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Nikki Davis was interviewed about her caregiver role by one of our professional partners.



I-HEAL investigators partnered with clinicians to present how they adapt interventions for those with cognitive disability.



Amanda Van Derwood shared tips for parenting with TBI in an impactful presentation titled, "The 3 C's of Parenting After Brain Injury."

## New with I-HEAL

### ***Call for Education Series Topics and Presenters***

The I-HEAL team has had 534 successful educational encounters in their second year. Incredible! Now, the I-HEAL Education Series is looking to continue such success.

The I-HEAL Education series is asking for suggested presenters and topics. Contact [Deveney.Ching@va.gov](mailto:Deveney.Ching@va.gov) with your ideas for the following:

- >Topics you'd like to learn more about
- >Topics you'd like teach about
- >People you'd like to learn more from



### ***Coming Soon: Project 3 Provider Recruitment***

As part of the process to assess the Project 3 playbook impact on rehabilitation team leaders, Project 3 will attend the upcoming policy and professional partners (PPP) meeting on June 10th. They will discuss the pilot and measures, and recruitment will begin soon.

**Please be on the lookout for a recruitment flyer to distribute to your professional network.**

## ***We Recognized March as Brain Injury Awareness Month***

The I-HEAL Instagram account recognized Brain Injury Awareness month by sharing experiences from people with brain injury and providers who research and treat them. This is one way that I-HEAL highlights our partner voices for impact. Check out the [I-HEAL Instagram](#) page to see the experiences shared throughout March.



## Highlighted Stories from I-HEAL

***Nikki Davis Was Interviewed about Her Caregiver Role by One of Our Professional Partners, the National Academy of Neuropsychology***



I-HEAL's lived experience partner Nikki Davis tends to be private about her life and experiences. However, 15 years into her journey as a caregiver for her husband, Ernie Davis, Nikki decided it was time to share some insight.

The story began when one of I-HEAL's Policy and Professional Partners heard Nikki share her experience at a professional conference (National Academy of Neuropsychology). Moved by Nikki's story, they connected her with the Brainwise publication to share her story to an even broader audience, increasing its impact.

In this interview article, Nikki discusses the past and present of her life with Ernie. Additionally, she refers to the challenging emotions shared in some of her social media posts and the reactions from other people. The interview provides a beautiful and expansive understanding of her experience as a long-term caregiver. Please take some time to read the thoughtful interview ([click here](#) or on image above).

This article is just one example of how groups within I-HEAL (in this case the PPP and LEP) work together to showcase the incredible people and reach of I-HEAL.

## ***I-HEAL Investigators Partnered with Clinicians to Present How They Adapt Interventions for Those with Cognitive Disability***



Project 2 principal investigators Jeanne Hoffman and Aaron Martin collaborated with individual engagement partner Luzimar Vega, who is a psychologist at James A. Haley. They presented "Improving access to Evidence Based Treatments for Persons with Cognitive Impairment" at the Midwinter Rehabilitation Psychology Conference in Charlotte, NC.

In their presentation, Project 2 discussed 1) the need for the Provider toolkit 2) the steps they took to compile a quality toolkit, with input from subject matter experts like Dr. Vega and 3) how they refined the toolkit according to feedback. Lastly, they asked for audience input on implementation and training. This presentation from Project 2 is one of many that shares the impactful work of I-HEAL.

Sharing the research process with colleagues in various fields is an important part of getting feedback to create the best possible products to implement when treating people with cognitive impairment.

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## Amanda Van Derwood shared Tips for Parenting with TBI in an Impactful Presentation Titled, "The 3 C's of Parenting After Brain Injury"



Amanda Van Derwood, I-HEAL lived experience partner, provided an educational presentation titled "The 3 C's of Parenting after Brain Injury" in Fall of 2025 in person. At the request of some who could not attend, Amanda presented again virtually in January 2026 to extend the reach of her guidance.

In her presentation, Amanda discussed the changes, challenges and coping skills as a parent with TBI, and she reminded the audience that because every brain injury is unique, parenting (or grandparenting) will look different for everyone. Amanda suggested patients embrace their new identity as a person with traumatic brain injury, accepting limitations so they can find independence and purpose.

Increasing quality of life through high-quality healthcare is one of I-HEAL's goals, so we are grateful that Amanda shared with our team and others her rehabilitation journey and its impact on her as a parent.

# I-Heal Team Members

## *Welcoming New Team Members*

We are excited to welcome new I-HEAL team members, Erin Garvey and Serrina Martinez. Read more about them below.

**Erin Garvey**



Erin is a product developer on I-HEAL and comes to us from Florida State University where she graduated with her B.A. in English and M.A. in Marketing Communications. In her spare time, she loves to go on long walks exploring the Tampa area or spend time reading a book! She is looking forward to collaborating with all the experts on I-HEAL and sharpening her design skills.

**Serrina Martinez**



Serrina Martinez is a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. Her research is about organizational and health communication, focusing on military organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs. She is currently working as a research health technician with I-Heal. Serrina has been serving in the Minnesota Army National Guard for over 22 years, bringing firsthand knowledge about military/Veteran experiences and communities.

## A note from the newsletter Author



Hello ya'll, I'm Sonia Arellano, the person behind the I-HEAL newsletter. I work with the I-HEAL team to bring this newsletter to you quarterly. In addition to my role on I-HEAL, I am a technical writer at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, and I help investigators with their grant applications and research publications.

Originally from Central Texas, I moved to Florida (almost ten years ago!) after completing my PhD in Writing at the University of Arizona. I am the proud daughter of Air Force Veterans (both parents served), and my husband is an Air Force Veteran and currently serving in the Florida National Guard.

On a personal note, I love to eat good food and to travel to new places. On the weekends, you'll find me spending time with my pets or sewing a new project. Please reach out with questions, feedback, or content for the newsletter: [Sonia.arellano@va.gov](mailto:Sonia.arellano@va.gov)

## Reminders

### *I-HEAL Engagement Meeting*

The next I-HEAL engagement meeting is set for Sept. 14th and 15th in Tampa, Florida, at The Rusty Pelican. Come ready to collaborate and give your feedback. Contact [Amanda.Tweed@va.gov](mailto:Amanda.Tweed@va.gov) with questions.

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## James A. Haley Research Day Events

Scan with your phone camera for more details:



[www.tampavaref.org/researchweek](http://www.tampavaref.org/researchweek)



Are you interested in the Veteran research happening at James A. Haley?

*Join Us* **May 1, 2026**

**9:00 - 11:00am** Keynote & Oral Presentations

**11:15am - 1:15pm** Poster Sessions

**1:15 - 1:45pm** Pizza Lunch

**1:45 - 3:30pm** Award Ceremony & Oral Presentation

Look for signs in Building 38 (SCI)

## *I-HEAL Abbreviations*

A quick guide of abbreviations used in I-HEAL can be found [here](#).

## *Follow I-HEAL on Social Media to See More Stories*



[https://www.instagram.com/iheal\\_brainhealth](https://www.instagram.com/iheal_brainhealth)



[https://x.com/iheal\\_brain](https://x.com/iheal_brain)



<https://www.facebook.com/iheal.brainhealth>

# I-HEAL Project Updates and Activities

*\*See below for a reminder on each project's overall goals*

## **Project 1: Cognitive Nudge**

- Completed focus groups with 29 lived experience partners.
- Completed the implementation survey with 319 providers.
- Revising the SOP for the nudge according to IEP feedback.
- Working on a publication about Electronic Medical Records.
- Will meet April 27-19th to write their implementation plan.

## **Project 2: Provider Toolkit** (EBT Adaptations for Cognitive Challenges)

- Presented at USF Research Day with a poster titled, "Toolkit Development to Support Adaptation of Behavioral Health Interventions for Individuals with TBI and Cognitive Impairment: An I-HEAL Focused Program Award Project"
- Exploring options for where to host the completed Toolkit.

## **Project 3: TeamBI Provider Playbook**

- Co-developing handouts for playbook "Family" chapter with LEP.
  - "Explaining TBI to children": Amanda and John Van Derwood
  - "Experienced Caregiver Message": Jill Coulter
- Drafting, revising, and finalizing playbook chapters according to partner feedback (behavior management experts in the workgroup, focus group findings from lived experience with TBI and caregivers).
- Started the process to assess playbook impact on rehabilitation team leaders.

## **Project 4: Virtual Health Policy Recommendations**

- Working on a manuscript tentatively titled "Data-driven policy recommendations for implementing virtual healthcare for persons with TBI" and submitting to *Health Affairs*.
- P4 MPI Jolie Haun will be presenting an update at the monthly LEP meeting in early April.

## Overall I-HEAL activities

- I-HEAL published its protocol in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research Research Protocols (JMIR)*. The publication is titled, "Using Implementation Science to Improve Health Care Access and Quality for People With Traumatic Brain Injury–Related Morbidity (I-HEAL): Protocol for a Translational Multiproject Program Award." See the publication linked [HERE](#).
- Dr. Risa Nakase-Richardson, one of I-HEAL's MPIs, presented at the University of Washington's TBI Symposium in Seattle. Her presentation highlighted I-HEAL's objectives, progress across all four projects, and key lessons learned along the way. Look out for more in the next I-HEAL Newsletter.
- Eight abstracts were submitted for the Military Health System Research Symposium 2026
  - Improving health care access and engagement for Veterans and Service Members after TBI (ihealbrain.org): A CDMRP implementation science grant update.
  - Provider perspectives on challenges to and strategies for healthcare delivery for patients with cognitive impairment following traumatic brain injury: Preliminary I-HEAL focus group results.
  - Challenges with delivering health care to patients with cognitive impairment after traumatic brain injury and provider recommendations for enhancing preparedness: Preliminary I-HEAL survey results.
  - Ethical imperative to adapt behavioral treatments for Service Members and Veterans with TBI: Stakeholder engagement findings.
  - Developing Evidence-Based Behavior Management Tools with caregivers of Veterans and Service Members with TBI to maximize adoption.
  - Policy recommendations for implementing virtual healthcare for Service Members and Veterans with TBI and Cognitive Disabilities.
  - Best Practices for Engaging Veteran and Service Members with Traumatic Brain Injury and their Families in Research.
  - Enhancing the reach and translation of TBI knowledge from researcher to clinician using non-traditional dissemination modalities.
- Three posters will be presented at VA Research Week May 1, 2026.
  - Engaging Caregivers to Enhance Behavior Management Training in VA TBI Rehabilitation.
  - Leveraging Qualitative Methods with TBI Patients and Their Caregivers to Drive Team-Based Inpatient Rehabilitation Strategies.
  - Interim Quantitative Survey Results from Providers Experience of Working with Patients with Cognitive Difficulties: An I-HEAL Cognitive Flag Project

# Project and Core Descriptions

## **Project 1: Cognitive Nudge**

A note within a patient's health record to tell healthcare team members that the patient experiences cognitive challenges and may need additional support from caregivers.

## **Project 2: Provider Toolkit**

A document for healthcare team members working with patients who experience cognitive challenges. The document is a collection of resources informed by existing research.

## **Project 3: Provider Playbook**

A training guide with strategies for rehabilitation healthcare team members working with patients who experience behavior changes due to TBI.

## **Project 4: Virtual Health Policy Recommendations**

Policy recommendations for using virtual health resources with patients with TBI. Recommendations are based on existing research and best practices.

## Implementation Science Core (ISC)

A team of people who support the creation of resources (handouts, presentations, and other communications) for projects and cores. These resources are created so that they can be easily understood and used.

## Operations Core

This group meets regularly to take care of the business side of research and supports the projects in their work. Operations responsibilities include the following: mentorship and education, communication and reporting, regulatory and budgeting, hiring and onboarding, meeting and events, study recruitment.

## Data and Communications Core (DCC)

This team shares the progress and dissemination of I-HEAL projects with the public and ensures that I-HEAL research is translated into accessible communications. This team also tracks the impact, influence, and awareness of those communications.

## Community Engagement Council (CEC)

The Community Engagement Council is made up of three groups of people:

1. People who can speak to their lived experience of TBI or caregiving for a loved one with TBI, also known as Lived Experience Partners (LEP).
2. Professionals from influential organizations who advise on all aspects of individual studies, also known as Individual Study Partners (IEP).
3. Professionals from influential organizations who advise on the dissemination plan and policy, also known as Policy and Professional Partners (PPP).

Do you have information to include in the upcoming newsletter?

Do you have questions about this newsletter?

Contact [Sonia.Arellano@va.gov](mailto:Sonia.Arellano@va.gov) to share your comments.