

IAVA 2017 ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY

A LOOK INTO THE LIVES OF POST-9/11 VETERANS



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA



Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (www.IAVA.org) is the leading post-9/11 veteran empowerment organization (VEO) with the most diverse and rapidly growing membership in America. As a non-profit founded in 2004, IAVA's mission is to connect, unite and empower post-9/11 veterans. Celebrating its 13th year anniversary, IAVA has connected more than 1.2 million veterans with resources and community, and provided more than 8,100 veterans with personalized support from IAVA's Master's level social workers.

IAVA would like to thank the Psychology Department at George Mason University on their partnership, supporting survey development, distribution and analysis.

IAVA's Member Survey would also not be possible without the funding support provided by the Barbara Streisand Foundation.



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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, IAVA killed \$4 billion in cuts to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a landmark bill that IAVA fought to pass in 2008. IAVA's member survey was the driver for what became a national call to action and a fight for this critical education benefit. This fight was personal; the road was long—longer than it should've been—but together we got it done.

But the fight is far from over. And the stakes have never been higher.

With each year, veterans worry about the nation's attention and support turning away from this community. Thus with each passing year it becomes more crucial that this nation understands and shares in both the struggles and successes of this newest generation of veterans.

IAVA's annual member survey is one of the largest non-governmental surveys of Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans and is the most comprehensive, asking about employment, education, benefits, health and other emerging issues. Through this survey, the collective voice of IAVA members have influenced the current She Who Borne the Battle Campaign, the 2016 Campaign to Defend the GI Bill, the 2014 Campaign to Combat Suicide, the 2013 Campaign to End the VA Backlog, the Vow to Hire Heroes Act and so much more!

This year's survey highlights some of the challenges that the fastest growing population of service members and veterans -- women veterans -- face. This survey drove our top policy priority for 2017, to improve recognition and services for women veterans. It also shows that mental health challenges and access to care continue to impact veterans in all facets of their lives. And it highlights a continued need for a focus on finances during the transition period.

Yet it also shows that vets are rising. Twenty-four percent of our members are planning to start their own business and three percent already have. Eighty-eight percent voted in the 2016 Presidential Election, and 41 percent are considering a run for public office themselves. The information from this survey is a major driver for all that IAVA does. It should be a road map for the country too. The post-9/11 generation of veterans has had the nation's back for over a decade; it's time for the nation to have theirs.

Best,

Paul Rieckhoff
Founder and CEO
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

AUTHOR

JACQUELINE MAFFUCCI, PH.D.

Jacqueline Maffucci, Ph.D. is the Research Director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. She holds a Bachelor of Science from Cornell University and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Neuroscience from The University of Texas at Austin. Prior to her position at IAVA, Dr. Maffucci spent three years as a consultant to the Pentagon focusing on behavioral health policy for the Army. This included two years spent on the Army Suicide Prevention Task Force. Among other responsibilities, she acted as the liaison to the Department of Defense research community working to translate research into policy, work she continues in her current role.



Dr. Maffucci currently serves on multiple advisory and steering committees, including the National Center for PTSD Education Advisory Board, the Department of Veterans Affairs Women's Health CREATE Veterans Council and the National Academic Affiliations Council. As IAVA's Research Director, Dr. Maffucci has published on a variety of issues critical to the veteran community, including the VA disability compensation backlog, mental health, suicide prevention and women veterans. She has contributed to CNN, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Yahoo News* and the *Baltimore Sun* as well as other television, print and radio outlets.



KEY FINDINGS

Overview

Mental health and suicide prevention, VA reform and employment are top issues for respondents.

Veteran issues are identified as a top priority when considering candidates, followed by the economy and health care.

IAVA member survey respondents are a diverse population politically, with Republican and Independent/No Affiliation represented equally and strongly.

Generally, respondents do not feel that any branch of government is performing well when it comes to serving veterans, yet 53% feel that President Trump will act in the interest of veterans.

Women Veterans

Respondents have diverse opinions on changing the VA motto, with 43% supporting, 39% neutral and 18% opposing. More women (60%) are in support of change, whereas more men (40%) are neutral. More importantly, in rating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), women veterans overall feel VA is not doing a good job of supporting them. Less than 50% rate VA health care as good or very good and 55% rate VA benefits as such. Women veteran respondents generally do not have concern over the safety of facilities or the number of female practitioners; these are rated fairly high. They are more concerned about the quality of care and the culture at VA. Only 44% feel VA employees treat women veterans with respect. This is on par with their rating for male peers. Only 27% feel civilians treat women veterans with respect.

VA Reform

The majority of respondents do not support full privatization of VA, with only 26% expressing support. Regarding the VA Choice Program, while only 20% have used it (with mixed reviews), over 80% are concerned about Choice Program funding expiring this year and over 90% support some sort of extension. Respondents also identify accountability in VA hiring and firing as the top priority for VA reform, followed by consolidation of community care and an upgrade to information technology (IT) systems.

Over 80% of respondents are enrolled in VA health care and the vast majority have used it in the last year. Reviews are mixed regarding access to and quality of care at VA. Respondents rate non-VA care higher in quality and timeliness as compared to VA care, and VA care higher in understanding the needs of the veteran patient.



Post-9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill continues to be a heavily utilized benefit, with 92% of respondents eligible to use it. Many have used it or are planning to; 55% have used it themselves, 11% transferred it to their dependent, 24% intend to use it. For those who have used it, satisfaction ratings continue to be high.

The vast majority of respondents agree that the Post-9/11 GI Bill is important for recruitment (76%) and reintegration (88%). A majority (56%) also feel that it's important for retention. Survey respondents were largely not supportive of cuts to the benefit to use as a pay-for for other programs. Nearly half oppose the introduction of a user fee.

Mental Health/Suicide Prevention

Issues with suicide and mental health continue to permeate the lives of our veterans. Just over 75% of respondents believe troops and veterans are not getting the care they need for mental health injuries. Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicate that they have had thoughts of taking their own life since joining the military. Most startling is a notable increase in the percent that know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted or died by suicide. Sixty-five percent of respondents personally know a post-9/11 veteran who attempted suicide (54% in 2015) while 58% of respondents personally know a veteran who died by suicide (45% in 2015).

Transitions

Ninety percent of respondents revealed that they had some level of challenge following their transition out of the military, including 37% being unprepared to manage finances, 23% not having a permanent place to live and 66% not having a job secured as they transitioned out.

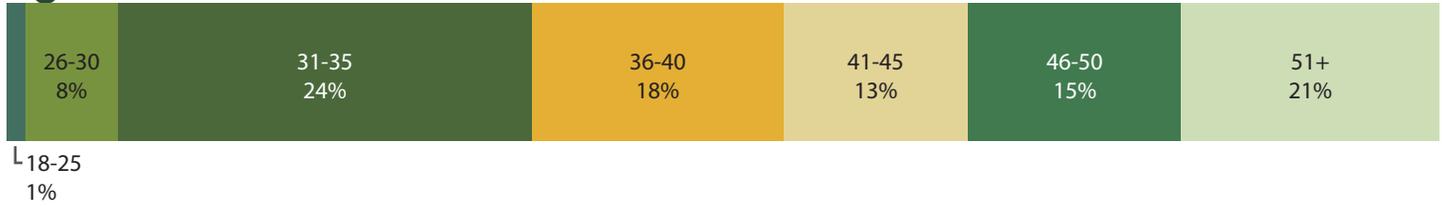
Employment

Six percent of survey respondents report being currently unemployed, the lowest number in years for our membership. Of those who are unemployed, 79% have been without work for 27 weeks or more. Among those who have jobs, 65% are satisfied with their job and 37% reported feeling underemployed. Top employment considerations included the salary/benefits package, the meaningfulness of the job and the ability to translate military skills.

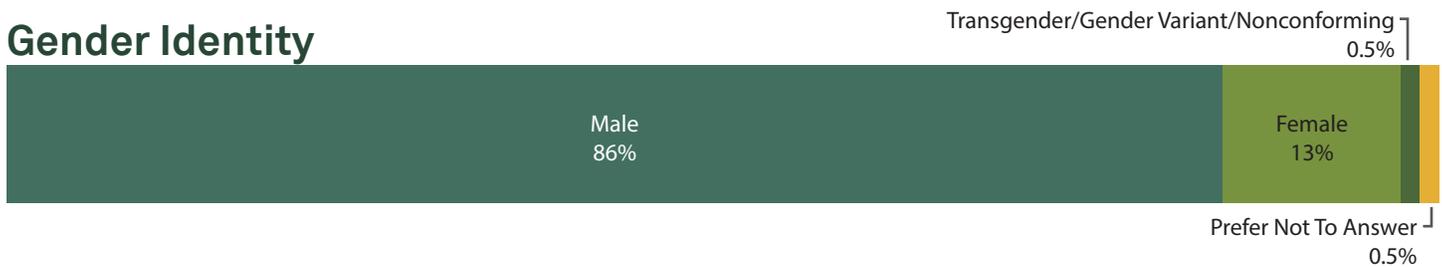
2017 MEMBER SURVEY

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age



Gender Identity



Ethnicity



Marital Status



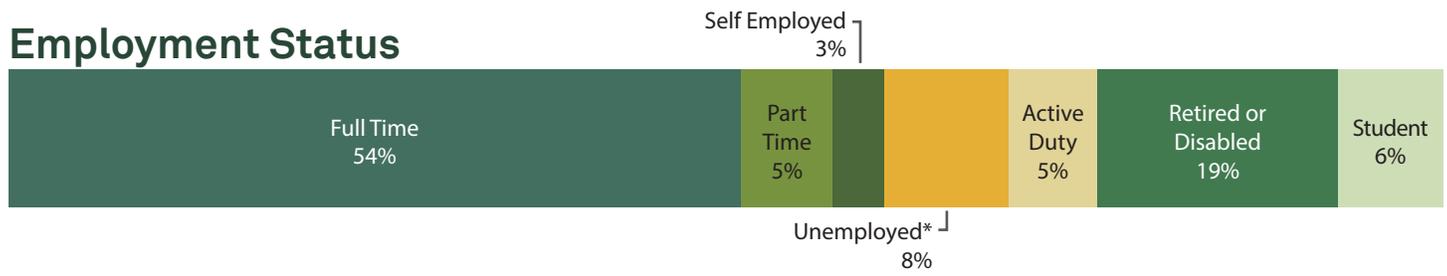
Household Income



2017 MEMBER SURVEY



Employment Status



Education



Community



* 6.4% Unemployed and looking for work, 1.2% Unemployed and not looking for work

SERVICE DEMOGRAPHICS

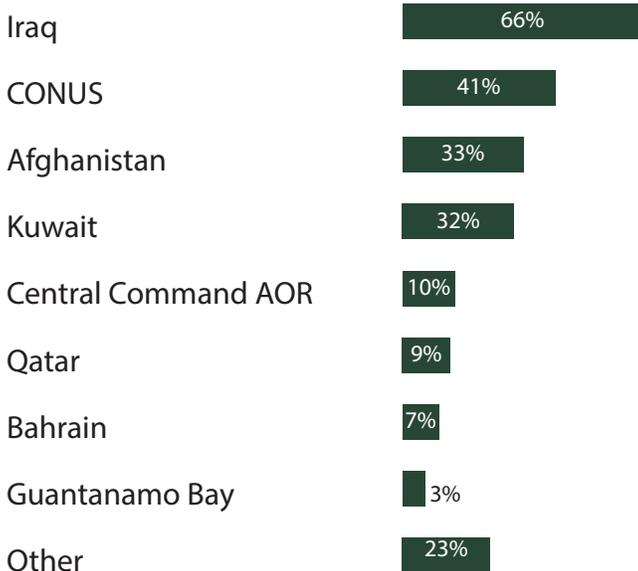
Branch of Service



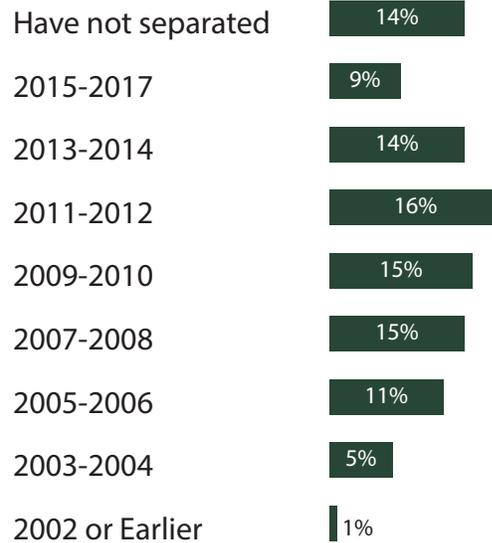
Officer or Enlisted



Where did you serve (select all that apply)?



What year did you separate from the military?



Number of Deployments

	OIF*	OEF**	OND†	ORS††
0	18%	39%	90%	98%
1	55%	44%	9%	2%
2	21%	12%	0.5%	0%
3+	6%	5%	0.5%	0%

*Operation Iraqi Freedom

**Operation Enduring Freedom

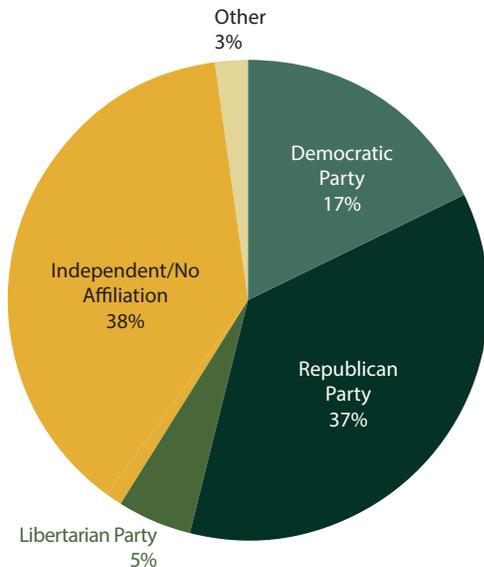
†Operation New Dawn

††Operation Resolute Support

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Veterans are generally more civically engaged than civilians, volunteering in their local community and engaging in politics and elections. This section asks IAVA members about their participation in politics, the issues that matter to them and their propensity to engage in the electoral process.

Political Ideology

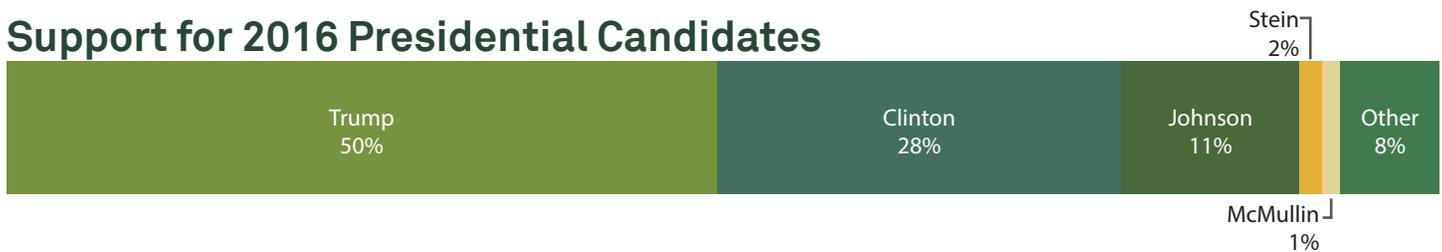


41% Have considered running for public office

96% Are registered to vote

88% Voted in 2016 Presidential election

Support for 2016 Presidential Candidates



Top 5 Issues Influencing Support for Political Candidates

1. VETERANS ISSUES

2. ECONOMY

3. HEALTH CARE

4. HOMELAND SECURITY/TERRORISM

5. MILITARY/DEFENSE ISSUES



THE ISSUES

There are a number of issues facing our nation today. From flag burning to firearms to legalization of medical marijuana, the veteran community must be a part of these conversations.

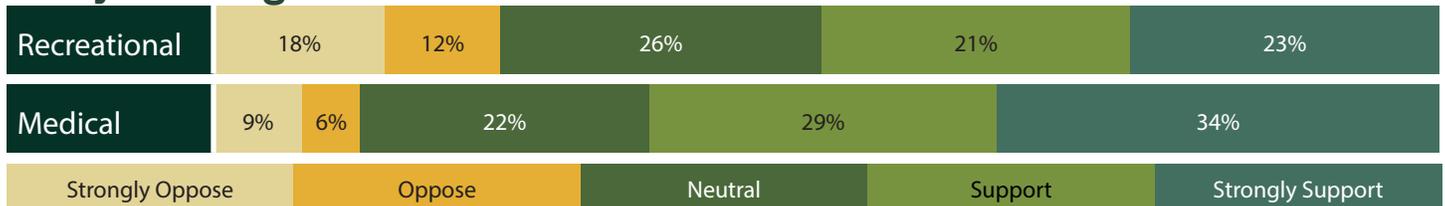
Top 3 Issues Impacting Post-9/11 Veterans

1. MENTAL HEALTH/SUICIDE PREVENTION

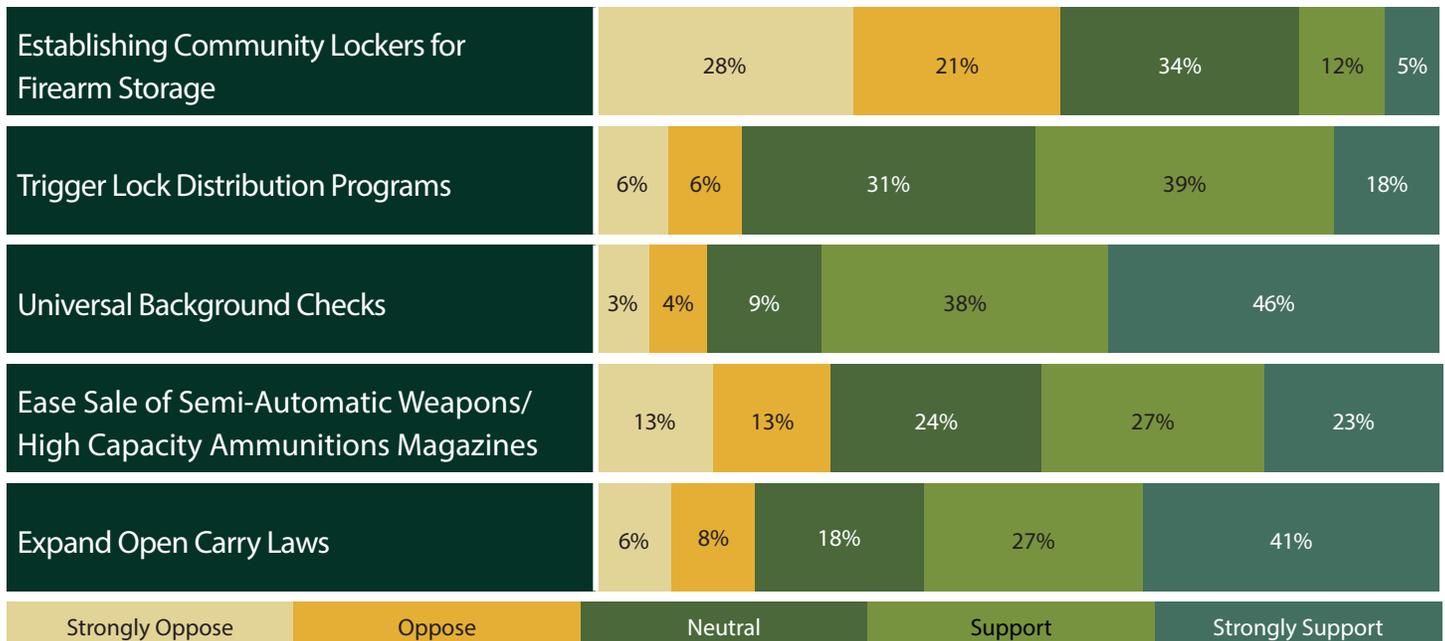
2. VA REFORM

3. EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS

Marijuana Legalization



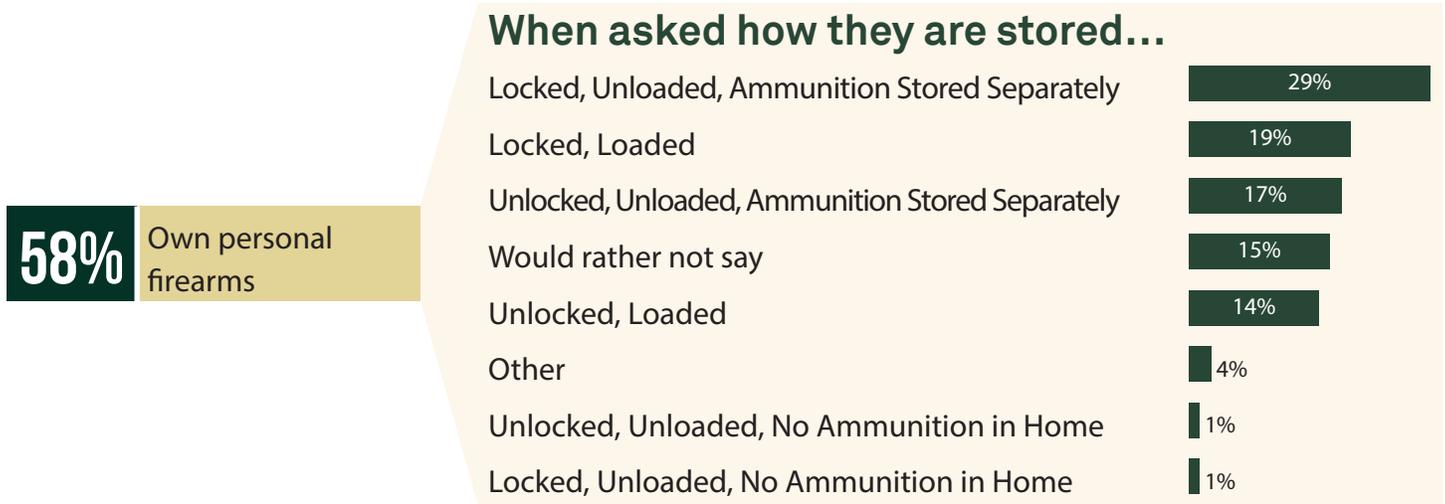
Firearms



59% SUPPORT AN AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION THAT WOULD ALLOW CONGRESS TO PROHIBIT FLAG BURNING BY STATUTE AND ALLOW FOR PUNISHMENT FOR THE PHYSICAL DESECRATION OF THE U.S. FLAG.

GUN OWNERSHIP & STORAGE

Gun ownership and safety continues to be at the forefront of the national conversation. The military community is one of the most highly trained when it comes to safe handling and storage of guns and are an important voice in this conversation. Add to that strong concern for the 20 veterans a day estimated to die by suicide, the majority with a firearm, and the conversation around safe storage becomes one that can be lifesaving.



MILITARY SERVICE

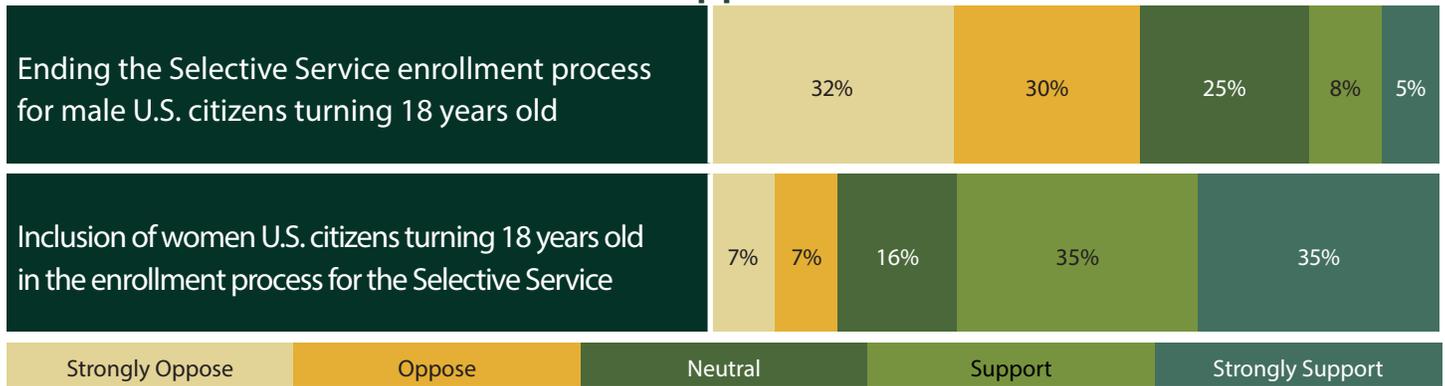
With less than one percent of the U.S. population having served in the current wars, it is more important than ever for those serving to share their voices on the issues most critical to them and their families. The nation must understand their service and sacrifice, and ensure that the debt owed to them for this service is paid in full.

When asked the following...

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Would you recommend service to a family member or a close friend?	92%	8%	0%
Do you support the creation of a national monument in Washington D.C. for veterans of the Global War on Terror?	82%	7%	11%
Are you concerned that a decrease in our military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan will decrease public attention on issues affecting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and service members?	58%	32%	10%



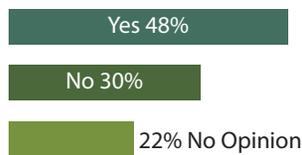
When asked to rate their level of support...



EQUALITY

Diversity is a force-multiplier for our armed forces as well as our nation. Before it was popular, IAVA -based on input and guidance from our members- was the first mainstream veteran organization to support the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. IAVA continues to engage our members on these issues and ensure that all service members, veterans and their families are treated equally under the law.

Did you support the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the law that banned military service by openly gay troops?



What impact do you believe the repeal of DADT had on military readiness?

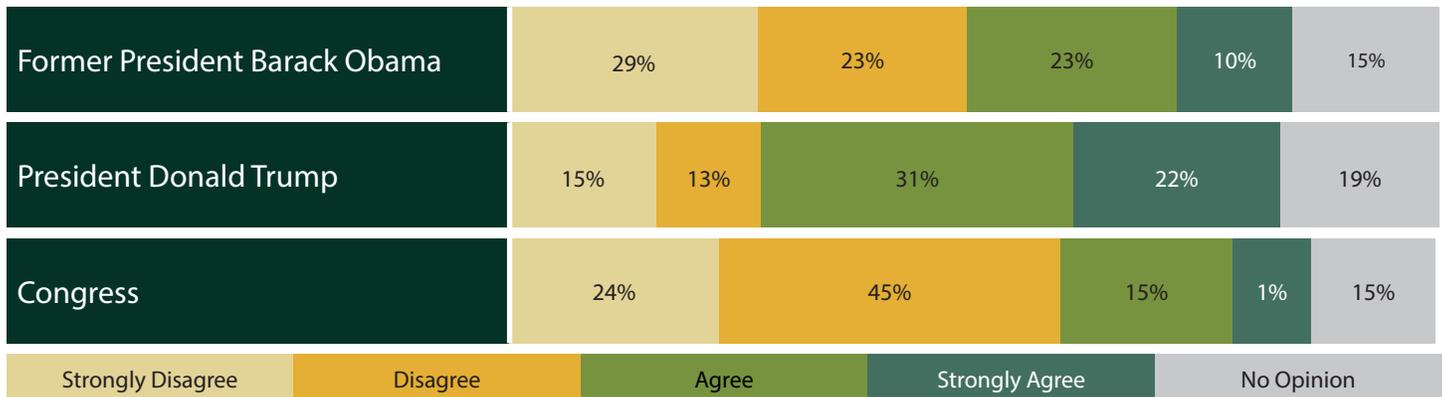




PERCEPTIONS

Transitioning out of the military can be challenging, especially when services and supports aren't in place to help. This section asks IAVA members about their perceptions of how Congress, the Administration and the community is doing in supporting them as they come home.

When asked to rate their level of agreement as to whether the following acts in the interest of veterans...



When asked about the American public...



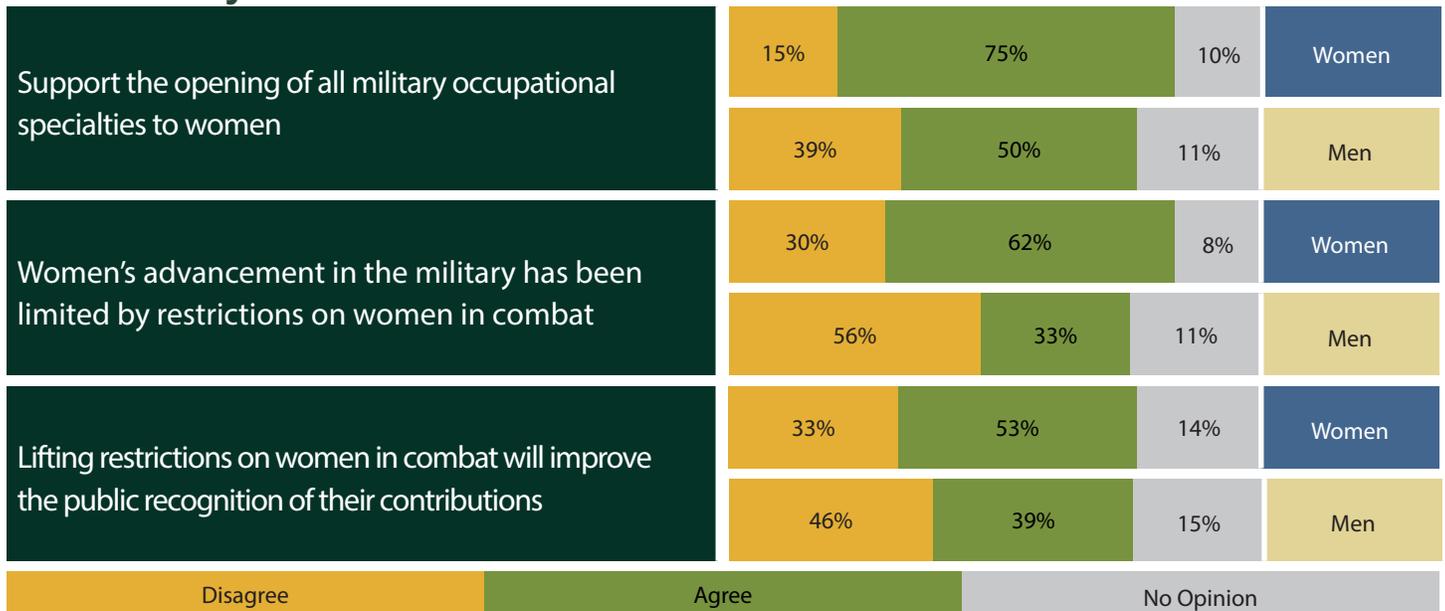
WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

Since 2001, 345,000 women have deployed in support of these current wars. Women are currently the fastest growing population in both the military and veteran communities. With the recent policy change to include women in all combat arms positions, these numbers will only continue to grow. It is past time for this nation to recognize and support these women.

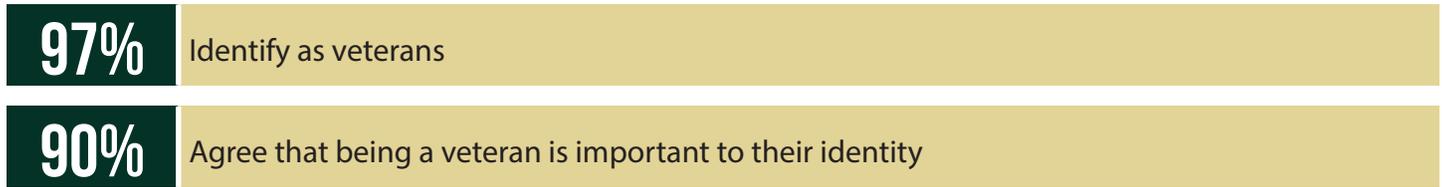
When asked how important it is for IAVA to address the issues women veterans face...



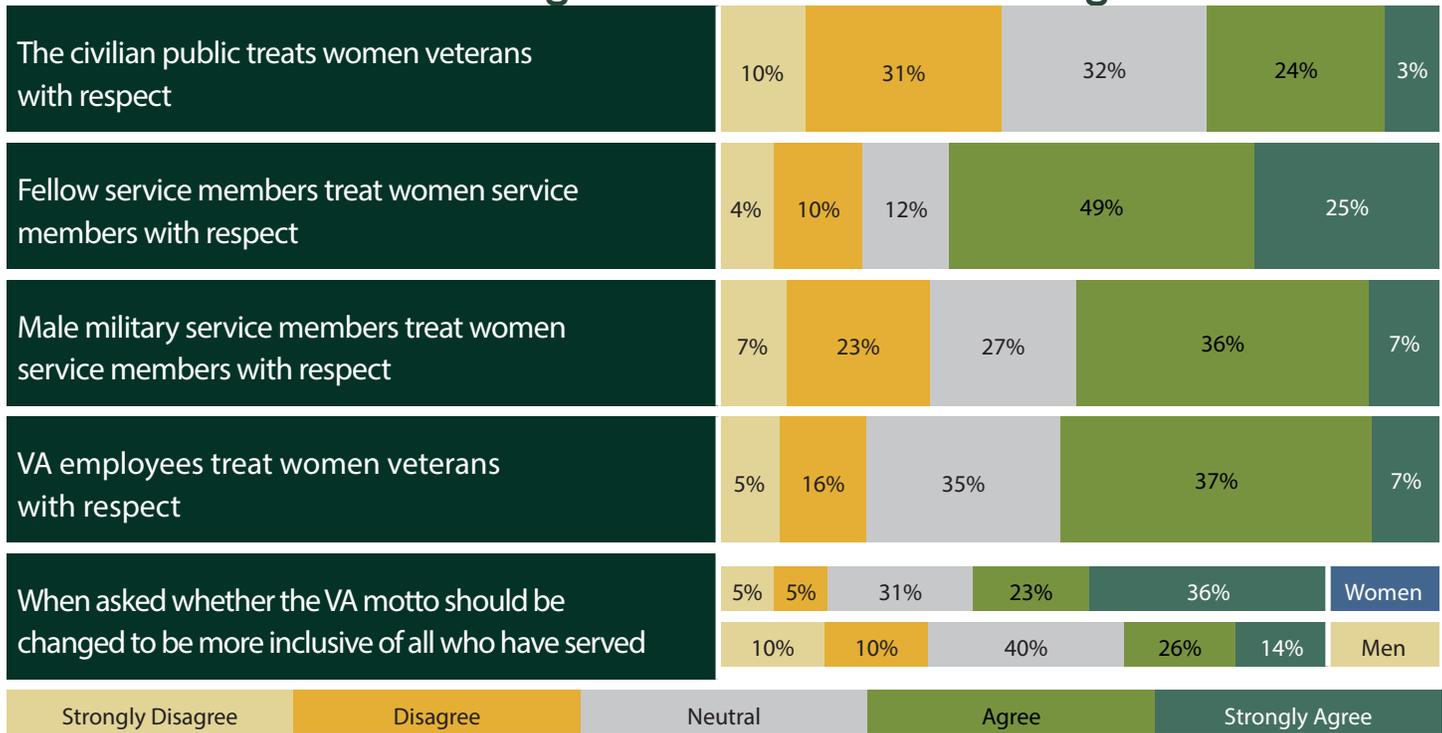
When asked about the following statements regarding women in the military...



WOMEN VETERANS*



When asked their level of agreement with the following statement...

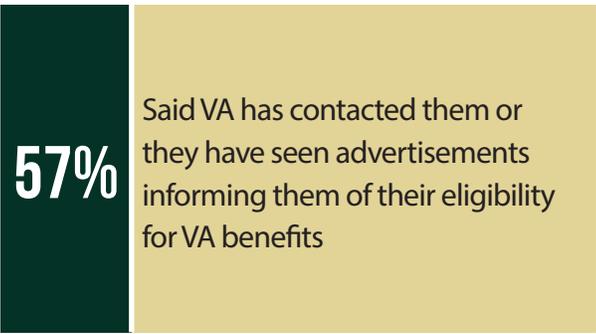
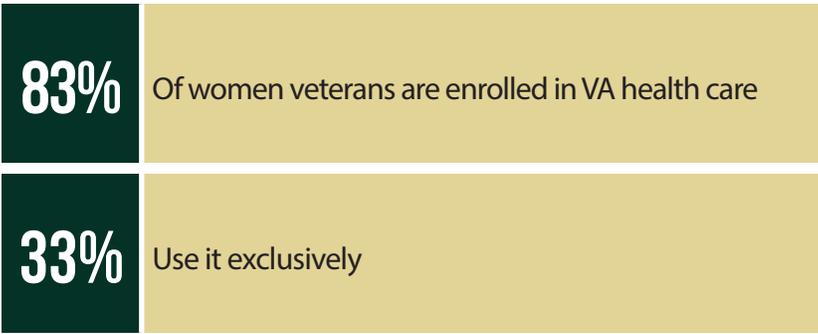


When asked whether VA adequately provides...

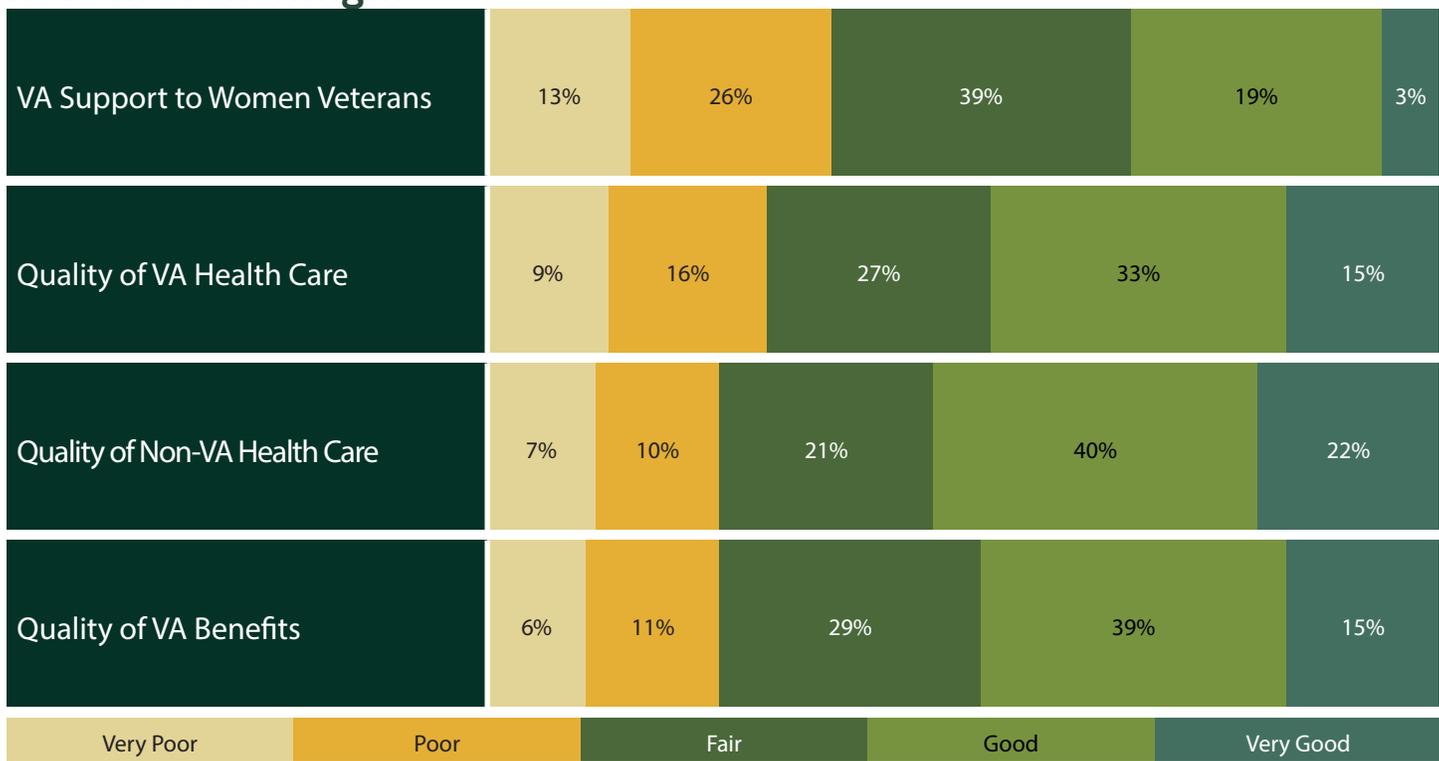


*Questions asked only of women veterans unless otherwise indicated.

2017 MEMBER SURVEY



Rate the following...



MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT

The FY2012 annual report from the DoD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPR) was a wake-up call to the nation, revealing an estimated 26,000 cases of unwanted sexual contact in the military. While attention on this issue since then has been high, progress has been fleeting.

Military sexual assault impacts both men and women in uniform. By understanding the past experiences of these survivors, IAVA can better combat sexual assault in the future.

Women Respondents

19%

Think DoD is effectively addressing military sexual assault

35%

Survivor* of military sexual assault

40%

Survivors who reported the crime

71%

Survivors who experienced retaliation after reporting

Male Respondents

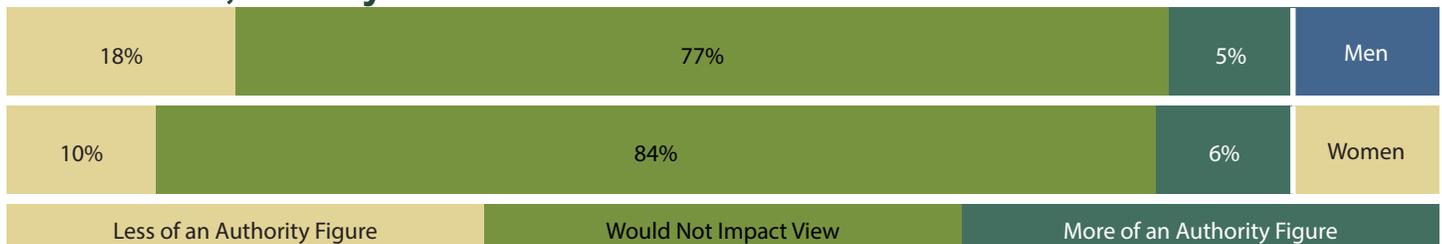
33%

1%

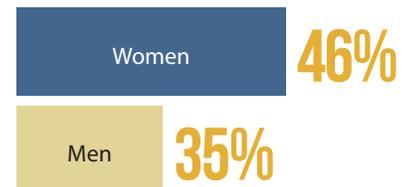
28%

64%

If the decision to send someone to court martial was taken away from the commander, would you view the commander as...



Survivors who would be more likely to report their assault if instead of their commander, a trained military prosecutor made the decision to move forward with the case:



*Total number of survivors: N=147 women; N=40 men

POST-9/11 GI BILL

The GI Bill has sent nearly two million veterans and their dependents to school since its creation in 2008. However, despite the enormous success of the New GI Bill, there is still work to be done to both protect and enhance this critical benefit.

92% Of respondents are eligible for the post-9/11 GI Bill

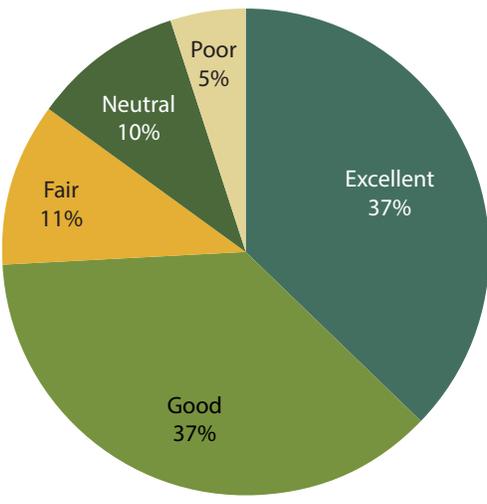


55% Have used it themselves

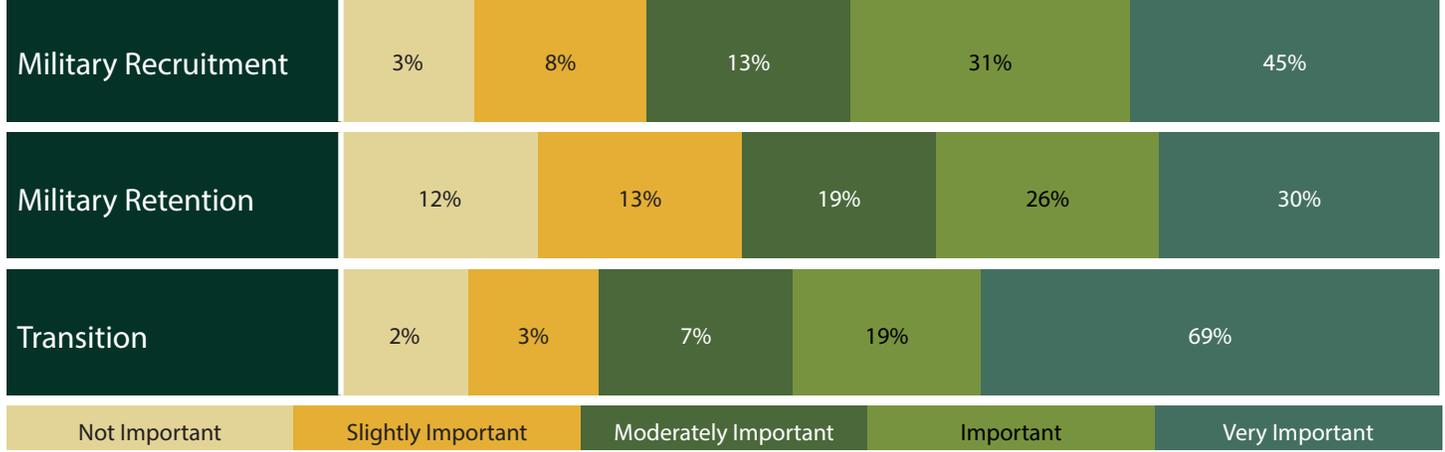
11% Have transferred it to a dependent

24% Intend to use it

Experience with Post-9/11 GI Bill



Importance of the Post-9/11 GI Bill



87% Of respondents oppose/strongly oppose cuts to the GI Bill

2017 MEMBER SURVEY

EDUCATION

With so many veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other education benefits to go back to school, it's important for schools to understand how best to set veterans up for success.

61%

Of respondents have pursued a degree since separating from the military

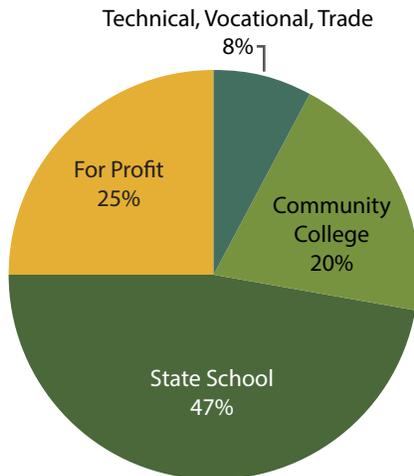
35%

Are currently in school

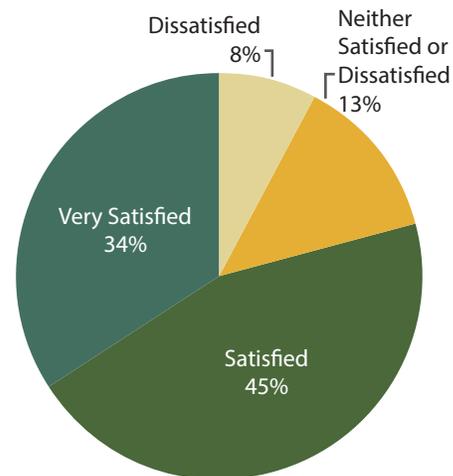
Education Benefits Used



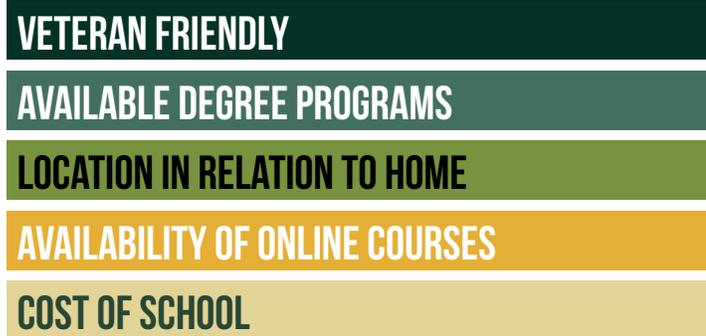
Type of School



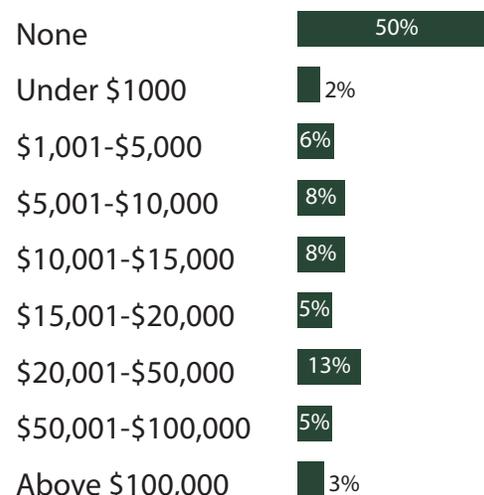
Satisfaction with Education Program



Top 5 Reasons Chose Institution



Amount of Student Loan Debt



Loans

46%

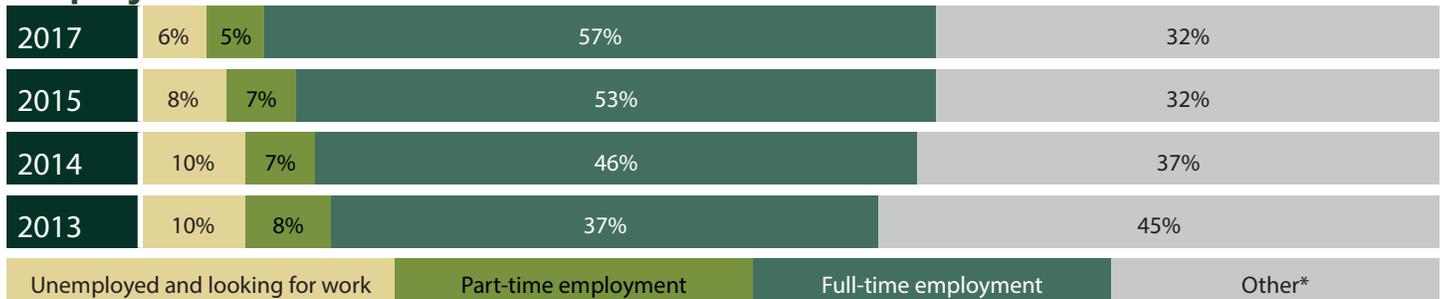
Took out loans to supplement education costs

2017 MEMBER SURVEY

EMPLOYMENT

In the last two years unemployment numbers for the veteran population, including post-9/11 veterans, have been steadily declining, and IAVA members are part of this trend. Veterans who have jobs in their preferred career field do better work and tend to remain in those jobs longer, meaning there are fewer issues with employee retention or attrition. This section aims to better understand how employers can put these talented leaders to work in their new careers once they leave the military.

Employment Status



Top 5 Industries of Employment



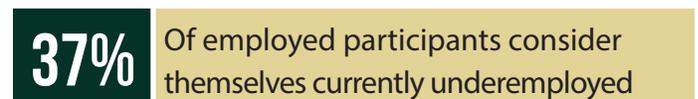
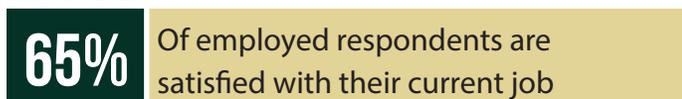
Top 3 Job Incentives

1. SALARY/BENEFITS PACKAGE
2. JOB IS MEANINGFUL
3. TRANSLATING MILITARY SKILLS

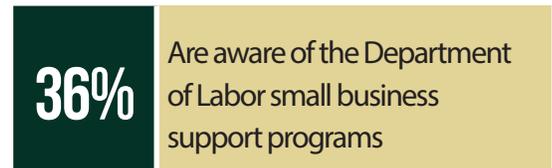
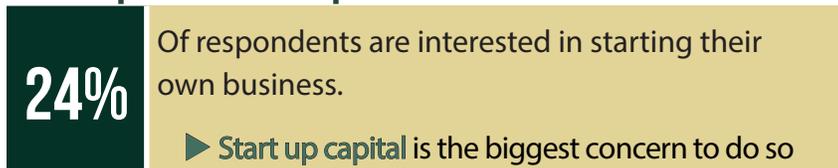
Top 3 Challenges Finding a Job

1. MEDICAL ISSUES
2. CERTIFICATION/REQUIREMENTS
3. COMPETITIVE WORK FORCE/CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

Job Satisfaction



Entrepreneurship



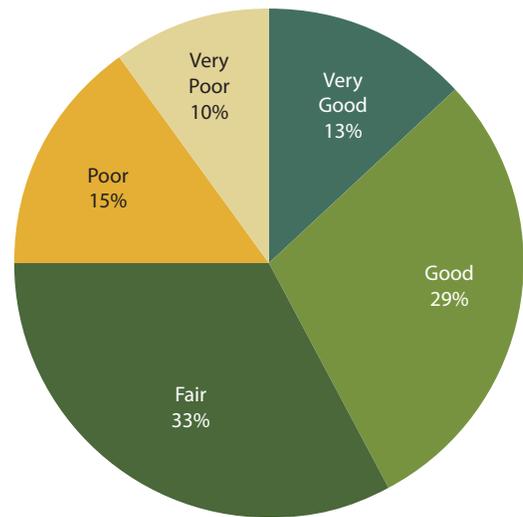
* Includes Student, Retired, Disabled, Active Duty, Unemployed not looking for work

VA HEALTH CARE UTILIZATION

The VA access crisis of 2014 brought to the light a problem veterans knew for years, critical challenges accessing VA health care. Since then, the VA has worked to address these challenges. In this section, IAVA members tell us how they're doing.



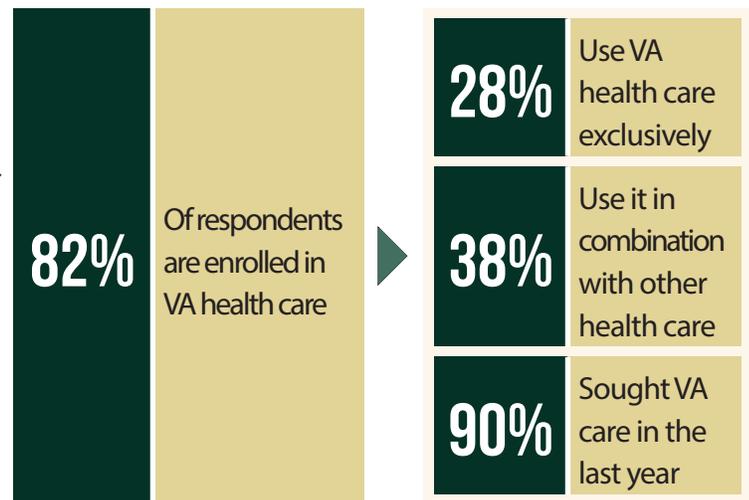
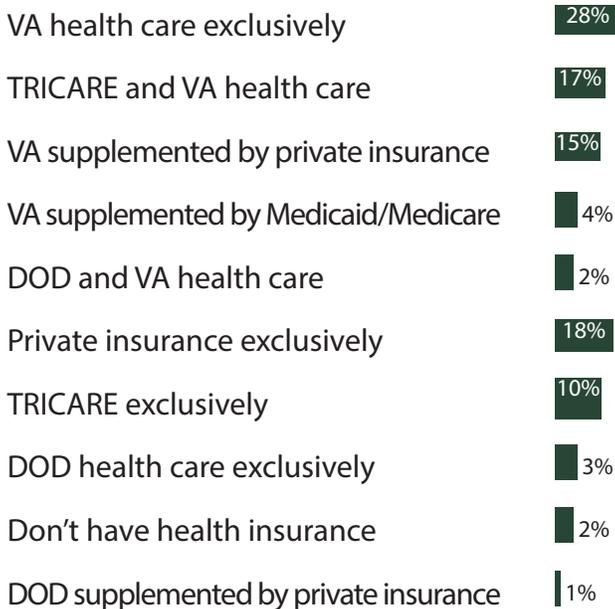
When asked about overall experience at the VA...



When asked to identify the top 3 issues for reforming VA...

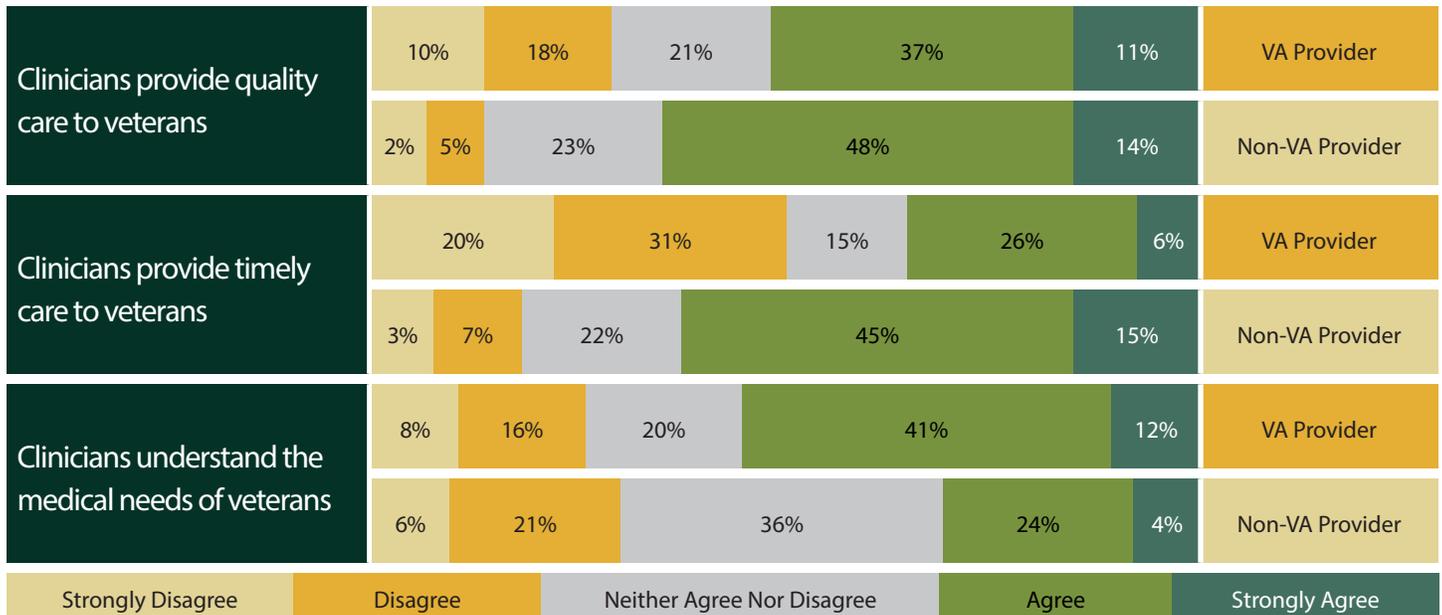
- 1. ACCOUNTABILITY**
- 2. CONSOLIDATION OF COMMUNITY CARE**
- 3. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UPDATES**

Health Care Sources



2017 MEMBER SURVEY

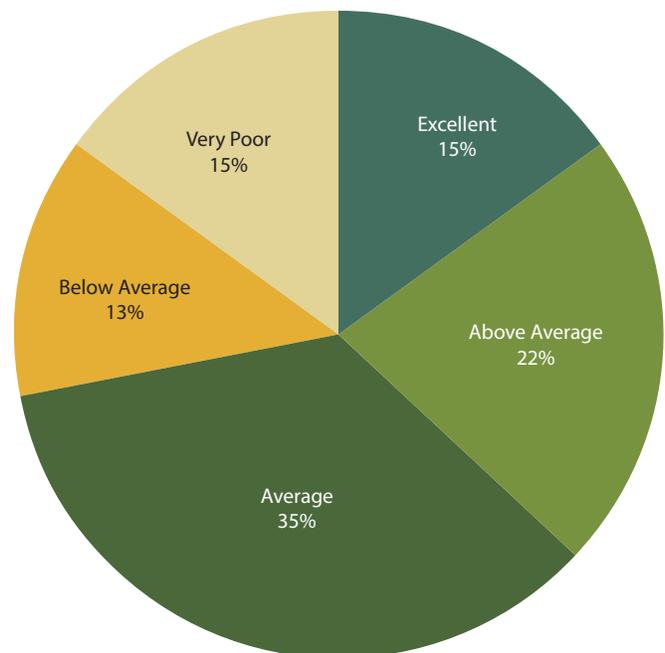
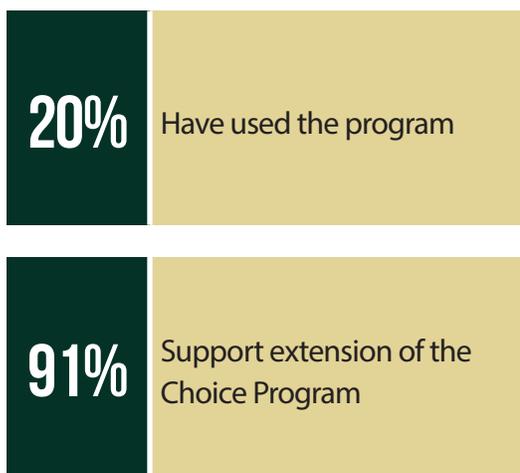
Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the following...



*Missing percentages represent those with no opinion

VA CHOICE PROGRAM

Experience with Choice Program





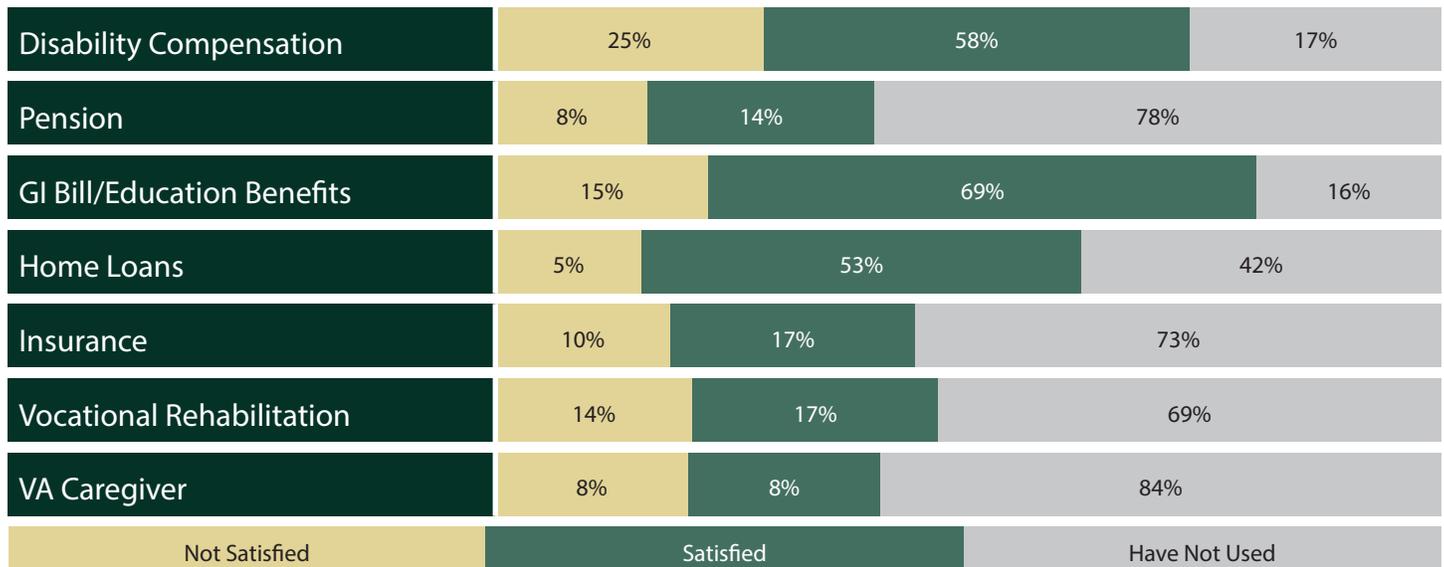
VA BENEFITS

The VA plays a critical role in supporting veterans. Yet time and again veterans have been left waiting for the benefits that they have earned. An effective VA system must be very different from the current legacy system. This section of IAVA's Member Survey asks about their experiences using VA benefits.

76%

Use VA Benefits other than health care

Satisfaction with Benefits



VA Disability Compensation

82%

Have a service-connected disability rating

► **76%** of respondents say that it took more than 125 days for the VA to notify them of a decision on their disability compensation claim, or that their claim is still pending

36%

Have filed an appeal to their VA disability compensation claim decision

- 37% in 2015
- 32% in 2014

27%

Report that it took a year or more to receive a decision on their appeal

- 26% in 2015

29%

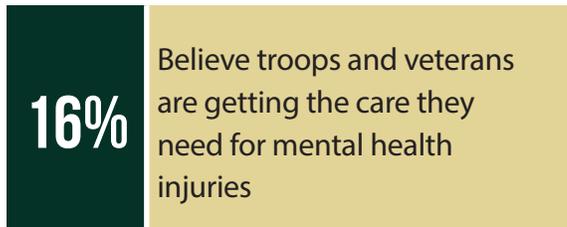
Still have a pending appeal

- 33% in 2015



MENTAL HEALTH

It can be difficult to seek help for an injury that can't be seen, yet the invisible wounds of war are very real. This section asks IAVA members to share their experiences with mental health care.



Top 3 Reasons Not Getting Care

1. THE STIGMA OF SEEKING HELP IS TOO GREAT

2. THEY HAVE ACCESS TO CARE, BUT NOT QUALITY CARE

3. THEY HAVE ACCESS BUT ARE NOT SEEKING CARE

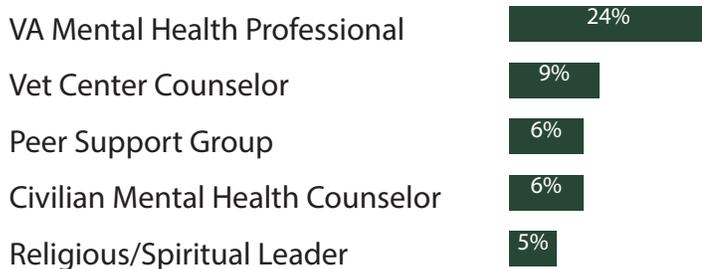
Do you have a service-connected mental health injury?



Are you seeking care for your mental health injury?



Top 5 Resources for Seeking Care

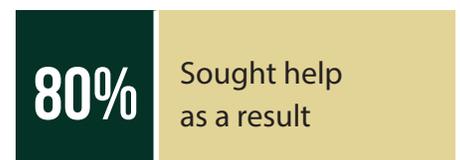
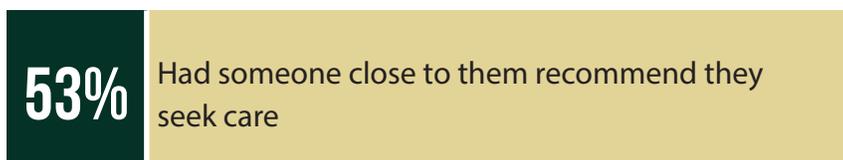


Top 3 Reasons Not Seeking Care

1. STARTED TREATMENT, BUT STOPPED

2. CONCERNED IT MIGHT AFFECT CAREER

3. DON'T THINK TREATMENT WILL WORK

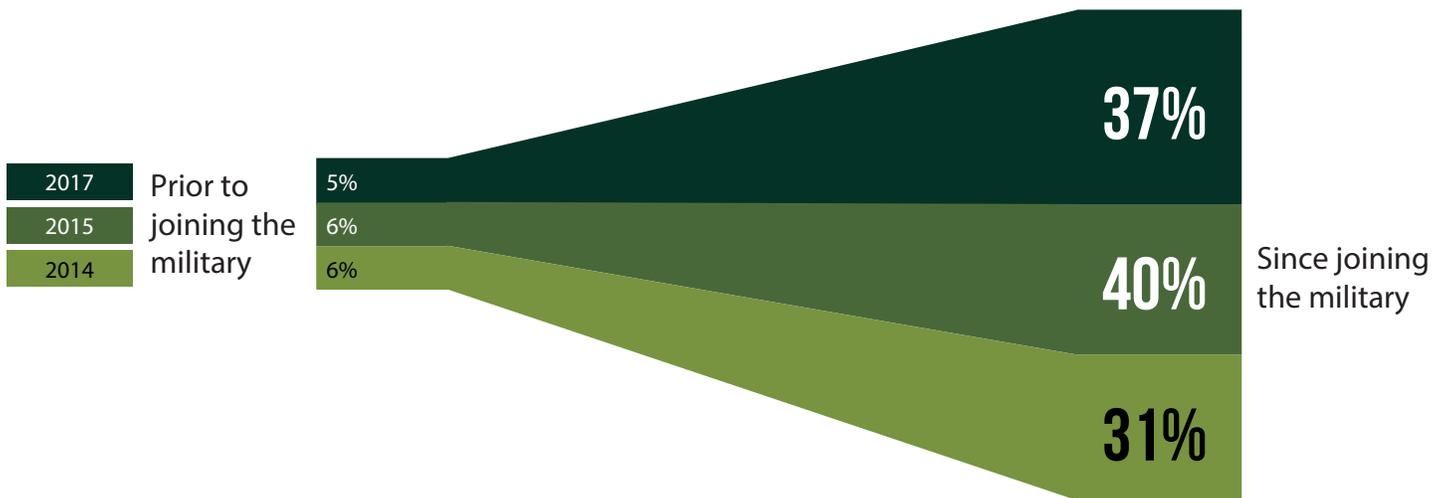


SUICIDE

The VA estimates that 20 veterans die from suicide each day. The DoD reports that 478 service members (active and reserve components) died by suicide in FY 2016. IAVA's members are on the front lines of this critical issue. This section asks IAVA members about their very real concerns about suicide in the veteran community.

ONLY 24% Feel as a nation we are making progress in combating military/ veteran suicide

Respondents who have considered taking their own lives:

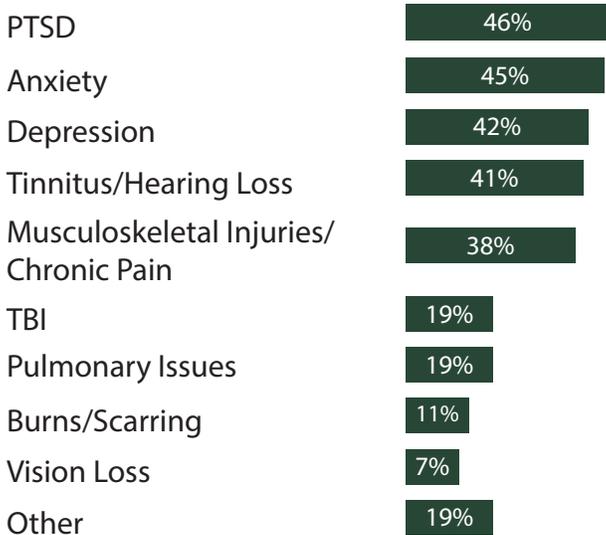


65%	Know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015: 54% • 2014: 47%
58%	Know a post-9/11 veteran that has died by suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015: 45% • 2014: 40%

GENERAL HEALTH

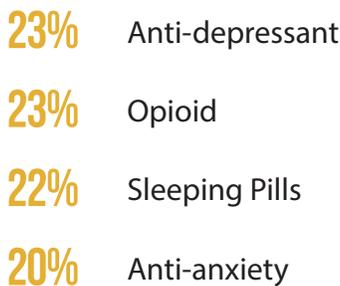
It is estimated that over 50,000 service members have been wounded in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Issues like chronic pain and exposure to airborne hazard and burn pits are just some of the health challenges faced. Complementary and alternative therapies are generating more interest in the community. This section asks IAVA members about these issues.

Service Related Injuries



Medications

Have you been prescribed or are you currently taking prescription medications for service-connected injuries:

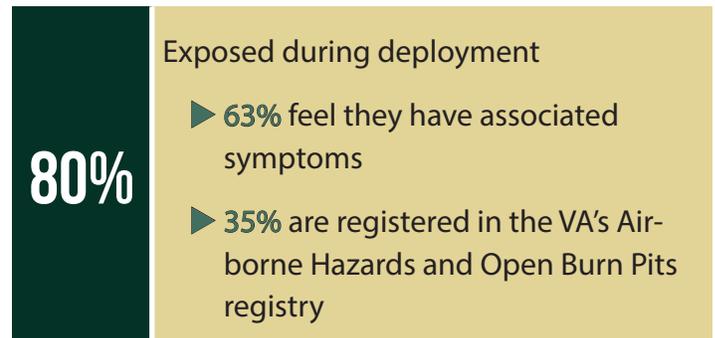


Alternative Therapies

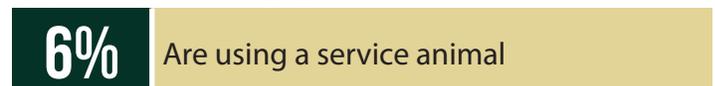
Are you using any of the following supplemental/alternative therapies as part of your care regimen?



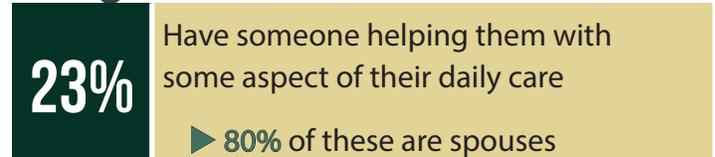
Burn Pits



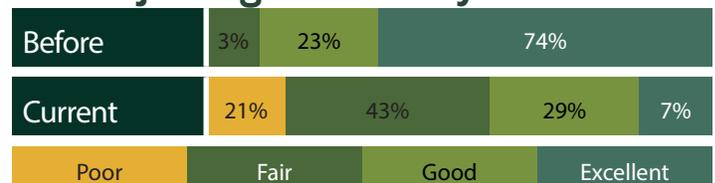
Service Animals



Caregivers



When asked to rate their overall health before joining the military and now...





TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Transition out of military service can be challenging. In addition to the stress of leaving their units, service members transitioning to civilian life must learn to manage their finances, find housing and gain employment. This section asks IAVA members about their preparedness in facing these challenges as they transitioned out of service.

When asked if they experienced challenges when transitioning out of the military...



Top 3 Transition Challenges

1. HEALTH CONCERNS

2. FINDING/KEEPING EMPLOYMENT

3. LOSS OF IDENTITY/PURPOSE

Employment

42%

Received support/training to transition to the civilian work force

66%

Did not have a job before transitioning out of the military

▶ 25% did not have a job for over a year

Finances

63%

Felt prepared to manage finances

Housing

23%

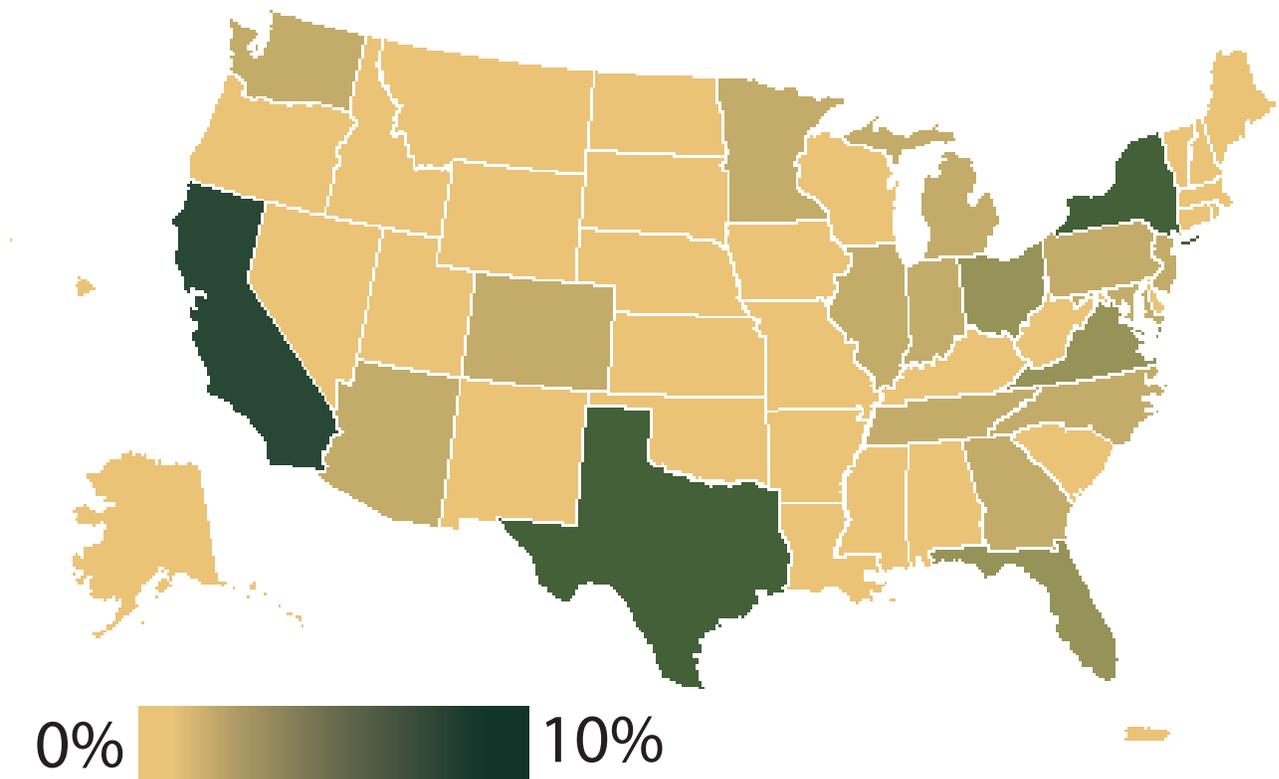
Did not have housing secured

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

IAVA's member survey was fielded using the Qualtrics survey tool in partnership with George Mason University. The survey alpha test was distributed among IAVA staff members from February 3-6, 2017 and later beta tested among a dozen IAVA leaders and staff members from Feb 9-10. The final survey was fielded among all IAVA veteran members from Feb 11-21. Emails were sent on Feb 11, 15, and 18. The opportunity to enter a drawing for two Southwest (SW) Airlines vouchers to fly anywhere SW flies in 2017 was provided as incentive to complete the survey. Social media was utilized to encourage post-9/11 veterans to join and take the survey. New members were also provided a link in the welcome email received during this time frame.

A total of 4,345 participants completed the survey, a record number; 857 started the survey but did not complete. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS



2017 MEMBER SURVEY



IAVA is incredibly thankful for the donors that have made this report possible with their contributions to IAVA.

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Clark Charitable Foundation
Langeloth Foundation

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The Wunderkinder Foundation
Others First

Begin Today For Tomorrow
The Scoob Trust Foundation
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IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA

2017 IAVA MEMBER SURVEY

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