Anticipated Impacts on Veterans Health:
The Staffing Methodology initiative could have a significant impact on the quantity and quality of nursing care offered to Veterans, and as a result, is critically important to evaluate. The Directive expires at the end of July 2015, making it essential to evaluate the results of implementing its effects in order to assess how best to proceed in this important area.

Project Background:
Based on pilot work conducted by an inter-professional Staffing Steering Committee in 2010, the Office of Nursing Services (ONS) issued the Staffing Methodology Directive. The Directive identified a standardized and evidence-based method for determining appropriate direct care staffing for VA nursing personnel at all points of care. It was initiated as part of an evolving strategy to support VHA facilities' ability to measure and monitor their nurse staffing, evolving from several decades of effort to support evidence based approaches to staffing on the part of the Office of Nursing Services. The mandate initially focused on in-patient acute medical-surgical care settings, but is now being expanded to include other settings, including Community Living Centers (CLCs), emergency departments peri-operative settings, and spinal cord injury units. Implementation of the Directive was mandated for inpatient acute medical-surgical care by the end of September, 2011. In early 2013, the VA Office of Inspector General conducted an evaluation at several facilities, and in response to ONS, sent a survey to all facilities in May 2013 to assess system-wide compliance with the Directive.

Project Objectives:
Using developmental evaluation approaches, assess the extent to which the defined elements of the Staffing Methodology Directive have been implemented across all VHA facilities and, 2) Using a summative approach, assess the effect of the Staffing Methodology Directive on budget development in VHA facilities using available nurse staffing and patient outcome data across all VHA facilities.

Study Design:
A developmental evaluation approach that includes summative evaluation methods to link the degree of implementation and the association between nurse staffing and skill mix and relevant patient outcomes before and after the Directive was disseminated and implemented. In our developmental approach, we will use interview (qualitative) and survey (quantitative) methods to assess activities under this initiative across VHA, and quantitative summative approaches to analyze staffing and patient outcomes data.

Potential Impacts:
Because the Staffing Methodology Directive is scheduled to expire in 2015, a timely evaluation of its outcomes and impacts is necessary to move forward with any decisions pertaining to its implementation. The findings of this investigation could have a significant impact on the initiative’s renewal and may suggest that certain changes be made concerning program implementation.