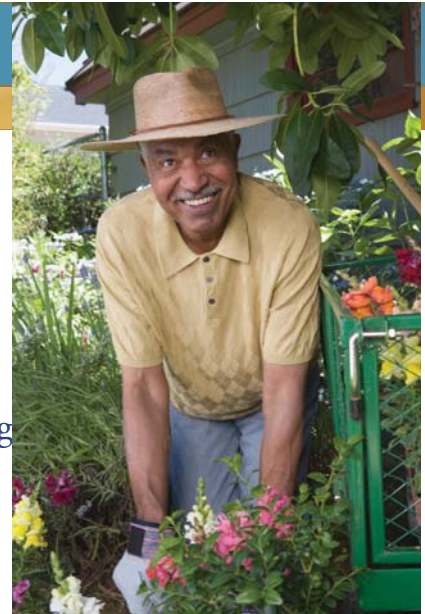




Mental Health

Major areas of focus for VA Research on mental health include substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), adjustment and anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. Researchers are studying and testing new drug therapies, enhancing collaborative care models in the primary care setting, and further improving access to mental health care through telehealth and other innovative technologies.



Examples of VA research advances

- **New brain-imaging techniques**—A team of VA researchers in the forefront of schizophrenia research is using “diffusion tensor imaging”—a relatively new form of MRI—to study the nerve fibers that form pathways within the brain. With this technology, researchers can now identify brain abnormalities that were previously undetectable with standard MRI scans, possibly leading to new targets for treatments for patients with schizophrenia and other conditions.
- **Effective team care for bipolar disorder**—A three-year study of 306 veterans with bipolar disorder at 11 VA medical centers found that those receiving care through a new collaborative model had better outcomes than those in usual care, without added costs. The new care model featured close teamwork between psychiatrists and nurse care coordinators, with an emphasis on teaching patients self-management skills.
- **Link between anxiety, alcoholism**—A VA research team in Chicago has discovered a genetic and biochemical pathway linking anxiety and alcoholism. Their studies focus on a molecule called CREB, which turns various genes on and off, and may point the way to new drug targets for both conditions.
- **Homeless veterans with mental illness**—Researchers with VA’s Northeast Program Evaluation Center recently documented the effectiveness of a program to help improve housing and mental-health outcomes for homeless veterans after hospitalization.

Facts About Mental Health

Mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety are common in the United States, with more than a quarter of Americans suffering from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. Mental health is a major focus for VA’s health care system. A recent health survey of 1.5 million veterans enrolled in VA health care found that more than a third had at least one mental health diagnosis. Depression was the most common diagnosis, followed by anxiety disorders—including PTSD—and schizophrenia. Schizophrenia alone affects some 100,000 VA patients and accounts for nearly 12 percent of VA’s total health care costs.

