

One in every three veterans lives in an area with psychiatrist shortages

January 5 2023, by Lori Solomon



More than one-third of TRICARE military beneficiaries live in

communities with inadequate access to psychiatrists, according to a study published online Jan. 3 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Marigee Bacolod, Ph.D., from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and colleagues assessed geographic variation in the availability of military and civilian psychiatrists within a 30-minute driving time of TRICARE beneficiaries' communities. The analysis included 39,487 unique communities with at least one TRICARE beneficiary between Jan. 1, 2016, and Sept. 30, 2020.

The researchers found that 35 percent of TRICARE beneficiaries lived in communities with a shortage of both military and civilian psychiatrists, and 6 percent lived in communities with no access to military or civilian psychiatrists. Compared with average income communities without high income inequality, [low-income communities](#) with high income inequality were 1.64 times more likely to have inadequate access to psychiatrists and 2.59 times more likely to have no access to psychiatrists. Additionally, low-income communities without high income inequality were 1.37 times more likely to have inadequate access to psychiatrists and 1.93 times more likely to have no access to psychiatrists. Compared with urban communities, [rural communities](#) were 6.65 times more likely to have inadequate access to psychiatrists.

"The study suggests that rural and economically disadvantaged [communities](#) need targeted [strategies](#) as the U.S. Department of Defense considers realignment of military psychiatric capacity, because they cannot rely on civilian [psychiatrists](#) to fulfill the need gap for these shortage areas," the authors write.

More information: Marigee Bacolod et al, Spatial Analysis of Access to Psychiatrists for US Military Personnel and Their Families, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.49314](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.49314)

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Citation: One in every three veterans lives in an area with psychiatrist shortages (2023, January 5) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-01-veterans-area-psychiatrist-shortages.html>

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