



2015 – Published a health disparities evidence brief that [evaluated](#) gaps in morbidity/mortality outcomes for major health conditions

2016 - Released first-ever [National Veterans Equity Report](#)

2018 – Evidence review and map [identified](#) death rate disparities among racial and ethnic groups within VHA

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

Mortality disparities persist mainly for black Veterans in several clinical areas in the VA health care system, according to a VA Portland Health Care System review. While efforts to ensure equal access have reduced many racial/ethnic mortality disparities, they do still exist for multiple patient populations and conditions. For example, black Veterans have higher mortality with kidney disease. More research is also needed on mortality disparities affecting American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, and Hispanic Veterans, as well as larger studies on life-expectancy gaps based on race. ([American Journal of Public Health](#), March 2018)

Most lesbian, gay, and transgender VHA users felt welcome at their facility and comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity to their provider, found a Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center study. This is a marked improvement over earlier studies. The results show that VA staff training efforts to raise awareness and competency have been successful. More

research is needed to figure out why transgender men feel less welcome and comfortable disclosing their gender identity. ([Psychological Services](#), Jan. 25, 2018)

Transgender people who had undergone transition-related medical interventions were less likely to have suicidal thoughts and symptoms of depression, in a study of transgender Veterans. People who had both hormone therapy and surgery on the chest and genitals had significantly lower levels of suicidal thoughts and depression, compared with those who had no medical intervention, hormone therapy only, or hormone therapy and surgery on either the chest or genitals but not both. Results suggest that combined medical treatment to affirm one's gender identity has a protective psychological effect. ([Psychological Medicine](#), Jan. 14, 2018)

A survey of a diverse sample of Veterans at primarily minority-serving sites showed generally high levels of satisfaction with VA healthcare. Researchers with the VA Salt Lake City and Pittsburgh health care systems interviewed Veterans by phone. They found the highest levels of satisfaction with regards to cost, outpatient facilities, and pharmacy. The lowest satisfaction was with access, pain management, and mental health care. The results did not show differences in satisfaction based on race or gender. ([Journal of General Internal Medicine](#), March 2018)

Veterans are just as likely as non-Veterans to complete sexual

orientation and gender identity items in survey research, according to a survey by VA's Center for Healthcare Organization and Implementation Research. Despite a legacy of Department of Defense policy that prohibited disclosing this information, Veterans answered survey questions at similar rates as civilians. The researchers recommend experimenting with collecting this information in clinical settings to advance health equity research. ([Medical Care](#), September 2017)

The VA National Transplant System did not exhibit the racial disparities in evaluation for kidney transplants as have been found in non-VA transplant centers, found a multi-center VA study. Minority group are affected by significant disparities in kidney transplantation, both within and outside VA. However, results show that race did not significantly affect the time to acceptance for a kidney transplant for VA patients. ([Transplantation](#), June 2017)

HbA1c may underestimate glucose levels in black patients with sickle-cell trait, according to a study including a Providence VA Medical Center researcher. HbA1c is the standard measure of how well a patient's diabetes is being controlled. But the results suggest that sickle-cell may make patients test lower on HbA1 measures. Based on the findings, new methods may be needed to accurately gauge diabetes control for black patients with sickle-cell trait. ([JAMA](#), Feb. 7, 2017)

As the nation's largest health care system, VA offers a unique opportunity to understand the complex reasons why health care disparities may occur.

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