

Proposal for a health management HIV outreach campaign within VA

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection remains a major public health problem within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Over 22,000 veterans with HIV infection are in care at VHA facilities, making VHA the largest single provider of care to HIV-infected individuals in the country. It is estimated that the prevalence of undiagnosed HIV infection at VHA facilities ranges from 0.1% to 2.8%. Thus, there may be anywhere from 5,000 to 140,000 veterans receiving VHA medical care with undiagnosed HIV infection. Because they are not linked to care for their HIV infection, these patients are at high risk for life-threatening complications of HIV infection; in addition, they may also unknowingly transmit HIV infection to others. Thus, improvements in early HIV diagnosis in VHA could make an enormous difference in the care of VHA patients with this infection. In 2006, the CDC recommended testing all adults for HIV in healthcare settings; routine testing would greatly improve early diagnosis of HIV infection. However, there are several barriers to implementing the CDC recommendations in VHA facilities. These include persuading patients who do not view themselves as being at risk to undergo testing; persuading overworked primary care providers that offering HIV testing (including the time involved in counseling and consenting) is a worthwhile expenditure of time; and lack of availability of point-of-care rapid testing at many VHA facilities.

To address these barriers, we propose to undertake a public health social marketing campaign to change VHA patient and provider attitudes towards HIV testing, with the aim of greatly increasing the number of veterans tested annually; diagnosing veterans with HIV earlier in their disease and linking them to life-saving care; decreasing transmission of HIV; and providing HIV prevention counseling to the vast majority of individuals who are found to be HIV-negative.

We will seek cooperation, coordination, and assistance from external organizations that have appropriate expertise in social marketing analysis, message development, communications, and evaluation. The work will be divided into four phases: formative (investigation of VA-specific patient and provider attitudinal barriers to HIV testing), development (construction of messages likely to affect provider and patient testing behavior), piloting (test marketing of messages and strategies at selected sites), and national launch. This marketing campaign would be coordinated with policy and educational initiatives making routine HIV testing official VA policy (within the constraints of applicable Federal law) and providing support to stations seeking to set up point-of-care testing.

The budget through the pilot phase would be approximately \$1.2 million (approximately \$165,000 for formative work; \$200,000 for development; \$600,000 for production; and \$300,000 for piloting). Funding would come from appropriated funds, as well as donations from outside entities, which may be accepted under special authority by the Chief Consultant of the Public Health Strategic Healthcare Group (PHSHG) to accept funds designated by the donor for carrying out the VHA policies administered by PHSHG.

The campaign would be organized around collaboration between multiple entities. It would be coordinated by the VA Clinical Public Health Programs office within the PHSHG, in partnership with other VA offices, such as Primary Care, Nursing, Laboratory, and Mental Health; Veteran Service Organizations; professional VA provider organizations; contract-based professional assistance from

experts in social marketing; strategic partners – particularly pharmaceutical and device manufacturers with a history of working with (and/or desire to work with) VA's HIV Program; and nonprofit entities such as VA Research and Education Foundations.

The initial pilot campaign could be developed during FY 2008, with the test market launch occurring in conjunction with World AIDS Day 2008 (December 1, 2008). Preliminary campaign materials could be ready for distribution by National HIV Testing Day (June 27, 2008). Following a successful pilot, a national roll-out would be planned for World AIDS Day 2009.