

Veteran Oral Health

Expanding Access and Equity Request for Proposals

Background

At CareQuest Institute for Oral Health®, we work together to create a system that is accessible, equitable, and integrated by bringing forth ideas and solutions.

We do this through our work in grantmaking, research, health improvement programs, policy and advocacy, and education, as well as our leadership in dental benefits and innovation advancements. But we don't do it alone. Collaboration and partnership are key to achieving our mission — to improve the oral health of all.

Our grantmaking team has a history of partnering with grassroots and community-based organizations that represent and/or engage those most directly impacted by oral health inequities. These populations include racial and ethnic minorities, rural communities, and older adults. Since our Grassroots Engagement Initiative in 2015–2020, we have continued to elevate new partner voices to reshape, disrupt, and transform our oral health system. Building from what we have learned, we are seeking collaborations with organizations that have aligned missions to improve oral health access, quality, and community support for veteran communities.

Purpose

According to research from both [CareQuest Institute and the American Institute for Dental Public Health \(AIDPH\)](#), veterans have consistently high rates of periodontitis, missing teeth, and filled teeth, even when controlling for other factors like chronic medical conditions and smoking status. Additionally, [a new report released by CareQuest Institute](#) outlines that veterans are 60% more likely than nonveterans to experience tooth decay, impacting their daily functioning and productivity in the workplace. Veterans are also more likely than nonveterans to have health conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, which are associated with poor oral health and often lead to higher out-of-pocket costs for patients.

Key Dates and Deadlines

- **March 13**
Request for Proposals Open
- **March 27, April 10, April 24**
Click a date below to register for Office Hours with CareQuest Institute staff
 - [March 27, 3–4 pm ET](#)
 - [April 10, 10–11 am ET](#)
 - [April 22, 12–1 pm ET](#)
- **May 1**
Deadline for Request for Proposals
- **Mid August**
Decision Notification

Contact

**CareQuest Institute
Philanthropy Team**
grants@carequest.org

Of specific note are the following data points:

- 42% of veterans reported having had gum treatment or bone loss around their teeth, which is a significantly higher proportion than reported by nonveterans (27%).
- Roughly 2 in 5 veterans described their oral health as fair or poor. This extrapolates to 8 million veterans with deficient oral health.
- Nearly 24% of veterans live in rural areas, where consistent access to care can be challenging. Fluoride treatments

Selection Criteria

Organizations interested in applying for funding through the Veteran Oral Health RFP are encouraged to use the recommendations in this report as a guide for developing their proposals. Priority will be given to proposals aligned with these recommendations, but proposals detailing other opportunities to expand access and equity for veterans' oral health will also be considered. Additional information about each recommendation is available [here](#).

Strategic Recommendations to Improve Access to Care

- Advocate for expanded eligibility criteria for veterans to receive oral health services. An estimated 15% of veterans qualify for VA dental services, as determined by Congress. To qualify, a veteran must either have a dental issue that is service-connected, be a former prisoner of war, or have a service-connected disability rated as total.
- Ensure utilization of dental benefits for VA-eligible veterans. Currently only one-third of eligible veterans are utilizing their dental benefits, indicating an opportunity to increase education and awareness surrounding benefits.
- Improve data collection and centralize reporting of oral health outcomes, focused on quality improvement, including disaggregated demographic and social-driver data at care sites outside of the VA structure where veterans access care.
- Explore value-based care initiatives that prioritize whole-person health outcomes, aligned with the VA Whole Health Initiative and vision for complementary and integrative health.
- Deploy diverse, multidisciplinary care teams to facilitate whole-person care, including increased access to oral health among those with chronic illnesses like diabetes or heart disease.
- Advance medical-dental integration, with a particular focus and priority on innovative solutions that link behavioral health and oral health for veterans.

- Expand the role of Federally Qualified Health Centers and rural health clinics, leveraging the expansion of access to care for veterans through the 2018 MISSION Act and the Community Care Network. Advocate for adequate resources for delivery of care at all levels (policy, workforce, reimbursement, etc.).

Strategic Recommendations to Improve Access to Care

- Prioritize trauma-informed approaches to clinical care that empower veterans to manage their own health while being sensitive to their life experiences.
- Support clinically appropriate and integrated oral health care to engender more trust between patients and their oral health providers while reinforcing a whole-person approach to care.
- Launch sustainable, veteran-focused quality improvement initiatives aimed at improving access, quality, and health outcomes.

CareQuest Institute's philanthropic approach is centered on the belief that oral health care solutions are more effective when individuals and communities that have been most negatively impacted by oral health disparities are driving their design, development, and implementation. That said, CareQuest Institute prioritizes proposals that reflect the applicant's authentic commitment to meaningfully and consistently engage members of the veteran community in the planning phase and throughout their proposed project. Compelling and aligned projects should be driven by, or collaborate with, individuals and/or organization partners representative of rather than "on behalf of" people involved in the veteran community.

What could this look like?

- A national organization developing a veteran-focused oral health policy agenda in collaboration with veteran self-advocates and veteran-focused partners
- A state-based organization hosting community listening sessions and advocacy trainings to strengthen the capacity for self- and policy advocacy among community members and to advance oral health advocacy toward expanding access to care
- A clinical organization piloting innovative clinical, workforce, and workflow solutions to inform and/or validate creative payment models that support oral health care for veterans
- A community-driven approach where project design and decision-making was led by the veteran community

The Veteran Oral Health RFP seeks to fund projects that drive system-level change in oral health in order to promote access to care for the veteran population. Currently, the criteria for selection of proposals are intentionally broad, recognizing that innovative work aligned with this strategy may employ a variety of tactics and partnerships, and that system-level barriers may vary depending on geographic region of focus. Organizations with proposals that are aligned with CareQuest Institute's philanthropic and strategic approaches, as mentioned above, will be prioritized.

CareQuest Institute's Philanthropy Team prioritizes work that:

- Demonstrates the use of a health and racial equity approach
- Intentionally engages communities in the design and implementation of the work, with a particular focus on historically marginalized populations
- Strengthens capacity and infrastructure through partnerships and collaboration
- Seeks to advance local, state, or federal policy or systems change

Proposals will be reviewed, and grantees selected, based on the following criteria:

- Clear identification of the system-level barrier(s) to oral health care for the veteran population that the proposed work will address (organization-wide systems, local systems/policy, state-based systems/policy, national systems/federal policy)
- Collaboration and engagement with the veteran community, veteran-serving organizations, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to inform decision-making in the planning and implementation of the work
- Feasibility and practicality of the proposed activities, including intended/anticipated outcomes and impact on the veteran population, as well as the broader oral health system
- Experience in effective data collection and analysis as well as project reporting/communications
- Willingness to seek and engage other funders in supporting and/or sustaining this work
- Willingness to partner with existing networks (such as the [Oral Health Progress and Equity Network](#), other CareQuest Institute grantees, etc.) to spread project learnings, opportunities for engagement, and thought leadership to strengthen oral health for Veterans across the broader oral health field



Eligibility

Applicants must be based and operating in the United States or its territories and may be either a public entity or nonprofit organization that is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code.

Use of Grant Funds

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries; subgrants to project partners/community organizations that clearly align with the mission, goals, and budget of the proposal; consultant fees; data collection and analysis; meetings; supplies; activities related to fundraising and development; project-related travel; and other direct project expenses.

Grant funds, including subgrants, **may not** be used for direct services (e.g., restorations, screenings, dental supplies, lost revenue, etc.), capital expenditures, lobbying, endowments, or scholarships, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a dedicated grant amount for proposed projects?

CareQuest Institute will fund 10 projects at \$125,000 each through the Veteran Oral Health RFP.

How long is the funding period for grants through this RFP?

At this time, CareQuest Institute is able to provide one year of funding to accepted applicants. Following satisfactory completion of this one-year grant period, organizations funded through this RFP may apply for future CareQuest Institute grant opportunities.

Are organizations that have not previously received funding from CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Yes. CareQuest Institute welcomes new prospective partners to apply through this RFP.

Are organizations that have previously received grant funding from CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Yes. CareQuest Institute is interested in deepening relationships with existing partners through this RFP.

Are organizations that are in an active grant period with CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Organizations may not have two concurrent grants from CareQuest Institute. However, existing grantees may apply through funding within this RFP if the intended grant “start date” is equal to or following the “end date” of the current grant from CareQuest Institute.

Is there a geographic focus or scope for this RFP?

CareQuest Institute is open to applications focused on national, state, and local contexts. However, there is particular interest in projects serving geographic areas and/or specific demographic populations that have been historically underserved.

How does CareQuest Institute define community engagement as it relates to this RFP?

CareQuest Institute, in partnership with Community Science, has developed a robust measurement framework for community engagement within oral health systems-change work. The [Continuum of Community Engagement](#) provides detailed examples of community engagement on a progressive scale. CareQuest Institute’s intent is to encourage progression along the continuum within funded projects and within the field of oral health overall.

What types of academic research will be funded as part of this RFP?

CareQuest Institute supports proposals that will help increase the understanding of factors that influence oral health equity for veterans facing barriers to care due to social determinants of health. Research-focused grants through this RFP will not support the following:

- Testing for efficiency or usefulness of a product, tool, or equipment (an exception is for research supporting innovative approaches of an existing tool or research to use this tool in underserved populations)
- New or novel data analysis using publicly accessible data
- Cross-site or multisite research
- Organizations that require an indirect rate greater than 15% of the requested funds

What support beyond funding is provided by CareQuest Institute?


Organizations funded within this initiative will have access to, and ongoing communication with, a network of community-driven partners doing similar work through a facilitated learning community. These partners will also have opportunities to collaborate on earned-media strategies and promotion of work via CareQuest Institute dissemination channels, including newsletters and social media. CareQuest Institute’s philanthropy staff will provide technical assistance to build organizational and project capacity. Lastly, partners will have opportunities to learn from CareQuest Institute and other subject-matter experts around topics such as evaluation and value-based care.

Who can I contact with further questions?

For questions not answered above, please send your inquiries to the Philanthropy team at CareQuest Institute: grants@carequest.org. Please reference this RFP in your subject line. A team member will contact you with additional assistance.

Please contact CareQuest Institute at grants@carequest.org or 857-295-0203 if you require accessibility accommodations related to applying through this RFP. This may include:

- Alternative methods of proposal submission
- Alternative methods of communication with the CareQuest Institute Grants Team
- Other

 [Take the eligibility quiz](#)
[Start your application](#)