

# VA Evidence Synthesis Program

2024 Program Impacts

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# VA Evidence Synthesis Program (ESP)

## 2024 Impacts by the Numbers

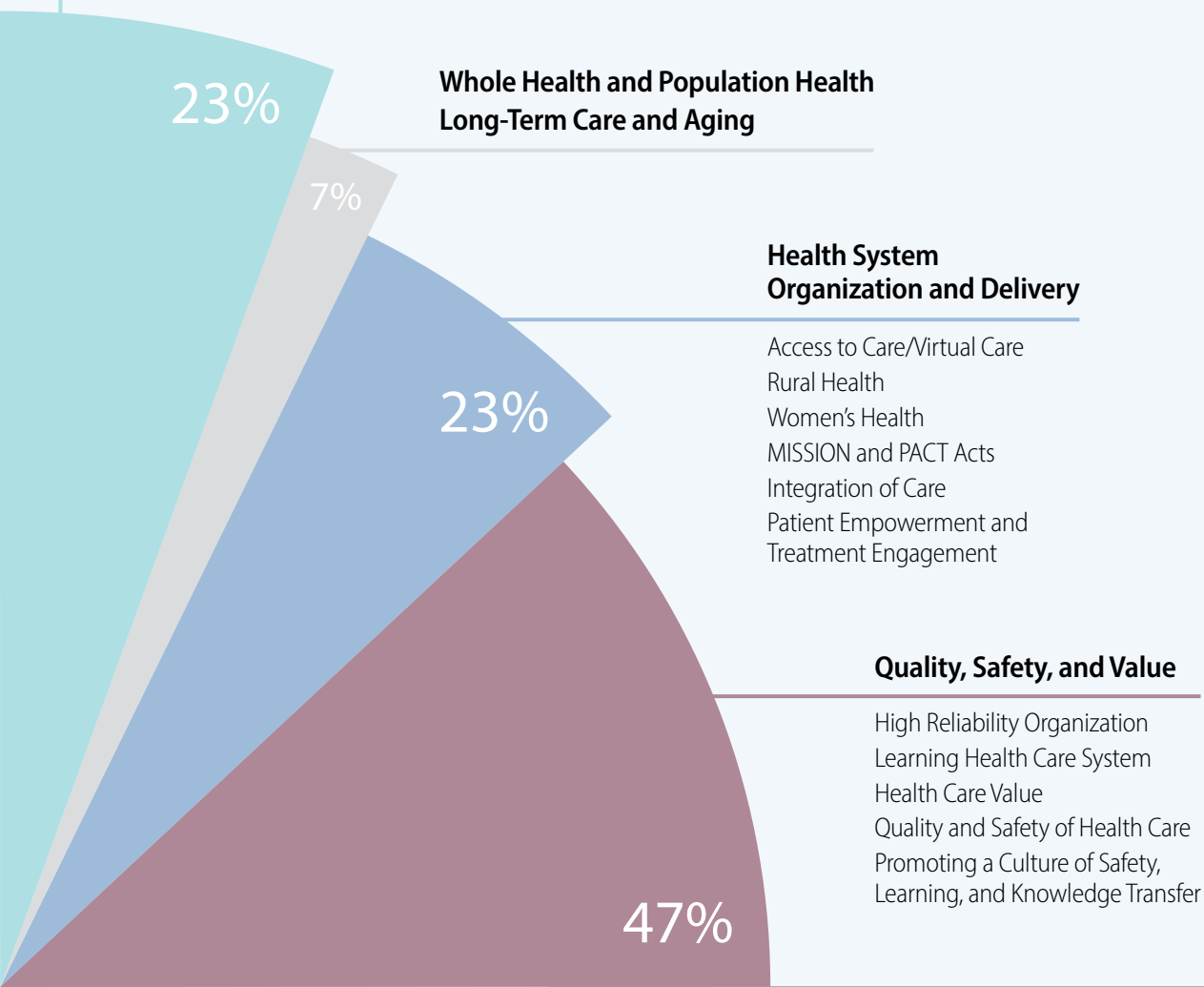
- **Completed 16 systematic reviews.** 9 reviews involved first-time ESP operational partners. 3 reviews responded to Congressional inquiries or legislation, and 1 review supported an HSR State-of-the-Art (SOTA) Conference.
- **Received 40 nominations for new review topics (a 54% increase over 2023).** 15 have been assigned to an ESP center for a review and 9 are pending an assignment decision. 7 assigned topics were nominated by first-time ESP operational partners.
- **Published in high-impact journals** including *Annals of Internal Medicine* (impact factor 19.6). ESP has published 195 articles that have been cited 12,488 times to date.
- **Gathered feedback from 29 operational partners.** 90% used the ESP report within 3 months and 90% were likely to request another ESP report in the future.

### Health Care and Clinical Management

Chronic Pain Management and Opioid Use Disorders  
 Disability Due to Military Exposures  
 Primary Care Practice and Complex Disease Mgmt.  
 Mental Health (including PTSD)

### Priorities Addressed by 2024 ESP Reports

HSR, ORD, VISN, and VA National Priorities



#### Whole Health and Population Health Long-Term Care and Aging

#### Health System Organization and Delivery

Access to Care/Virtual Care  
 Rural Health  
 Women's Health  
 MISSION and PACT Acts  
 Integration of Care  
 Patient Empowerment and  
 Treatment Engagement

#### Quality, Safety, and Value

High Reliability Organization  
 Learning Health Care System  
 Health Care Value  
 Quality and Safety of Health Care  
 Promoting a Culture of Safety,  
 Learning, and Knowledge Transfer

Overview of  
2024 ESP Reports

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High Engagement  
ESP Reports

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# 2024 ESP Reports and Partners

## Healthcare Quality, Safety, and Utilization

### VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care: A Living Systematic Review

Office of the ADUSH for Quality and Patient Safety and Office of ADUSH for Health, Office of Community Care

### Health Care Team Interventions for Older Adults With Distress Behaviors

Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Interoffice Care for Patients with Complex Problems Steering Committee

### Research on Healthcare Worker-Directed Violence

Health Systems Research

### Artificial Intelligence in Clinical Care

Office of Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks, Digital Health Office

### Effectiveness of Post-Discharge Contacts on Health Care Utilization and Patient Satisfaction

Office of Primary Care

## Cardiology and Vascular Diseases

### In-Hospital Sodium Intake for Acute Decompensated Heart Failure

Specialty Care Services (Hospital Medicine)

## Mental Health and Substance Use

### Internet and Mobile Interventions for Adults with PTSD and Their Family Members

National Center for PTSD

### Effectiveness of Syringe Services Programs

Office of Research and Development, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

### Occurrence of Psychiatric Conditions or Symptoms After Military Service-Related Environmental and Chemical Toxic Exposures

Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

## Cancer Screening and Care

### Classification of Cancer Cachexia

VHA Nutrition Field Advisory Board

### Screening for Hepatocellular Carcinoma in Adults at Increased Risk

National GI and Hepatology Program

## Pain and Inflammatory Conditions

### Dextrose Prolotherapy for Musculoskeletal Pain

Whole Health Pain Management Team

### Massage Therapy for Painful Conditions: Update from 2018–2023

Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, Physical Medicine and Rehab. Services

### Extended Reality Interventions for Chronic Pain

Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning

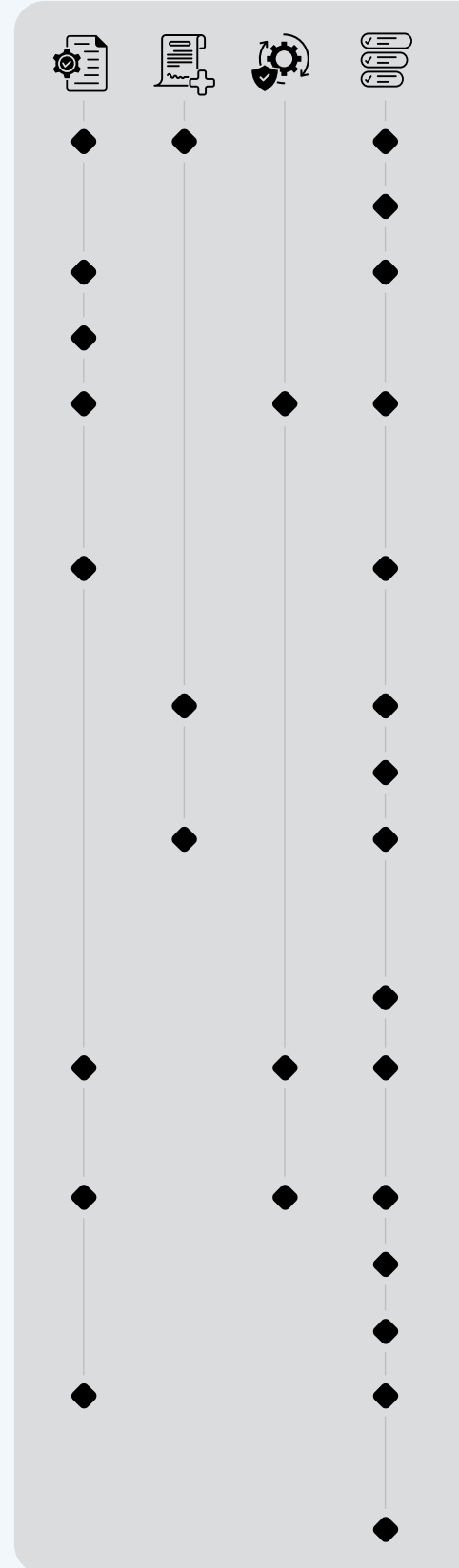
### Radiation Therapy for Benign Conditions

National Radiation Oncology Program

## Women Veterans

### An Evidence Map of the Women Veterans' Health Literature (2016–2023)

Office of Women's Health



#### Icons



Quality & Safety of Health Care



High Reliability Organization



Rapid Evidence Product



Congressional Inquiry/ Legislation



Other ORD/HSR Priority



Evidence Map

## Spotlight An Evidence Map of the Women Veterans' Health Literature (2016–2023) [↗](#)

Women Veterans are the fastest growing population served by VA. To support the work of VA's Office of Women's Health and Women's Health Research Network, investigators at the ESP center in Durham, NC used an evidence mapping approach to identify and describe all studies published on women Veterans' health from 2016–2023, updating an earlier ESP report that mapped studies published from 2008–2015. These evidence maps are among several ESP reports over the last 2 decades that have informed VA's efforts to meet the unique health care needs of women Veterans.

Findings from the ESP report have been presented to the White House Women's Health Research Initiative, VA researchers and clinician investigators, and external stakeholders including the NIH Office of Research on Women's Health.

**"The tremendous hard work and high-quality product that resulted from the amazing ESP team...has already directly informed priorities moving forward."**

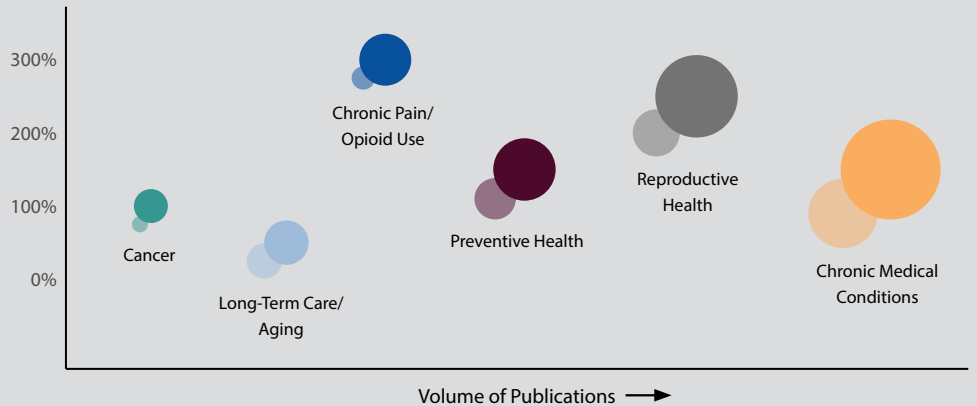
Elizabeth M. Yano, PhD, MSPH, Director of the VA Center for the Study of Healthcare Innovation, Implementation, and Policy

See more examples of how ESP has supported VA goals on page 6 [▶](#)








### Women Veterans' Health Studies with a Medical Focus

The visualization below is excerpted from the ESP report and shows growth in publications with a medical focus from the 2008–2015 period (% increase) and publication volume for individual medical focus areas.



Lighter-shaded circles indicate publication volume in the 2008–2015 period and darker circles show publication volume in the 2016–2023 period. Medical studies with a focus on chronic pain/opioid use experienced the largest growth (329%), followed closely by reproductive health studies (267%).

### Highly Viewed ESP Reports During 2024

	 <b>Massage Therapy for Painful Conditions</b> (2016, 2023 Update)	 <b>Acupuncture as Treatment for Adult Health Conditions</b> (2014, 2022 Update)	 <b>Psychedelic Medications for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders</b> (2023)	 <b>VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care: A Living Systematic Review</b> (2024)	 <b>Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence Among Veterans</b> (2013, 2021 Update)
Page Views	2,945	2,484	2,438	1,852	1,519
Downloads	388	732	258	311	225

## ESP Journal Publications During FY24

ESP reports are shared across the VA, and the majority are made publicly available. To further expand the program's impact, ESP reports are often translated into journal articles. Many are published in high-impact medical journals and are frequently cited.

- **Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Occult Hypoxemia Prevalence and Clinical Outcomes Among Hospitalized Patients: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis** (Journal of General Internal Medicine)
- **Use of Massage Therapy for Pain, 2018-2023: A Systematic Review** (JAMA Network Open)
- **Health Care Team Interventions to Reduce Distress Behaviors in Older Adults: A Systematic Review** (Clinical Gerontologist)
- **Behavioural Mental Health Interventions Delivered in the Emergency Department for Suicide, Overdose and Psychosis: A Scoping Review** (BMJ Open)
- **Interventions to Improve Long-Term Adherence to Physical Rehabilitation: A Systematic Review** (Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy)
- **Genomic Classifiers and Prognosis of Localized Prostate Cancer: A Systematic Review** (Prostate Cancer and Prostatic Diseases)
- **Protocols to Reduce Seclusion in Inpatient Mental Health Units** (International Journal of Mental Health Nursing)
- **Dual Antiplatelet Management in the Perioperative Period: Updated and Expanded Systematic Review** (Systematic Reviews)

## Most Influential ESP Publications to Date

	ESP Center	Citations	Impact
Risk Prediction Models for Hospital Readmission: A Systematic Review (JAMA)	Portland	1396 +43	33.9 -4.5
Racial and Ethnic Disparities in COVID-19-Related Infections, Hospitalizations, and Deaths: A Systematic Review (Annals of Internal Medicine)	Portland	784 +143	40.4 -12.8
What is an Evidence Map? A Systematic Review of Definitions, Methods, and Products (Systematic Reviews)	Los Angeles	380 +46	11.3 -0.1
Electronic Patient Portals: Evidence on Health Outcomes, Satisfaction, Efficiency, and Attitudes: A Systematic Review (Annals of Internal Medicine)	Los Angeles	373 +9	5.0 +0.1
Mental Health Conditions Among Patients Seeking and Undergoing Bariatric Surgery: A Meta-Analysis (JAMA)	Los Angeles	371 +33	21.5 -2.2
Effects of Pay-for-Performance Programs on Health, Health Care Use, and Processes of Care: A Systematic Review (Annals of Internal Medicine)	Portland	271 +27	13.0 +0.2
Delivery of Genomic Medicine for Common Chronic Adult Diseases: A Systematic Review (JAMA)	Los Angeles	271 +3	13.9 -1.9
Early Warning System Scores for Clinical Deterioration in Hospitalized Patients: A Systematic Review (Annals of the American Thoracic Society)	Portland	270 +29	2.4 -0.1
Prevalence, Assessment, and Treatment of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Evidence (Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation)	Minneapolis	238 +31	5.9 +0.2
Teledermatology for Diagnosis and Management of Skin Conditions: A Systematic Review (Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology)	Minneapolis	235 +35	5.9 +0.2

**Impact** = Scopus Field-Weighted Citation Scores. +/- indicate change in citation counts or impact scores from 2023.

# ESP in Action

Examples of VA national goals and activities supported by recent ESP reports



## Shaping a Research Agenda

### Nursing Research State-of-the-Art (SOTA) Conference

In late 2023, VHA Health Systems Research (HSR) convened a SOTA conference to identify priorities for future VA nursing research. As with previous SOTAs, ESP conducted rapid literature searches and reviews of existing research to help participants identify existing knowledge gaps. This effort included a rapid review of **Research on Healthcare Worker Directed Violence**. ESP staff also helped to facilitate the SOTA conference.

*"The ESP team was instrumental in planning the Nursing SOTA and developing the VA Nursing Research Agenda...The flexibility of the ESP team, and their willingness to take on different roles compared to prior SOTAs, played a critical role in the success of the conference."* **Amelia Schlack, PhD, RN, SOTA Organizer**

Other recent ESP reports that informed VA research include:

- **Psychedelic Medications for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders**
- **Factors Associated with Homelessness Among US Veterans**
- **Neuroimaging and Neurophysiologic Biomarkers for Mental Health**



## Responding to Legislation

ESP reports are used to respond to legislation aimed at improving understanding of health conditions impacting Veterans. Reports have identified key knowledge gaps, or shown that enough evidence exists that VA research efforts could focus on other important issues. Recent examples include:

- **Occurrence of Psychiatric Conditions or Symptoms After Military Service-Related Environmental and Chemical Toxic Exposures**
- **Internet and Mobile Interventions for Adults with PTSD and Their Family Members**

*"The ESP report on internet interventions [for PTSD] saved VA considerable time and money...Congressional legislation called for a study [but the ESP] report confirmed that what VA is doing in the area of mobile apps is sufficient."*

**Jessica Hamblen, PhD, National Center for PTSD**



## Addressing Urgent and Emerging Needs

ESP reports can provide timely insights about novel diagnostic and treatment approaches and emerging clinical questions. When clinical or policy guidance is urgently needed, ESP can adapt traditional evidence synthesis methods to accelerate review timelines. Recent examples include:

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Clinical Care**
- **VA versus Non-VA Quality of Care**
- **Differential Pulse Oximeter Accuracy, Occult Hypoxemia Prevalence, and Clinical Outcomes by Patient Race/Ethnicity**
- **Radiation Therapy for Benign Conditions**

*"The report [on radiation therapy for benign conditions] exceeds my expectations...[It] produces a professionally done analysis in a concise albeit clear fashion."* **Steve Lee, MD, PhD, Desert Pacific Healthcare Network**



## Evolving VA Care for Chronic and Complex Conditions

### Chronic Pain

Treatment of complex conditions continues to evolve. Recent ESP reports on **Dextrose Prolotherapy for Musculoskeletal Pain** and **Extended Reality Interventions for Chronic Pain**—as well as this year's update to the ESP review of **Massage Therapy for Painful Conditions**—are results of long-running partnerships between ESP and VHA program offices and working groups that have helped them keep pace with developing evidence and provide Veterans with the most effective treatment options.

*"Appreciative of [ESP's work on] complementary and integrative health, where there are fewer other sources producing such evidence synthesis."*

**Juli Olson, DC, DACM, Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation**

*"The ESP is a valuable program partner. We will continue to seek their support as often as possible."*

**Sheila Sullivan, PhD, RN, Office of Nursing Services**

Can a synthesis of available evidence support your programmatic or research goals? ►

# Connect with ESP

The **VA Evidence Synthesis Program** was established in 2007 to help VA fulfill its vision of functioning as a continuously learning health care system. ESP maintains this mission by providing timely, targeted, independent syntheses for VA leadership to translate into evidence-based clinical practice and to inform VA's research and program evaluation efforts. ESP investigators are recognized leaders in the field of research synthesis, and many are practicing VA clinicians. Together, they ensure ESP products are:

- **Innovative and Rigorous.** ESP makes use of time-tested synthesis approaches, and when necessary, adapts these methods to meet our partners' specific needs while preserving rigor and transparency.
- **High Impact.** ESP tackles high-priority issues like opioid use, suicide prevention, and military toxic exposures. ESP products have informed reports to Congress, ACP guidelines, and VHA formularies.
- **Relevant.** ESP works to ensure reports are actionable in the VA setting and Veteran population. In 2024, 92% of operational partners for ESP systematic reviews and evidence maps indicated that ESP presented a clear understanding of how available evidence applies within the VA context.
- **Timely.** Requests are accepted year-round, with more urgent needs prioritized for rapid products. ESP product time frames range from weeks to 1 year from project initiation.

## How can VA leadership work with ESP?

ESP serves the entire VA system from centers located in Durham, NC, Los Angeles, CA, Minneapolis, MN, Portland, OR, and Providence, RI. Working with ESP begins by submitting a **topic nomination form** [↗](#). Once your topic is nominated, ESP staff work with you to determine the optimal review approach. If the topic meets prioritization criteria and is selected by HSR leadership, an ESP Center will be assigned to conduct the review. High-priority, time-sensitive needs can be addressed as capacity allows.

**"ESP provides high-level, high-quality systematic reviews and is a truly underappreciated and underutilized jewel in the VHA. Kudos to the researchers for the support of the VHA mission."** Albert Chen, MD, PhD, Chief of Radiotherapy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (Houston, TX)

[Access completed ESP reports on the web](#) [↗](#) or [VA intranet](#) [↗](#)

This report was developed by the ESP Coordinating Center, located at VA Portland Health Care System in Portland, Oregon. Questions about report content or the program can be directed to [esp.cc@va.gov](mailto:esp.cc@va.gov).