



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

New program offering genetic testing for veterans to inform decisions about your medications

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) for the “Pharmacogenomics Action for Cancer Survivorship” (PHASER) Program.

Sanford Health and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have teamed up to offer genetic testing to current VA health care system patients at no cost to the patient. We want to help your doctor find appropriate medications for a number of common health concerns.

What is genetic testing?

Genetic testing finds differences in genes that are related to your health. There are many different genetic tests. Genetic tests look for changes in your genetic makeup (DNA) that are linked to certain conditions, physical traits, disease risk or how you respond to medication.

What type of genetic test does this program offer?

The type of genetic testing we’re offering is a pharmacogenomic test. Pharmacogenomics, or PGx, determines how you respond to medication because of your genetics. Everyone responds to medicines differently, and sometimes these differences are due to gene changes. PGx testing uses your DNA to help your doctor determine prescription drugs that may work better for you. You can potentially reduce the trial-and-error process with certain medications, limit your side effects and get better drug responses by knowing the right drug at the right dose. This genetic test only provides information about your response to medicine. It does not provide information about the genetic risk of developing or recurring cancer, nor does it diagnose rare genetic diseases.

Who can get tested?

The genetic testing program launched in 2019 at the Durham VA Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. The program plans to expand to all VA sites over time. Our goal is to test 250,000 U.S. veterans across 125 locations by 2022. Patients are not required to have a previous cancer diagnosis or any other diagnosis to participate.

What will this cost?

This program comes at no cost for veterans or taxpayers due to a generous \$25 million gift from philanthropist Denny Sanford and a matching fundraising effort from Sanford Health. Although the test itself will be provided at no cost to VA patients, standard co-payments for regular doctor visits and medications prescribed by their doctors are not covered.

How does this test help my doctor choose the right medication for me?

The test results will go back to your doctor with information on how several commonly prescribed medications may work for you based on your genetics. This information, along with other factors specific to you, can help your doctor when prescribing your medications.

What if new drugs come out or new information is learned in the future for the genes tested?

There’s no need for additional testing if the new drug or information is related to the genes we looked at with this PGx test. We’ll simply update your VA medical record with the new information.

Will this testing help treat cancer?

The PGx test offered in this program mostly analyzes genes that are not related to medications used to treat cancer. If you have a cancer diagnosis, your doctor may order different tests to help decide which medicines will be best for your cancer.

Who do I contact to get testing ordered?

Please talk with your VA doctor(s) about this test. They can order the test for you.

When will this test be available in my area?

While we aim to offer testing at all VA sites, initially, this program will only be offered in Durham, North Carolina.

Who will have access to the test results? Will they be stored in my VA medical record?

Your VA doctor that orders the PGx test will receive your test results. The results will also be stored in your VA medical record and Sanford Health laboratory*. If you have other doctors outside the VA, you may want to share results with them.

How does this program differ from the Million Veteran Program (MVP)?

The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is a research study that aims to better understand how genes affect health. The PHASeR PGx test program is a clinical testing program. If you are a participant in the MVP study, you will not receive results from the genetic testing performed through MVP. As part of participating in the PHASeR PGx test program, you and your health care providers will receive your genetic test results. You can participate in both MVP and the PHASeR programs.

Is this a research study?

No, this is not a research study. This test is similar to other clinical tests, such as cholesterol, chemistry, and blood cell count panels, ordered by your doctor. The test results are intended to be used as part of your medical care.

Will this test disclose my risk for any diseases, including cancer?

The genes on this test are only related to drug response. So, they will not tell you anything about your risk for any diseases. Please talk with your doctor about other tests for disease risk, including cancer.

What is the testing process?

Have your VA doctor submit the order for this test. Get your blood drawn at your VA facility. Your VA facility will send your blood sample to a lab at Sanford Health in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for testing. The results will be returned to your VA doctor and saved in your electronic medical record for future reference. Once your doctor gets the results, Sanford Health will securely discard your sample.

How long does the test take?

Test results may take up to two weeks to be returned back to your VA doctor and entered into the medical record.

Are there any risks with testing?

The physical risks of testing are similar to other tests that require a blood sample. These risks include fainting, pain or bruising at the site of the puncture. It is possible that the treatment recommendations based on the test results may include medicines that are more expensive or not covered by your insurance. Be sure to discuss these issues with your doctor.

Will I need to speak to a pharmacist?

It may be helpful to discuss the test results with a pharmacist. Ask your VA doctor about consulting a PHASeR pharmacist.

Can my family members get tested?

Testing through the PHASeR program is only available to VA patients. However, other types of PGx testing are available outside the VA. If your family member is interested in testing, they should talk to their doctor.

* The patient's genetic information is stored in the electronic medical record at the VA and within the electronic medical record at Sanford Health laboratory, the latter of which generates the test results. The genetic information of a patient is considered PHI and, as such, said information, and any associated identifiers, are protected with the appropriate safeguards consistent with HIPAA and other regulations that apply to both the VA and Sanford.

Visit <https://imagenetics.sanfordhealth.org/veterans-genetic-testing/> for more information.