

Non-VA healthcare providers are uncertain how to care for veterans

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A study published in *Family Practice* indicates that healthcare providers outside of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Department are uncertain how to address veterans' needs. The study says that this is due to limited knowledge of resources and coordination problems.

Between 2011 and 2015 there were 20 million veterans living in the United States, comprising approximately 6% of the total population. Non-VA [healthcare providers](#) in the US have been called to screen [patients](#) for veteran status in order to better identify [health](#) conditions related to military [service](#). Despite this, many service members are still not asked about veteran status. Even once a patient is identified as a current or former service member, providers admit they are uncertain about how to manage specific treatments.

Researchers completed interviews with non-VA primary care providers as part of a larger quantitative survey study of their attitudes around veteran care. Providers were asked about their approach to addressing veteran status in their practice and their thoughts on how to address the needs of this population. Researchers analysed and categorized data retrieved from the transcripts to identify major themes.

All participants expressed a sense that knowing about military participation was important for assessing someone's health; asking a few additional questions about military service may improve treatment recommendations and allow for referrals for specific mental health services. However, responses generally indicated limited insight into the

possible health impacts of military experience beyond psychological concerns.

Overall, the interviews revealed that providers had inconsistent knowledge about the military population, admitting that they never learned about veterans or the military during their medical training, and so had limited exposure. Providers discussed that a lack of information, lack of available services (particularly in rural areas), and uncertainty about veterans' insurance coverage reduce their ability to care for [veteran](#) patients.

"Given the significant numbers of veterans who use non-VA sources of care and the potentially broad-ranging impacts of [military service](#) on health, supporting providers in their ability to recognize and address the needs of these patients—and to do so in a culturally competent manner—is critically important to improving these patients' overall health and well-being," said Bonnie Vest, research assistant professor in the department of family medicine at the University at Buffalo and the principal investigator for the project.

More information: *Family Practice* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/fampra/cmz078](#)

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