SUMMARY

SUBMISSION DEADLINE – Wednesday, May 31, 2017

The Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP), a VA Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Center of Innovation, invites VISN4 investigators to apply for up to $25,000 in pilot research support during VA fiscal year (FY) 2018. The deadline for submission of completed applications is May 31, 2017. Funding decisions will be made in early July.

Investigators are encouraged to submit pilot research or quality improvement projects that align with CHERP’s primary focus to improve the quality and equity of health and health care for vulnerable Veterans or secondary focus to improve the quality, safety, and value of clinical therapeutics. Applications are limited to 5 pages.

In addition, competitive CHERP pilot project applications will:

1. Include a primary or secondary aim, focus, or approach that addresses issues of particular importance to emerging or recognized vulnerable Veteran populations.
2. Involve at least one local or national VA clinical or operations health system partner to ensure the value and relevance of the research to the VA health care system.
3. Incorporate Veteran input in the development and/or execution of the project.
4. Build the foundation necessary for the development of a highly competitive VA HSR&D research application (i.e., Merit Review Award, Service Directed Project, Career Development Award) within 2 years of the funding start date.

Questions regarding funding priorities, eligibility, or the application process may be directed to CHERP Research Development Core Co-Directors, Kelly Burkitt, PhD (412-360-2202 or kelly.burkitt@va.gov) in Pittsburgh or Kimberly “Max” Brown, PhD (215-823-5800 x6248 or kimberly.brown6@va.gov) in Philadelphia.
Request for Applications
Competitive Pilot Research Program Fiscal Year 2018

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

OVERVIEW
The Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP) invites applications for pilot research or quality improvement proposals focused on improving equity and/or quality in health and health care among vulnerable Veterans or to improve the quality, safety, and value of clinical therapeutics. Projects must be of a reasonable size and scope to be completed with the funds available (up to $25,000) and within the one year time frame (October 1, 2017-September 30, 2018). The deadline for submission of completed applications is May 31, 2017. Funding decisions will be made in early July.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS/PRIORITIES
1. Include a primary or secondary aim, focus, or approach that addresses issues of particular importance to emerging or recognized vulnerable Veteran populations. This can be achieved through: (1) advancing understanding of the patient, provider, clinical interface, health care system, and environmental/community determinants of quality and equity in health and health care for vulnerable Veteran populations; (2) assessing the efficacy, effectiveness, safety, and cost of interventions and initiatives that impact the quality and equity of health care for vulnerable Veteran populations; or (3) developing effective implementation strategies, including determining how to best implement, disseminate, and evaluate successful interventions to improve the quality and equity of health care for vulnerable Veteran populations.

CHERP defines new and recognized vulnerable populations, including but not limited to (1) racial and ethnic minorities; (2) women; (3) Veterans who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless; (4) individuals with low socioeconomic status (SES); (5) those with diminished autonomy or limited life expectancy; (6) those with serious mental illness (SMI), traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stigmatizing (e.g., HIV, hepatitis C, substance abuse) or disabling (e.g., spinal cord injury) medical conditions; (7) Veterans who experienced military sexual trauma or intimate partner violence; (8) those disadvantaged due to geographic residence (e.g., rural residence); (9) Veteran cohorts with shared experiences, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND); and (10) sexual orientation or gender identity minorities [i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT)].

2. Involve at least one local or national VA clinical or operations health system partner to ensure the value and relevance of the research to the VA health care system. CHERP encourages research and quality improvement projects focused on development, evaluation, and implementation of effective strategies to improve the quality and equity of Veteran health and health care. To achieve this goal, it is a requirement of this RFA that the research or evaluation team collaborate with a local, regional or national VA partner who values the proposed project and can apply what is learned to care delivery. Examples of potential partners include VAPHS and VISN4 clinical service line and administrative leaders, the Office of Health Equity (OHE), the Office of Rural Health, the Center for Medication Safety, Pharmacy Benefits Management, the Office of Analytics & Business Intelligence, and the Office of Patient Care Services.

3. Incorporate Veteran input in the development and/or execution of the project. Veteran engagement in the design, collection, and analysis of research studies improves the relevance of findings to VA and the public at large, as well as the uptake and dissemination of those findings. To
the extent possible, CHERP pilot applications should describe methods for incorporating Veteran input in the development and/or execution of the project.

4. **Build the foundation necessary for the development of a highly competitive VA HSR&D research application.** To be successful in achieving this goal, investigators are encouraged to align their research focus with VA HSR&D priority areas ([HSR&D Major Priority Domains and High-Priority Research Topics](#)) or VHA’s strategic plan (see VHA Blueprint for Excellence; FY2014-2020 Strategic Plan) or ongoing transformation ([Veterans Choice Act; My VA; VA Commission on Care Report](#)).

**ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

This funding mechanism is designed to advance the research careers of junior scientists and enable senior scientists to pursue new areas of inquiry of high priority to CHERP, VA HSR&D, and VHA.

Applications will be accepted from doctoral level clinician and non-clinician investigators with paid VA appointments in VISN4 who are eligible to compete for VA HSR&D investigator-initiated research awards (i.e., must have a >5/8ths VA appointment or a commitment for such appointment upon securing VA HSR&D funding). In addition:

- Applicants must be compliant with all VA research regulations (e.g., certification in human subjects protection, data security, and good clinical practices).
- Clinical and non-clinical postdoctoral fellows are eligible to apply for funding as a Principal Investigator provided there is an established collaboration with a CHERP Core Investigator, a demonstrated commitment to the VA and VA health care, and explicit plans for future VA HSR&D funding.
- Applicants must have an established or planned affiliation with CHERP. Interested applicants who are not affiliated with CHERP are encouraged to collaborate with a CHERP investigator who is committed to the project and supporting development of the subsequent proposal.
- Principal Investigators without prior independent extramural support (e.g., PI on VA Merit Review Award or NIH/AHRQ R01 Grant or equivalent) are required to identify a project mentor and submit a VA or NIH biosketch (SF 424) and a letter of commitment from the identified mentor describing in detail his/her role in the proposed project.

**BUDGET**

Proposals with budgets up to $25,000 will be accepted. Budgets should cover all expenses for the proposed work, including costs of instrument development, data collection, database development, data management, computer programming, and statistical analyses, if required. In general, applicants are encouraged to utilize the CHERP Biostatistics and Informatics Core for the programming, data acquisition, data management, and statistical services and the CHERP Methods Core for psychometric and qualitative expertise required by the project. Expenditures will be audited by CHERP leadership to ensure that spending is consistent with approved budgets.

Awarded funds not expended by September 30, 2018 will be swept by the VA Medical Center and lost to the program. For this reason, investigators who are unable implement a spending plan that fully obligates the funds awarded may be at risk for re-allocation of awarded funds by CHERP leadership.

- Salary support commensurate with the level of effort devoted to the project may be requested for non-clinical (i.e., non-Title 38) Principal Investigators and/or co-investigators who are directly involved in the proposed research.
- Funds are not available for travel, tuition, publication costs, computer hardware or software, or physical plant infrastructure.
- Expenses for major equipment are limited to $1,000.

Please note that awardees may be asked to modify budget requests based on recommendations of the Review Committee.
GUIDELINES/CHECKLIST FOR PROPOSAL PREPARATION

The completed PDF application should follow the format outlined below:

1) **CHERP Competitive Pilot Research Program Application Cover Page** (attached)

2) **Abstract** (40 line limit)

3) **Research Plan.** The Research Plan (Sections A-F) should include information sufficient to evaluate the project independent of any other document. The Research Plan must not exceed 5 single-spaced pages. **Margins must be ½ inch and the type must be at least 11-point in size.** All tables, graphs, figures, diagrams, and charts must be included within the 5-page limit. Applications that exceed the 5-page limit or do not conform to the type size limitations will be returned without review.

   A. **Specific Aims.** List the broad, long-term objective(s) and the specific aims for the research proposed in this application. If appropriate, state the hypotheses to be tested.

   B. **Clinical/Operations Health System Partner(s).** Identify the clinical or operations health system partner(s) that are involved and the role of the partner(s) in the research project.

   C. **Background, Significance, and Preliminary Studies.** Briefly describe the background leading to the present application, critically evaluate existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gap(s) the project is intended to fill. State concisely the importance and health relevance of the research described in this application by relating the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives. Explicitly describe the connection of the proposed project to CHERP’s mission, funding priorities, and the VHA Blueprint for Excellence, FY2014-2020 Strategic Plan, Veterans Choice Act, or My VA as applicable. Describe any preliminary studies or information pertinent to the application and any other information that will help to establish the experience and competence of the team to pursue the proposed project.

   D. **Research Design and Methods.** Describe the research design and the procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Indicate how the data will be collected and analyzed. Describe any new methodology introduced and its advantage over existing methodologies. Discuss the potential difficulties and limitations of the proposed procedures. This section must address the following areas:
   - Study Population and Sample
   - Data Sources & Measures– if proposing secondary data analyses, a timeline for acquiring the database outlining the process of obtaining permission and an estimate of when permission will be granted must be included
   - Incorporating Veteran Input
   - Analysis Plan

   E. **Inclusion of Veteran Input and Engagement.** CHERP strongly recommends Veteran input and engagement in health services research to the extent possible. This includes a substantive effort to engage Veterans in the development of the pilot proposal, and/or to propose Veteran engagement in the execution of the study, and/or dissemination of study findings.

   F. **Timeline and Plans Future Funding.** Describe the project timeline and plans for future funding. Present the timeline in Gantt Chart format, including all stages of the project, from start-up, data collection, data analysis, dissemination, and application for future funding.

4) **Literature Cited** (no page limit)

5) **Clinical or Operations Health System Partner(s) Letter(s) of Support**

6) **Project Mentor Letter of Support** (if applicable)

7) **NIH Biosketch for the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators, Consultants, or Mentors who are NOT CHERP Core Investigators**

8) **Budget and Budget Justification**
GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION

Applications are due on or before **May 31, 2017**. Incomplete applications or applications not prepared in accordance with the instructions will not be considered. Funding announcements will be made in early July with the earliest start date of October 1, 2017 pending IRB & R&D approval and availability of funds.

**SUBMISSION INFORMATION**
An electronic copy of the completed application should be submitted as a **single PDF** file to Kelly H. Burkitt, PhD at kelly.burkitt@va.gov.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
Questions regarding funding priorities, eligibility, or the application process may be directed to CHERP Research Development Core Co-Directors, Kelly Burkitt, PhD (412-360-2202 or kelly.burkitt@va.gov) in Pittsburgh or Kimberly “Max” Brown, PhD (215-823-5800 x6248 or kimberly.brown6@va.gov) in Philadelphia.

Investigators are encouraged to work with CHERP on the **budget and budget justification** prior to submission. All budget questions should be directed to Kimberly Hansen, MA, CHERP Program Analyst (412-360-2219 or kimberly.hansen1@va.gov) in Pittsburgh or Kimberly “Max” Brown, PhD (215-823-5800 x6248 or kimberly.brown6@va.gov) in Philadelphia.

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR CHERP INFRASTRUCTURE CORES**
The **Biostatistics and Informatics Core (BIC)** provides technical assistance and consultation regarding study design, data collection, data programming, data management, and statistical analysis. Contact Mary Walsh (412-360-2256 or mary.walsh3@va.gov) to arrange an initial 1-2 hour consultation with an appropriate BIC faculty member.

The **Methods Core** is available to provide consultation and technical support to investigators on a range of quantitative and qualitative methodological issues, including: (1) instrument selection and/or evaluation, item scale construction, and instrument development; and (2) design & conceptualization, training & oversight of qualitative staff, and management & analysis of qualitative data, respectively. Contact Judy Shea, PhD (215-573-5111 or sheaja@mail.med.upenn.edu) for quantitative or qualitative consultation in Philadelphia or Galen Switzer, PhD (412-360-2255 or galen.switzer@va.gov) for quantitative consultation and Keri Rodriguez, PhD (412-360-2149 or keri.rodriguez@va.gov) for qualitative consultation in Pittsburgh.

The **Implementation and Evaluation Core** is available for consultation on projects throughout the research process including: (1) conducting, evaluating, and refining quality and outcome improvement efforts; (2) the application of established and effective implementation strategies; and (3) the conceptualization and conduct of research on implementation. Contact Matt Chinman, PhD (412-360-2438 or matthew.chinman@va.gov).

The **Communication and Dissemination Core** provides consultation and support regarding identifying potential VA operational and clinical partners for developing research projects and disseminating research progress and results to target audiences, including operational partners, key stakeholders in the VA and academic affiliates, and peer researchers. Contact Carson Clark (215-823-4159 or carson.clark@va.gov).

The **Research Development Core** supports development and submission of all research proposals by CHERP investigators, including preparatory data acquisition, proposal development, pre-submission internal scientific review, administrative review of all research applications, and administration of the CHERP Pilot Research Program. The Core also provides post-award support to investigators completing Just-In-Time requirements. Contact Kimberly “Max” Brown, PhD (215-823-5800 x6248 or kimberly.brown6@va.gov) or Kelly H. Burkitt, PhD (412-360-2202 or kelly.burkitt@va.gov).
# APPLICATION COVER PAGE

## CHERP COMPETITIVE PILOT RESEARCH PROGRAM

**FISCAL YEAR 2018**

*Due Wednesday, May 31, 2017*

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**Signature of Principal Investigator**  
Date

**Signature of Principal Investigator’s Supervisor**  
Date