

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-570](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

VA research, which has contributed to many medical advances, may be funded by VA's appropriation or extramurally by other federal agencies and nonfederal sources. To access extramural funding, investigators at VA medical centers usually work with an NPC or academic affiliate partner to submit a grant proposal. Once a grant is awarded, medical centers' partners administer the grant by distributing funding, fulfilling reporting requirements, and performing other administrative activities.

GAO was asked to review VA's extramural research. This report examines, among other objectives, (1) how much VA spent on extramural research in fiscal year 2019 and (2) the efforts VA has made to support medical centers' partnerships for extramural research.

GAO analyzed VA policies, documents, and data. It also conducted site visits and interviewed officials from VA's Central Office and from a nongeneralizable sample of VA medical centers, NPCs, and academic affiliates, which GAO selected to represent variation in geographic location and funding.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA (1) provide more information to VA medical centers on strengthening research relationships with academic affiliates and (2) develop decision tools to help VA medical centers determine whether NPCs or academic affiliates should administer extramural grants. VA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-20-570](#). For more information, contact John Neumann at (202) 512-6888 or neumannj@gao.gov.

July 2020

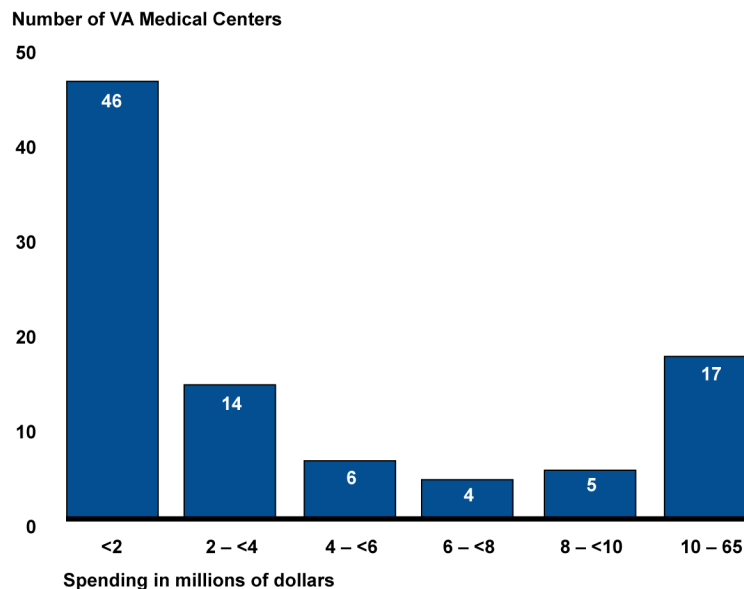
VA RESEARCH

Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Partnerships and Guide Decision-Making with Nonprofits and Academic Affiliates

What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) extramural research spending totaled about \$510 million in fiscal year 2019—nearly half of the \$1.1 billion in total spending on VA research. Of the \$510 million, federal sources, such as National Institutes of Health, funded \$382 million (75 percent), and nonfederal sources, including private entities, academic institutions, state and local governments, and foundations, funded \$128 million (25 percent). Spending at the 92 VA medical centers that conducted extramural research in fiscal year 2019 ranged from less than \$2 million to more than \$10 million (see figure). VA medical centers' nonprofit research and education corporations (NPC) and academic affiliate partners administered the grants that accounted for 91 percent of the spending.

Figure: Extramural Research Spending by VA Medical Centers that Conducted Extramural Research in Fiscal Year 2019



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) data. | GAO 20-570

VA has made efforts to promote and support VA medical centers' partnerships with academic affiliates—for example, by coordinating a mentoring program for local VA research officials—and considers effective affiliations as an enhancement to research. However, VA's Central Office officials have not provided examples of successful practices for strengthening research partnerships with academic affiliates. Having such practices would promote collaborative opportunities for VA medical centers with academic affiliates, particularly for medical centers that have poor communication with affiliates. Additionally, VA's Central Office has provided general guidance but not specific tools to VA medical centers for determining when an NPC or an academic affiliate should administer a project's extramural funds. Having specific decision-making tools could help medical centers make more informed decisions to provide optimal support for the research.