ACORN Background
ACORN is a collaborative initiative that aims to: (1) systematically screen Veterans for social needs within several domains; (2) provide clinical teams with real-time information about Veterans’ unmet needs; and (3) offer Veterans relevant resources and referrals to VA and community services.

Domains Covered in the ACORN Screener

- Education
- Employment
- Food Security
- Housing
- Legal
- Social Isolation & Loneliness
- Transportation
- Technology
- Utilities (added in 2021)

Significance of ACORN
Given the adverse impact of social needs on health outcomes, healthcare organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of identifying and managing unmet needs. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) currently screens Veterans for food insecurity, housing instability, and intimate partner violence, but lacks a systematic screening process to identify social needs more broadly. ACORN provides clinical care teams with a broader understanding of the social and economic contexts impacting individual Veterans.

Implementing ACORN
ACORN has been implemented in several VA clinical settings, including Primary Care, Women’s Health, Mental Health, Social Work, and Peer Support. Veterans can complete ACORN screening prior to or during clinic visits through one of two mechanisms: 1) self-administered screening on paper or an electronic tablet; or 2) staff-administered screening directly in the VHA electronic health record. Veterans who screen positive are provided with geographically tailored resource guides, resource navigation support, and/or referrals to Social Work.

Using ACORN in a VA Clinic or Hospital
We are currently implementing and evaluating ACORN in a variety of clinical settings across the VHA. The ACORN Team is available to support clinical teams interested in implementing this program. Please contact our team at VHABEDACORN@va.gov with any questions or to discuss expansion to your site. For additional resources, please see:

- Systematic Screening of Veterans for Health-related Social Needs: An Ethical Imperative
- VA Podcast Network - Social Determinants of Health: Veteran Health Equity Podcast, Episode 1
- VA Office of Health Equity Social Determinants of Health

Updated September 2022
(1) In the past two months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?¹
   a. Yes – Living in stable housing

   9 (1.1) Are you worried or concerned that in the next two months you may NOT have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?¹
   i. Yes – worried about housing near future

   9 (1.2) Where have you lived for MOST of the past two months?¹
   a. Apartment/House/Room (no government subsidy)
   b. Apartment/House/Room (with government subsidy)
   c. With Friend/Family
   d. Motel/Hotel
   e. Short-term Institution like Hospital, Rehab Center, Drug Treatment Center
   f. Homeless Shelter
   g. Anywhere outside (e.g. Street, Vehicle, Abandoned Building)
   h. Other

   ii. No – Not worried about housing near future
   b. No – Not living in stable housing

   9 Collect answer for the question “Where have you lived for MOST of the past two months?”¹

   Ÿ If respondent endorses either “not living in stable housing” OR “worried about housing near future” for (1):
   (1.3) Are you currently without a place to stay?
   a. Yes
   b. No

(2) I’m going to read you two statements that people have made about their food situation. For each statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for your household in the last 12 months.
(2.1) Within the past 12 months, you worried whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more.²
   a. Often true
   b. Sometimes true
   c. Never true

(2.2) Within the past 12 months, the food you bought just didn’t last and you didn’t have money to get more.²
   a. Often true
   b. Sometimes true
   c. Never true

   Ÿ If respondent endorses “often true” or “sometimes true” for either “food would run out” OR “food didn’t last” for (2):
   (2.3) Do you need help getting food for this week?
   a. Yes
   b. No

(3) How often do you have trouble paying for your utilities (i.e., electric, gas, oil, water, or phone)?³
   a. Often
   b. Sometimes
   c. Never
   d. Not applicable/I don’t pay for utilities

   Ÿ If respondent endorses “often”or “sometimes” for (3):
   (3.1) Has the electric, gas, oil, or water company threatened to shut off services in your home?⁴
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Already shut off
   d. Not applicable/I don’t pay for utilities

(4) How often has lack of transportation kept you from medical appointments, meetings, work, or from getting things needed for daily living?⁵
   a. Often
   b. Sometimes
   c. Never

   Ÿ If respondent endorses “often”or “sometimes” for (4):
   (4.1) Do you have an upcoming appointment that you need transportation assistance to?
   a. Yes
   b. No

(Continued)
(5) Do you currently have any legal issues you need help with?
   a. Yes  b. No

(6) How often do you feel lonely or isolated from those around you?\textsuperscript{6}
   a. Often  b. Sometimes  c. Never

(7) Do you want help finding or keeping work or a job?\textsuperscript{7}
   a. Yes, help finding work  b. Yes, help keeping work  c. No, I don't want help finding or keeping work

(8) Do you want more information about educational benefits and resources for Veterans?
   a. Yes  b. No

(9) Do you have access to any of the following devices? (Please select all that apply.)
   Simple cell phone (flip phone)
   Smartphone (a cell phone with a touchscreen and internet)
   Landline
   Computer (laptop, desktop, or tablet such as an iPad)
   None

(10) Do you have access to affordable and reliable internet at home?
   a. Yes  b. No  c. I don't want internet access at home

(11) How often do you run out of phone minutes and/or data before the end of the month?
   a. Often  b. Sometimes  c. Never  d. I don't have a cellphone (flip phone or smartphone)

(12) Veterans can now have video visits with their care team from home or another location of their choice. Would you like help setting up a future video visit with a member of your VA care team?
   a. Yes  b. No  c. I already know how to do video visits/don't need help  d. I don't know what a video visit is

Ô If respondent endorses “yes” for (12):
(12.1) Do you need help learning to use a smartphone, tablet, or computer for video visits at the VA?
   a. Yes  b. No  c. I don't have any of these devices

When derived from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Accountable Health Communities (AHC) Screener, the original source is cited per AHC guidance. Questions without citations were developed by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) ACORN core team and collaborators across multiple VHA offices and sites.

5. Adapted with permission from the national PRAPARE\textsuperscript{®} social determinants of health protocol developed by the National Association of Community Health Centers, the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations, and the Oregon Primary Care Organization and their development partners. www.nachc.org/prapare. ©National Association of Community Health Centers. All Rights Reserved.
# ACORN SCREENING TOOL QUESTION SOURCE TABLE

**Project Title:** Assessing Circumstances & Offering Resources for Needs (ACORN)

**Funders:** VHA Office of Health Equity

**Project Leads:** Alicia Cohen, MD, MSc, FAAFP, Meaghan Kennedy, MD, MPH, Lauren Russell, MPP

**Project Coordinator:** Kathleen Mitchell, MPH

**Project Contact Email:** VHABEDACORN@va.gov

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**Table.** Sources of SDOH items used in the ACORN screening tool.

When derived from the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Accountable Health Communities (AHC) Screener](https://www.cms.gov), the original source is cited per AHC guidance. Questions without citations were developed by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) ACORN core team and collaborators across multiple VHA offices and sites.

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<th>Domain</th>
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| Housing  | In the past two months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?  
• Yes – Living in stable housing  
|          | Are you worried or concerned that in the next two months you may NOT have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?  
• Yes – worried about housing near future  
• No – not worried about housing near future |                |                                                                 |
|          | Where have you lived for MOST of the past two months?  
• Apartment/House/Room (no government subsidy)  
• Apartment/House/Room (with government subsidy)  
• With Friend/Family  
• Motel/Hotel  
• Short-term Institution like Hospital, Rehab Center, Drug Treatment Center  
• Homeless Shelter  
• Anywhere outside (e.g. Street, Vehicle, Abandoned Building)  
• Other |                |                                                                 |
|          | Are you currently without a place to stay?  
• Yes  

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*Updated September 2022*
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| Food    | Within the past 12 months, you worried whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more.  
• Often True  
• Sometimes True  
|         | Within the past 12 months, the food you bought just didn’t last and you didn’t have money to get more.  
• Often True  
• Sometimes True  
|         | Do you need help getting food for this week?  
• Yes  
| Utilities | How often do you have trouble paying for your utilities (i.e., electric, gas, oil, water, or phone)?  
• Often  
• Sometimes  
• Never  
|         | Has the electric, gas, oil, or water company threatened to shut off services in your home?  
• Yes  
• No  
• Already shut off  
| Transportation | How often has lack of transportation kept you from medical appointments, meetings, work, or from getting things needed for daily living?  
• Often  
• Sometimes  
• Never | PRAPARE | Adapted with permission from the national PRAPARE® social determinants of health protocol developed by the National Association of Community Health Centers, the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations, and the Oregon Primary Care Organization and their development partners. www.nachc.org/prapare. ©National Association of Community Health Centers. All Rights Reserved. |
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| Transportation cont.         | Do you have an upcoming appointment that you need transportation assistance to?  
· Yes  
| Legal                        | Do you currently have any legal issues you need help with?  
· Yes  
| Social Isolation and Loneliness | How often do you feel lonely or isolated from those around you?  
· Often  
· Sometimes  
| Employment                   | Do you want help finding or keeping work or a job?  
· Yes, help finding work  
· Yes, help keeping work  
| Education                    | Do you want more information about educational benefits and resources for Veterans?  
· Yes  
| Digital Divide               | Do you have access to any of the following devices?  
· Simple cell phone (flip phone)  
· Smartphone (a cell phone with a touchscreen and internet)  
· Computer (laptop, desktop, or tablet such as an iPad)  
· Landline  
· None  
Do you have access to affordable and reliable internet at home?  
· Yes  
· No  
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<th>Citation</th>
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</table>
| Digital Divide, cont.     | How often do you run out of phone minutes and/or data before the end of the month?  
|                           | • Often  
|                           | • Sometimes  
|                           | • Never  
|                           | • I don’t have a cellphone (flip phone or smartphone)                     |                                                                                 | Developed by VHA ACORN team in collaboration with VHA National Social Work Program, VHA Office of Connected Care, and VA Homelessness-Modified ACORN Screening Tool Project Team |
|                           | Veterans can now have video visits with their care team from home or another location of their choice. Would you like help setting up a future video visit with a member of your VA care team?  
|                           | • Yes  
|                           | • No  
|                           | • I already know how to do video visits/ I don’t need help  
|                           | Do you need help learning to use a smartphone, tablet, or computer for video visits at the VA?  
|                           | • Yes  
|                           | • No  
|                           | • I don’t have any of these devices                                       |                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                 |
If you are interested in citing this work, please use the following information:
https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/docs/ACORN_Screening_Tool.pdf

For any questions about the ACORN screener, please contact the ACORN team at VHABEDACORN@va.gov.

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Veterans Health Administration National Social Work Program
Veterans Health Administration Office of Connected Care
VA Homelessness-Modified ACORN Screening Tool Project Team (VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team; Center for Healthcare Organization and Implementation Research, VA Bedford Healthcare System; Center of Innovation for Long Term Services and Supports, VA Providence Healthcare System; VA New England Healthcare System (VISN 1) Chief Medical Office)

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