

Veterans' Mental Health and Substance Use in South Carolina

Introduction to Mental Health and the Veteran Population

In 2016, the number of adults in the U.S. with any type of mental illness was 44.7 million, or 18.3% of the total population¹. There are about 20 million veterans living in the U.S and approximately 400,000 living in South Carolina (SC), representing 10% of the adult population of the state². In SC, veterans are primarily Non-Hispanic white (72%); male (89%); and age 65 or older (41%)³.

The data for this report come from the SC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (see data details on back), which does not collect information on post-traumatic stress disorder or the role or specific conflict each veteran was involved in during their service. Therefore, this document serves as a general snapshot of mental health and substance use among veterans in SC.

Nationally, veterans with depression have higher odds of being hospitalized than veterans without depression⁴. Compared to non-veterans, **veterans in SC had 26% higher odds of having depression.**

Primary Prevention

Social networks, social support, and economic stability are important for the psychological well-being of adults⁵. A larger proportion of veterans in SC were married (65%) and a lower proportion of them were unemployed (4.2%) compared to non-veterans.

Additionally, being physically active can be beneficial to one's mental health⁶. Although the proportion of those participating in leisure time physical activity in the past 30 days did not differ between veterans and non-veterans, SC is exceeding the Healthy People 2020 (HP2020) goal⁷!

SC VETERANS AND NON-VETERANS	HP2020
73%	67%

Keep up the good work!

Veterans reported a lower number of average days in the last month (3.7) where their mental health was not good, compared to non-veterans (4.4).



Screening for Disease

Visiting a doctor regularly and obtaining mental health treatment has been shown to be beneficial and lead to better health outcomes for everyone⁸.

Keep up the good work!

Regardless of their differences in sex and age, compared to non-veterans, veterans have better odds of:

Having seen a doctor for a checkup in the past year	72% higher
Not delaying medical care due to cost	71% higher

Disability

Mental health disorders are the largest contributors to disability globally⁹. The prevalence of having a disability is higher among veterans (28%) than among non-veterans (25%). Regardless of differences in sex and age, compared to disabled non-veterans, disabled veterans had 50% higher odds of having depression.

As depression can be debilitating¹⁰, and a larger proportion of veterans are disabled, veterans reported a larger average number of days where their poor physical or mental health kept them from their regular activities:

Veterans	6.5 days in the last month
Non-veterans	5.3 days in the last month

Substance Use

Substance use disorders, like alcohol use disorder, can complicate and even increase the risk of depression^{11,12}. Regardless of their differences in sex and age, compared to non-veterans, veterans had 74% higher odds of ever having a problem with alcohol or drugs at some point in their lives[†].

There is always room for improvement!

There were no differences between veterans and non-veterans regarding the proportion of those who reported:

Binge drinking (more than 4 drinks for women or 5 drinks for men in one occasion)	15%
Heavy drinking (more than 7 drinks for women or 14 drinks for men in one week)	7%
Currently have problems with alcohol or drugs*	2%
Any marijuana use in the last month*	5%

Keep up the good work!

Regardless of their differences in sex and age, compared to non-veterans, veterans have better odds of:

Not being current smokers	20% higher
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Information about Services

US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA): va.gov

My HealtheVet: <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthvet/home>

Dorn VA Medical Center (Columbia): <https://www.columbiasc.va.gov/>

Johnson VA Medical Center (Charleston): <https://www.charleston.va.gov/>

Social Media

Johnson VA Medical Center (Charleston):
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VAMCCCharleston/>
Twitter: @CharlestonVAMC

Columbia VA Health Care System (Columbia VAHCS):
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VAColumbiaSC>
Twitter: @VAMCColumbiaSC

VA:
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs/>
Twitter: @VeteransHealth

Transportation Resources

Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging:
<https://www.getcaresc.com/guide/transportation>
1-800-868-9095

Hands on Health South Carolina:
http://www.handsonhealth-sc.org/golocal/golocalmap.php?mplus_topic_id=L134
1-843-792-3303

Data Details

Data on adult behaviors and health conditions are collected in SC from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). The data presented here are from 2015-2017. Indicators marked with an asterisk (*) are from 2017 only. Veteran status was determined by this question: "Have you ever served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces, either in the regular military or in a National Guard or military reserve unit?" All differences noted above are statistically significant evaluated at the 0.05 level. The SC BRFSS is administered by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

‡Disability is defined as reporting: being blind or having serious difficulty seeing; having serious difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions; having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs; having difficulty dressing or bathing; or having difficulty doing errands alone due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition.

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Information about Health Topics

Veterans Health Library: <http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/>

Whole Health Library: <http://projects.hsl.wisc.edu/SERVICE/veteran-materials/index.html>

Tobacco and Health: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/>

Telephone Numbers

Veterans Health Administration: 1-800-293-8262 (toll free) or 803-776-4000 (local)

Telephone Advice Program (TAP Line): 803-647-5829 (local)

Veterans Benefit Administration: 1-800-827-1000

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 [Press 1]



References

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