USE OF THE STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE CHECKLIST

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

In response to the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act (H.R. 4174), the Partnered Evidence-based Policymaking Resource Center developed a checklist to assess the strength of evidence for all future budget, legislative, and regulatory proposals. The checklist separates evidence into five domains: need, feasibility, effectiveness, cost, and comparison to alternatives.

Introduction

The Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act (H.R. 4174, Evidence Act) was signed into law with bipartisan support in 2019 to formalize the use of evidence in the policymaking and budget making processes. Evidence-based policymaking uses systematically collected information on the need for a policy change or the effectiveness of a program to inform policy decisions. The Evidence Act institutionalizes a standardized evidence-based policymaking framework and requires that all government agencies comply. Compliance with the law requires submission of formal deliverables, such as annual capacity assessments and evaluation plans, as well as quadrennial learning agendas.

To complement these formal deliverables, the Partnered Evidence-based Policy Resource Center (PEPReC), part of Veterans Health Administration (VHA), developed an evidence review protocol for the assessment of new budget, legislative, and regulatory proposals (Appendix A). While not explicitly required by law, this protocol for assessing evidence is an example of the Evidence Act in action and is intended to benefit the submitting program offices.

Development of this checklist was based upon existing scientific review and consideration of practical needs for policy and budget-related decision-making. It was then further refined through consultation with VHA leaders involved in policymaking and executive decisions.

Strength of Evidence Checklist

On a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high), the checklist scores evidence provided by program offices in support of their proposals five domains: need, feasibility, effectiveness, cost, and comparison to alternatives.

Need	Feasibility	Effectiveness	Cost	Comparison to Alternatives
Is there a stated **need** for a novel approach and/or additional resources?	Is there demonstrated **feasibility** of implementing the proposal in identified setting or timeframe, including how it aligns with larger VA priorities?	Is there proof of how **effective** the proposed policy or program will be and how success will be measured?	Is there a breakdown of internal and/or external budget **cost** impacts?	Have **alternative** policies or programs been considered and dismissed?

Is all evidence included the timeliest available and relevant?

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Evidence is broadly defined, but it must be valid, relevant, and reliable information from a reputable source. Reputable sources can include but are not limited to GAO reports, program evaluation reports, and academic literature. This broad definition recognizes and reflects the diversity of proposals and the variation in available evidence — not all proposals will be supported with the same type of evidence (i.e., evaluation data, academic literature).

The checklist is used for all proposals, including but not limited to, resubmissions and expiring authorities which are not exempt from the new evidence requirements.

Successful proposals demonstrate a firm connection between the question of interest and available evidence across all five domains. In the event a specific question cannot be answered due to the nature of the proposal (i.e., the only alternative solution is to maintain the status quo, or the proposal is cost neutral), a null or not applicable answer is acceptable, if the reason why has been acknowledged and explained accordingly.

VHA Use of the Checklist

Use of the checklist has become part of the VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and the VHA Office of Finance process to grade legislative and budget proposals, with the review process performed by the Quality Research Initiative (QUERI) and Office of Research and Development (ORD). This process has occurred since 2020 and may expand to include assessment of regulatory proposals in the future.

> **USE BY OTHER ENTITIES**
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> *Other entities have reached out to QUERI to better understand the evidence assessment process and how it might be most helpful, given unique needs. The checklist has been adapted for wider VA use, including Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration. The Office of Enterprise Integration has also adapted it, and other offices are considering its use.*

For each proposal, two reviewers are assigned, and both use the checklist to independently grade the strength of evidence. Reviewers then meet to reconcile and discuss scores, settling on a final score for each domain of evidence and an overall proposal score out of 100. Relevant, anonymized comments to explain the scoring are included. Included comments explain where additional evidence is needed.

Checklist Iterations

At the completion of each legislative and budget cycle, reviewers meet to debrief the process and determine what parts of the checklist can be clarified and how to provide better guidance. The goal of these iterations is not only to improve the checklist, but also to help make the evidence provided in future submissions stronger and better integrated into the narratives.

Next Steps

The checklist is continuously evolving and expanding. In the true spirit of the Evidence Act, use of the checklist each year can allow for program offices to improve the provided evidence for each proposal and strengthen it. With more offices and VA administrations expressing interest in using the checklist, VA is systematically increasing the use of evidence to inform policy and budget decisions.

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STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE REVIEW PROTOCOL *For VHA budget, legislative, and regulatory proposals*	
Please adequately address the following considerations in the proposal.	**Score (x/100)**
NEED	
Explain the clear policy need for a new approach or additional resources in this area *at this time*.	
Explain the clear operational need for *this specific* proposed approach or *these* additional resources.	
Ensure that the evidence included to demonstrate need is **clearly linked** to the question at hand.	
FEASIBILITY	
Explain the current context or logistical environment in which the proposal will be implemented (e.g. political environment, external markets, clinical and administrative priorities, VA strategic plan).	
Explain the *political and policy* feasibility of this proposal (mention any anticipated opposition).	
Explain the *operational* feasibility and implementation of this proposal (mention any anticipated barriers).	
Explain the proposed method for quantifying *implementation* success (with specific metrics).	
Ensure that the evidence included to demonstrate feasibility in the current context or logistical environment is **clearly linked** to the question at hand.	
EFFECTIVENESS	
Explain if elements of this proposal have already been implemented (inside or outside VA) and why or why not.	
Explain the direct and/or indirect impacts of this proposal on the Veteran population, including specific subpopulations.	
Include a clear statement of intended outcome for the proposed program or policy.	
Explain the proposed method for quantifying effectiveness and *outcome* success (with specific metrics).	
Ensure the evidence included to demonstrate whether the proposal will be effective in achieving the intended outcome is **clearly linked** to the question at hand.	
COST	
Clearly define and estimate internal (i.e., VHA) budget impacts.	
Clearly define and estimate external (e.g., CMS, private sector, DoD, VBA) budget impacts.	
Ensure that the evidence included to estimate and justify costs is **clearly linked** to the question at hand.	
COMPARISON TO ALTERNATIVES	
Explain the alternative solutions that were explored and why they were excluded based on evidence.	
Explain how the status quo is inadequate based on evidence.	
Ensure that the evidence included to compare the new policy/program to alternative solutions and the status quo is **clearly linked** to the question at hand.	
OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS	
Ensure that all evidence included with the proposal is the **timeliest available and relevant**.	
Score Scale (1-5) 5 = evidence is robust, relevant, sufficient, and supports proposal approval 3 = evidence is adequate, relevant, and may support proposal approval 1 = evidence is minimal, unrelated, and may not support proposal approval	
Reviewer:	**Date:**

For questions or clarification, please contact peprec@va.gov

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