



VA Advanced Fellowship in
Women's Health
Become a Leader in Women's Health

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VA Connecticut Healthcare System

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Cynthia Brandt, MD
Sally Haskell, MD
Mary Driscoll, PhD
Co-Directors of Training
VA Connecticut Advanced Fellowship in Women's Health



VA AFWH
Become a Leader in Women's Health



VA | U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Program Overview:

The VA AFWH Fellowship provides two years of post-residency, post-doctoral research, education, and clinical learning opportunities to eligible health professionals (such as physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, etc.). Fellows spend approximately 75 percent of their time in research and 25 percent of their time engaged in clinical care. The Women’s Health Fellowship at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS) offers immersive training experiences in women’s health research, policy, and clinical care.

Research
(75% Effort)

- Faculty interest and expertise includes, but is not limited to: gender disparities in medical (e.g., cardiovascular disease) and mental health outcomes (e.g., PTSD, suicidality) in post 9/11 Veterans; medical informatics; musculoskeletal health, chronic pain, and trauma in women Veterans; implementation of comprehensive and trauma-informed women’s healthcare; medical/mental health complexity in women Veterans; intimate partner violence screening and intervention. Faculty utilize a range of methodological approaches in their research.

Clinical Care
(25% Effort)

- Fellows typically provide direct clinical care to women Veterans via the Women’s Health Center at the West Haven VAMC, or via immersion in a variety of existing specialty care clinics (e.g., pain management, cardiology, etc). They may also elect to provide clinical care on existing clinical research projects at VACHS. Finally, fellows may elect to satisfy clinical care effort requirements via program evaluation or quality improvement projects.

Policy

- Opportunities to participate in national level programmatic and policy initiatives that support health care of women Veterans in the Veterans Health Administration are available.

VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS):



The VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS) provides high quality primary and specialty care to a service area containing more than 395,000 Veterans. VACHS, and its West Haven VA Medical Center (VAMC) campus, has extensive research programs that are recognized nationally and regionally, including the Pain Research, Informatics, Multimorbidities and Education (PRIME) Center of Innovation (COIN). The VACHS benefits from its affiliations with Yale University, including the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing.

Overview of VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS)

VACHS consists of an integrated system of healthcare delivery encompassing the full range of ambulatory care services as well as a tertiary care inpatient facility at its West Haven campus, Primary Care Centers of Excellence at the Newington and West Haven campuses, six Community Based Outpatient Clinics, three Veterans Outreach Centers, and a recovery-oriented Community Care Center. Representative specialty care accessible within the VACHS includes intensive care units, neurology inpatient and outpatient services, comprehensive mental health services, rehabilitation medicine, hospice and palliative medicine, and specialized services for specific clinical problems.

Overview of Pain Research, Informatics, Multimorbidities, and Education Center of Innovation

VACHS is home to the Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) funded PRIME Center. [PRIME](#) is one of 19 HSR&D Centers of Innovation (COIN), and it is the only Center with targeted research in pain, women's health, and LGBTQ+ health. The PRIME Center provides expert professional, scientific, and biostatistical support through its five Cores: 1) Education, Dissemination & Implementation (Steve Martino, PhD; Director); 2) Medical Informatics (Cynthia Brandt, MD; Director); 3) Methodology and Biostatistics (Joseph Goulet, PhD; Director); 4) Qualitative (Kristin Mattocks, PhD; Director), and 5) Administration and Coordination (Alicia Heapy, PhD; Director). **As part of its mission statement, the PRIME Center of Innovation is committed to assisting junior investigators performing health services research within and outside the areas of pain, women's health, and LGBTQ+ health, and fostering collaborations within and across VA facilities.**

Overview of Intimate Partner Violence Center for Innovation and Research (IPV-CIR)

Located in, and supported by, the PRIME Center at VACHS, the goal of the [IPV-CIR](#) is to develop, disseminate, implement, and evaluate innovative, high-quality, veteran-centered, trauma-informed, and recovery-oriented practices for intimate partner violence (IPV) detection, prevention, and treatment.

Overview of Women's Health Services at VACHS:

VA Connecticut has had a Comprehensive Women's Health Center since 1997. This is a separate clinic, located in a private, newly renovated area on the 7th floor, where women Veterans receive team-based primary care from designated women's health primary care providers and a women's health patient aligned care team (PACT) staff, with co-located mental health and gynecology services. Fellows typically provide clinical care in this space, though arrangements can be made in other clinics throughout the hospital as time and space permit.

Yale School of Medicine

Relationship between VACHS and Yale University



Women's Health Fellows receive an appointment at the Yale University School of Medicine or the Yale University School of Nursing, as appropriate. This appointment allows Fellows to access Yale University academic resources, as well as participate in a variety of didactic and educational offerings offered through the university that include, but are not limited to classes offered by the National Clinical Scholars Program (NCSP; see [CSPCourses](#)). Fellows may also seek consultation from the Yale Center for Analytical Sciences (YCAS) when developing independent lines of inquiry. YCAS brings together expertise in biostatistics, epidemiology, health economics and health services research at Yale.

Commitment to Diversity

VA Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS) proudly serves Veterans from all backgrounds. Of relevance to the Women's Health Fellowship, VACHS serves a growing population of women Veterans. We have outreach coordinators for both women Veterans and LGBTQ+ Veterans. VACHS has been identified as a leader in LGBTQ+ Health Equality, a designation by the Human Rights Campaign, since 2014.

Our Fellowship abides by federal equal opportunity employment laws and policies which specify that "VA does not tolerate unlawful discrimination, including workplace harassment, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including gender identity, transgender status, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), age (40 or older), disability, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, or retaliation for opposing discriminatory practices or participating in the discrimination-complaint process. This applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruitment, hiring, promotions, transfers, reassignments, training, career development, benefits, and separation."

Research & Training Components: Along with a robust Women's Health research program, the VACHS PRIME Center maintains an active LGBTQ+ focused research program. Faculty and Fellows are encouraged to attend colloquia at VACHS (including the PRIME Seminar), Grand Rounds, and other discussions at Yale School of Medicine which focus on topics such as unconscious bias, understanding the health needs of sexual and gender minority individuals, navigating patients who voice racist views, and translating minority stress research into LGBTQ+-affirmative interventions.

The surrounding areas of West Haven and New Haven are home to a diverse population. The greater New Haven area represents a moderately sized city with many cultural opportunities including various restaurants, theaters, local social and advocacy groups, and museums. Our affiliate, Yale University, hosts several affinity groups supporting education, advocacy, community building, and more. These [Affinity Groups](#) are typically open to Fellows.

Available Positions for the 2023-2024 Training Year:

- MD/DO (1 position)
- Associated Health Professional (Nurse, Psychologist, Social Worker, etc.; 1 position)

Application Process:

If interested, please fill out the screening application here: [online screening application](#). Application review begins December 1st and continues on a rolling basis until the positions are filled. *To apply, please submit the following to the Directors of Training (see below for email addresses):*

- Letter of Interest
- Curriculum Vitae
- 3 Letters of Recommendation

Directors of Training:

Sally Haskell, MD: Sally.Haskell@va.gov

Cynthia Brandt, MD: Cynthia.Brandt@va.gov

Mary Driscoll, PhD: Mary.Driscoll3@va.gov

Application Selection:

We actively welcome applicants from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

All applications will be reviewed in full and a subset of candidates invited to interview (virtually or in-person, per applicant preference).

FACULTY:

*Former VACHS Women's Health Fellow

Women's Health Fellowship Leadership Team: West Haven, CT



Sally Haskell, MD, MS (she/her/hers) is the Director of the VACHS Advanced Fellowship in Women's Health and Professor at Yale School of Medicine. She is also the Deputy Chief Officer for Clinical Operations and National Director of Comprehensive Women's Health in the Office of Women's Health for the Veterans Health Administration, where she directs policy and operations for women Veterans' healthcare nationally. Dr. Haskell is the Co-PI of the Women Veterans Cohort Study. Her research interests are broadly related to women's health and healthcare, and include policy and implementation of women's healthcare, post-deployment health in women Veterans, musculoskeletal health and chronic pain, providing care to populations with complex mental health and medical comorbidities, and gender disparities in cardiovascular health. Dr. Haskell provides teaching and mentoring for medical residents, women's health fellows, Yale National Clinician Scholars Program Fellows, and VA Career Development award recipients.

Contact: Sally.Haskell@va.gov



Cynthia Brandt, MD, MPH (she/her/hers) is a Co-Director of the Women's Health Fellowship at VACHS. Much of her work has focused on building informatics infrastructure for clinical research, working closely with clinical research groups, the development and the application and use of open-source informatics tools for information retrieval and information extraction from the VA's electronic health record free-text data. Additionally, Dr. Brandt currently provides mentoring and training for both Yale national library of medicine informatics fellows and pre-doctoral students, and VA special informatics fellows. Research projects with fellows

have included broad informatics domains including clinical guidelines, clinical research databases, natural language processing, the design and application of informatics tools, personal health records, handheld computing, evaluation of informatics projects, and the design and use of electronic medical record data for quality, health services research and clinical decision support.

Contact: Cynthia.brandt@va.gov or Cynthia.Brandt@yale.edu



***Mary Driscoll, PhD (she/her/hers)** Co-Directs the Women's Health Fellowship at VACHS. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, a Clinical Research Psychologist and Core Investigator in the PRIME Center at VACHS, and a national pain consultant for VHA's Office of Women's Health. Dr. Driscoll maintains an active research portfolio rooted in understanding gender disparities in pain and its treatment, the development and tailoring of evidence based psychological interventions for pain that leverage technology and target social/emotional factors, the overlap between trauma and pain, and the provision of trauma-informed pain care. She directs a health psychology rotation in the women's clinic at VACHS and serves on the Chronic Pain Advisory Council for HealthyWomen.

Contact: Mary.Driscoll3@va.gov

Women's Health Fellowship Core Faculty: VACHS



Lori Bastian, MD, MPH (she/her/hers) is a Professor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine and Section Chief of General Internal Medicine at the VACHS. She oversees the academic development and clinical productivity of the hospitalists, primary care, and research faculty based at VA Connecticut. She is the Director of the PRIME Center at VACHS. She also co-Directs the Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Fellowship at VACHS. Dr. Bastian has extensive experience researching health behaviors among women Veterans. Her primary interests center on smoking cessation, chronic pain, and their intersection along with differences in clinical risk and outcomes among men and women Veterans in VA care. Over her 30-year career in the VA, she has mentored over 60 trainees, including pre-doctoral, post-doctoral and current faculty members, several of whom obtained VA Career Development Awards.

Contact: Lori.Bastian@va.gov



Matthew M. Burg, PhD (he/him/his) is Professor of Medicine in the Section of Cardiovascular Medicine and a licensed clinical psychologist. He directs the Cardiovascular Behavioral Medicine Research Program at VACHS and has conducted seminal research on the contribution of stress and emotional factors to incident cardiovascular disease and prognosis, the pathophysiology underlying this risk, and the development and testing of behavioral interventions to mitigate this risk. As a collaborator in the Women Veterans Cohort Study, he has examined the incident cardiovascular disease risk associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, including the effect of trauma and stress exposures on this risk and the behavioral factors associated with this risk specifically for women. During his 35-year career at VACHS, he has trained and mentored a great many trainees, many of whom obtained career development and subsequent investigator-initiated awards from VA and NIH.

Contact: Matthew.Burg@yale.edu



Mukta Dhond, MD (she/her/hers) is the Women’s Health Medical Director for VACHS and Assistant Professor at Yale School of Medicine. She is a general internist who provides clinical care in the Dr. Jacqueline Satchell Women’s Center at the West Haven VAMC. She is also a clinician educator who supervises trainees in this Model 3 clinic as well as in the inpatient hospital setting. She is a core faculty member of the Women and Gender Health Education Program for medical residents from Yale Traditional Internal Medicine, Primary Care Internal Medicine and Medicine/Pediatrics residency programs. Her medical interests include medical education, trauma informed care, reproductive health and transgender health.

Contact: Mukta.Dhond@va.gov



***Allison Gaffey, PhD** (she/her/hers) is an Instructor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine (Cardiovascular Medicine), a Research Psychologist and faculty member in the VACHS Departments of Psychology and Cardiology, and a licensed Clinical Psychologist with specialized training in cardiovascular behavioral medicine. Her clinical interests focus on hypertension and cardiovascular primary and secondary prevention and women’s cardiovascular health, including women who are Veterans. Dr. Gaffey’s scientific agenda focuses on sex-specific associations and sex differences in cardiovascular health and related pathophysiology, specifically: 1) to determine

how social vulnerability (i.e., trauma and adverse experiences related to social determinants of health) contributes to consequent risk, 2) to understand nontraditional modifiable risk factors (e.g., stress and sleep), and 3) to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, earlier behavioral or public health risk mitigation.

Contact: Allison.Gaffey@yale.edu



Robin Masheb (she/her/hers) is Professor of Psychiatry and a clinical psychologist at the Yale School of Medicine. She is also the founder and Director of the Veterans Initiative for Eating and Weight (The View), the first and only national program dedicated to addressing the broad spectrum of eating and weight problems in the Veteran population through research and expert consultation to national VA policy and operations offices. The recipient of multiple grants from the NIH, VA and DoD, Dr. Masheb is expert in the conduct of trials to develop and implement evidence-based treatments comprised of behavioral, dietary, and pharmacologic interventions. She has extensive expertise in efficacy, effectiveness, pragmatic, and comparative effectiveness trials, as well as psychometric, survey, administrative data, and qualitative research. Dr. Masheb is a fellow of both the American Psychological Association’s Division of Health Psychology and the Society of Behavioral Medicine, and serves on multiple internship, postdoctoral and advanced fellowship training committees for the VA and Yale School of Medicine.

Contact: Robin.Masheb@yale.edu



Kristin Mattocks, PhD, MPH is the Associate Dean for Veterans Affairs and Professor of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, as well as the Associate Chief of Staff for Research at VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System. Dr. Mattocks received her graduate degrees from Yale University in health policy and administration. Dr. Mattocks is a VA women’s health researcher, specifically focusing on pregnancy and maternity care for women Veterans. In October 2022, Dr. Mattocks launched the first study of

doula care for pregnant Veterans, with a focus on reducing maternal morbidity and mortality among

women Veterans of color. Dr. Mattocks is also the director of the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 1 Career Development Award (CDA) program, which awards 2-year training grants to junior clinical, rehabilitation, basic science and health services research investigators in New England
Contact: Kristin.Mattocks@va.gov



***Galina Portnoy, Ph.D. (she/her/hers)** is a research psychologist and core investigator with the PRIME Center at VACHS and Assistant Professor at the Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Portnoy directs the Intimate Partner Violence Center for Innovation and Research (IPV-CIR), a VA IPVAP Innovation Hub and specializes in the study of IPV detection, prevention, and treatment, with a focus on IPV use (i.e., perpetration) and bidirectional IPV. Her other primary research interests include the intersecting areas of trauma, resilience, women's health, and relationship health and safety. Dr. Portnoy is trained as a clinical and community psychologist and an implementation scientist. Her current work focuses on the development and evaluation of bidirectional IPV screening and treatment, and strategies for disseminating and implementing empirically supported IPV practices for Veterans in healthcare settings.
Contact: Galina.Portnoy@va.gov



Candice Presseau, Ph.D. (she/her/hers) is a counseling and research psychologist, with a program of research exploring the intersection of systemic and cultural factors as they relate to risk and resilience in Veteran populations. She has several current projects focused on the intersection of violence exposure and suicide risk among women Veterans. As Associate Director for the Intimate Partner Violence Center for Innovation and Research (IPV-CIR), she contributes to national evaluation, implementation, and dissemination related to IPV prevention and response within VHA. She recently submitted for pilot funding to determine feasibility and acceptability of her newly developed retreat-based suicide prevention program for violence-exposed women Veterans and is currently developing a training program in the approach for VHA clinicians that will be rolled out later this year.
Contact: Candice.Presseau@va.gov



Julie A. Womack, PhD, CNM, FNP-BC is an associate professor at the Yale School of Nursing and a Health Sciences Researcher at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, West Haven, CT. Her undergraduate degree is from Stanford University where she majored in Comparative Religions. She received a Master's Degree from Stanford in International Development Education. She has a subsequent Master's Degree in Nursing (midwifery) from Yale School of Nursing and a post-Master's from Vanderbilt University School of Nursing (family nurse practitioner). She received her PhD in Nursing from Yale University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in Informatics at VACHS. Dr. Womack's research focuses on HIV and aging with a focus on conditions that disproportionately affect women such as falls, frailty, and functional disability. She is particularly interested in the use of informatics tools to facilitate research on these and other patient-centered outcomes.
Contact: Julie.Womack@yale.edu

Women's Health Fellowship Adjunct Faculty: West Haven, CT

Kathleen Akgun, MD is an Associate professor of medicine at Yale School of Medicine with an adjunct appointment with the Yale School of Nursing. She serves as a staff physician at VACHS in the Medicine

Department, section of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep medicine. She is the Director of the medical intensive care unit (MICU). She is board-certified in pulmonary medicine, critical care and hospice and palliative medicine and she is a health services researcher with particular research interests in outcomes and health disparities in pulmonary medicine, critical care and palliative care. She has done extensive epidemiologic work determining MICU admission and outcomes for persons aging with HIV and the impact that living with alcohol use disorder and other substance use disorders have on health outcomes. Contact: Kathleen.Akgun@va.gov

Dr. William Becker, MD is a physician researcher at VACHS, an Associate Professor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine and a co-Principal Investigator of the VA HSR&D funded Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE). He is a health services researcher with expertise in pragmatic clinical trials and implementation science and is medical director of the Opioid Reassessment Clinic at VA Connecticut. His professional goal is to improve the management of chronic pain and opioid use disorder in primary care. Contact: William.Becker4@va.gov

Anne Black, PhD (she/her/hers) is an educational psychologist and quantitative methodologist with expertise in research design, psychometric measurement, assessment, and statistics. She is a VA- and NIH-funded health services researcher, core investigator with the PRIME Center at VACHS, and Assistant Professor at Yale School of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine. As a methodologist, she enjoys working with complex data sets, including VA's electronic health record data, to answer clinical questions to improve health and health care. Her current research focuses on approaches to chronic pain management including long-term opioid therapy, opioid-related risks and medications for opioid use disorder. Contact: Anne.Black@va.gov

***Joan Combellick, PhD., MPH, MSN, CNM, FACNM (she/her/hers)** is a certified nurse midwife. Her program of research focuses on building the evidence for best clinical practice in the areas of women's health, high quality maternity care, and healthcare delivery to vulnerable populations. She has worked in both international and domestic settings in midwifery care and education. Previous research focused on the impact of common interventions around the time of birth on the neonate's microbiome with the aim of evaluating implications for shaping clinical practice protocols during labor and birth. While completing her postdoctoral fellowship at VACHS in Women's Health, she expanded this focus to include care delivery to individuals with a history of trauma and related mental health conditions, as well as maternal outcomes in the setting of the Veteran experience. Current research aims to build on this background in biomarker research, care delivery to those who have experienced trauma, and the midwifery approach to care. She has experience with both qualitative and quantitative methods and has a track record bridging diverse clinical practice and research areas. Dr. Combellick Co-Directs the midwifery specialty and faculty at the Yale Midwifery Faculty Practice affiliated with Yale New Haven Hospital and she leads the Maternal Outcomes Review initiative at VACHS. Contact: Joan.Combellick@yale.edu

Suzanne Decker, PhD (she/her/hers) is a licensed clinical psychologist at VACHS, New England Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC), PRIME Center, and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine. Dr. Decker's interests span three related areas: adaptation and implementation of skills-based behavioral suicide prevention treatments, emotion dysregulation as a potential mechanism for suicide and other high-risk behaviors such as substance use, and suicidal ideation and its correlates. Dr. Decker developed the Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Group program at VA Connecticut, which has led to published research, a funded multi-site hybrid

effectiveness-implementation grant, and a national training initiative with VA's Women's Mental Health group at Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. Dr. Decker is the Director of the Advanced Fellowship in Mental Illness Research and Treatment at MIRECC and enjoys mentoring trainees.

Contact: Suzanne.Decker@va.gov

James Dziura, MPH, PhD (he/him/his) is a Professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at Yale Medical School. Dr. Dziura also serves as the Co-Director of the Yale Center for Analytical Sciences (YCAS) and the Director of the Yale Data Coordinating Center (YDCC) in the Yale School of Public Health. He has been active in training young investigators, both individually (as a mentor and statistical resource for junior faculty, post-doctoral fellows, residents and students) and in the classroom (where he has developed a graduate-level course and several workshops on biostatistics in clinical research). His primary research interests are in the coordination of multicenter clinical trials.

Contact: James.Dziura@yale.edu

Joseph L. Goulet, PhD (he/him/his) is the Director of the Methodology and Biostatistics core of the PRIME Center. In this capacity, Dr. Goulet brings extensive experience applying advanced statistical methods to clinical trials as well as administrative data. He has been involved in the design and conduct of clinical trials as well as large scale cohort studies of Veterans in VHA care using EHR data sources supplemented by prospective patient surveys on HIV, women Veteran's health, and musculoskeletal disorders. Dr. Goulet is PI of the *Understanding Suicide Risks Among LGBT Veterans in VA Care* (IIR 18-0535) study, which employs informatics tools for information retrieval from the VHA's electronic medical record free-text data. Research interests focus on the impact of mental health disorders on the course of care and outcomes for Veterans with comorbid medical conditions. Additional concentrated interests center on reducing Veteran suicide, as evidenced by work on evaluating the accuracy and completeness of VHA suicide risk screening and examining suicide risk among sexual and gender diverse Veterans.

Contact: Joseph.Goulet@va.gov

Alicia Heapy, PhD (she/her/hers) is the associate director of the PRIME Center at VACHS, and associate professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine. She is also Co-Principal Investigator of the VA HSR&D funded Pain/Opioid Consortium of Research (CORE). Dr. Heapy is a health services researcher with expertise in pragmatic and comparative effectiveness trials and technology-based interventions. Her professional goal is to improve patient access to and uptake of psychological interventions for chronic pain.

Contact: Alicia.Heapy@va.gov

Steve Martino, Ph.D., is Chief of the Psychology Service at the VACHS and Professor of Psychiatry within the Psychology Section at the Yale University School of Medicine. He has extensive experience in psychotherapy development, clinician training and treatment fidelity, and multi-site hybrid effectiveness-implementation trials research, including mixed methods formative evaluation. Broadly, he is an expert in motivational interviewing and adapting cognitive behavior therapy for technology-based platforms. His current research focuses on testing strategies for implementing addiction and pain treatment approaches in community treatment programs and medical settings and the acceptability and feasibility of equine-facilitated therapy.

Contact: Steve.Martino@va.gov