



Alex Rich, PhD, MPH

Data Director, Common Defense



Dr. Alex Rich is the Data Director at Common Defense, a veteran-led progressive grassroots organization dedicated to engaging, training, and mobilizing veterans to transform our society through leadership and advocacy. His work focuses on collecting, cleaning, and linking public datasets to develop interactive digital tools like [VHAdata.org](https://vha.data.org) that provide insights to help improve health policy.

Alex is an Air Force veteran who flew special operations missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere as a U-28 and KC-135 special operations air refueling pilot for a decade. He served as a Wing Flight Safety Officer and crash investigator, leading teams in root cause analysis after a tragedy and developing systemic solutions to prevent future accidents. He carried that training and perspective forward into public health research. Alex is a proud Virginia Tech Aerospace Engineering alum who went on to earn a Masters in Public Health from Yale and a PhD in Health Informatics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For his doctoral thesis, he developed software to find undisclosed conflicts of interest behind influential medical journal articles, many of them linked to the opioid crisis. His work helped the State of West Virginia win a \$161 million settlement from an opioid manufacturer in 2022.

Alex was recruited to work at the US Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) during the global pandemic. He led the team that did all of the analytics behind the logistics and equitable distribution of over 750 million Covid-19 test kits to American households. Since joining Common Defense, he has focused on the use of public data to understand VHA staffing. Beyond the nerdy math that he loves, Alex believes that we as a species did not evolve to read symbols on a spreadsheet—we evolved to see the tiger in the trees coming to kill us. Clean, intuitive data visualization is among the most powerful tools we have in aligning health policy with the lived realities of those we seek to serve.