

Health Outcomes Associated with Health and Wellness Coaches

Health and Wellness Coaching (HWC) is an integral part of Complementary Integrative Health within the Whole Health System. These services focus on empowering Veterans, motivating them, and promoting their long-term well-being. Health and Wellness Coaching has proven impact on successful management of diabetes, obesity, chronic pain, smoking cessation, and medication adherence, as well as improvements in self-efficacy, well-being, and overall quality of life.

Improvements in Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions

- In an on-going study examining the impact of engagement in HWC on select preventative care and chronic health conditions preliminary analyses indicate engagement in HWC process has a significant impact on Veterans' health. For example, compared to the one year prior to engagement in HWC, Veterans who engaged in the HWC process (8+ sessions) had **improvements (pre to post) in colorectal screenings (72% to 79%), controlled high blood pressure (70% to 78%), and managed diabetes (76% to 79%) in the one-year post-initiation of HWC.**ⁱ

Sustained Smoking Cessation

- In a retrospective matched-comparison cohort study of Veterans who were current tobacco users in 2023, those who engaged in Health and Wellness Coaching were **significantly more likely to demonstrate sustained smoking cessation (HR=1.18, 95% CI [1.08, 1.28]) and increased use of cessation medications over a 13-month study period.** HWCs provide expanded options for supporting Veterans in identifying their own pathways to achieve smoking cessation goals, with results exceeding those achieved by standard counseling and assistance.ⁱⁱ

Increased Access and Service Engagement

- In a retrospective study examining the impact of engagement in health and well-being services in the 1 year following HWC, findings indicated that compared to Veterans who engaged in only 1 coaching session, **those who completed 8+ coaching sessions were significantly more likely to engage in physical therapy sessions (6.2 vs 2.0, p<.001 (SMD 0.238)) and evidence-based psychotherapies (7.3 vs 3.5, p<.001 (SMD 0.277).**ⁱⁱⁱ

Improved Mental Health and Reductions in Stress

- A mixed methods quality improvement evaluation examining the impact and effectiveness of HWC services at one VA Medical Center examined perceived physical and mental health and stress outcomes over a 3-month period (pre/post coaching). Findings included **improvements in mental health and functioning (p = 0.006), lower stress levels (p=0.003) and improved health competence (p=0.01).** Qualitative interviews indicated high satisfaction with work towards personal health goals, including making meaningful changes in lifestyle, diet, exercise, sleep quality, and overall mood.^{iv}
- A single-arm, mixed-methods pilot study focused on exploring acceptability and outcomes of engagement in telephone-delivered HWC among Veterans (n=22) with suicidal ideation found high levels of fidelity to the model and satisfaction with HWC services. Although the sample size was small, the impact of HWC was great enough to see **significant improvements in perceived psychological well-being (p=0.01), reduction in depression symptoms (p=.03), stress (p=.03), and anxiety (p=0.04).**

"He was a support function in terms of how well I was doing... with diet and exercise. I mean, it doesn't seem to work well unless you do both and that was sometimes a challenge. He [HWC] was always good about letting me flesh out and set the goals and then and then checking in with me when we talked, you know, 'hey, how's this going?' I think accountability is important for when you're trying to make life changes. And It's important to have accountability from somebody who cares." (Vietnam Army Veteran, Tomah VA)

Scan QR code to learn about one 77-year old Marine Corp Veteran's empowering story of how his work with a Health and Wellness Coach reversed the course of diabetes, reduced chronic pain, and improved his life.





Synthesis of Research from Non-VA Studies

In the latest Compendium of Health and Wellness Coaching published in the *Journal of Integrative and Complementary Medicine* (2023)^v, evidence from 212 studies examining the impact of HWC on health outcomes, disease management, medication adherence, self-efficacy, quality of life is presented. Studies include a mix of research designs, including 108 randomized clinical trials, and a range of outcomes, such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, hypertension, obesity, cancer, and wellness, respiratory diseases and chronic pain management. The largest number of studies and strongest evidence for HWC focus on diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

Health Condition	Compendium of Health and Wellness Coaching: 2023 Addendum ^v
Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 106 studies identified, including 46 RCTs, 21 quantitative, and 12 mixed method designs. Across all studies, <u>79% of those measuring glycated hemoglobin A1c reported decreases</u> (i.e., positive change), particularly among RCTs, with additional impact, including improved lifestyle modification, medication adherence, and mental health indicators.
Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 109 studies identified, including 47 RCTs, 53 quantitative/cohort, and 9 mixed method designs <u>Positive outcomes were observed in 81.8% of studies for body weight and body mass index reduction</u>, and additional benefits were noted in areas such as nutrition, physical activity, and mental health. Among the intervention designs was a marked increase in coaching delivered virtually.
Heart Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 32 studies identified, including 24 RCTs and 1 quality improvement study Studies reported <u>improvements in clinical markers such as hemoglobin A1c, lipid profiles, weight, and mental health</u>. Additionally, some studies highlighted the potential financial benefits of HWC for cardiovascular health, including one longitudinal case-control study measuring reductions in mortality and health care costs across 6 years.
Hypertension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 48 studies identified, including 16 RCTs, 2 cohort studies, and 1 quasi-experimental study. Studies reported <u>improved outcomes in blood pressure management, medication adherence, and lifestyle improvements</u>. Although all studies demonstrated improvements in outcomes, some did not reach statistical significance. High levels of participant engagement in HWC and perceived improvements in blood pressure control were commonly reported.
Cholesterol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24 studies, including 11 RCTs. Across these studies, <u>reductions in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, total cholesterol, and blood pressure</u> were reported, alongside increased participant satisfaction. Higher engagement levels were also associated with improved lipid profiles.
Chronic Pain Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 investigational research studies. HWC interventions for chronic pain showed benefits such as reduced pain, <u>improved physical activity, and enhanced functional abilities</u>. Quality-of-life improvements were notable, particularly in fibromyalgia and knee osteoarthritis.
Respiratory Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 studies, including 5 RCTs, 2 cohort, and 2 case-control studies. Studies generally focused on patients with COPD and showed <u>improvements in long-term COPD management through engagement in self-management behaviors</u> (e.g., improved physical activity) and <u>inhaler adherence</u>. Several studies also examined cost outcomes and found reductions in hospitalizations and emergency health care utilization. Several studies also found improvements in quality of life and reduction in depression symptoms

ⁱ On-going study. Unpublished data obtained from VHA Office of Performance Measurement (17API2), which resides within the Office of Analytics and Performance Integration, under the Office of Quality and Patient Safety (QPS). Preliminary findings presented to VA seminar: Hyde, J, Douglas, J, Flike, K, Kloehn, A, Zeliadt, S. Health and Wellness Coaching in VA: A Snapshot of Who is Engaged and Select Outcomes. January 23, 2025.

ⁱⁱ Zeng, S, Coggeshall, SS, Rosser, EW, Taylor, SL, Burgess, DJ, Luo, G, Zeliadt, SB. The Role of Whole Health in Enhancing Tobacco Cessation Outcomes for Veterans: A Retrospective Study. 2025, Under review, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hyde, J, Douglas, J, Flike, K, Kloehn, A, Zeliadt, S. The "Ripple Effect" of Focusing on What Matters Most to Patients: The Impact of Health and Wellness Coaching on U.S. Military Veterans' Engagement in Health and Well-Being Services. Podium Presentation at the Annual Academy Health Research Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, June 7-10, 2025.

^{iv} Purcell N, Zamora K, Bertenthal D, Abadjian L, Tighe J, Seal KH. How VA Whole Health Coaching Can Impact Veterans' Health and Quality of Life: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Program Evaluation. *Glob Adv Health Med*. 2021 Mar 5;10:21. doi: 10.1177/2164956121998283. PMID: 33747639.

^v Abu Dabrh, A. M., Weiss, J. M., Munipalli, B., Kaye, M. P., Smith, K., Shur, E., Harenberg, S., Garofalo, R., Mohabbat, A. B., Robinson, A., Paul, S. N., Beech, B. M., Moore, M., Brigham, T. J., & Sforzo, G. A. (2025). Compendium of Health and Wellness Coaching: 2023 Addendum. *Journal of integrative and complementary medicine*, <https://doi.org/10.1089/jicm.2024.0672>