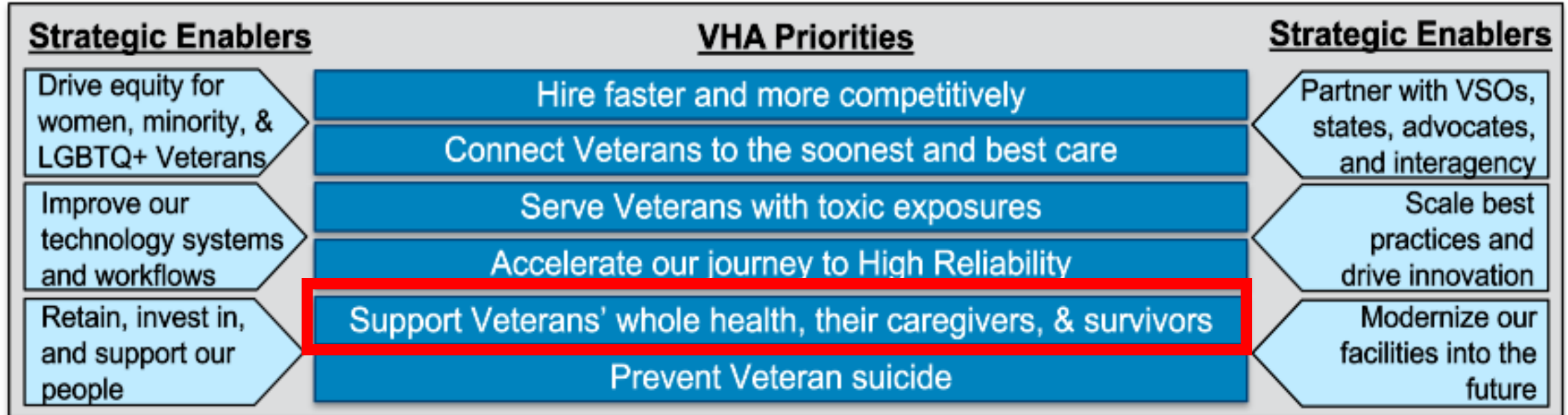
Still, it is time we did more by pushing the boundaries of how we expand Whole Health even further.

Veterans deserve more because their sacrifice and our mission demand it of us.”

[FY-2022-2025-VHA-Long-Range-Plan_10B-Cleared-508.pdf](#)

Veterans Affairs Health Care Priorities and Strategic Enablers

[Link: VA Health Care Priorities](#)



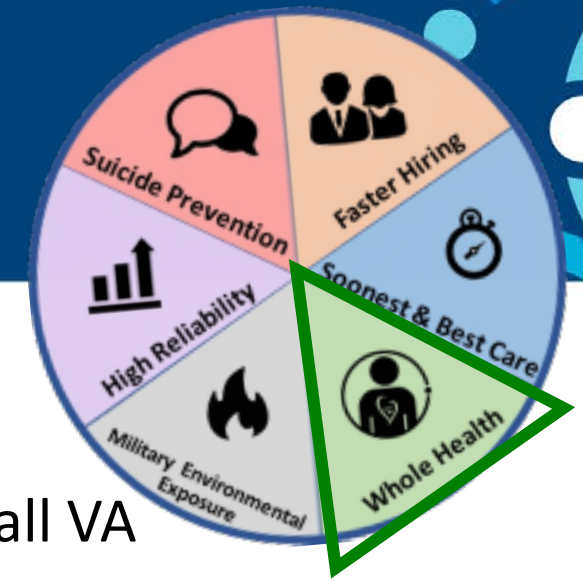
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Support Veterans' Whole Health, Their Caregivers and Survivors: Two Key Areas



1. Expand Veteran access to Whole Health

- Increase number of Veterans who use Whole Health services at all VA medical facilities
- Includes virtual, TeleWholeHealth services and community care (e.g., acupuncture). **Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Goals MET**

2. Advance Employee Well-Being

- **Chief Well-Being Officers:** focused on addressing clinician burnout by identifying/addressing clinical and administrative barriers at minimum of 18 VA medical facilities. **FY23 Goal MET**
- **Employee Whole Health Coordinators:** focused on (all) staff well-being at $\geq 60\%$ of VA medical facilities. **FY23 Goal MET**

Veterans' Voices - U.S. Navy Veteran Tammy D'Alesandro, Washington DC

“It’s been a really beautiful transformation of my relationship with myself.”

When she left the Navy and before she found Whole Health at the Washington DC VA Medical Center, Tammy said, “I don’t know where to go, I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what I like.”

Her work on the Personal Development area of the [Circle of Health](#) has transformed her life. She says these efforts have helped her develop a relationship with herself; and today she loves the person she is.

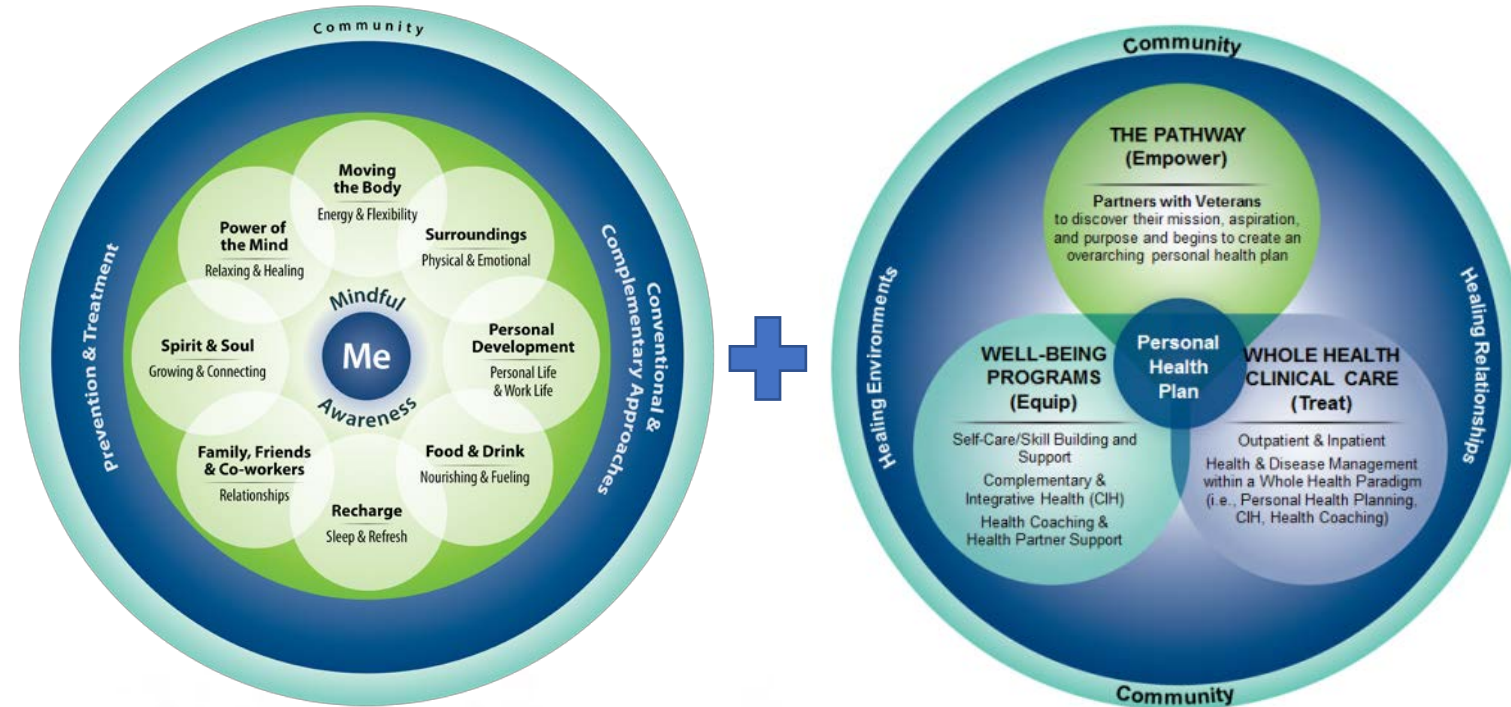
[Finding Her Way with Whole Health - Whole Health \(va.gov\)](#)

Veteran Whole Health stories: [Features - Whole Health \(va.gov\)](#)



Moving from “What’s the matter with you?” to “What Matters to You?”

Whole Health is an approach to health care that **empowers** and **equips** people to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest.



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Total Force Fitness – Department of Defense

- Focuses on a Service Member's **entire health** throughout their career, connecting **eight dimensions of fitness** to **optimize health, performance and readiness holistically**.

- Physical Fitness
- Environmental Fitness
- Medical and Dental Preventive Care Fitness
- Nutritional Fitness
- Spiritual Fitness
- Psychological Fitness
- Social Fitness
- Financial Fitness



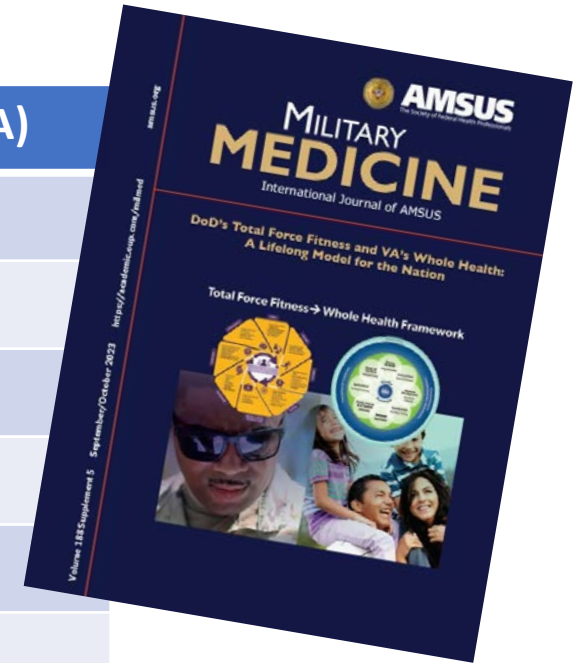
<https://www.hprc-online.org/total-force-fitness/tff-strategies/what-total-force-fitness>



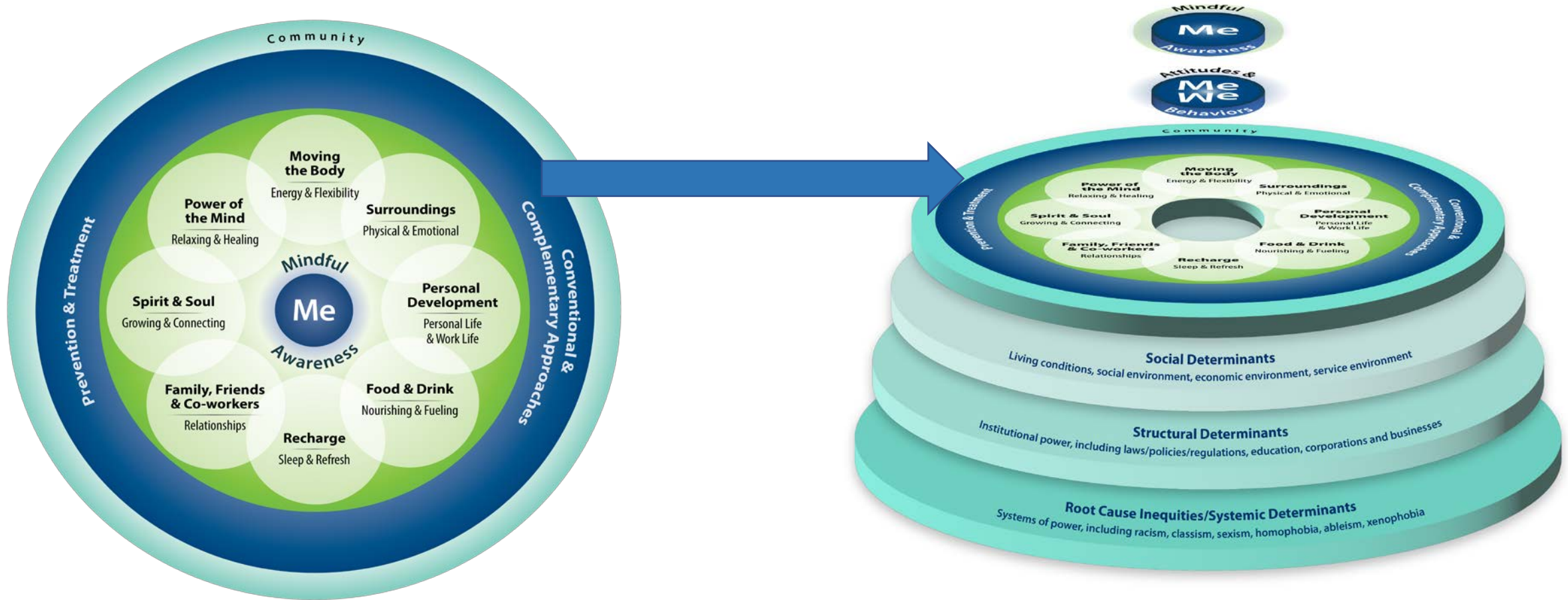
Lifelong Approaches



Total Force Fitness (DoD)	Whole Health Circle of Health (VA)
Physical	Moving the Body & Recharge
Environmental	Surroundings
Financial	Personal Development
Nutritional	Food & Drink
Social	Family, Friends & Co-workers
Spiritual & Ideological	Spirit & Soul
Psychological	Power of the Mind
Medical and Dental Preventive Care	Conventional & Complementary Approaches Prevention & Treatment



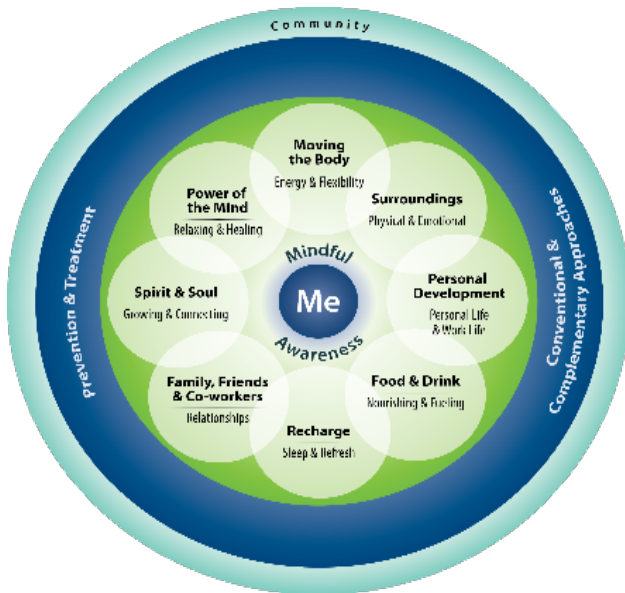
Whole Health and the Social and Structural Determinants of Health



Personal Health Inventory

Personalized Health Planning process

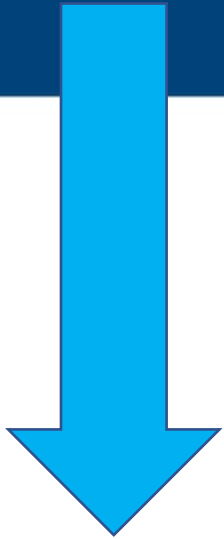
- A **process of exploration**, not “just” your health issues...values, beliefs
- **Mission, Aspirations & Purpose**



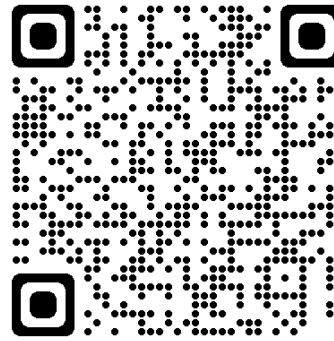
Personal Health Inventory ([LINK: Brief PHI](#)):

1. What really matters to you in your life?
2. What brings you a sense of joy and happiness?
3. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “miserable” and 5 being “great” where do you feel you are on the following:
 - ***Physical Well-Being***
 - ***Mental/Emotional Well-Being***
 - ***Life: How is it to live your day-to-day life?***

Personal Health Inventory



Personal Health PLAN



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PERSONAL HEALTH INVENTORY

Use this circle to help you think about your whole health.

- "Me" at the center of the circle: This represents what is important to you in your life, and may include your mission, aspirations, or purpose. Your care focuses on you as a unique person.
- Mindful awareness is about noticing what is happening when it happens.
- Your everyday actions make up the green circle. Your options and choices may be affected by many factors.
- The next ring is professional care (tests, medications, treatments, surgeries, and counseling). This section includes complementary approaches like acupuncture and yoga.
- The outer ring includes the people, places, and resources in your community. Your community has a powerful influence on your personal experience of health and well-being.

Rate where you feel you are on the scales below from 1-5, with 1 being not so good, and 5 being great.

Physical Well-Being 1 NOT SO GOOD 2 3 4 5 GREAT

Mental/Emotional Well-Being 1 NOT SO GOOD 2 3 4 5 GREAT

Life: How is it to live your day-to-day life? 1 NOT SO GOOD 2 3 4 5 GREAT

What matters most to you in your life right now? Write a few words to capture your thoughts:

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Where You Are and Where You Would Like to Be

For each area below, consider "Where you are" and "Where you want to be." Write in a number between 1 (low) and 5 (high) that best represents where you are and where you want to be. You do not need to be a "5" in any of the areas now, nor even wish to be a "5" in the future.

Building Blocks of Health and Well-being

	Where I am Now (1-5)	Where I Want to Be (1-5)
Moving the Body: Our physical, mental, and emotional health are impacted by the amount and kind of movement we do.		
Recharge: Our bodies and minds need rest in order to optimize our health. Recharging also involves activities that replenish your mental and physical energy.		
Food and Drink: What we eat, and drink can have a huge effect on how we experience life, both physically and mentally.		
Personal Development: Our health is impacted by how we spend our time. We feel best when we can do things that really matter to us or bring us joy.		
Family, Friends, and Co-Workers: Our relationships, including those with pets, have as significant an effect on our physical and emotional health as any other factor associated with well-being.		
Spirit and Soul: Connecting with something greater than ourselves may provide a sense of meaning and purpose, peace, or comfort. Spiritual connection can take many forms, both indoors and out. Safe, stable, and comfortable surroundings have a positive effect on our health.		
Surroundings: Surroundings include where we live, work, learn, play, and worship—emotional health. Changing our mindset can aid in healing and coping.		
Power of the Mind: Our thoughts are powerful and can affect our physical, mental, and emotional health. Changing our mindset can aid in healing and coping.		
Professional Care: Partnering with your health care team to address your health concerns, understand care options, and define actions you may take to promote your health and goals.		

Reflections

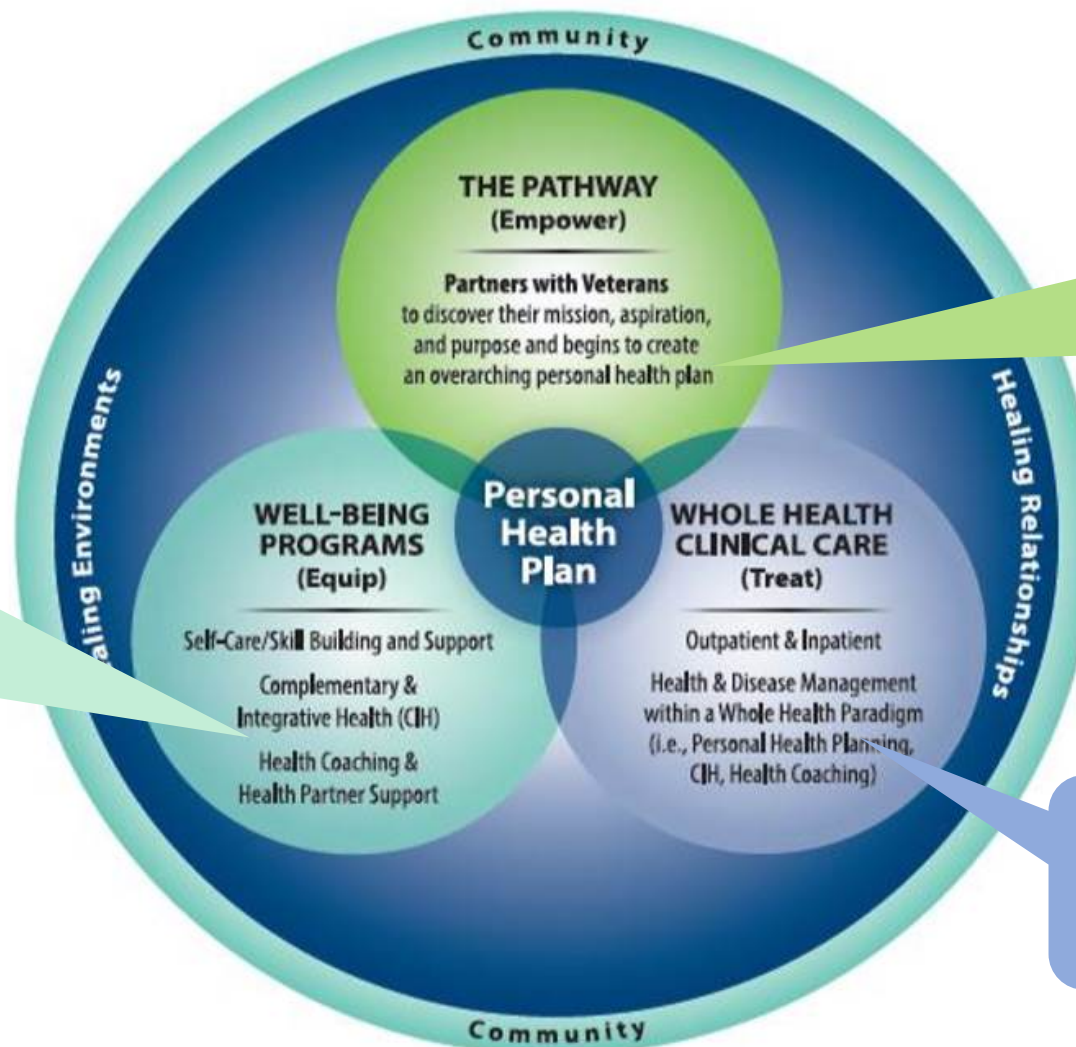
Now that you have thought about what matters to you in all of these areas, what would your life look like if you had the health you want? What kind of activities would you be doing? Or how might you feel different? What area might you focus on?

What might get in the way? How might you start?

After completing the Personal Health Inventory, talk to a friend, a family member, your health coach, a peer, or someone on your health care team about areas you would like to explore further. Or visit www.va.gov/wholehealth.

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The Whole Health System makes Whole Health “happen”



- ✓ Encourage self-care
- ✓ Decrease reliance on provider delivered care
- ✓ Complementary and Integrative Health Approaches

- ✓ Engage Veterans in their Mission Aspiration Purpose (MAP)
- ✓ Veteran Partners, Whole Health Coaches

- ✓ Cultural transformation of how clinical health care is delivered

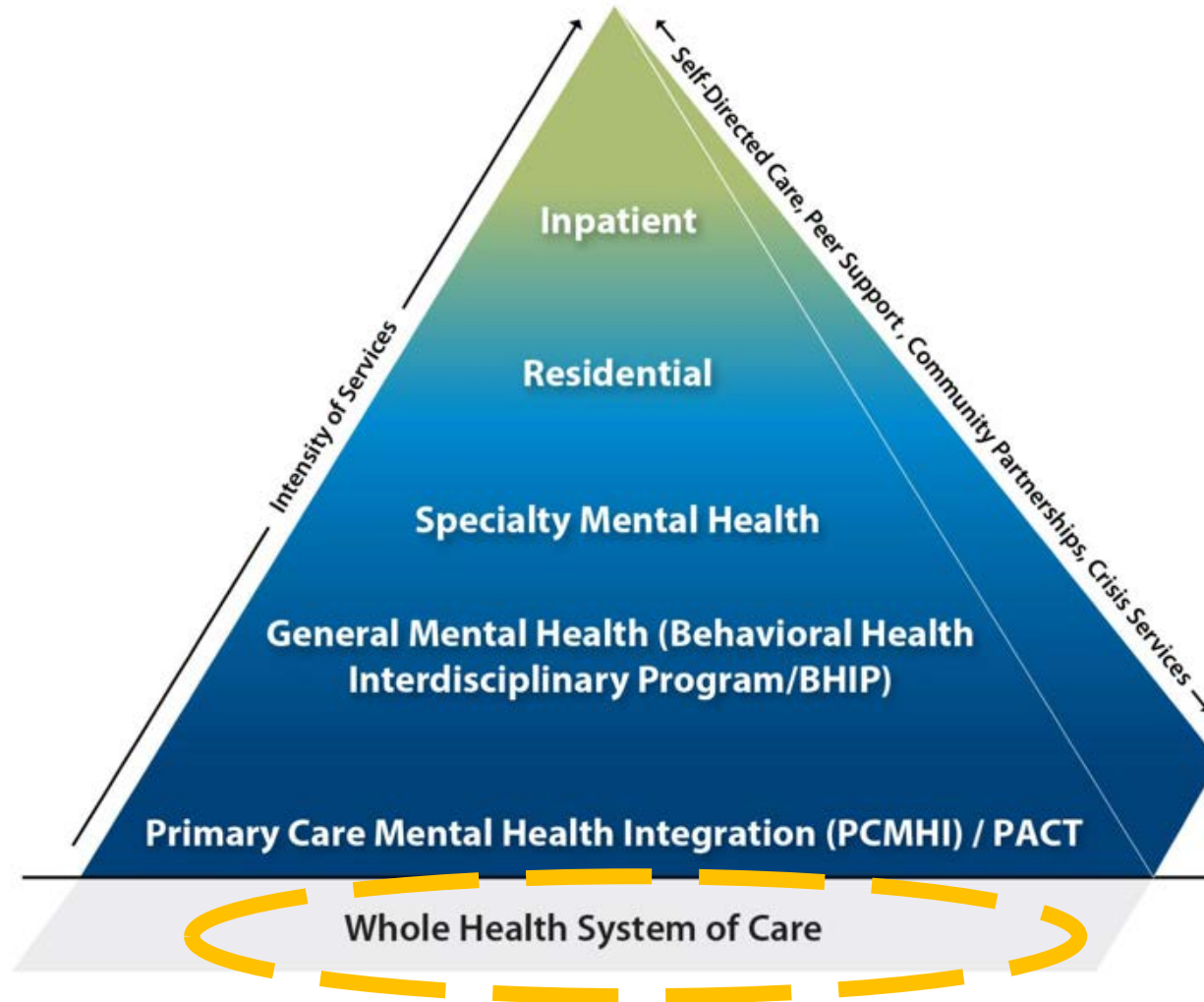
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Whole Health is the foundation of the Veterans Affairs Mental Health Continuum of Care



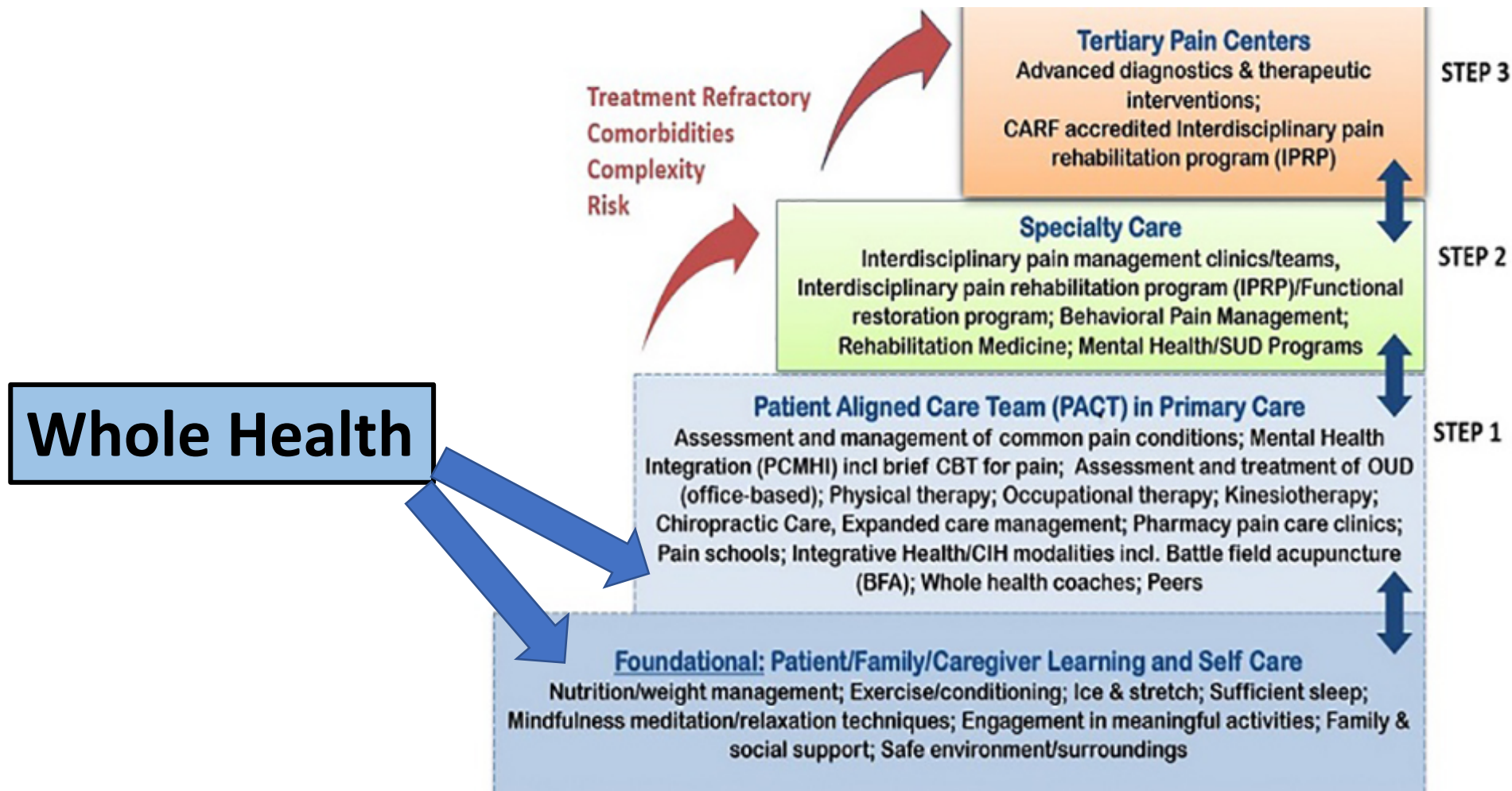
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Whole Health is fully integrated in VA's Stepped Care Model of Pain Management



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Employee Engagement Enterprise-Wide Framework


Subj: Department of Veterans Affairs Employee Engagement Enterprise-wide Framework (VIEWS 5724518)

To: Secretary (00)

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to creating an environment where all employees are engaged and flourish. Highly engaged employees are motivated, productive and committed to organizational goals. Work life becomes a gratifying enterprise with Veterans as the ultimate beneficiary of each employee's effort. Employee engagement is a crucial component in achieving the Secretary's four fundamental principles of Advocacy, Access, Outcomes and Excellence. It is also part of the President's Management Agenda and the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to ensuring that the Federal workforce is strong, empowered and well equipped to effectively deliver for the public. The Federal Government must be a model employer, with high employee engagement, a commitment to respect workers' right to organize and bargain collectively and strong systems to hire, retain and develop the people needed to deliver agency missions.

2. The attached VA Employee Engagement Enterprise-wide Framework sets the vision for emphasizing employee engagement across the enterprise with targeted goals and objectives. Originally published April 17, 2019, the framework has been revised under the direction of the Secretary; the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and

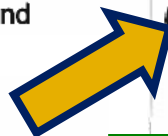
Approval:



Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

2/27/22

Date



2022-2026 Employee Engagement Enterprise-wide Framework

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT VISION STATEMENT: VA's organizational culture inspires people to support each other to deliver world-class services to Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1. *Servant Leadership Behaviors drive employee engagement and improve operations. (Overarching)*

- 1A. All people in VA embody and demonstrate servant leadership as a foundational leadership philosophy.
- 1B. VA's culture of servant leadership promotes listening, empathy, commitment and trust.

Goal 2. *The Employee's Voice matters most to improve outcomes and experiences.*

- 2A. Gather and share employee feedback and engagement data.
- 2B. Employee feedback and engagement data is secure, easy to access, understand and use to improve the employee experience.
- 2C. Employees' voices in their workplaces are strengthened through their unions.

Goal 3. *VA's Innovative Environment drives change across the Department.*

- 3A. Promote idea sharing, collaboration and feedback to drive innovation and process improvement.
- 3B. Provide leadership support and tools for employees to implement their ideas.
- 3C. Monitor, evaluate and measure the status of improvement efforts to ensure achievement of objectives.

Goal 4. *Employees emulate VA core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence (I CARE).*

- 4A. Hire people who possess VA's I CARE core values.
- 4B. Ensure continuous development in leadership and technical skills throughout VA to enhance employees' service and performance.
- 4C. Promote and support whole health, mental health and work-life integration in self and others to enhance employee well-being.
- 4D. Promote and support harassment-free workplaces to ensure inclusion, diversity, equity and access.

Goal 5. *VA employees recognize their connection to the Mission and how their efforts improve outcomes and experiences to enhance their sense of purpose. (Foundational, Cross-Cutting).*

- 5A. Recognize employees' positive contributions to improve engagement and morale.

Whole Health Flagship Outcomes: Executive Summary

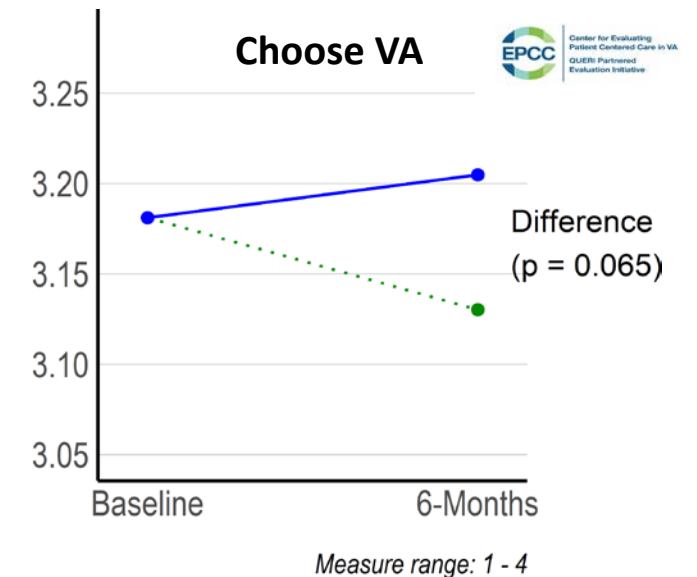
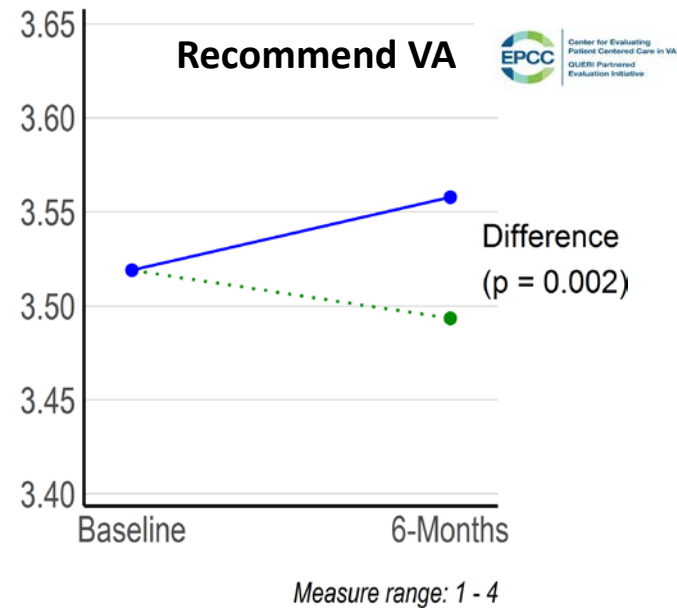
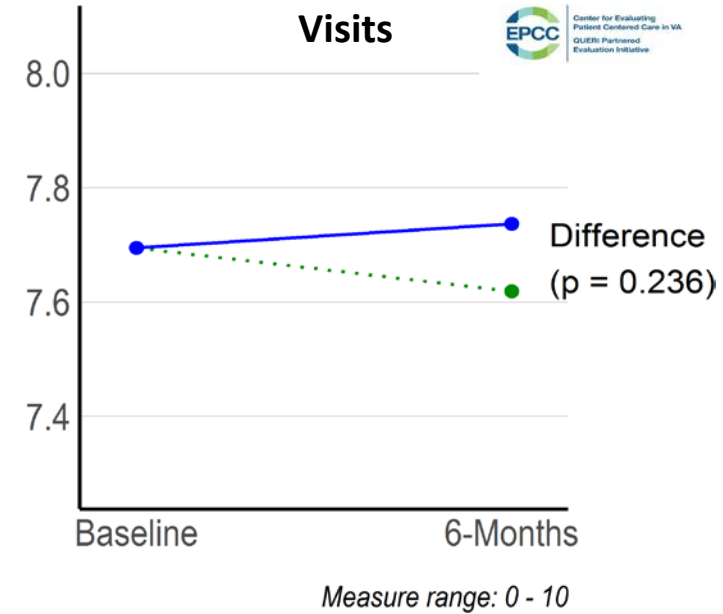
Methods		Results & Observations
Patient reported outcomes survey baseline & 6 months	22 measures across 4 domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience of care• Patient engagement• Well-being• Pain	On most measures, Veterans receiving WH reported improvements at 6 –months
Large Random Sample of Veterans (n=6,683)	58% moderate/severe chronic pain 25% used Whole Health/75% used Conventional Care	At 6-months, adjusting for baseline differences, compared to conventional care users Veterans receiving WH reported greater improvements in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experiences of Care, including satisfaction with care• Perceptions of care as more patient-centered, and discussing personal health goals• Patient Engagement in healthcare decisions and healthy behaviors/self-care
		Observed positive trends in pain, stress and well-being among Veterans receiving WH, however these were not significantly different compared to conventional care.

https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/docs/EPCC_WHSevaluation_FinalReport_508.pdf

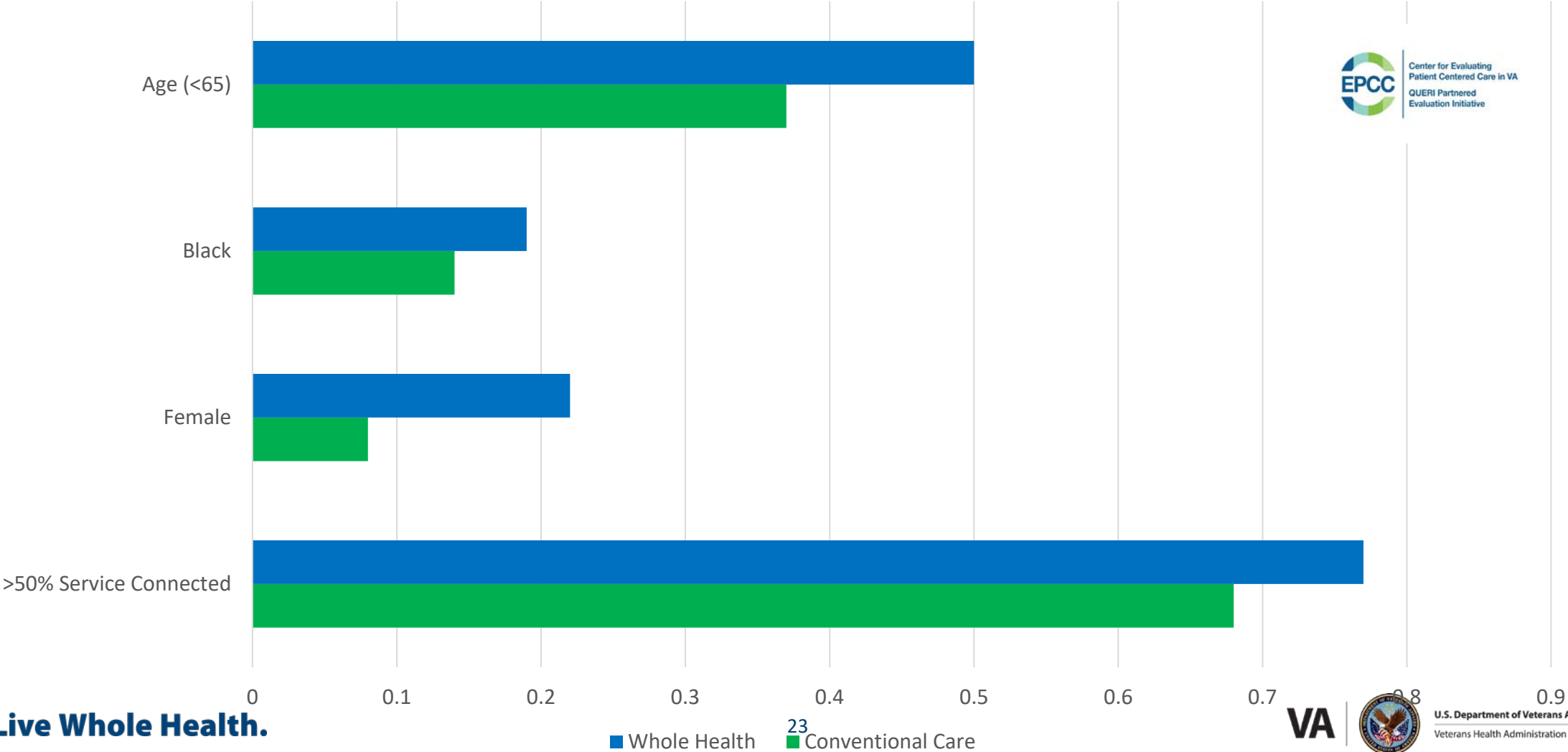
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Satisfaction – Trends (Adjusted Comparison)

- **Visits:** How were visits overall with primary VA provider during the past 6 months
- **Recommend VA:** How likely to recommend VA primary care service to other Veterans
- **Choose VA:** How likely to continue in VA if free out-of-VA care was available



Demographics



 Center for Evaluating Patient Centered Care in VA
QUERI Partnered Evaluation Initiative

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■ Whole Health 23 ■ Conventional Care

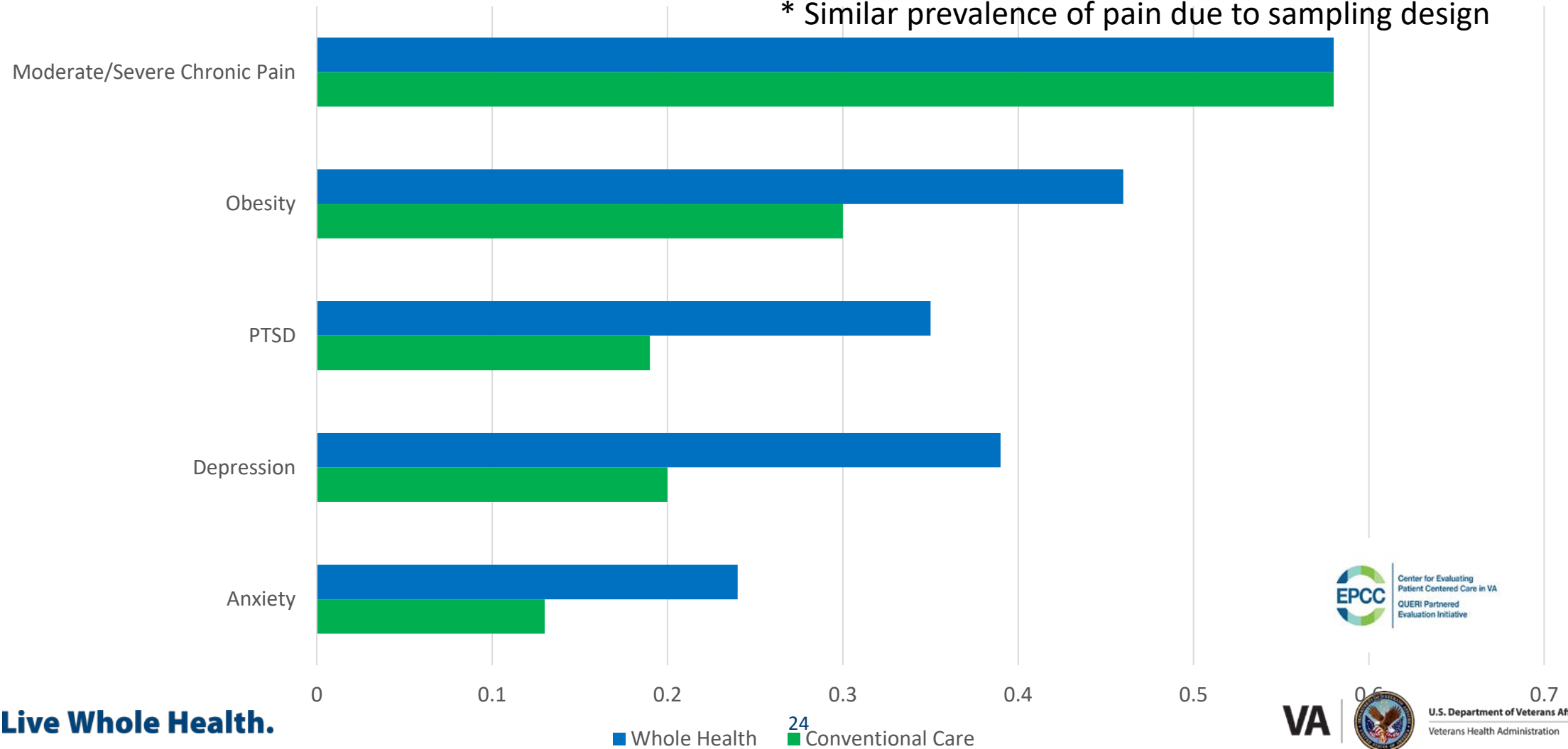
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Clinical Profiles

* Similar prevalence of pain due to sampling design

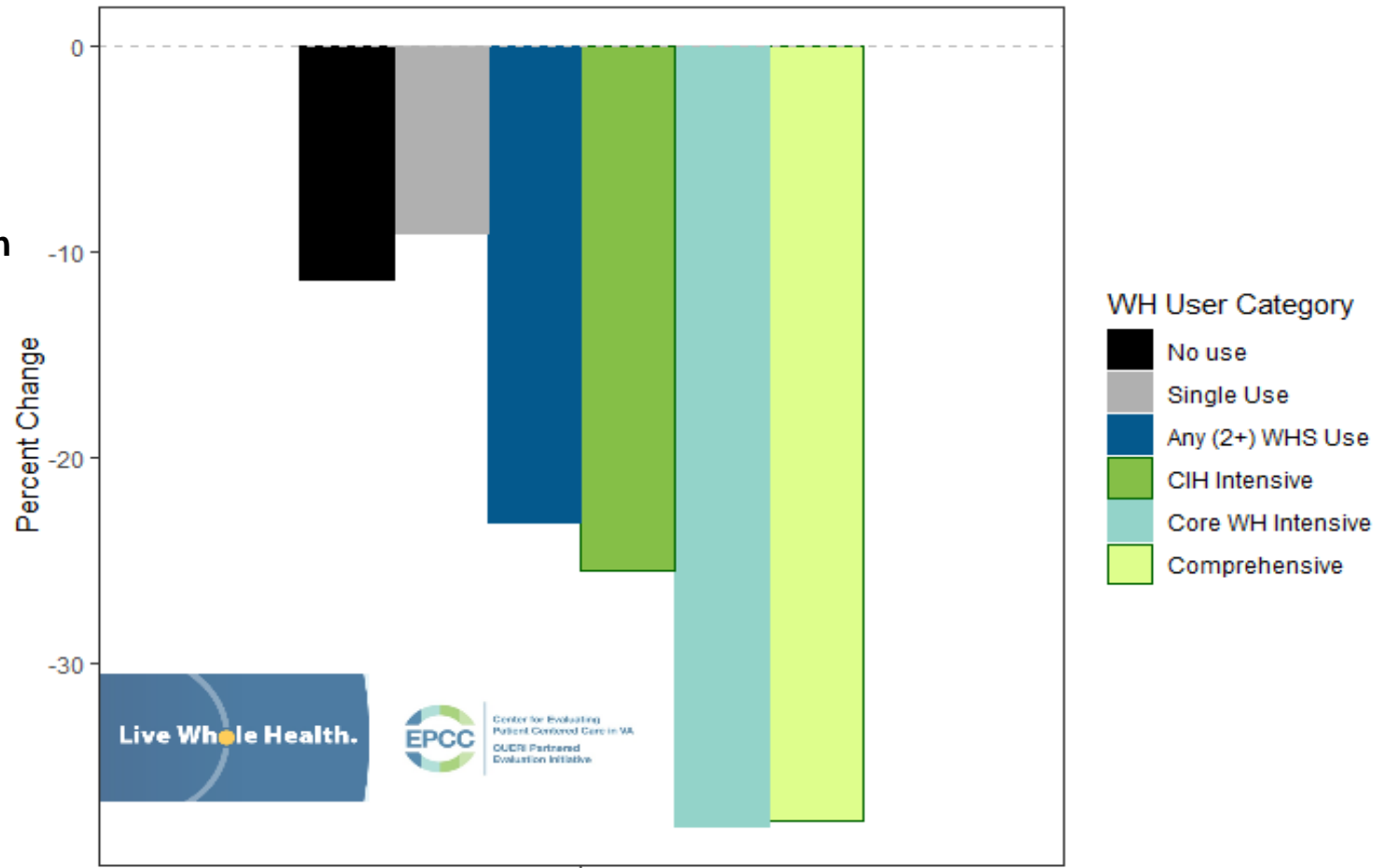


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■ Whole Health ■ Conventional Care

PRELIMINARY FLAGSHIP OUTCOMES: OPIOID UTILIZATION

Change in opioid use by WH user category for Veterans with chronic pain (n=114357)



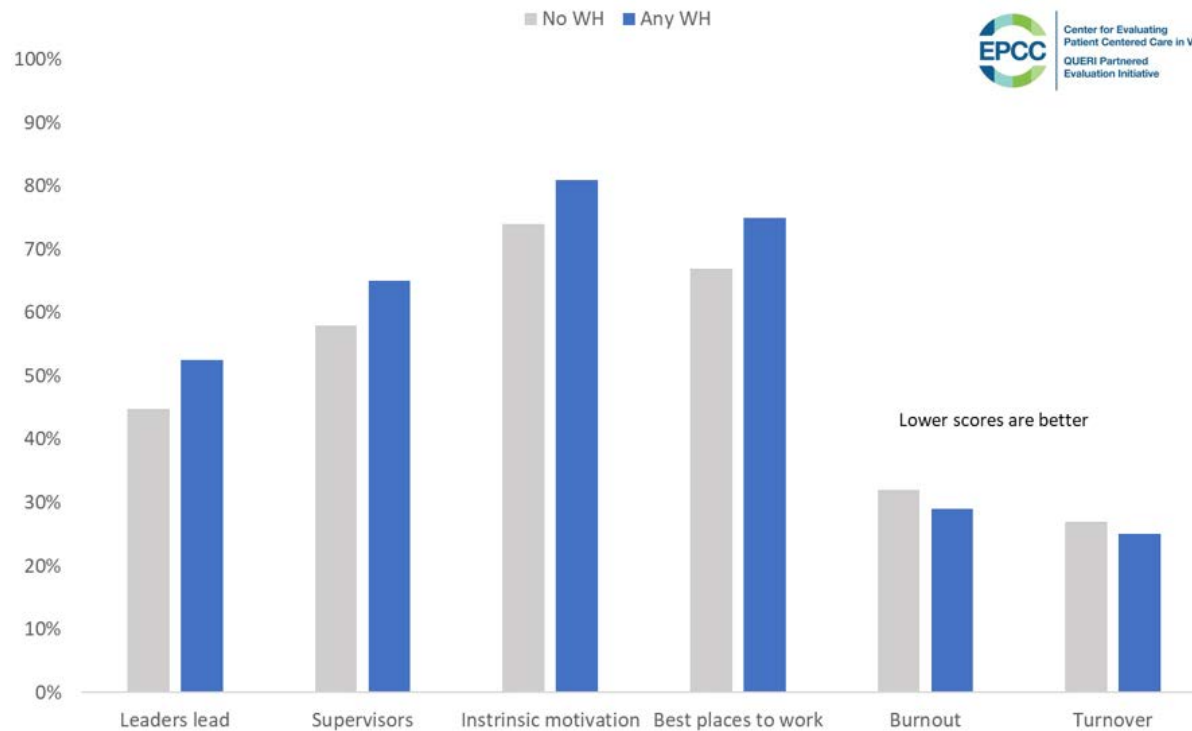
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EPCC Center for Evaluating Patient-Centered Care in VA OUCR Partnered Evaluation Initiative

Impact of Employee Involvement with Whole Health on VA All Employee Survey Outcomes



Employee Engagement Index, Best Places to Work, Burnout and Turnover Intent by Involvement with any WHS activity for Employees (N>140,00) based on 2020 AES



Employee Engagement Index, Best Places to Work, Burnout, and Turnover by Individual Involvement with Any Whole Health System Activity in Flagship Sites.

Whole Health involvement was associated with important employee outcomes!

Bokhour BG, Hyde J, Zeliadt S, and Mohr D. February 2020 Whole Health System Evaluation of Care Progress Report. Retrieved August 2020, https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/docs/EPCCWholeHealthSystemofCareEvaluation-2020-02-18FINAL_508.pdf

Next Steps in Outcome Evaluation

- Are there specific subgroups of Veterans who respond more or less favorably to WH (e.g. Veterans with pain plus two mental health diagnoses vs. pain only)?
- What implementation approaches are most effective for Veterans with pain?
- What is the impact of Whole Health on Veterans with Substance Use Disorders?
- What can we learn about cost avoidance in WH users with chronic pain?
- Are there specific elements of the Whole Health System that are more or less effective in certain populations or more closely tied to specific outcomes?



Center for Evaluating
Patient Centered Care in VA
QUERI Partnered
Evaluation Initiative



VA Whole Health Flagship Analysis: Association of Whole Health and CIH on Downstream Spine Procedures



Executive Summary - BLUF

- Veterans with chronic pain receive a substantial number of invasive spine procedures, including repeat epidural spinal injections over time.
- We compared Veterans with chronic pain who begin participating in Whole Health or CIH with similar Veterans who did not use these services (n=53,412).
- Expected rates of invasive spine procedures dropped substantially in the first 3 months after participating in Whole Health and CIH.
- These reductions attenuated over time, but were still substantially different at 18 months.

Estimated Procedures Avoided 18 Months – Whole Health

	Whole Health (n=584)	Expected rate	Estimated Procedures Avoided (18 months)	% Avoided
Any procedure	510	679	169	-25%
Nonsurgical procedures/Epidural spine injections	383	564	181	-32%
Spine surgeries	109	116	7	-6%
Spinal cord stimulators	<i>Not reported due to small rates</i>			

Estimated Procedures Avoided 18 Months – Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH)

	CIH (n=3,794)	Expected rate	Estimated Procedures Avoided (18 months)	% Avoided
Any procedure	4,407	5,508	1,101	-20%
Nonsurgical procedures/Epidural spine injections	3,325	4,387	1,062	-24%
Spine surgeries	974	961	13 additional	+1%
Spinal cord stimulators	114	242	128	-53%



Center for Evaluating
Patient Centered Care in VA
QUERI Partnered
Evaluation Initiative



Center for Healthcare Organization
and Implementation Research

Associations Between Use of Whole Health Services and Engagement in Evidence-Based Psychotherapy



PROJECT SUMMARY: BLUF

- **What we did:**

- We examined the relationship between utilization of Whole Health services and subsequent engagement in evidence-based psychotherapies (EBPs) among Veterans with common mental health diagnoses (n=284,111)

- **What we found:**

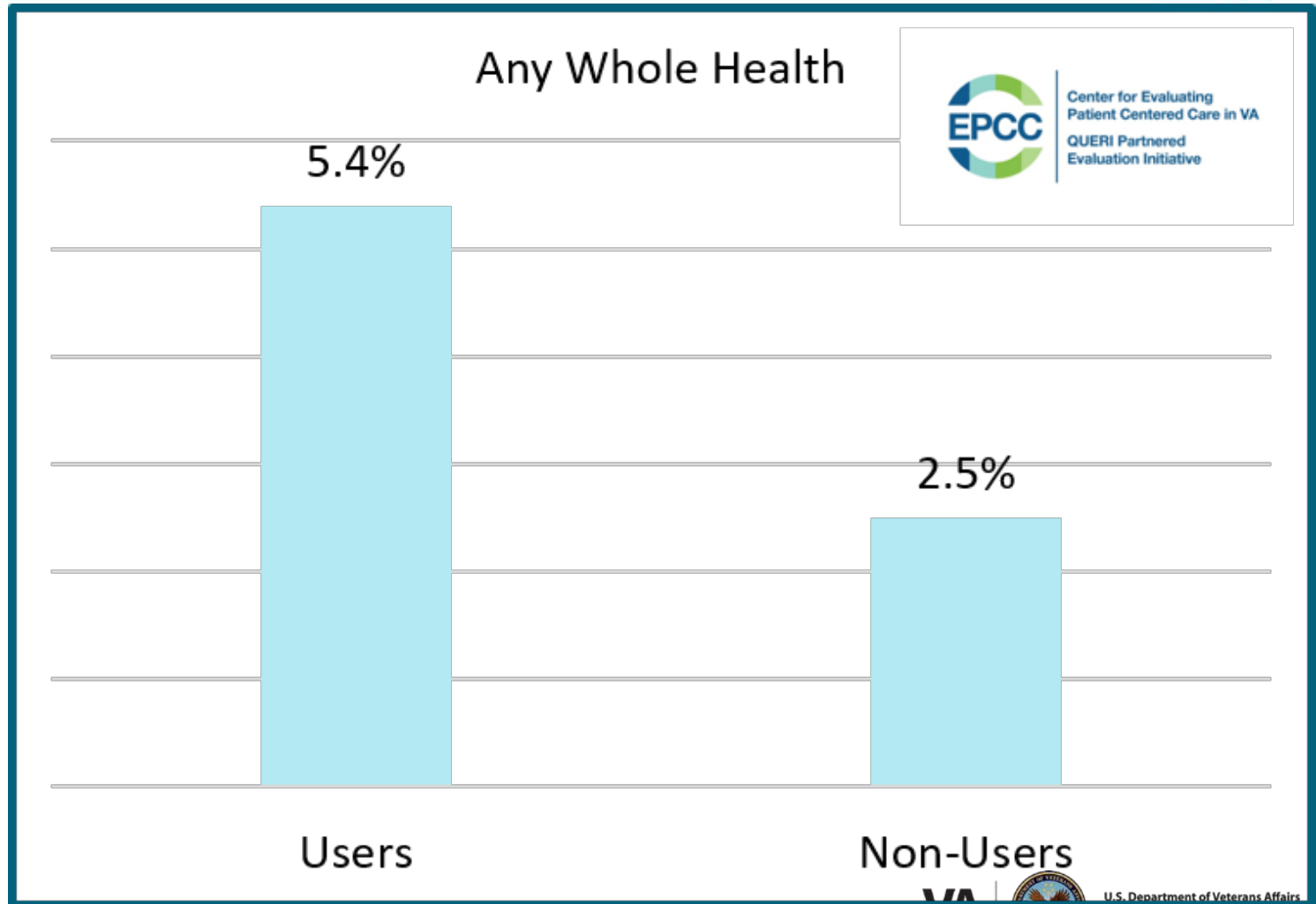
- Veterans with depression disorders, anxiety disorders, and/or PTSD who used Whole Health services had 2.3 times higher odds of using an EBP for those conditions in the subsequent year, as compared to Veterans who did not use Whole Health services
- Impacts differed across specific Whole Health services/therapies
 - Use of Tai Chi, meditation and yoga had the strongest association with subsequent EBP engagement
- Etingen, B., Smith, B.M., Zeliadt, S.B. *et al.* VHA Whole Health Services and Complementary and Integrative Health Therapies: a Gateway to Evidence-Based Mental Health Treatment. *J GEN INTERN MED* **38**, 3144–3151 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-023-08296-z>

Results – Predicted Rate of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Use

The 'predicted' rate of EBP use for Veterans who use Whole Health is 2.3 times that of Veterans who do not use Whole Health

Predicted EBP Use for Whole Health Users vs. Non-Users

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NATIONAL
ACADEMIES

Sciences
Engineering
Medicine

Achieving Whole Health

A New Approach for Veterans and the Nation

[LINK: National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#)

Alex Krist, Virginia Commonwealth University

Jeannette South-Paul, Meharry Medical College

Andrew Bazemore, American Board of Family Medicine

Harold Kudler, Duke University

Sara Singer, Stanford University

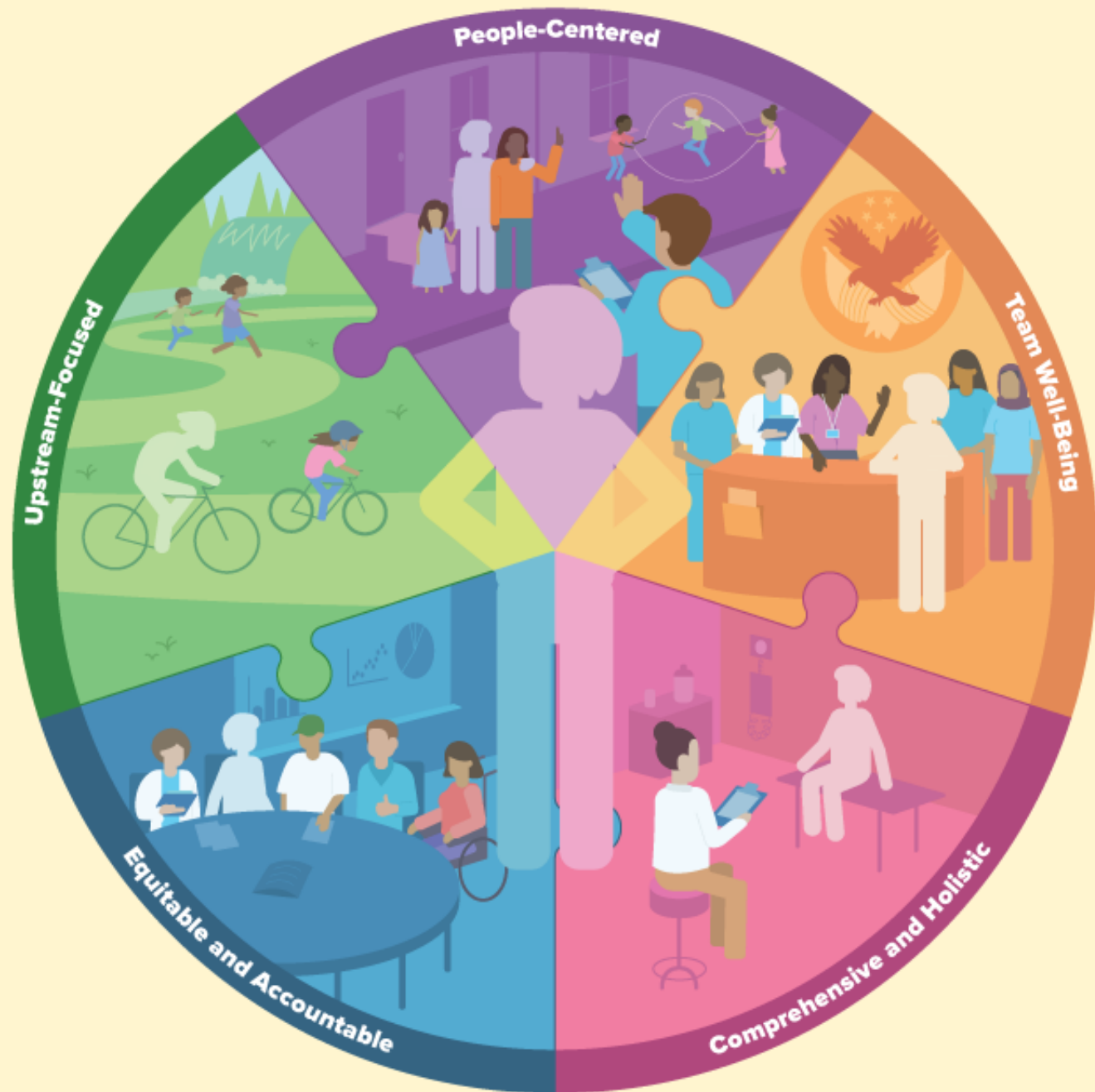
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Achieving Whole Health

**A New Approach for Veterans
and the Nation**



ACHIEVING WHOLE HEALTH

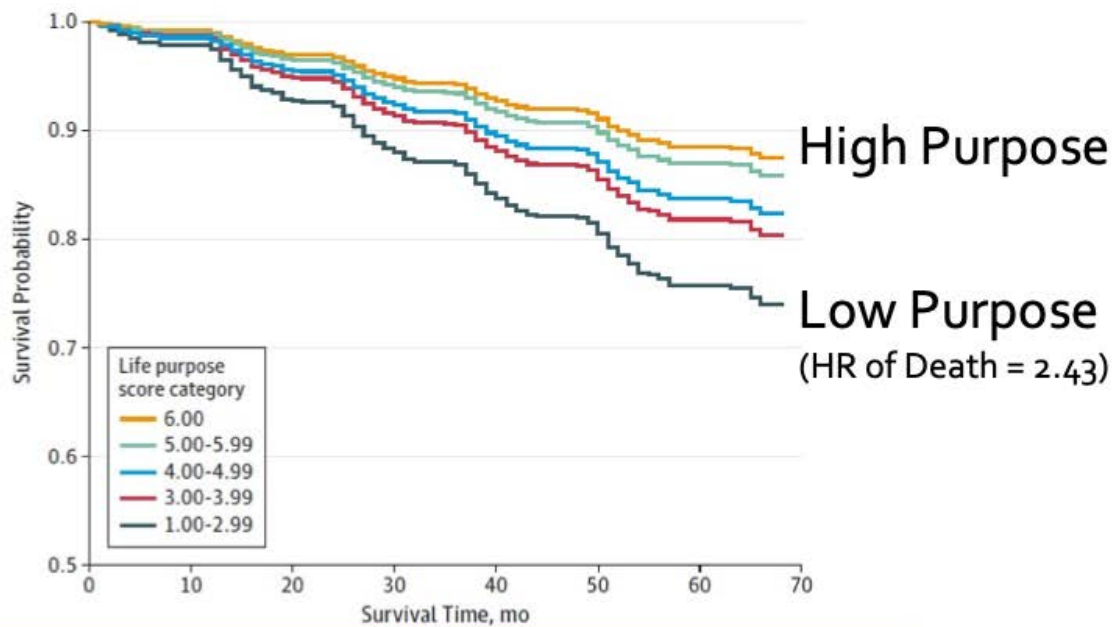
Five foundational elements of whole health that are necessary for an effective whole health care system.

What Does the Evidence Say on Whole Health?

- Improved patient experience and reported outcomes
- Increased access, reduced emergency department usage, fewer hospitalizations
- Improved quality metrics
- Improved outcomes for specific conditions (pain management, mental health, TBI, healthy aging)
- Reduced maternal and infant mortality
- Improved equity, promotion of team well-being, some cost reductions

The Next Challenges: Meaningful Measures

Figure. Survival Curves Illustrating the Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality



Alimujiang A, et al. Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older than 50 Years. JAMA Open. 2(5):2019

Well-Being Signs Clinical Tool

Finalized Well-Being Signs Tool

For these questions, please consider the **most important** things that you do, or wish to do, in your daily life. *[This might include having a job, spending time with family and friends, participating in leisure-time activities, or managing your health or finances, for example].*

If you are not sure which response to choose, please make your best guess.

Over the past month, on average how often have you been:

1. **Fully satisfied** with how these things are going?
2. **Regularly involved** in things that are important to you?
3. **Functioning your best** in the most important things you do?

None of the time										All of the time
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

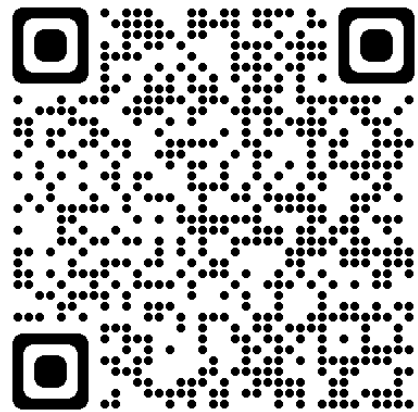
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QUESTIONS?

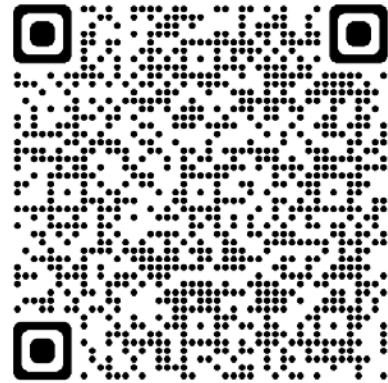
**U.S. Army Veteran, Jennifer Yarbrough,
Nashville TN**



[Veteran finds support in Whole Health - Whole Health \(va.gov\)](#)

Back Up/Resource Slides

U.S. Army Veteran, Reverend James Mitchell Beckley WV



[Praising God and Offering Thanks for
Whole Health - Whole Health \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/wholehealth)



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Whole Health Highlighted by Surgeon General and National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine



FOR INFO

Surgeon General's Perspective

The Time Is Now for a Whole-Person Health Approach to Public Health

From 2020 to 2021, life expectancy at birth in the United States dropped from 77.0 to 76.1 years, the lowest level in more than 2 decades.¹ This decrease was largely driven by the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and unintentional injuries, including opioid overdose deaths.¹ The most dramatic drop was among non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people at 1.9 years; in 2021, AI/AN people had a life expectancy at birth of 65.2 years, the same life expectancy as the total US population in 1944.¹ The lower life expectancy overall and widening health disparities by race and geography made clear what many public health



Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA
VADM, US Public Health Service

officials and researchers have reckoned with for quite some time: that the focus on treating disease once it is already apparent, which largely characterizes the US approach, cannot effectively address the major public health challenges of our time. It is becoming increasingly clear that a poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, chronic stress, and poor sleep can lead to multiple and often co-occurring diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, degenerative joint disease, and depression, and that when addressed early, progression to disease can be prevented and health can be restored.² Furthermore, understanding connections across biological, behavioral, social, and environmental domains can inform the development of multicomponent behavioral and/or systems-level interventions to prevent disease and restore health.² We need a shift in perspective to an upstream "whole-person health" approach (also referred to as whole health or whole person) aimed at providing the tools and resources that individuals and communities need to face today's challenges before they develop downstream consequences.

Whole-person health can be defined as "an approach that considers multiple dimensions of the patient and their context, including biological, psychological, social, and possibly spiritual and ecological factors, and addresses these in an integrated fashion that keeps sight of the whole."³ This whole-person approach must address the impact of structural and social determinants of health within existing public health and community-based health efforts to ultimately succeed. It must also become a cornerstone of how we

improve the public health of communities and our country.

Fortunately, there are many innovative programs based on this principle that we can look to as we shift our approach to long-standing public health challenges.

Whole Health in the Veterans Health Administration

One example of a whole-person innovation with demonstrated results is happening at the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the nation's largest integrated health care system. The VA serves 9 million veterans each year across nearly 1300 health care facilities.⁴ The VA Whole Health program was initially deployed at 18 flagship sites across the country that were part of the mandate in the Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act to expand access for veterans to complementary, integrative, whole-health approaches, and it is rapidly spreading across the entire VA health system.⁵

One goal of the VA program is to change the conversation from "What's the matter with you?" to "What matters to you?" Because of the focus on the whole person rather than a specific disease condition, the conversation incorporates a public health lens to guide interventions addressing the structural determinants of care, which may hold people back from achieving what matters to them, whether that be food insecurity, gender- or race-based discrimination, or lack of safe housing in the community. This "person or partner" in care as opposed to patient perspective is especially important for veterans with complex conditions, such as chronic pain and mental health challenges, where a disease-focused strategy might not be as effective.

The whole-health approach integrates peer-led personalized health planning, use of whole-health coaches, and well-being classes with approaches that are allopathic (conventional medicine) and complementary and health based (eg, stress reduction, yoga, tai chi, mindfulness, nutrition, acupuncture) to focus on veterans' goals, including education, housing, and financial needs.

One example of success is the Promoting Resilience and Equity With Whole Health Initiative at VA New Jersey.

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS

Public Health Reports
1-4
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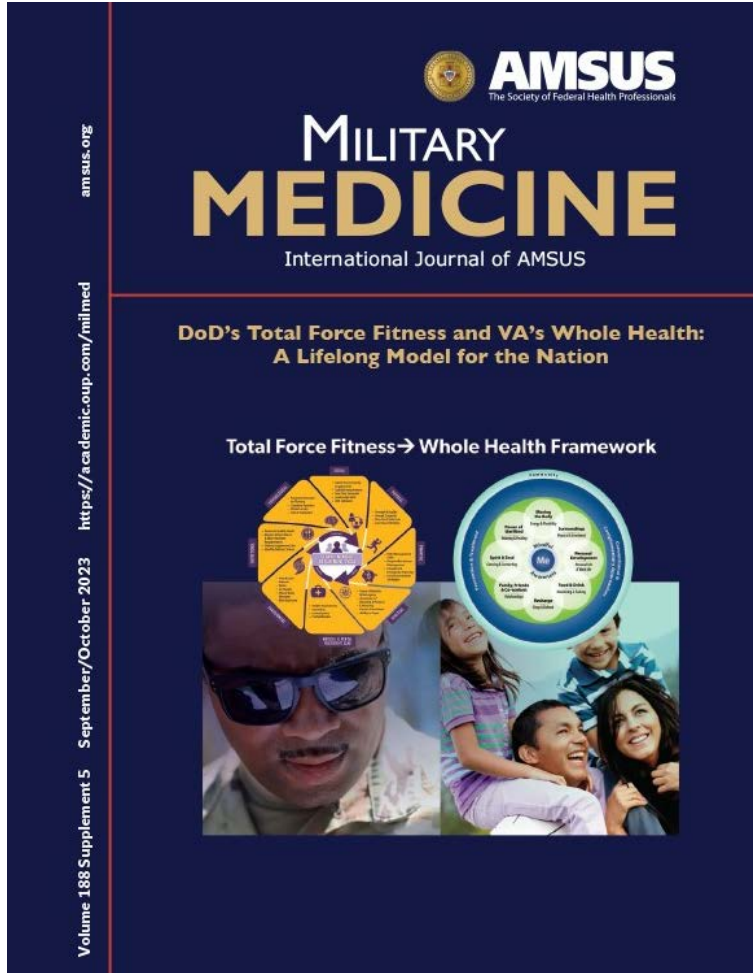
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U.S. Should Scale and Spread Whole Health Care Through VA and HHS Leadership, Create Federal Center for Whole Health Innovation, Says New Report

News Release | February 15, 2023

Live Whole Health.

DoD's Total Force Fitness and VA's Whole Health: A Lifelong Model for the Nation



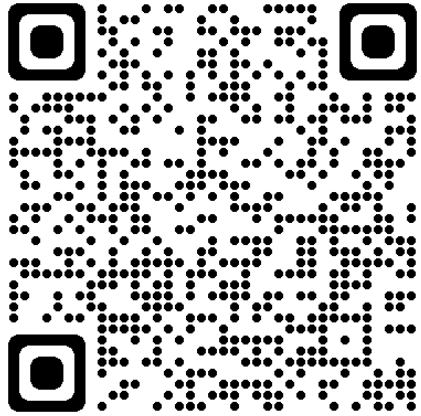
[A Supplemental Volume of *Military Medicine*](#) “Department of Defense’s Total Force Fitness and (Department of) Veterans Affairs Whole Health: A Lifelong Model for the Nation” was recently published:

Read more.....

- [Veterans Affairs’ Whole Health System of Care for Transitioning Service Members and Veterans---](#) [Cynthia J Gantt, NC, USN \(Ret.\)](#), [Nancy Donovan, MSSW](#), [Maureen Khung, MPH](#)
- [The Untapped Power of Health and Wellness Coaching---](#) [Kelly Howard, USAR](#), [Cynthia J Gantt, NC, USN \(Ret.\)](#), [Sara Grimsgaard Noyes, MS, NBC-HWC](#), [M Alaric Franzos, MC, USN \(Ret.\)](#)
- [SWOT: Analysis of Strategic Approaches in Total Force Fitness and Whole Health Summit---](#) [Craig A Triscari, USA \(Ret.\)](#), [Ronald B Rutherford, USN \(Ret.\)](#), [Carlo DiMercurio, MSC, USN \(Ret.\)](#), [M Alaric Franzos, MC, USN \(Ret.\)](#)
- [Warrior Total Force Fitness and Veteran Whole Health: What Is Possible and What Is Desired?---](#) [LTG \(Ret.\) Eric B Schoomaker](#)
- [COMMENTARY: DoD Total Force Fitness and VA Whole Health Summit: Moving Forward Together on Well-being and Resilience \(March 2022\)---](#) [Dr. Steven Lieberman](#)

Live Whole Health.

Whole Health Veteran, Employee, and Professional Web Resources



www.va.gov/wholehealth



- Professional Resources
 - Complementary and Integrative Health
 - Education Course Materials
 - Employee Whole Health
 - Evidence-Based Research
 - Outreach Toolkit


VA » Health Care » Whole Health

Whole Health

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 - Get Involved
 - Veteran Resources
 - Professional Resources
 - Circle of Health
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 - Whole Health Library
 - More Health Care

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 - Zip Code
 - Go
- Health Programs
- Protect Your Health



Read Veteran Stories
Read stories featuring Veterans across the country who have chosen to live Whole Health for themselves, their families, and their communities.
[Learn more »](#)

Read Veteran Stories **Discover What Matters** **Getting Started**

What is Whole Health?

Whole Health is VA's cutting-edge approach to care that supports your health and well-being. Whole Health centers around **what matters to you**, not what is the matter with you. This means your health team will get to know you as a person, before working with you to develop a personalized health plan based on your values, needs, and goals.

Find out how you can #LiveWholeHealth from home through VA's ongoing self-care blog series. This series highlights Whole Health resources—such as video sessions for yoga or meditation—that you can follow along at home to live healthier and happier.

Quality Talks: VA Whole Health

Dr. Benjamin Kligler, Executive Director, Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation explains VA Whole Health and what it means for Veterans, VA's healthcare System and even more broadly for the future of healthcare.

This presentation was recorded at the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), "Quality Talks" event in May 2023.



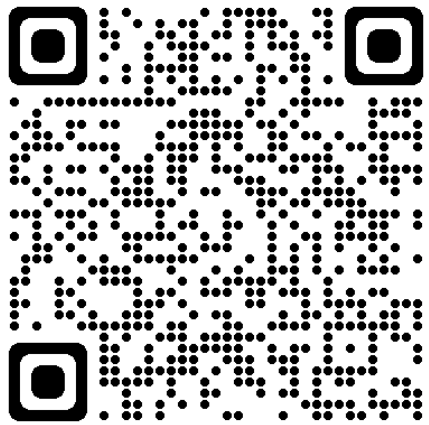
➤ Watch now at:

[Whole Health: Dr. Kligler & NCQA \(YouTube\)](#)
Live Whole Health.

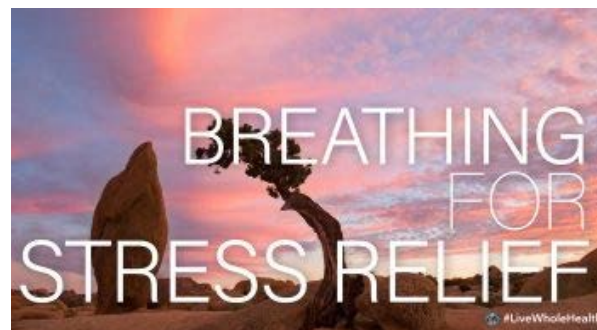


#LiveWholeHealth Self Care Resources

~200 Experiential YouTube videos for Veterans, family members, employees and anyone who wants to practice self-care.



Live Whole Health.

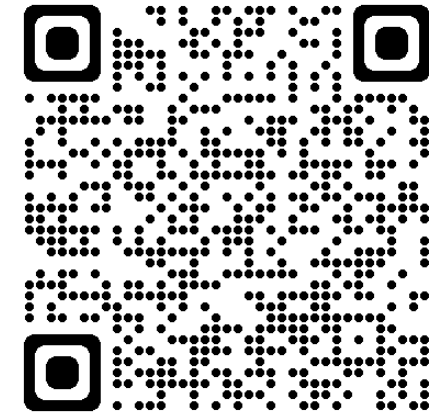
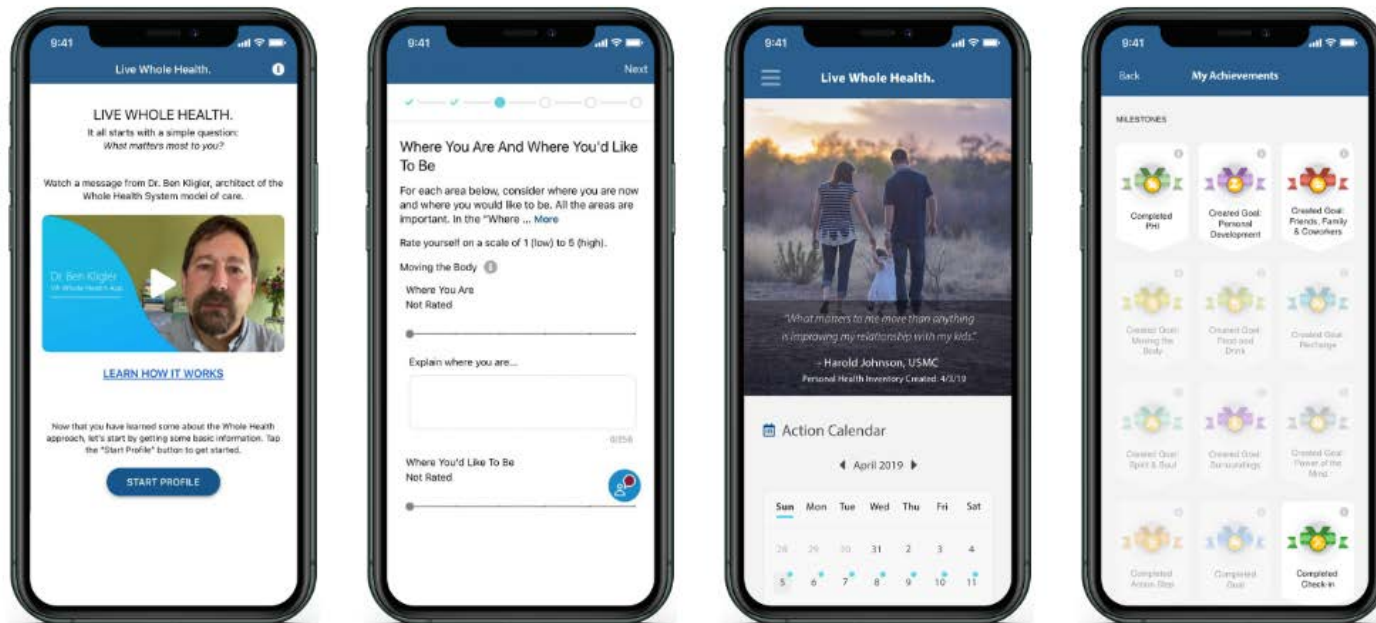



Live Whole Health Mobile App – available to anyone!

Develop a personal health strategy improving overall health and well-being.


- Guides the user through a Personal Health Inventory and helps create relevant SMART goals with actionable steps to achieve goals.
- Search LiveWholeHealth on your App Store.

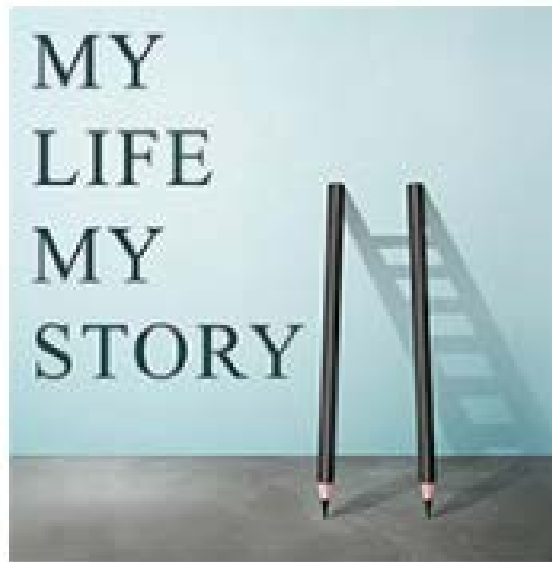
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**WHOLE
HEALTH
FOR
VETERANS
WITH
CHRONIC
PAIN**

VA  U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs




SHE WEARS THE BOOTS: A PODCAST FOR WOMEN VETERANS

“ Whole Health meets you where you are. It does not judge you, and is flexible depending on your health needs. ”

Transformation to a Whole Health System of Care includes, but is not limited to policy directives...

New directive ensures that Whole Health services are accessible to Veterans at every VA Medical Center

December 13, 2022

VHA DIRECTIVE 1137

PROVISION OF COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

1. POLICY

It is Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy that Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) complementary and integrative health (CIH) providers proactively provide CIH approaches to Veterans as appropriate and effectively integrate their care delivery with Veterans' receipt of conventional health care. **NOTE:** *Although for some conditions many CIH approaches are increasingly considered first line therapies, for treatment purposes CIH must only be offered as a complement to conventional health care and not as an alternative. CIH approaches may be offered to support Veteran goals for self-care and well-being. See paragraph 3 for List 1 required and List 2 optional CIH approaches.* **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. § 7301(b).

Originally signed May 2017

https://www.va.gov/VHApublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=10072

October 13, 2023

VHA DIRECTIVE 1445

WHOLE HEALTH SYSTEM

1. POLICY

It is Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy that the Whole Health System (WHS) is integrated at all Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities so that Veterans have access to a model of care that empowers and equips them to take charge of their health and well-being and to live their lives to the fullest. VHA is also committed to supporting employee well-being as integral to transforming to a WHS.

https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=11498