

Chapter 15: Research and Academic Affiliations

Contributions to American Health Care

The primary VHA mission is serving the health care needs of the nation's veterans. But VHA has three other statutory missions—medical education, research, and serving in a contingency backup role to the Department of Defense (DoD), coupled with supporting Homeland Security.

The VA was authorized in the post-World War II era to implement involvement in research and medical education in order to attract talented, young medical professionals into the VA system. The arrangement has paid tremendous dividends. Not only has the VA had the benefit of highly skilled medical staff, but also the “side benefit” contributions to the nation at large in research and education have been tremendous.

VA research has produced an array of remarkable medical advances over the years, from the pioneer kidney and liver transplants, and the scientific basis for CT scanning, to more recent, groundbreaking therapies for many types of mental illness. Seventy percent of physicians now practicing in the nation have had some portion of their training in the VA system. The VA health care system also plays a substantial training role throughout the allied health professions.

VA's contingency roles are also of vital importance, both in support of DoD and the Public Health Service during times of disaster or national emergency. Moreover, the VA is one of the nation's principal assets for responding with medical assistance in large-scale national emergencies as part of the Homeland Security network.

This Chapter highlights the following:

- VA Research
- VA's Academic Affiliations
- Relationship of these missions to CARES

Research

VA's research program is one of the largest and most productive in the nation. The Office of Research and Development oversees VA's research in biomedicine, rehabilitation, health services and cooperative studies. With an annual budget of nearly \$400 million and total research dollars of more than \$1 billion, VA research funds more than 5,200 investigators at 113 VA facilities across the country. VA-based investigators are currently conducting more than 17,000 active research projects designed to enhance the health care VHA provides to veterans. Each of the divisions has particular areas of expertise, but the divisions also increasingly work across disciplinary boundaries to maintain focus on improving patient care. In addition, VA's research program seeks to translate knowledge gained through research into practice by ensuring that new information is quickly made available to those who deliver care. Moreover, VHA clinician-investigators provide high quality care to veterans, who, as a result, have access to experimental drugs and protocols before these “cutting-edge” treatments are available in private or community hospitals.

CARES and Research

Research is considered a CARES non-clinical service in that it does not generate patient workload directly. As such, workload criteria are not appropriate measures of need. To determine the space needed at each facility to support its research program, CARES developed a measure that

assigns a dollar value to each square foot of research space, equaling \$150 research dollars per square foot. This ratio was derived from dividing the total VHA research dollars in FY2001 by the total square footage of research space in the same year. This ratio is applied to the projected research funding at each facility to determine space needs in the future.

The National CARES Plan contains more than 20 research leases, new construction, and enhanced use (EU) lease proposals that address one or more of the following situations:

- Space available at VA facilities does not meet VA criteria and is far enough under criteria to warrant replacement rather than renovation;
- Future projections indicate a need for a significant amount of additional research space—exceeding the amount locally available;
- Community and/or affiliate partnering is proposed to provide and/or share research space.

When research space is slated to decrease in the future, the space is vacated and either made available for other uses or held in reserve. A number of market plans expect a positive impact on research from planning initiatives that expand in-house inpatient and outpatient services; in several situations, research space will be increased through reallocating existing facility space.

Capital costs for research are not included in other cost estimates in the National CARES Plan because research does not generate patient workload directly. Research is a critical part of the VA mission, however, and a summary of capital improvement costs from the VISN Market Plans is presented in Table 15.1.

TABLE 15.1.—SUMMARY OF CAPITAL INVESTMENTS FOR RESEARCH THROUGH FY 2022

Capital investment	Square feet	Total cost in current \$
Renovate Existing Space	828,993	\$87,077,891
New Construction	1,509,417	326,267,915
Lease (Build Out Costs)	986,464	55,210,164
Enhanced Use	350,400	0
Total	468,555,970

Academic Affiliations

VA is the largest single provider of health professional training in the world. Currently, 130 VHA facilities have affiliations with 107 of the nation's 126 medical schools and over 1,200

other educational institutions.⁵⁹ In FY2002, over 76,000 students received clinical training in VHA facilities. Through these partnerships, almost 28,000 medical residents and 16,000

⁵⁹ Reference: VHA Directive 1400, July 31, 2002. Enabling legislation and basic authority for VHA's conduct of education and training programs are contained in Title 38 U.S. Code Chapters 73 and 81.

medical students receive some of their training at VHA medical centers every year. Accounting for approximately nine percent of the Graduate Medical Education (GME) in the United States, VHA supports 8,800 physician resident positions in almost 2,000 residency programs accredited in the name of our