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#	QUESTION	RESPONSE
1.	What is Project HERO?	<p>Project HERO is a pilot program that helps Veterans get the care they need when it's not available at their local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center. While Veterans can still research and see doctors outside VA with a Fee care authorization, Project HERO removes the guesswork by contracting with Humana Veterans Healthcare Services (HVHS) and Delta Dental to provide Veterans with pre-screened networks of medical and dental providers who meet VA standards for quality care.</p> <p>The ultimate goal of Project HERO is to ensure that all care delivered by VA, either through Veterans Health Administration (VHA) or community providers, is of comparable quality and consistency for all Veterans.</p>
2.	What services are provided?	<p>The scope of services purchased under Project HERO include: medical/surgical specialty care, mental health, diagnostics, dialysis, and dental. Each VISN team identified specialty care needs by geographic location based on historic data and ongoing care needs. VISN teams documented existing contracts for specialty care to ensure that Project HERO does not conflict with existing contracts.</p>

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		<p>Through Project HERO, Humana Veterans Healthcare Services and Delta Dental Federal provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentialed, quality providers • Return of clinical information to the VA for patient record keeping, and continuity of care • Monitoring and reporting of access to care, appointment timeliness, patient safety and satisfaction • Appointment-setting services with local medical and dental providers • Patient advocate services • Timely payment of provider invoices
3.	Where is Project HERO available?	<p>Project HERO is currently available in four VA health care networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 8: VA Sunshine Health Care Network Southern Georgia and most of Florida. Does not include Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands. • VISN 16: South Central VA Health Care Network Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and portions of the states of Texas, Missouri, Alabama, and Florida. • VISN 20: Northwest Network Washington State, Oregon, most of the state of Idaho, and one county each in Montana and California. Does not include Alaska. • VISN 23: VA Midwest Health Care Network Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and portions of northern Kansas, Missouri, western Illinois, western Wisconsin, and eastern Wyoming. Please note that the pilot does not include Puerto Rico or Alaska. <p>These VISNs have the highest expenditures for out-of-VA-network (Fee) care, particularly relative to the number of patient enrollees in the VISN. These VISNs represent approximately 25% of total VA health care enrollment and 30% of annual Fee care expenditures. These selection factors were used to ensure the pilot results are representative of the larger VA population. Over time, positive outcomes may result in the expansion of Project HERO to additional regions.</p>
4.	How do Veterans participate in Project HERO?	<p>Eligible Veterans enroll in the VA health care system. When specific medical expertise or technology isn't available at the VA medical center (VAMC), the VA medical center (VAMC) Fee office gives each eligible Veteran a Project HERO authorization. HVHS or Delta Dental contacts the Veteran directly to make an appointment. After the appointment, HVHS and/or Delta Dental providers send the patient records and invoices directly to HVHS or Delta Dental. HVHS and Delta Dental then send the patient records and claims data to VA.</p>
5.	Do Veterans have a choice to participate or not?	<p>All VA enrollees in participating VISNs enjoy the benefits of Project HERO, which functions as a behind-the-scenes pilot program that is largely transparent to Veterans. Project HERO does not restrict or reduce a Veteran's right to seek care at any VA medical facility. The Project HERO pilot/demonstration does not impact Veteran eligibility status or policy.</p>
6.	How does VA make sure that Veterans get comparable quality of care that they would get at a VA	<p>Project HERO Program Management Office (PMO) monitors HVHS and Delta Dental provider credentialing and facility accreditation status, timely access to care, patient safety events,</p>

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	facility?	patient complaints, clinical information returned to VA for continuity of care, and more. The Project HERO PMO also regularly distributes patient satisfaction surveys.
7.	How is care evaluated by Project HERO?	The Project HERO Program Management Office (PMO) regularly tracks and monitors quality, safety, vendor performance and other data. This information is gathered, analyzed, and reported on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. The Project HERO PMO shares its findings in reports with internal and external stakeholders including the Project HERO Governing Board, directors of participating Project HERO VISNs, senior VA and VHA leadership, VSOs, Academic Affiliates, and labor unions.
8.	Why was Project HERO created?	In November 2005, VA developed Project HERO in response to House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Conference Report 109-305, which directed VA to focus on cost-effective purchasing of care and develop a competitive award with at least three objectives-oriented demonstrations (pilot programs) to encourage collaboration with industry and academia.
9.	Why do we want a contracted healthcare network – won't that restrict Veteran choice?	No. Veterans will continue to have a range of choices among providers that meet or exceed VA standards of care. VA seeks effective, high-quality relationships with community-based providers to complement the VHA system of care when specific medical expertise or technology is not available in the Department.
10.	What are the objectives of Project HERO?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide as much care within the VA as practicable • When necessary, efficiently refer Veterans to high-quality community-based care • Improve exchange of medical information between VA and non-VA providers • Foster high-quality care and patient safety • Control operating costs • Increase Veteran satisfaction • Secure accountable evaluation of Demonstration (pilot) results • Sustain partnerships with university Affiliates
11.	What are the expected benefits of Project HERO?	Project HERO contracts enable VA oversight of Fee care for quality, cost-effective care. All contracted provider networks are required by contract to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet VA-specified quality standards • Meet provider credentialing and facility accreditation standards • Submit clinical information to VA to improve continuity of care • Provide a centralized VHA/vendor-coordinated referral and appointment process • Provide timely payments to providers
12.	What is the duration of the pilot?	The contracts have a base year plus four option years.
13.	Who were the contracts awarded to, and when did delivery begin?	Project HERO contracts were awarded to Humana Veteran Healthcare Services (HVHS) and Delta Dental on October 1, 2007 and the contracts are currently in their first option year. As of January 2008, HVHS provides medical/surgical, mental health, diagnostics, and dialysis services in VISNs 8, 16, 20, and 23. Delta Dental provides dental services in VISNs 8, 16, 20, and 23.
14.	On what basis were the contracts awarded and who decided?	VA made the Project HERO award to the offerors whose proposals represented the best overall value to the VA. All proposals were evaluated by a Source Selection Evaluation Team (SSET) comprised of subject matter experts representing multiple

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		VA disciplines. Based on the evaluation criteria contained within the Request for Proposal (RFP), the SSET made an award recommendation to the Source Selection Authority (SSA). The SSA confirmed the best value award decision and the Contracting Officer awarded the contracts.
15.	How are the contracts administered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project HERO Contracting Officers manage and administer the Project HERO contracts. • The Contracting Officer Technical Representatives (COTRs) monitor contract operations contractor performance. • The Project HERO Governing Board evaluates and votes on proposed changes in terms and conditions of the contracts.
16.	Does the pilot transfer greater amounts of care outside VA?	Project HERO does not increase the volume of care provided outside of VA facilities. Project HERO contracts provide a way for the VA to require Fee care providers provide quality, cost-effective care. Contractor performance is not measured according to the volume of care provided.
17.	How much does Project HERO cost? Where are the funds coming from?	Medical care provided under Project HERO comes from current medical services dollars already allocated for purchased care. Purchased healthcare needs have been identified by geographic area (VISN and VAMC) and by type of specialty care needed. VA purchases services ONLY when VA staff cannot provide the service.
18.	What savings do you hope to achieve through Project HERO?	In CY08, 67% of Project HERO claim line items were less than 95% of Medicare rates, compared to 22% of other Fee claim line items for the same service.
19.	How does Project HERO work with the Fee program?	Project HERO is one option within Fee care. When needed medical or dental care isn't available at the local VA medical center (VAMC), the VAMC Fee office provides eligible Veterans a Fee care authorization or a Project HERO authorization to get the care they need. VA does not have oversight over Fee care providers. VA does have quality and cost oversight over Project HERO provider networks.
20.	Why don't we just issue Fee cards and let patients choose their own providers?	Issuing Fee cards and allowing patients to choose their own providers eliminates the opportunity for VA to provide effective medical management, resulting in unnecessary or duplicative services and missed opportunities to repatriate care to VA. A non-structured selection of providers also adversely impacts continuity of care. With Project HERO, VA can establish meaningful professional relationships with community-based providers and ensure that these providers pass qualification standards that might not be found in otherwise selected providers.
21.	How do you intend to involve the Veteran service organizations (VSOs) in Project HERO?	VSOs were actively engaged throughout the proposal and award process, and the Project HERO PMO meets with VSOs quarterly to collaborate and seek input on program developments.
22.	Where can I get more information?	Email: vhacoprojecthero@va.gov , call 303.370.7755, or visit : http://www.va.gov/hac/hero/