
MDRC

MANAGEMENT DECISION
AND RESEARCH CENTER

**National Survey of VA Researchers
2002**

**Volume 1
Network Results: VISN 4**

HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

2002 Survey of VA Researchers: Results for VISN 4

This section of the 2002 Survey of VA Researchers report presents results based on the responses from 86 researchers in VISN 4 who completed the survey.

Descriptive results for VISN 4 are presented in eight tables. Characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2.1. Researchers' evaluations of the status of research in VA are presented in Tables 2.2 through 2.6. Researchers' views of the attractiveness of their VA position are presented in Table 2.7. Table 2.8 is a summary of VISN performance and tracks VISN trends on seven scales over time and compares the VISN scores on those scales with the VA national averages. Definitions of the scales are included as an appendix.

VISN 4 Researcher Satisfaction in 2002

On most questions, VISN 4 researchers reported that they were more satisfied than dissatisfied with research in VA. However, substantial dissatisfaction was also expressed.

1. Researchers were most satisfied with:

- Autonomy to choose their research direction (84% satisfied; Table 2.3);
- Enjoyment of the research (81% satisfied; Table 2.3); and
- Availability of research collaborators (77% satisfied; Table 2.2).

2. Researchers were particularly dissatisfied with:

- Availability of clerical support (51% dissatisfied; Table 2.2);
- Amount of paperwork (51% dissatisfied; Table 2.3); and
- Opportunities to contribute to VISN decision making (50% dissatisfied; Table 2.4).

3. Researchers reported that research opportunities and support were important to recruitment and retention.² Specifically:

- 50% of researchers indicated that they themselves would not work in VA without research opportunities (Table 2.7); and
- 82% judged that research opportunities and support were important for recruiting and retaining high quality clinicians in VA.

4. Beginning in 2001, the researcher survey included a new series of items about satisfaction with VISN support for research. Nationally and in VISN 4, researchers reported relatively low satisfaction on these VISN-focused items (Table 2.4).

² Questions related to this topic utilized various response scales; therefore, not all questions are included in tables in this report.

5. Five new questions in the 2002 survey asked about satisfaction with the functions and services of the Office of Research Compliance and Assurance (ORCA). Researchers gave mostly neutral responses on each of these questions (Table 2.6). For example:

- Usefulness of ORCA MAP reviews (63% neutral).

Comparison of VISN 4 and VA National Averages

Significance testing (Table 2.8) indicated that VISN 4 scale scores for satisfaction with research support from the VISN (Overall VISN Support) and satisfaction with Protected Time for Research were significantly above the 2002 national averages.

VISN 4 Changes in Ratings from Earlier Years

Table 2.8 also displays VISN 4 scale scores for 1998 through 2002. VISN 4's score on Overall VISN Support decreased significantly from 2001 to 2002. All other scale scores in VISN 4 remained stable during this time.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of 2002 Respondents in VISN 4 and Nationwide

Characteristic	Categories	VISN 4 (n=86)	VA Nationwide (n=2356)
		Percent	Percent
Principal Research Affiliation	Medical	61	69
	Rehabilitation	13	7
	Health Services	14	14
	Cooperative Studies	5	5
	Other	7	5
Years in VHA	0 to 5	31	22
	6 to 10	25	20
	Over 10	44	59
Clinical Affiliation	Surgery	10	9
	Rehabilitation	10	4
	General Internal Medicine	15	12
	Medical Subspecialty	25	34
	Psychiatry / Psychology	21	17
	Dentistry	1	1
	Other	14	18
	None	4	6
Gender	Female	29	29
Ethnicity	African-American	0	1
	Asian or Pacific Islander	5	10
	Hispanic	1	3
	White	90	83
	Other	4	3
Research Project Funding	Any	90	90
	VA	67	59
	Other Federal	56	47
	Foundation	26	26
	Pharmaceutical / Business	34	36
Principal Investigator Funding	Any	88	87
	VA	59	55
	Other Federal	44	37
	Foundation	19	22
	Pharmaceutical / Business	27	31
Degree	PhD only	24	31
	MD (MD only or MD/PhD)	76	69

Table 2.2. Satisfaction with Research Support at the Local Facility

Question 1	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Availability of RAs / technologists	17	30	53	32	25	42
b Availability of clerical support	51	21	28	54	21	25
c Competence of support staff	22	23	55	21	25	54
d Assistance with research project management	30	18	53	29	22	49
e Availability of collaborators	7	15	77	15	19	66
f Mentoring / collegial support	14	21	65	20	22	58
g Office space / facilities	34	20	46	30	20	50
h Laboratory space / facilities	42	17	41	31	21	48
i Animal care facilities	13	28	59	14	19	68
j Supportiveness of local VA leadership	16	27	57	26	21	53
k Supportiveness of affiliated university	12	19	69	20	23	57
l Adequacy of protected research time	27	16	57	37	18	44
m Computer systems / support	35	24	41	28	21	50
n Libraries	20	21	59	21	21	58

Table 2.3. Satisfaction with Research Work at Local VA

Question 2	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Salary / fringe benefits	16	34	49	27	26	47
b Future security of research opportunities	30	36	34	36	33	31
n Job security	14	23	63	16	22	62
c Workload	21	22	56	27	30	43
d Level of stress	32	20	48	33	30	37
e Opportunities for creativity	14	14	72	17	20	62
f Opportunities to use my skills	18	8	74	14	18	67
g Opportunities to expand my skills	19	14	67	19	24	56
h Enjoyment of the research	6	13	81	5	10	85
i Autonomy to choose research direction	6	11	84	4	10	86
j Amount of paperwork	51	28	21	55	27	19
k Communication within local research services	27	23	50	24	28	48
l Overall satisfaction with local research environment	19	28	53	24	24	52
m Attractiveness of my position compared to other job opportunities	15	29	56	19	30	51

Table 2.4. Satisfaction with Research Support from the VISN

Question 3	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Supportiveness of VISN leadership	28	33	40	42	35	23
b VISN support for protected time	37	31	32	49	32	19
c VISN educational programs	31	43	26	37	44	19
d VISN support for specific projects	29	39	32	44	38	18
e Opportunities to contribute to decisions	50	32	18	56	33	11
f VISN rewards and recognition for research	46	28	26	55	34	11
g Synergy among researchers in VISN	29	43	28	47	36	17
h VISN recognition of work at university	45	38	17	55	34	11

Table 2.5. Satisfaction with Support from the National Research Office

Question 4	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Supportiveness of VA research headquarters	22	32	46	22	37	41
b Communications w/VA research headquarters	28	38	34	25	40	35
c VA letter of intent process	22	42	36	15	40	45
d VA grant review process	20	29	51	21	33	46
e Funding level, VA investigator initiated grants	31	35	35	38	31	31

Table 2.6. Satisfaction with ORCA Functions & Services

Question 5	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
a Benefits to the VA research program of the ORCA national office	21	51	28	21	54	25
b Benefits to the VA research program of the ORCA field offices	19	58	22	21	57	22
c Communications with ORCA	21	56	23	22	60	18
d Usefulness of ORCA TED ¹ initiative	23	56	21	24	56	19
e Usefulness of ORCA MAP ² reviews	23	63	14	23	62	15

¹Training, Education, and Development

²Mini Assessment Program

Table 2.7. Attractiveness of VA Position

Questions 6-11, 13 ¹	VISN 4 (n=86) Percent			National Average (n=2356) Percent		
	No ²	Neutral	Yes ³	No ²	Neutral	Yes ³
6 If you had to decide all over again, do you think you would choose a career in the VA?	21	19	60	17	25	58
7 Would you recommend a research career in the VA to a colleague?	20	24	56	24	23	53
8 Do you think you will look for a job outside of the VA in the next year?	61	16	22	62	18	20
9 Is it likely that you will retire from the VA in the next five years?	74	8	18	67	13	20
10 Do you personally know of any individual whose recruitment to VA was made possible by the availability of research opportunities and support in the VA?	33	NA	67	36	NA	64
11 Do you personally know of an individual who could not be recruited to the VA because opportunities and support for research in the VA were insufficient?	62	NA	38	52	NA	48
13 If research opportunities were <u>not</u> available in the VA, how likely do you think it is that you would currently be working in the VA system? ⁴	50	NA	50	62	NA	38

NA = Not applicable; no neutral response category for this question.

¹Question 12 not included in this table because of differences in response scale.

²Includes “probably not” and “no.”

³Includes “probably yes” and “yes.”

⁴Respondents indicating that there was less than or equal to a 5% chance that they would work in VA if research opportunities were not available were defined as “No.”

Table 2.8. VISN 4 Performance Summary: Trends Within VISN and Comparison with VA National Average

	Research Work	Local Support	VISN Leadership Support	Overall VISN Support	National Research Program	Protected Time for Research	ORCA Functions
1998	3.54	3.30	2.77	NA	3.00	2.94	NA
1999	3.65	3.08	2.88	NA	3.01	3.24	NA
2000	3.76	3.22	3.23	NA	3.17	3.15	NA
2001	3.64	3.40	3.49	3.23	3.05	3.49	NA
2002	3.65	3.30	3.13	2.86	3.13	3.35	2.95
Change	+0.01	-0.10	-0.36	-0.37*	+0.08	-0.14	---
VA 2002	3.59	3.30	2.69	2.48	3.14	3.08	2.91
VISN vs. VA	+0.06	0	+0.44	+0.38**	-0.01	+0.27**	+0.04

All measures reported in this table utilized a 1-5 response scale with a higher score indicative of higher levels of satisfaction. Scale definitions are provided in the appendix to this chapter; scale development is described in the national summary chapter.

VISN Leadership Support is a single-item measure of the supportiveness of VISN leadership (Q3a).

Overall VISN Support is a more comprehensive scale that includes the VISN leadership item (Q3a) and seven others (Q3b through Q3h) representing a variety of VISN-based research support activities.

Change = change in VISN score from 2001 to 2002. A positive score indicates an improvement in research satisfaction from 2001 to 2002; a negative score indicates a decline in researcher satisfaction from 2001 to 2002. Change scores flagged by an asterisk (*) were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

VA 2002 = VA national average in 2002.

VISN vs. VA = difference between the 2002 VISN score and the 2002 VA national average. A positive score indicates that satisfaction among researchers in the VISN was higher than the national average; a negative score indicates that satisfaction among researchers in the VISN was lower than the national average. Significant differences are flagged. A single asterisk (*) indicates a difference between the VISN and national average that was significant ($p < .05$) without a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons, but was not significant when the Bonferroni adjustment was applied. Double asterisks (**) indicate a difference between the VISN and national average that was significant ($p < .05$) even after the Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons was applied (i.e., a difference that was significant both with and without the Bonferroni adjustment).

NA = Not available; questions for this scale were not included in the survey for the year in question.

Survey of VA Researchers 2002

This study is being conducted for VA national Office of Research and Development to assess researchers' views about the status of VA research. People's experiences may differ based upon the type of research they do and their local environment; therefore, it is important to hear from all those doing research. The survey is being repeated to track changes in the status of VA research. To facilitate assessment of changes, please complete the questionnaire whether or not you completed it in a previous year. There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your views and experiences.

Remember that your answers will be confidential and no one will be able to identify your individual responses. The return envelope has an identification number on it only so we will know when your questionnaire is returned. Once received, the questionnaire will be separated from the envelope. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire or associated with the results in any way. Please take the time to complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Your help is appreciated.

This questionnaire is meant for people who are actively involved in research. If you are not involved in research, please check the box below and return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

I am not doing research at this point in my career.

Q1. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **facilities and support for your research at your local VA.** (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Availability of research assistants / technologists	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Availability of clerical support for my research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Competence of support staff	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Assistance with grant management and administration	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Availability of research collaborators	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	Mentoring / collegial support	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Office space / facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	Laboratory space / facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I.	Animal care facilities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
J.	Supportiveness of my local VA facility leadership	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
K.	Supportiveness of my affiliated university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
L.	The adequacy of my protected time for research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
M.	Computer systems / support	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
N.	Libraries / reference sources	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 2 next.

Q2. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of your research work at your local VA. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Salary / fringe benefits	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Future security of research opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Workload	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Level of stress	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Opportunities for creativity	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	Opportunities to use my skills	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Opportunities to expand my skills	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	Enjoyment of the research I am doing	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I.	Autonomy to choose my research direction	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
J.	Amount of paperwork	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
K.	Communication within the research services of my local VA	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
L.	Overall satisfaction with my local VA research environment	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
M.	Attractiveness of my position compared to other available job opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
N.	Job security	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 3 next.

Q3. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **support and opportunities for your research work in your VISN.** (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Supportiveness of my VISN leadership	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	VISN support for protected time for research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Educational programs provided by my VISN	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	VISN support for specific research projects	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Opportunities to contribute to VISN decision making	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
F.	VISN rewards and recognition supporting research	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
G.	Synergy among researchers in my VISN	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
H.	VISN recognition of my contributions at my affiliated university	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Q4. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **support and opportunities for your research work in the national VA system.** (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Supportiveness of VA Research Headquarters	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Communication with VA Research Headquarters	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	VA Letter of Intent process	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	VA Grant Review process	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Funding level for VA Investigator Initiated Grants	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Go to Question 5 next.

Q5. The Office of Research Compliance and Assurance (ORCA) has been established within the Office of the Under Secretary for Health to advise the Under Secretary on all matters related to the protection of human research participants, laboratory animal welfare, research safety, and research misconduct. ORCA functions to promote and enhance the ethical conduct of research and oversee the investigation of allegations of research improprieties in conformance with applicable regulations and policies.

Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following aspects of **ORCA functions and services**. (Circle one.)

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral or Ambivalent	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
A.	Benefits to the VA Research Program of the ORCA national office	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
B.	Benefits to the VA Research Program of the ORCA field offices	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
C.	Communications with ORCA	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
D.	Usefulness of ORCA TED (Training, Education, and Development) initiative	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
E.	Usefulness of ORCA MAP (Mini Assessment Program) performance reviews	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Q6. If you had to decide all over again, do you think you would choose a career in the VA? (Circle one.)

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Q7. Would you recommend a research career in the VA to a colleague?

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Go to Question 8 next.

Q8. Do you think you will look for a job outside of the VA in the next year?

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Q9. Is it likely that you will retire from the VA in the next five years?

1. Yes, Definitely
2. Probably
3. 50 / 50 Chance
4. Probably Not
5. No, Definitely Not

Q10. Do you personally know of any individual whose recruitment to the VA was made possible by the availability of research opportunities and support in the VA?

1. No
2. Yes

Q11. Do you personally know of an individual who could not be recruited to the VA because opportunities and support for research in the VA were insufficient?

1. No
2. Yes

Q12. How important are research opportunities and support to recruiting and retaining high quality clinicians in the VA?

0. Don't know
1. Not at all important
2. Not very important
3. Moderately important
4. Very important
5. Extremely important

Q13. If research opportunities were not available in the VA, how likely do you think it is that you would currently be working in the VA system?

_____ % chance that I would be working in the VA

Go to Question 14 next.

Background Questions

Q14. Are you: (Check one.)

- Female
- Male

Q15. How long have you worked at the VA? (Check one.)

- 0 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- Over 10 years*

Q16. What is your age? (Check one.)

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

Q17. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Check one.)

- African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- White
- Multiracial
- Don't Know
- Other (please specify)_____

Go to Question 18 next.

Q18. With which VA Research Service are you most closely affiliated? (Check one.)

- Medical Research
- Nursing Research
- Rehabilitation Research
- Health Services Research
- Cooperative Studies/Trials
- Other (please specify) _____

Q19. With which VA Clinical Service/Section are you most closely affiliated? (Check one.)

- Surgery
- Rehabilitation
- General Internal Medicine
- Subspecialty of Internal Medicine
- Psychiatry / Psychology
- Pharmacy
- Nursing
- Dentistry
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

Q20. Are you currently receiving research grant or contract funding from the following sources?
(Please check all that apply.)

- VA
- NIH
- Other Federal agencies
- Foundations
- Pharmaceutical companies or other businesses
- Other sources

Go to Question 21 next.

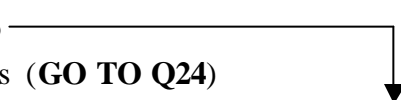
Q21. Are you currently a **principal investigator** on a grant or contract from the following sources?
(Please check all that apply.)

- VA
- NIH
- Other Federal agencies
- Foundations
- Pharmaceutical companies or other businesses
- Other sources

Q22. Please indicate whether you have any of the following advanced degrees:
(Please check all that apply.)

- Masters degree (Specify field: _____)
- Ph.D. (Specify field: _____)
- Medical degree (e.g., MD, DO)
- Dental degree (e.g., DDS)
- Other: Specify: _____

Q23. Do you work full time for VA?

- No _____
 - Yes (**GO TO Q24**)
- 

Q23a. What is your fraction in VA (in percent)? _____ %

Q23b. Do you also have a university appointment?

- No
- Yes

Q24. What percentage of your VA time is devoted to the following activities?
(Note: These percentages should add to **100% of your total VA time.**)

Research:	_____	%
Clinical Care:	_____	%
Administration:	_____	%
Clinical Training / Education:	_____	%
Research Training / Education:	_____	%
Other:	_____	%
Total	100	%

Questionnaire concludes on the next page.

Is there anything else you would like to let us know about working on research in the VA? If so, please use this space for that purpose. We are interested in any recommendations you have concerning how your local VA research environment could be improved.

Your contribution to this effort to better understand VA researchers' experiences and views is greatly appreciated. Thank you very much for your help. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

**Mark Meterko, PhD
SOVAR Project 2002
C/o Atlantic Marketing Research Company, Inc.
109 State Street
Boston, MA 02109**

Appendix B. Scale Definitions

Scale	Definition	Survey Items
Research Work	Satisfaction with own research work (e.g., levels of stress, opportunities for creativity, attractiveness of my position compared with other available job opportunities).	Q2c - Q2i and Q2m
Local Support	Satisfaction with local VA facilities and support (e.g., availability of support staff, computer systems/support, laboratory space).	Q1b - Q1d, Q1f - Q1j, Q1m, Q1n, Q2k and Q2L
VISN Leadership Support	Satisfaction with supportiveness of VISN leadership	Q3a
Overall VISN Support	Satisfaction with VISN support and opportunities (e.g., VISN rewards and recognition supporting research, VISN support for specific research projects, supportiveness of VISN leadership)	Q3a - Q3h
National Research Program	Satisfaction with support and opportunities in VA national research system (e.g., supportiveness of research headquarters, satisfaction with grant review process)	Q4a - Q4e
Protected Time for Research	Adequacy of own protected time for research	Q1L
ORCA Functions	Satisfaction with aspects of ORCA functions and services	Q5a – Q5e