

# Substance Use and Other Mental Health Disorders Among Veterans

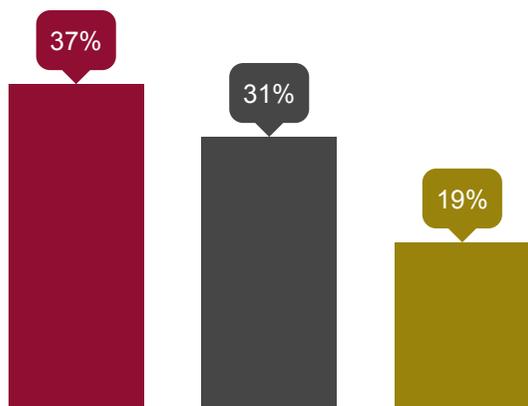


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Publication Date: November 6, 2018

## History of High Risk Alcohol Use\* in Wisconsin Veterans, SHOW, 2008-2013

■ Combat Veterans ■ Non-Combat Veterans ■ Non-Veterans



Numbers reflect the percentage of people who answered yes to the question, "Was there a time or times in your life when you drank five or more drinks of any kind of alcoholic beverage almost every day?"

\*SAMHSA defines binge drinking as 5+ alcoholic drinks for men/4+ alcoholic drinks for women on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past month and heavy alcohol use as binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past month

## Risk Factors

### Both mental health and substance use disorders:

- ✦ Difficulties readjusting to civilian life
- ✦ Higher rates of discrimination for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) veterans
- ✦ Lack of access to quality healthcare
- ✦ Psychological distress (negative feelings or emotions that impact level of functioning)
- ✦ Stigma around seeking help
- ✦ Trauma

### Substance use:

- ✦ Chronic pain
- ✦ Mental health problems such as:
  - anxiety & depression
  - post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

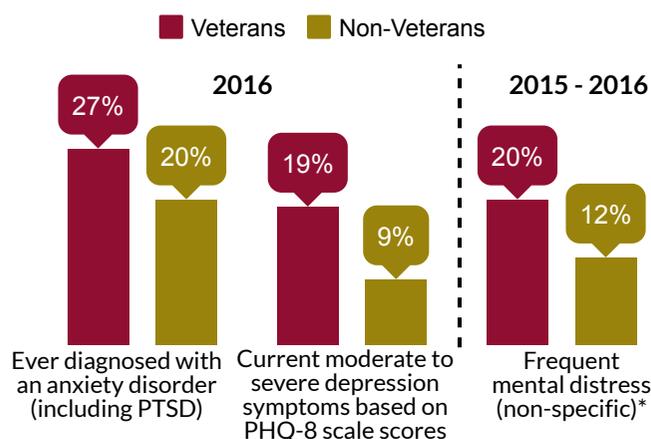
## The Way Forward

The co-occurrence of substance use and other mental health disorders is common among veterans and if left untreated can lead to higher rates of adverse health outcomes. **Protective factors** for substance use and mental health include: academic success, social support and connectedness, self-esteem, and spirituality/religiosity. Finding effective help as soon as possible is the best way to address co-occurring disorders. This can include equipping health and social services professionals to screen and identify co-occurring disorders in veterans. Increasing the use of evidence-based practices in prevention for veterans is another way to prevent and reduce the prevalence of co-occurring disorders. Furthermore, expanding health and social programs that target veterans, specifically veterans with minority statuses (race, sexual orientation, and gender identity), helps to address some of the risk factors. For additional resources and support, visit [www.wicvso.org](http://www.wicvso.org) to connect with your local WI County Veteran Service Officer. With proper support and interventions, healthy living is possible and attainable.

## Fast Facts

- 80% of homeless veterans suffer from mental health and/or substance use disorders (SUD) (VA, 2017).
- 30% of Vietnam veterans will experience PTSD at some point during their lifetime (VA, 2018).
- 28% of Veterans Health Administration (VA) patients had a co-occurring mental health and SUD in 2016 (SAMHSA, 2016).
- 25% of female veterans have experienced military sexual trauma (MST), which can often lead to SUD, PTSD, depression, and other mood disorders (VA, 2018).
- 2.5x U.S. female veterans were over twice as likely to die by suicide as compared to female non-veterans in 2014 (VA, 2017).

## Mental Health in Wisconsin Veterans ages 21-54, BRFSS, 2015-2016



\*Frequent mental distress is 14+ days in the past 30 days when mental health was not good

### Sources:

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