

Over 2,200 veterans died in 2008 due to lack of health insurance

November 10 2009

Age	Number of Uninsured Veterans, 2008	Percent of Uninsured who are Veterans	Deaths/100,000 Population	Excess Deaths Among All Uninsured Americans	Excess Deaths Among Uninsured Veterans, 2008
18 to 24*	54,022	0.65%	81.4	2,388	16
25 to 34	224,351	2.06%	104.4	3,642	79
35 to 44	300,859	3.68%	192.3	5,885	209
45 to 54	426,348	5.90%	432.0	10,201	602
55 to 64	456,034	10.32%	966.9	13,175	1,360
Total (Under 65)	1,461,615	3.70%		44,798	2,266
Total (All Ages)	1,340,795	3.84%			

The table showing the excess deaths of veterans due to lack of insurance

A research team at Harvard Medical School estimates 2,266 U.S. military veterans under the age of 65 died last year because they lacked health insurance and thus had reduced access to care. That figure is more than 14 times the number of deaths (155) suffered by U.S. troops in Afghanistan in 2008, and more than twice as many as have died (911 as of Oct. 31) since the war began in 2001.

The researchers, who released their analysis today, pointedly say the health reform legislation pending in the House and Senate will not significantly affect this grim picture.

The Harvard group analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2009 Current Population Survey, which surveyed Americans about their

insurance coverage and veteran status, and found that 1,461,615 [veterans](#) between the ages of 18 and 64 were uninsured in 2008. Veterans were only classified as uninsured if they neither had [health insurance](#) nor received ongoing care at Veterans Health Administration (VA) hospitals or clinics.

Using their recently published [findings](#) in the [American Journal of Public Health](#) that show being uninsured raises an individual's odds of dying by 40 percent (causing 44,798 deaths in the United States annually among those aged 17 to 64), they arrived at their estimate of 2,266 preventable deaths of non-elderly veterans in 2008. (See table.)

"Like other uninsured Americans, most uninsured vets are working people - too poor to afford private coverage but not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid or means-tested VA care," said Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School who [testified before Congress](#) about uninsured veterans in 2007 and carried out the analysis released today. "As a result, veterans go without the care they need every day in the U.S., and thousands die each year. It's a disgrace."

Dr. David Himmelstein, co-author of the analysis and associate professor of medicine at Harvard, commented, "On this Veterans Day we should not only honor the nearly 500 soldiers who have died this year in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also the more than 2,200 veterans who were killed by our broken health insurance system. That's six preventable deaths a day."

He continued: "These unnecessary deaths will continue under the legislation now before the House and Senate. Those bills would do virtually nothing for the uninsured until 2013, and leave at least 17 million uninsured over the long run. We need a solution that works for all veterans - and for all Americans - single-payer national health

insurance."

While many Americans believe that all veterans can get care from the VA, even combat veterans may not be able to obtain VA care, Woolhandler said. As a rule, VA facilities provide care for any veteran who is disabled by a condition connected to his or her military service and care for specific medical conditions acquired during military service.

Woolhandler said veterans who pass a means test are eligible for care in VA facilities, but have lower priority status (Priority 5 or 7, depending upon income level). Veterans with higher incomes are classified in the lowest priority group and are not eligible for VA enrollment.

Source: Physicians for a National Health Program

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