



2022

# IAVA MEMBER SURVEY



CASE STUDY REPORT | MARCH 2022

Perceptions and views of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans on  
the challenges and successes of the next greatest generation of veterans

## Who is IAVA?

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is the premier veterans advocacy and support organization on the planet. Every day, we fight for veterans. We are the tip-of-the-spear non-profit engine of impact that connects, unites, and empowers hundreds of thousands of veterans and allies nationwide.

Founded by an Iraq veteran in 2004, IAVA is the non-partisan leader in advocacy, public awareness, and concierge veteran empowerment. We organize locally and drive historic impacts nationally.

## Authors

This year's member survey report is published as a collaboration between Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of American (IAVA) and Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). The principal author of this report is Adam Pritchard, IVMF, who is responsible for all data analysis presented in this report, along with contributions and insights from Samantha Powell and Travis Horr, IAVA.

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## A Message from CEO Jeremy Butler

I am so proud of what we have accomplished together this past year - passing the Deborah Sampson Act, bringing changes to US military law to improve justice for victims of military sexual assault and other serious crimes, establishing accountability for predatory schools that profit off of Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries by finally closing the “90/10 loophole” and passing the Afghan War Commission Act, among other great victories! The far-reaching changes that will result from full implementation of regulations to close the “90/10 loophole” are long overdue and have been an IAVA priority for years.

IAVA fought tirelessly for this generation of veterans over the last year, conducting almost 200 Capitol Hill meetings in a time when virtual has been the norm, speaking directly with VA leadership, and executing robust media outreach to highlight the needs of post-9/11 veterans. It has been a humbling, eventful, educational year and I am excited about what is still to come. 2022 is an opportunity to continue to build on our momentum.

IAVA routinely hears from our members on the issues that matter most to them. They come to our, currently virtual, Fly-In and reach out for support via our Quick Reaction Force not only to share their experiences at war but also their experiences at home: difficulties using the GI Bill, navigating VA healthcare, or dealing with symptoms of toxic exposure. Yet, it is our Member Survey that best details the experiences of this generation of veterans. Responses to this year’s survey show a generation of veterans who are thriving. Seventy-five percent have used their post-9/11 GI Bill or transferred their benefits to a dependent, an increase of 13 percent since 2014. Our members are volunteering in their communities at high rates and unemployment is holding steady at five percent.

While post-9/11 veterans are succeeding in their education and careers, our survey also reveals some troubling statistics. Many members report facing significant physical and mental health challenges. Forty-four percent of our members report experiencing suicidal ideation since joining the military, up 13 percent since 2014. Additionally, 64 percent of our members personally know a veteran who has died by suicide—a shocking 26 percent increase since 2014. Meanwhile, a stunning 90 percent of our members report experiencing symptoms that are or might be related to burn pits or toxic exposure.

Our nation needs to step up and support this generation of veterans. Most pressingly, we need to provide health care and benefits to those sickened by toxic exposures and we need to pass the Post 9/11 Mental Health Care Improvement Act. This legislation seeks to improve access to mental health care, expand the mental health workforce and training at VA, and increase mental health research.

Let’s ensure veterans get the healthcare and resources they rightly deserve. This past year was incredible but there is still much to be accomplished. Let’s get it done!

Onward,  
Jeremy Butler  
Navy Veteran  
CEO, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

## Key Highlights from the 2022 IAVA Member Survey

The 2022 IAVA Member Survey collected responses from 5,174 IAVA members. The results of this survey are presented in this report. Here are some key highlights from the data collected from IAVA members who responded to the survey.

### IAVA Member Profile

IAVA members have served around the world, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Syria, Korea, the Balkans, and other locations globally. They have deployed in every major combat operation since 9/11, and sometimes prior, and represent members of each branch of military service. IAVA's members continue to serve at home in their communities and through veteran service organizations. The demographics from IAVA's latest member survey show the diversity of today's veterans, and their experiences and challenges during transition to civilian life. These results will help to inform policy and practice - ensuring that more veterans can have a smooth transition and successful life after their service.

- Around 3 in 4 IAVA members have served in Iraq, and 2 in 5 in Afghanistan.
- IAVA membership represents the diversity among post-9/11 veterans – including 14% of members who are female, 30% who belong to a non-white racial or ethnic group, and 6% who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Only about half of veterans describe their transition as smooth, with more than 3 in 4 reporting some or many transition challenges.

### Social Issues

IAVA members are highly engaged in the politics and issues facing the nation today. From voting to volunteering, veterans are an important voice on many key social and policy topics. IAVA members lead the conversation around mental health and suicide prevention, extremism, COVID-19, firearm regulation, women veterans, military sexual assault, and the Fall 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan.

#### *Political and Civic Engagement*

- 70% of IAVA members identify mental health and suicide prevention as a top issue for post-9/11 veterans.
- 98% of IAVA members are registered to vote and 83% are planning to vote in the upcoming midterm election.
- 4 in 5 believe that more veterans in Congress would have a positive impact, and 3 in 10 veterans have themselves considered continuing to serve the country by running for political office.
- 46% of IAVA members volunteer on a regular basis, most often with organizations that support other veterans and their families.
- Only 7% of IAVA members report that they trust political leaders and public officials “a lot” or “a great deal” and only 18% have that level of trust for national news organizations.

- 85% of IAVA members agree that more should have been done to support the evacuation of our Afghan allies during the withdrawal of forces in fall 2021.
- More than half of IAVA members support or have supported the permanent removal or withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

### *Issues from the Headlines*

- 85% of IAVA members had received the COVID-19 vaccine, half of whom received it at the VA or a DoD facility.
- 91% of IAVA members agree with expedited U.S. citizenship for military service, and 85% agree with the Special Immigrant Visa Program (SIV) for Iraqi and Afghan allies who worked for U.S. Armed Forces.
- Around one-third of IAVA members report having personally witnessed examples of extremism in the military ranks or among post-9/11 veterans.

### *Women Veterans*

- 85% of IAVA members said it was extremely or very important for IAVA to address issues facing women veterans.
- 48% believe women's advancement in the military has been limited by past restrictions on women in combat.
- 16% of female IAVA members report feeling unsafe when going to a VA facility.

### *Gun Ownership and Safety*

- 68% of IAVA members own personal firearms.
- 78% of IAVA members support universal background checks for firearm purchases.
- 62% of IAVA members support the distribution of trigger locks.

### *Military Sexual Assault and Intimate Violence*

- 42% of IAVA members believe the DOD is not effectively addressing the problem of military sexual assault, and only 15% believe they are.
- 78% of IAVA members believe that a trained military prosecutor handling sexual assault cases would not impact their view of a commanding officer and 8% believe it would make them view their commander as more of an authority figure.
- 51% of those reporting experiences of military sexual assault said that access to a trained military prosecutor would have made them more likely to report the assault, and only 3% said it would have made them less likely to report.
- 63% of IAVA members think domestic violence is a serious problem within the military community, but only 8% think the VA does enough to support those who experience domestic violence.

### **Post-Service Career**

The success of post-9/11 veterans as they transition into their post-service careers have been shaped by key opportunities like the post-9/11 GI Bill, ensuring that education and employment are accessible for veterans.

### *GI Bill and Education*

- **63% of veterans had enrolled in some form of higher education since separating from the military.**
- **71% of veterans who pursued higher education reported using the Post-9/11 GI Bill to support their education after transitioning out of service.**
- **73% said they could not afford school without the GI Bill and another 14% were unsure if they could afford school without the GI Bill.**

### *Employment*

- **81% of veterans reported that they were extremely or somewhat satisfied with their current job.**
- **71% of veterans felt they were not underemployed, that is, that they had enough paid work and that their skills and abilities were being fully utilized in their work.**
- **Among veterans reporting their employment status, 5.1% reported being unemployed and looking for work and another 2.7% were unemployed but not looking for work.**
- **17% of veterans experienced an employment status change during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## **Health and Wellbeing**

**Many post-9/11 veterans experience health challenges that can include issues with physical health, mental health, service-connected disabilities, or the effects of burn pits and other toxic exposures.**

### *General Health*

- **65% of IAVA members rated their overall health as excellent before joining the military, but only 6% rated their current overall health as excellent.**
- **87% said that maintaining their health is extremely or very important.**
- **86% of IAVA members reported having experienced a service-connected physical injury or illness, including conditions such as: tinnitus (68%), muscle or joint injuries (67%), chronic pain (63%), or hearing loss (54%).**

### *Cannabis*

- **44% of IAVA members reported having used cannabis for recreational purposes, 30% for medicinal purposes, and 16% reported having discussed medical cannabis with their current primary care doctor.**
- **86% of IAVA members agreed that the VA should allow research into cannabis as a treatment option, and 88% agreed that cannabis should be researched for medicinal use.**

### *Alcohol and Tobacco*

- **43% of IAVA members reported drinking alcohol at least once per week, with 8% reporting that they consume alcohol every day; of those who drank, 32% reported binge drinking at least one day per month in the past year.**
- **58% of IAVA members had ever used tobacco products. Among tobacco users, 27% continue to do so daily and 61% have quit using tobacco products.**

### *Burn Pits and Toxic Exposure*

- **82% of IAVA members report that they were exposed to burn pits and/or airborne toxic materials during their service.**
- **59% of those reporting exposure to burn pits or airborne toxic materials are registered for the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits Registry.**

### *Mental Health*

- **61% of IAVA members reported having a service-connected mental health injury, and 3 in 4 of those reporting a mental health injury are currently seeking care for it.**
- **Among those not currently seeking care, 29% are not because they have not found a mental health professional that understands their needs.**

### *Suicide*

- **61% of IAVA members believe we are not making progress as a nation in combating military/veteran suicide, and 17% believe we are making progress.**
- **67% of IAVA members believe that the military/veteran community are not getting the care they need for mental health injuries.**
- **68% IAVA members personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide, and 64% personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has died by suicide.**

## **VA Healthcare**

**Veterans and their families rely on the VA and its many other benefits programs to provide the best quality healthcare and assistance possible.**

- **84% of veterans are enrolled in VA healthcare, and 60% rated their overall experience with VA healthcare as excellent or good.**
- **31% of veterans have used the VA Community Care Program, and 61% rated the Community Care Program as excellent or good.**

### *VA Disability Benefits*

- **80% of veterans have a service-connected disability rating from VA.**
- **About half (48%) of the disability claims that are still pending have been pending for over 1 year.**
- **Of claims with a decision, 68% of claimants were satisfied with the outcome.**

### *VA Healthcare Sexual Misconduct*

- **16% of female and 10% of male veterans report not feeling safe when going to a VA facility.**
- **7% of veterans report having witnessed or personally heard about someone else experiencing sexual misconduct while seeking care at VA.**
- **3.5% of veterans reported having experienced sexual harassment, and 0.8% reported experiencing sexual assault while seeking care at the VA.**



# IAVA Member Profile

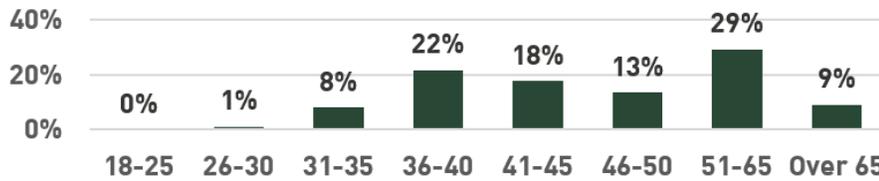
IAVA's members continue to serve at home in their communities and through veteran service organizations. The demographics from IAVA's latest member survey show the diversity of today's veterans and their experiences and challenges during transition to civilian life. These results will help to inform policy and practice - ensuring that more veterans can have a smooth transition and successful life after their service.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Around 3 in 4 IAVA members have served in Iraq, and 2 in 5 have served in Afghanistan.
- IAVA membership is representative of the diversity among post-9/11 veterans - including 14% of members who are female, 30% who belong to a non-white racial or ethnic group, and 6% who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Only about half of veterans describe their transition as smooth, with more than 3 in 4 reporting some or many transition challenges.

Demographics

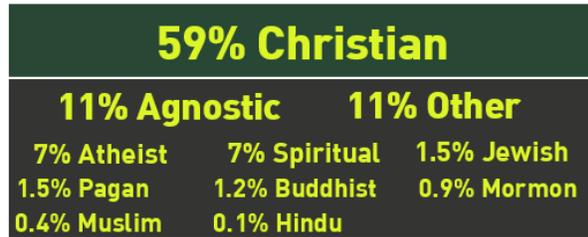
**What is your age?**



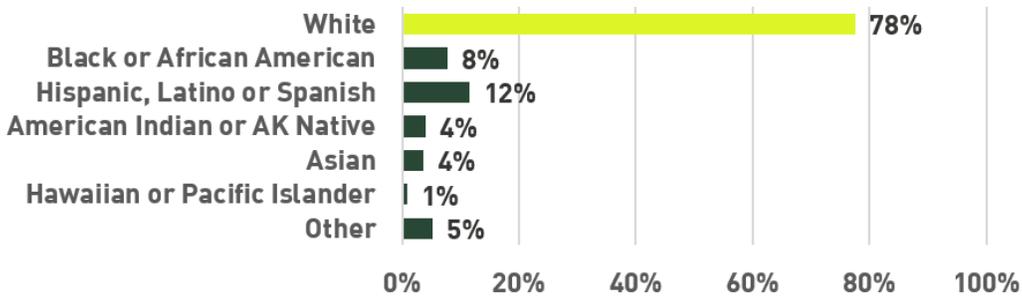
**What is your gender?**



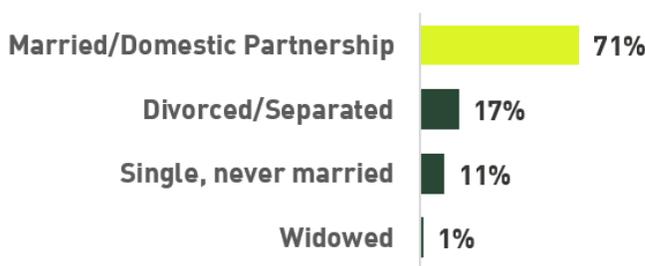
**What is your religious affiliation?**



**How do you describe yourself? (select all that apply)**



**What is your marital status?**



**How many children do you have?**



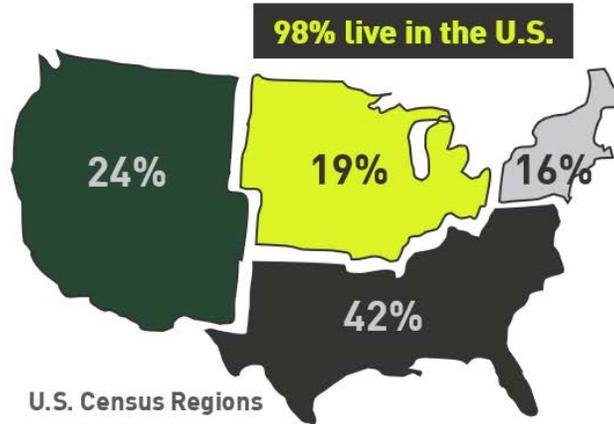
**Has your spouse served in the military?**



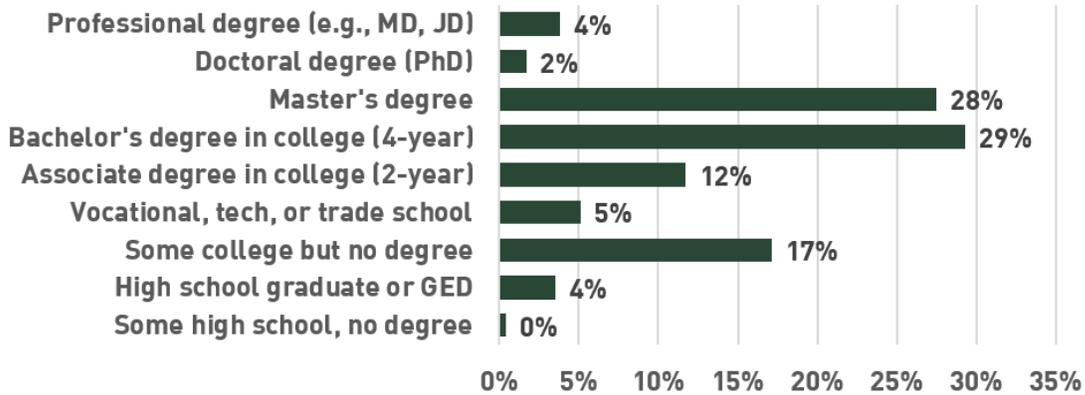
**Do you identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?**



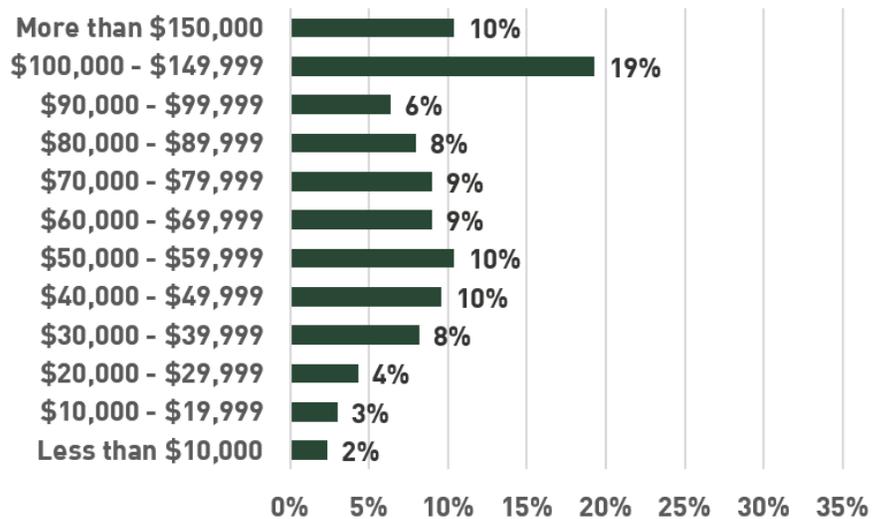
**Which best describes where you currently live?**



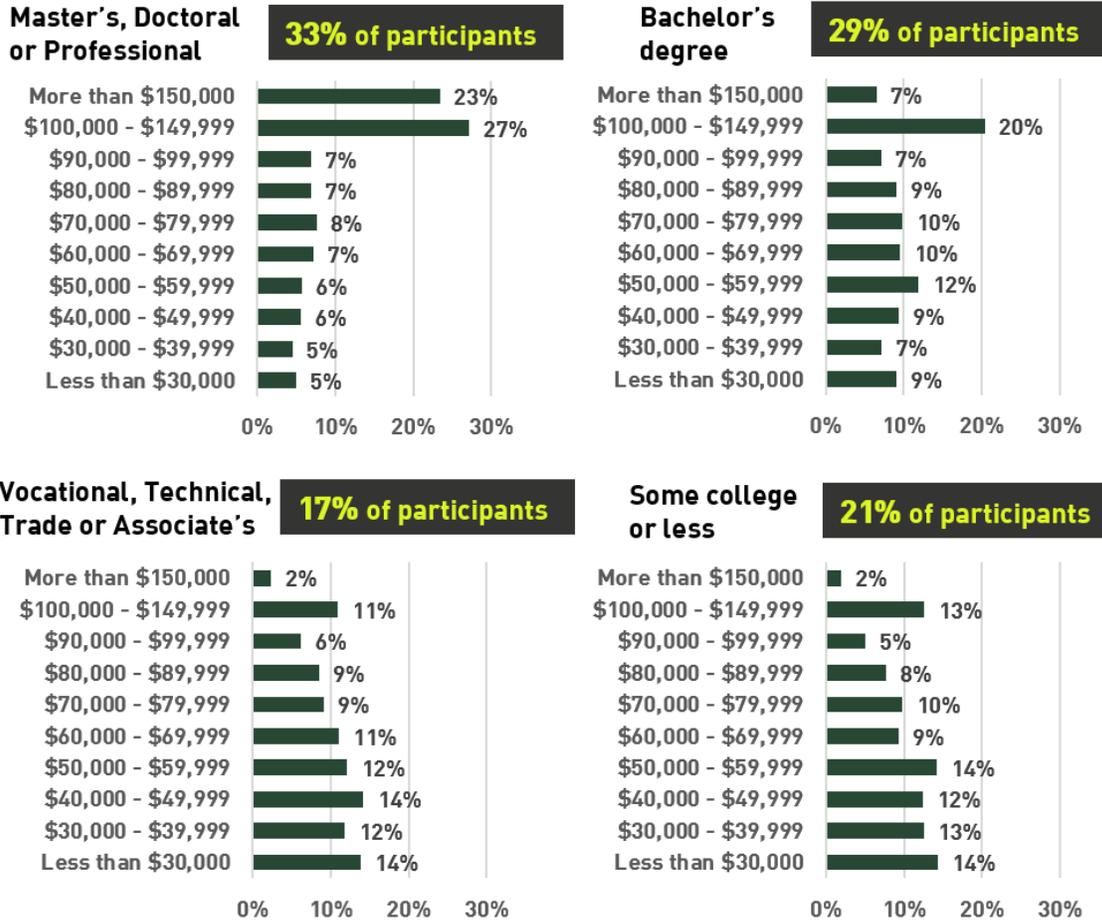
**What is the highest degree you have completed?**



**How much was your total personal income in 2020?**

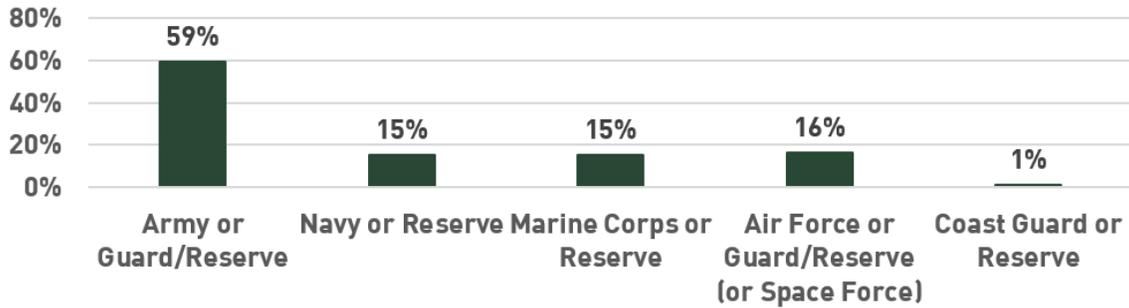


**Total 2020 personal income by highest education completed**

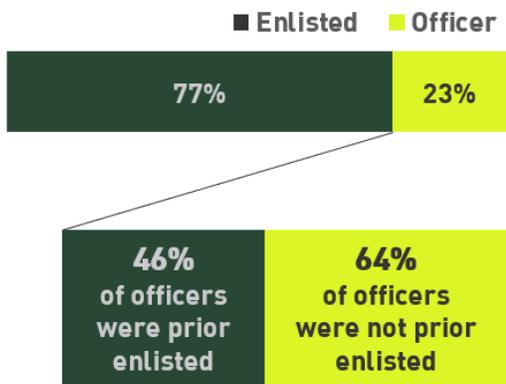


**Military Service**

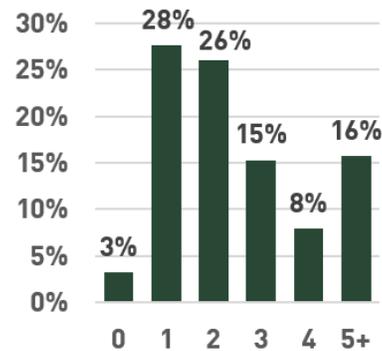
**In which branch(es) did you serve?**



**What is/was your highest rank?**

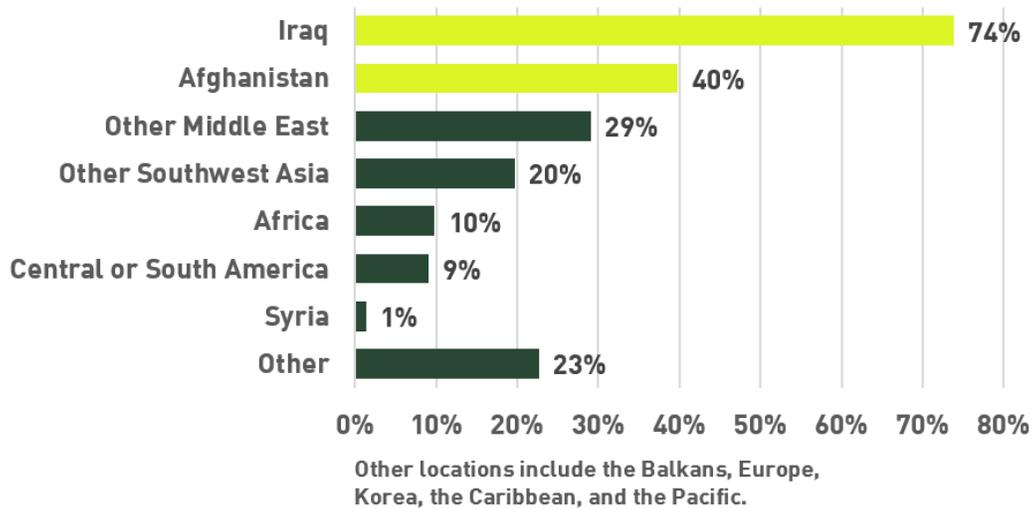


**How many times have you deployed?**

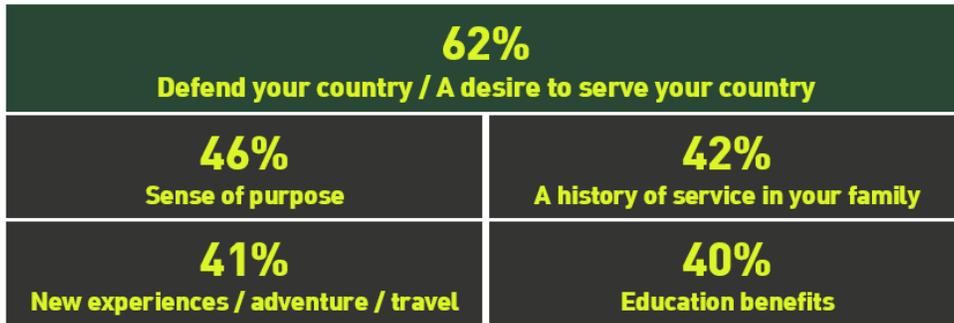


**78%**  
of Guard/Reserve had deployed over 30 days (activated)

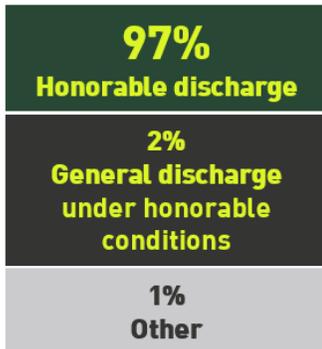
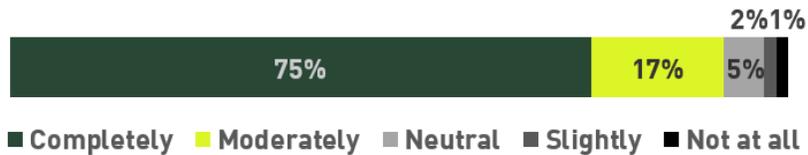
**Where have you served on Active Duty?**



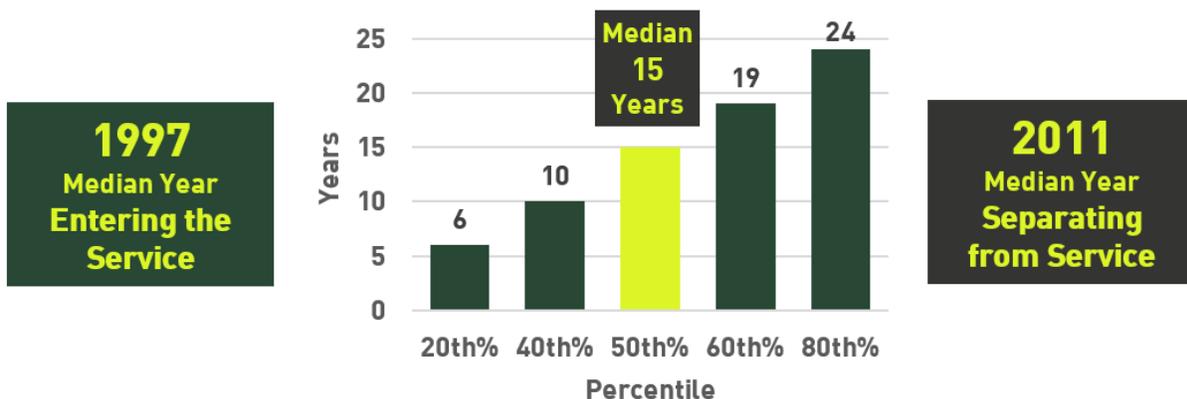
Why did you join the military? Top five reasons.



Overall, was joining the military a good decision for you personally?

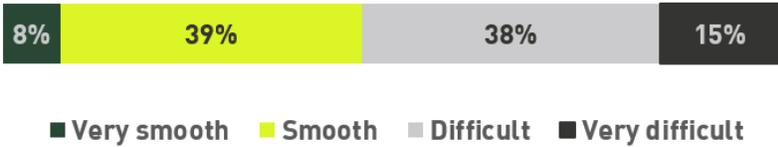


Years of service from joining the military to separation.

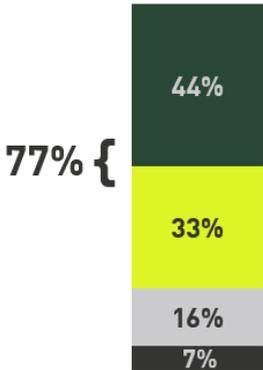


Transition Experiences

**How would you describe your overall transition from active duty to veteran status?**



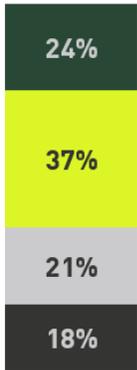
**Did you experience challenges when transitioning out of the military?**



77% {

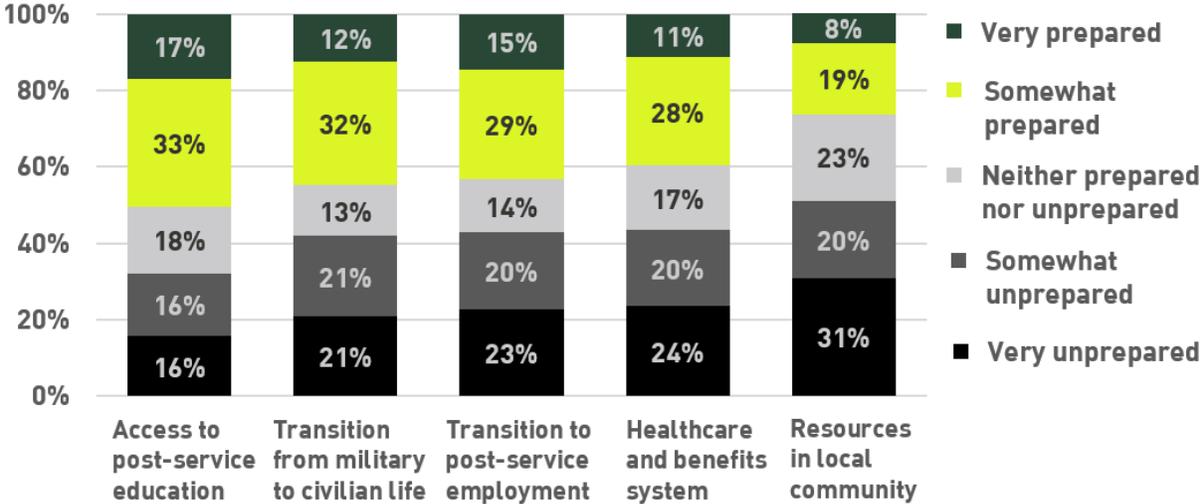
- Many
- Somewhat
- Very little
- None

**Do you currently experience any challenges related to your military service?**

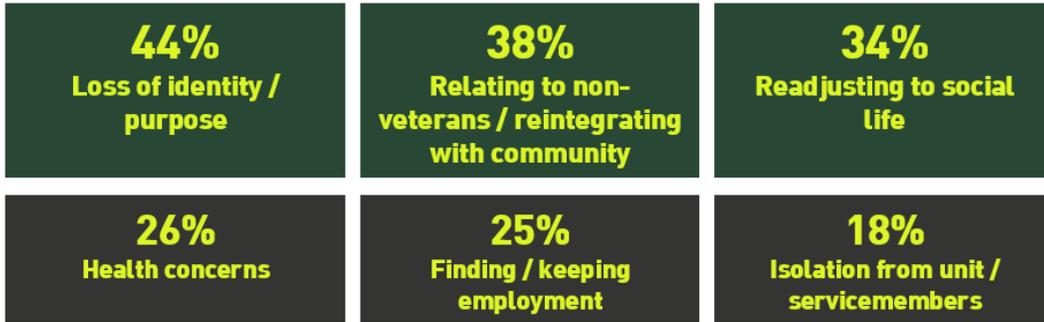


} 61%

**Using the following scale, how prepared were you to successfully navigate the following...?**



**Biggest challenges faced when transitioning out of the military.**



Were you prepared to manage your finances immediately after your transition out of the military?



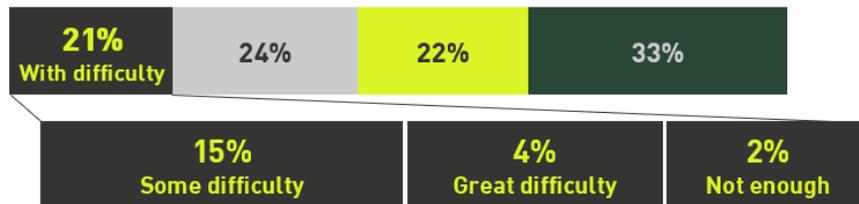
Do you think your current financial situation is better than, about the same as, or worse than others your age?



**74%** Own a home or mortgage     **22%** Rent

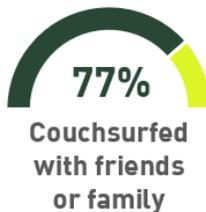
In a typical month, does your current monthly income cover basic necessary expenses (e.g., housing, food, clothing, and transportation):

■ With difficulty   ■ Fairly easily   ■ Easily   ■ Very easily

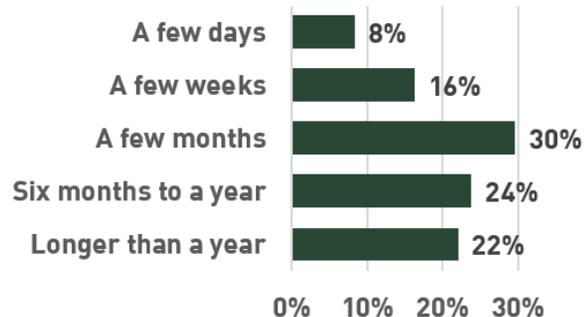


**23% of veterans** Did not have a permanent place to live when they transitioned out of the military

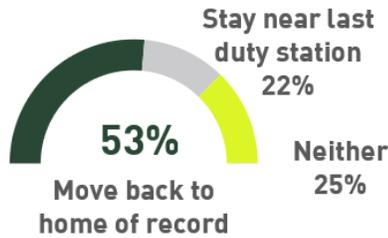
Among the 23% without a permanent place to live when they transitioned out of the military:



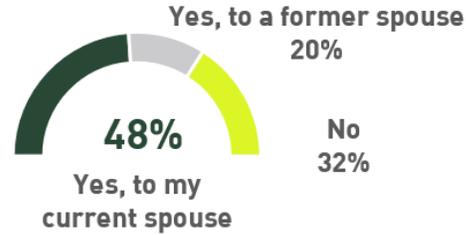
Time without a permanent place to live



**Upon separating, did you:**

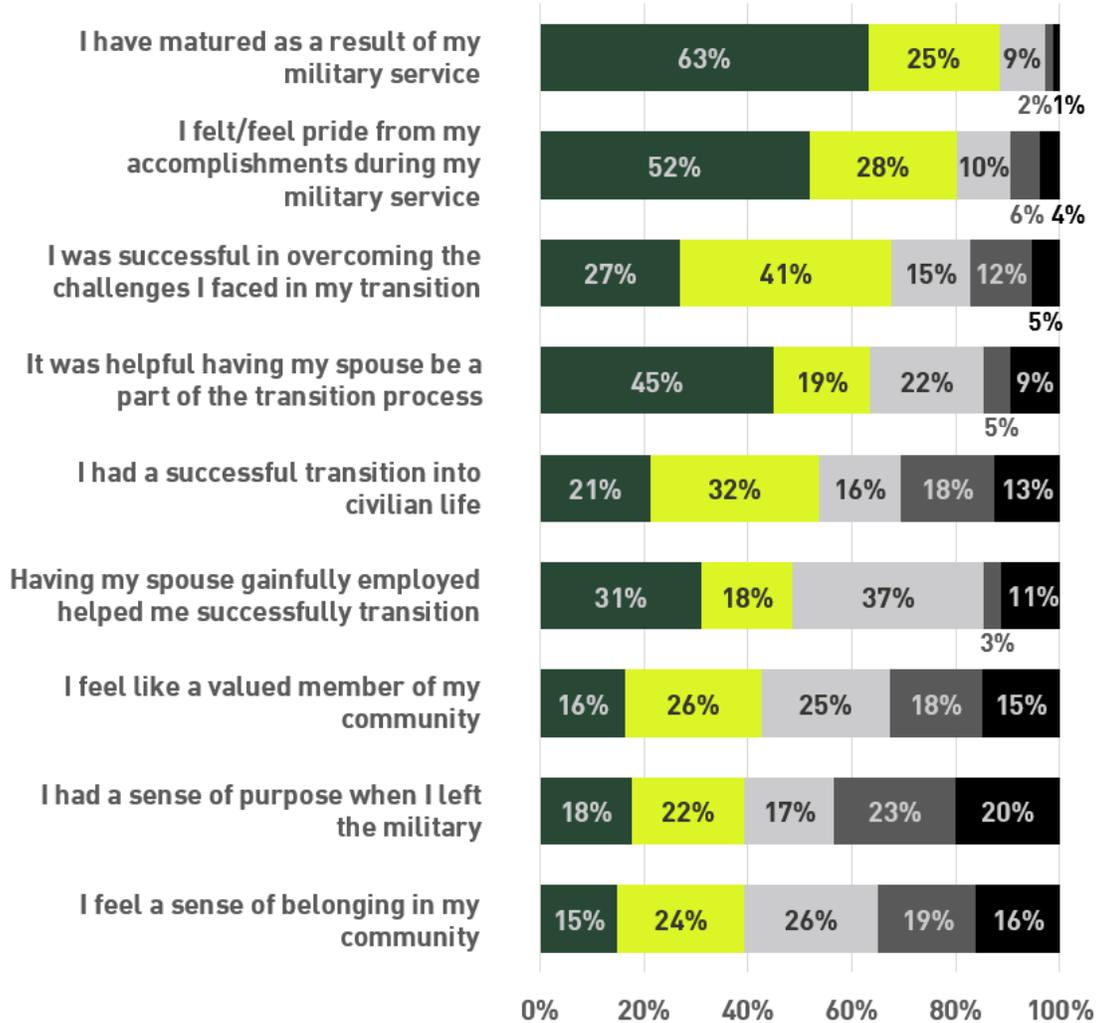


**Were you married at the time of your transition out of the military?**



**Transition experiences and attitudes.**

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree





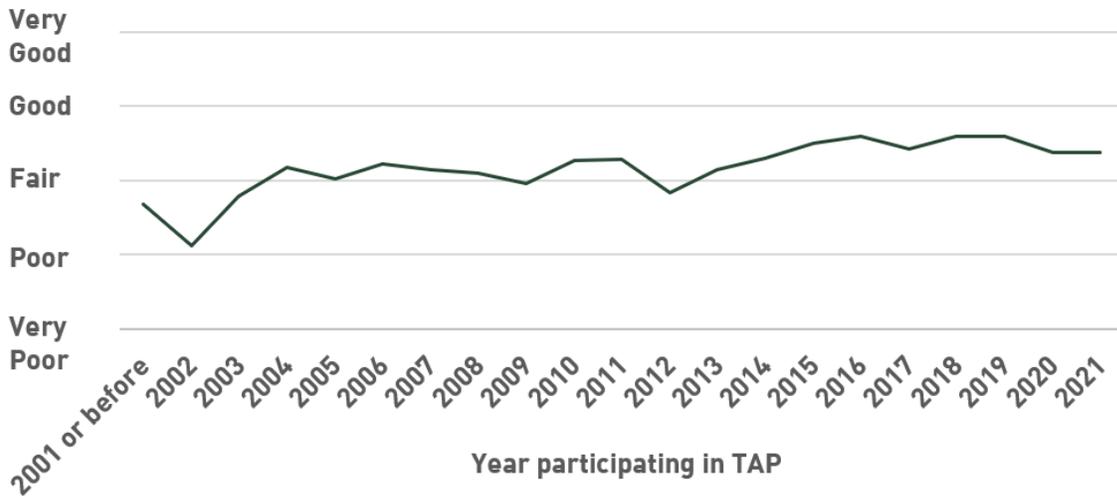
# 43% Participated or are currently participating in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

**53%**  
of veterans  
transitioned in  
**2011**  
or later

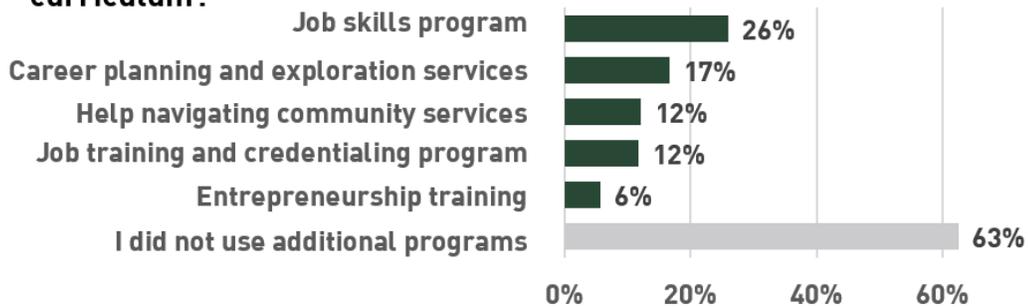
**62%**  
Would like to have  
ongoing access to  
training material  
from TAP after  
separation



## Average rating of experience in the Transition Assistance Program

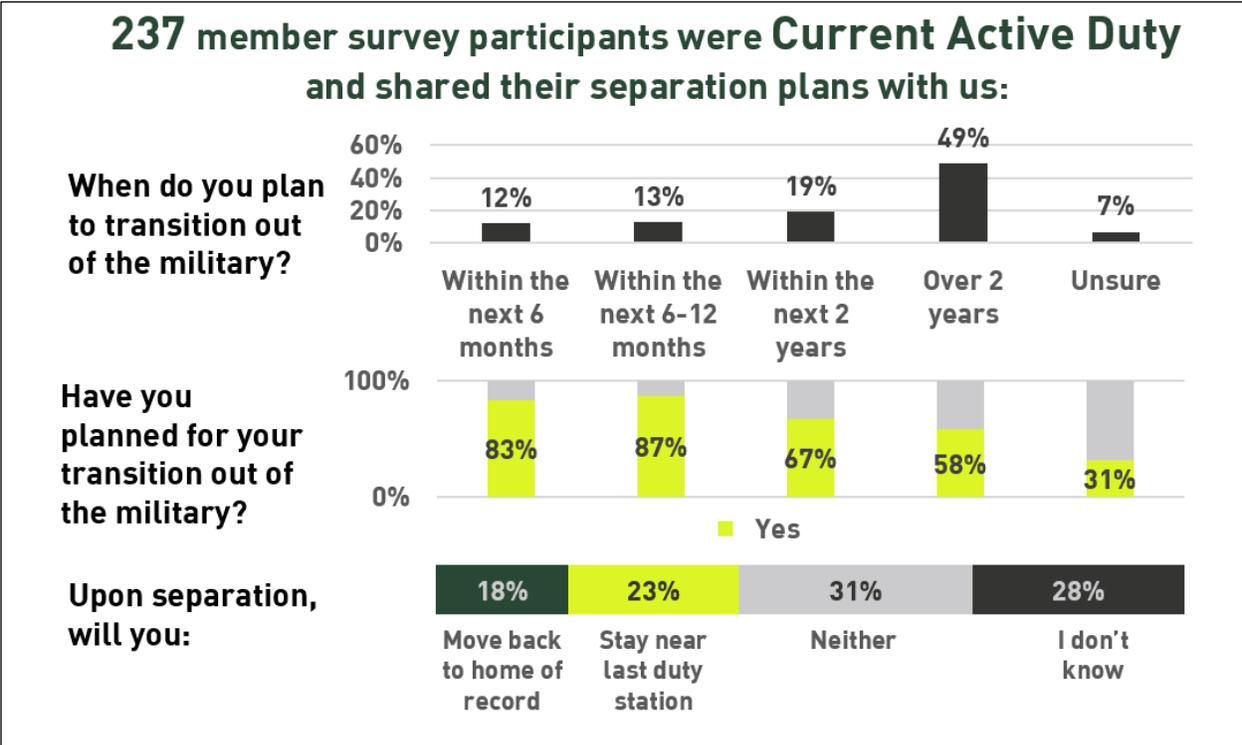


## Did you use any programs and services beyond the core TAP curriculum?



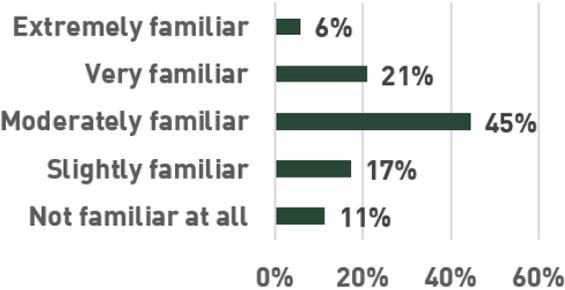
## Compared to the core TAP curriculum, these programs were:



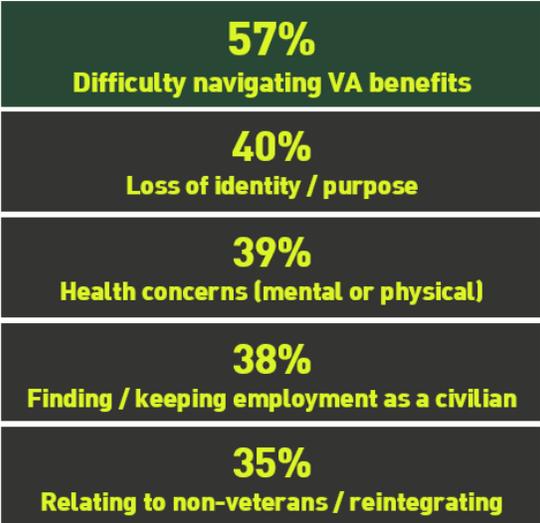


**45%**  
of current active duty participants have participated in TAP

How familiar are you with the public benefits available to you as you transition out of the military?



**Top 5** Expected transition challenges of active duty participants





# Social Issues

IAVA members are highly engaged in the politics and issues facing the nation today. From voting to volunteering, veterans are leading voices on many key social and policy needs. IAVA members lead the conversation around mental health and suicide prevention, extremism, COVID-19, firearm regulation, women veterans, military sexual assault, and the Fall 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

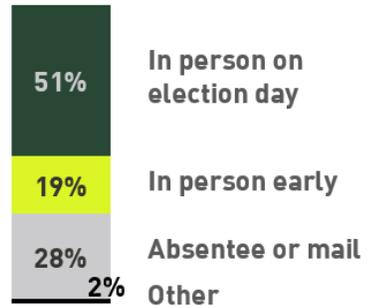
- IAVA members recognize the importance of political participation – 98% are registered to vote, 4 in 5 believe that more veterans in Congress would have a positive impact, and 3 in 10 IAVA members have considered running for political office to continue serving the country.
- About 1 in 3 IAVA members reports having personally witnessed examples of extremism among the ranks of the military and post-9/11 veterans.
- Two-thirds of IAVA members own personal firearms, 78% support universal background checks for firearm purchases, and 62% support the distribution of trigger locks.
- Only around 1 in 7 IAVA members (15%) believe that DOD is effectively addressing military sexual assault – 42% say no and 43% are unsure. However, 4 in 5 IAVA members felt that involving a trained military prosecutor would not undermine their commanding officer. Half of those experiencing military sexual assault felt that access to a trained military prosecutor would have made them more likely to report their incident and only 3% said it would make them less likely to report.

Political and Civic Engagement

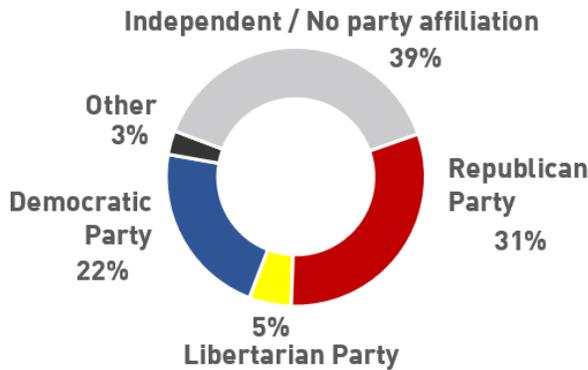
**98%** are registered to vote

**83%**  
Are “definitely” planning to vote in the  
**2022 midterm elections**

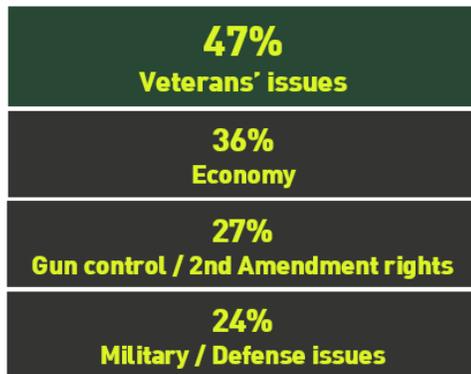
Preferred voting method



With what political party do you affiliate?



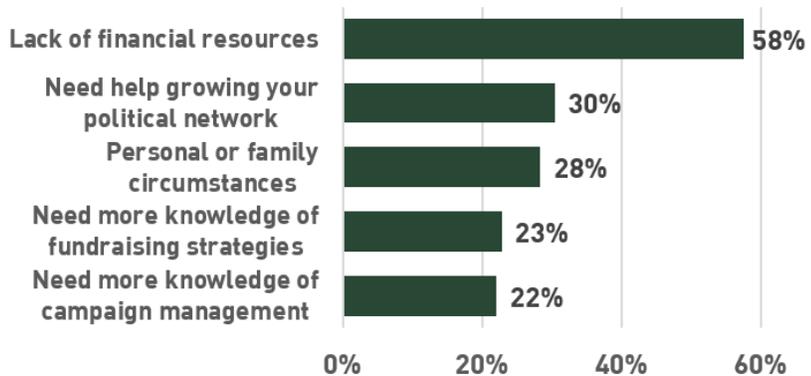
Top issues when considering your support of a political candidate:



**31%**  
Have considered running for public office



Most significant challenges to your ability to run for public office (top responses)



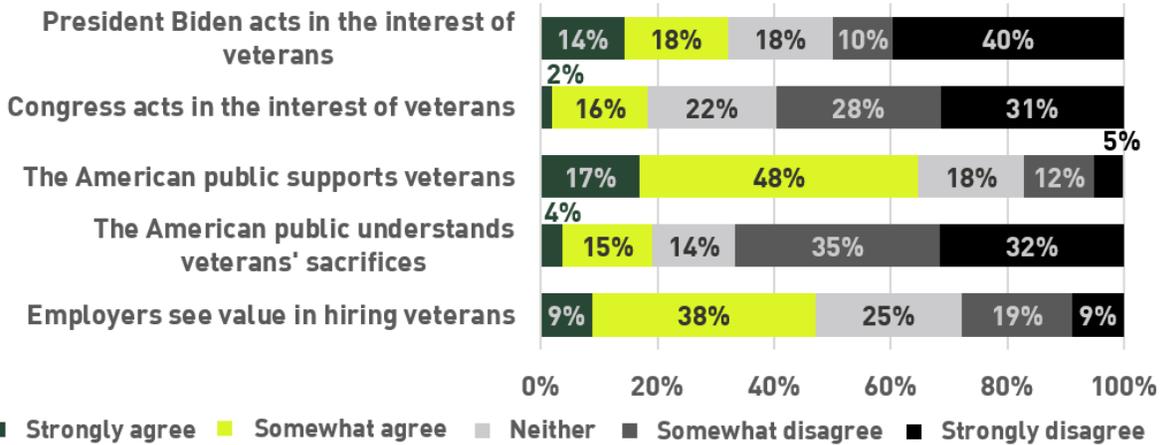
What impact do you think having more veterans in Congress would have on the ability of Congress to address national issues?



In your opinion, what are the three most important issues to post-9/11 veterans?



Which of the following most closely resembles your opinion:



**Selective Service**

Ending the Selective Service enrollment process (used in the event of a draft) for male U.S. citizens turning 18 years old.



Maintaining the Selective Service with the inclusion of women U.S. citizens turning 18 years old in the enrollment process.



**Immigration and Citizenship**

Currently, military service can serve as a way to expedite the pathway to U.S. citizenship. What is your opinion of this policy?



The Special Immigrant Visa Program (SIV) is for certain Iraqi and Afghan nationals who have worked for U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq or Afghanistan (as contractors, translators, interpreters, etc.) to emigrate to the United States. What is your opinion of this policy?



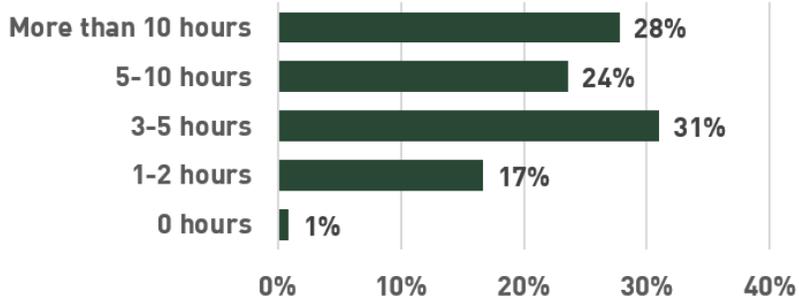
Under current immigration law, non-citizens may be deported after committing a crime, regardless of veteran status or military service. What is your opinion of this law?



Post-9/11 veterans stand out for their desire to continue to serve and give back once they return home. Many IAVA members have discovered the psychological, emotional, and social benefits from serving in their local communities.

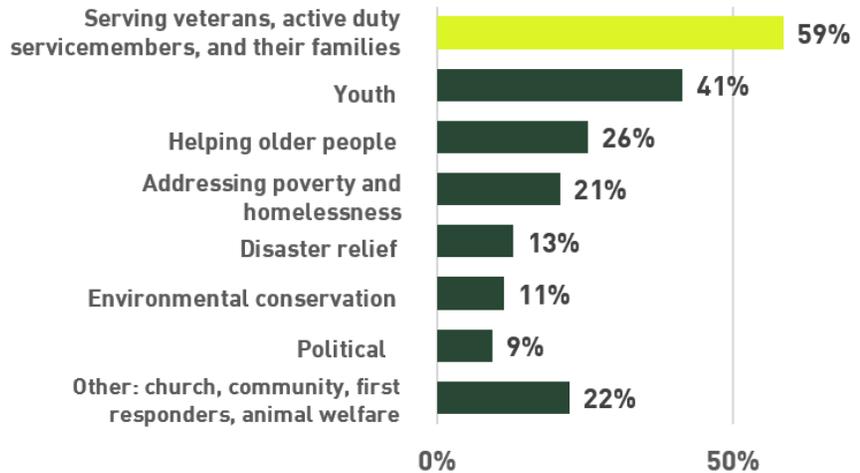
**46%**  
Volunteer on a regular basis

**How many hours per month do you spend volunteering?**

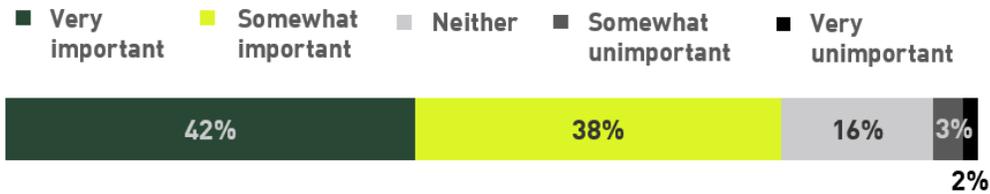


**70%**  
Are also members of other veteran organizations

**Which issues do you focus your volunteer work on?**



**How important is it for you to interact regularly with other veterans and military servicemembers?**



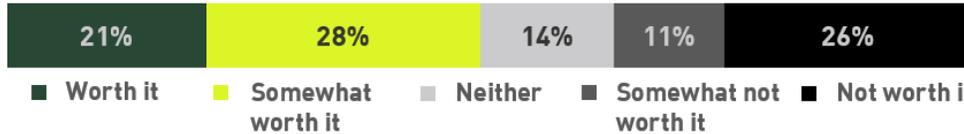
**How do you interact with other veterans and military servicemembers?**



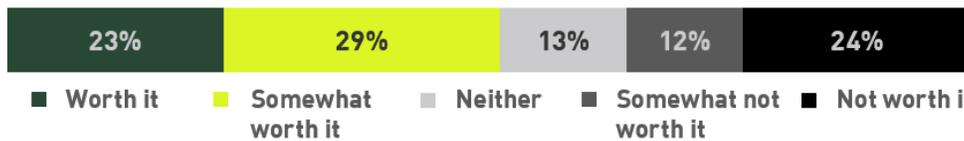
**Issues from the Headlines**

IAVA members are engaged with the news of the day and have varying degrees of trust and support for political figures and institutions. This survey was fielded between 9/3/2021 and 10/31/2021, immediately following the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**In all, do you think our engagement in Iraq was worth it, or not?**



**In all, do you think our engagement in Afghanistan was worth it, or not?**

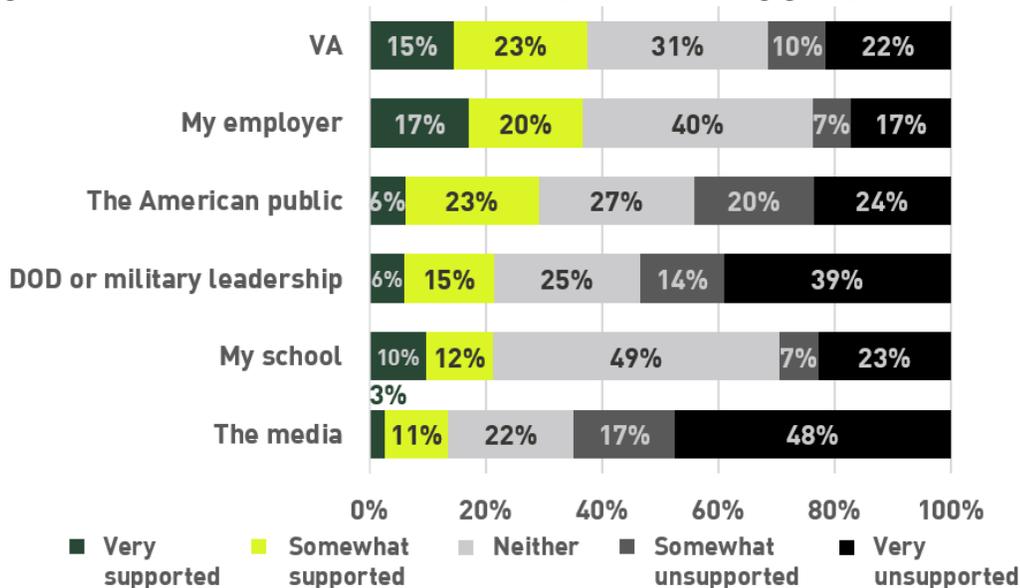


**Views on the Afghanistan withdrawal**

Note: Survey was fielded between 9/3/21 and 10/28/21.

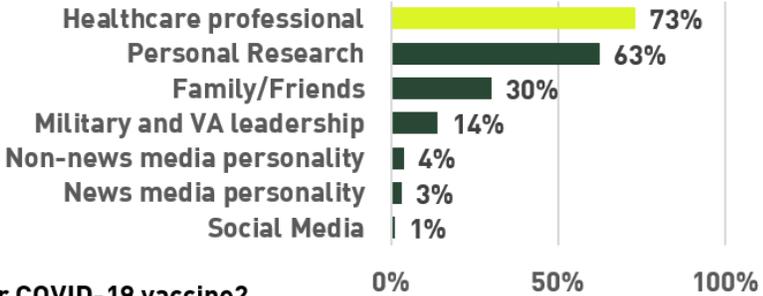


**As a servicemember/veteran, how supported did you feel during the Afghanistan withdrawal and aftermath by the following groups?**

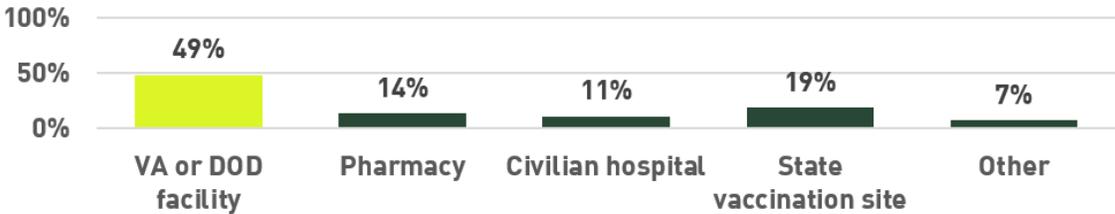


**85%**  
**Had received  
 the COVID-19  
 vaccine**  
 before November 2021

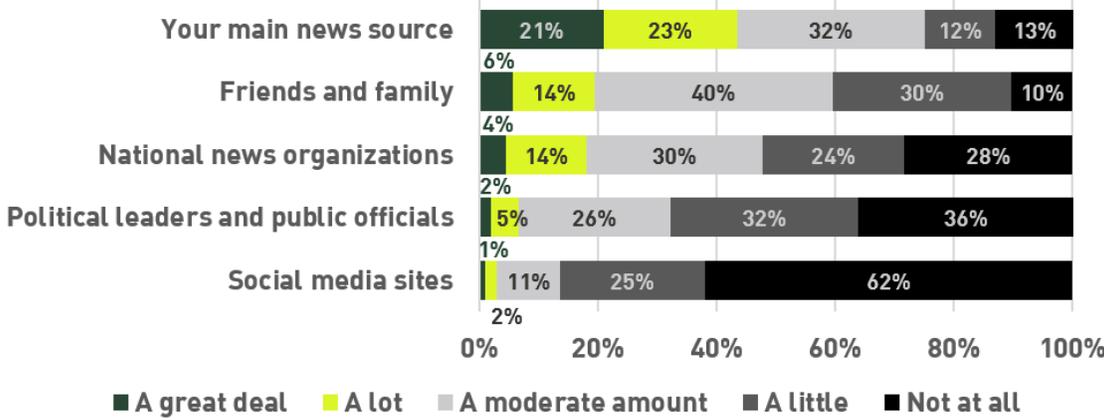
When making the decision whether or not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, whose advice did you value most? (Select up to 3 options)



Where did you receive your COVID-19 vaccine?



How much do you trust the accuracy of the political news and information you get from:



Do you think your main news source mentioned above is part of the mainstream media?

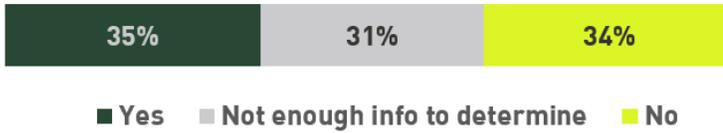


Do you think your main news source presents the news in a different way from most media outlets?



Views on Extremism

Do you think there is a serious problem of extremism within the military ranks?



**32%**  
Have personally witnessed examples of extremism within the ranks of the military

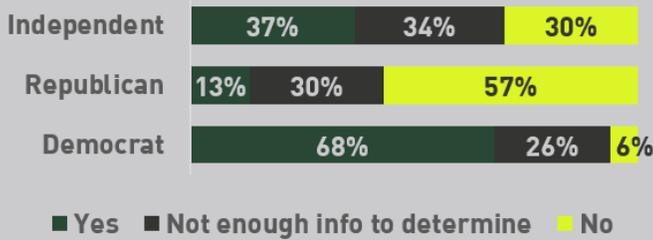
Do you think there is a serious problem of extremism among post-9/11 veterans?



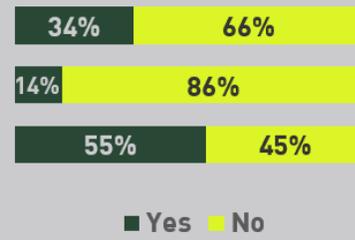
**32%**  
Have personally witnessed examples of extremism among post-9/11 veterans

Extremism Views by Political Party Affiliation

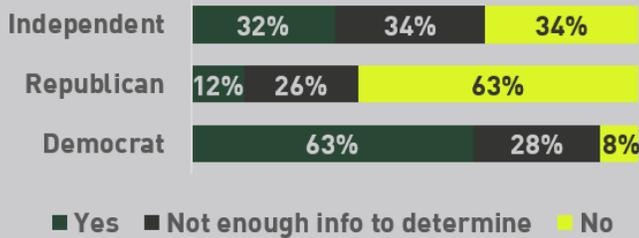
Do you think there is a serious problem of extremism within the military ranks?



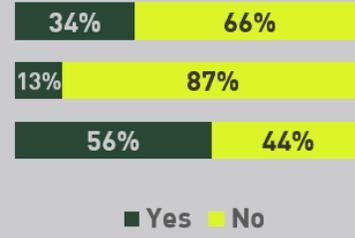
Have you personally witnessed examples of extremism within the military ranks?



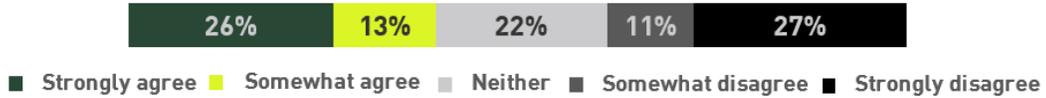
Do you think there is a serious problem of extremism among post-9/11 veterans?



Have you personally witnessed examples of extremism among post-9/11 veterans?



**What is your opinion on allowing openly transgender persons to participate in military service?**

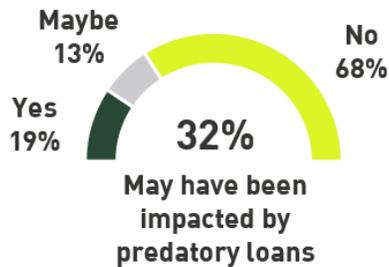


**Have you ever been impacted by cybercrimes, and did you report them?**



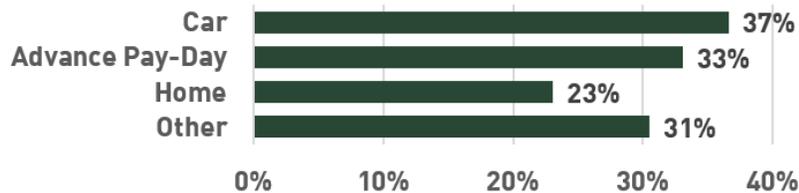
**Main types of cybercrimes affecting military and veteran families:**  
 Imposter scams  
 financial / purchase scams  
 hacked accounts / devices identity theft  
 cyberbullying / harassment / stalking

**Do you believe you have experienced predatory loan practices?**



**Predatory lending is generally defined as:**  
 Imposing unfair or abusive loan terms on borrowers through deceptive, unfair, or fraudulent practices

**Under what conditions did your loan occur?**



## Women Veterans

Women represent the fastest-growing subset of the veteran population. In 2017, IAVA launched our groundbreaking campaign, #SheWhoBorneTheBattle, focused on recognizing the service of women veterans and closing gaps in care provided to them by the VA. We continue to fight for recognition and improved care for all the women veterans who have served or will serve our country.

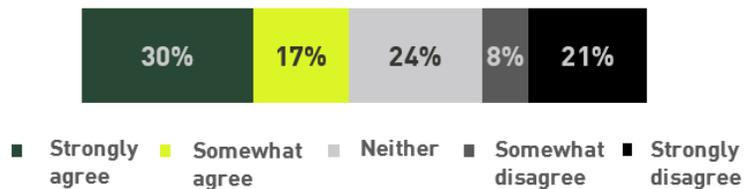
**Women Veterans make up 14% of IAVA Membership Survey Participants**

**How important do you think it is for IAVA to address issues facing women veterans?**



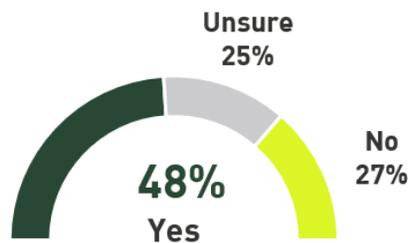
**The VA motto:**  
 "To care for him who has borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."  
 The motto was chosen 59 years ago and based on President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address in 1865.

**What is your opinion on changing the motto to be more inclusive of all who have served?**

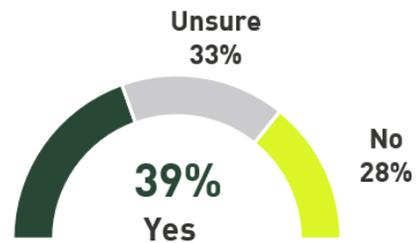


**Women in combat**

**Do you think women's advancement in the military has been limited by past restrictions on women in combat?**



**Do you believe that lifting the restrictions on women in combat has improved the public recognition of their military contributions?**

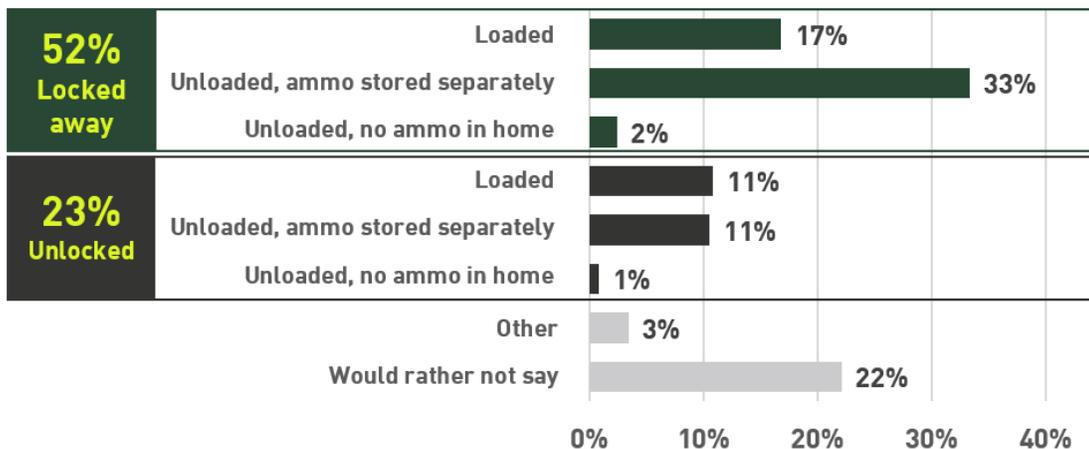


## Gun Ownership and Safety

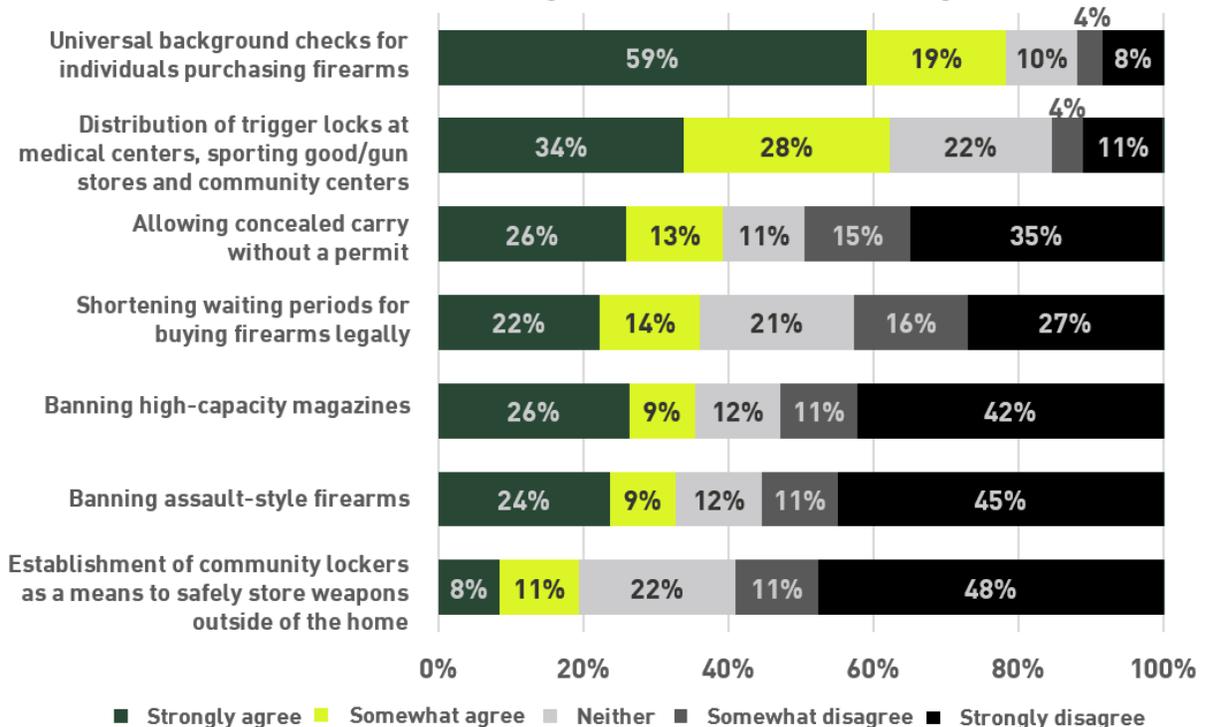
It is a powerful and often politicized topic in today's environment, but firearm ownership and storage is a particularly important topic in the veteran community. IAVA members overwhelmingly support universal background checks, but do not support banning assault style weapons or high capacity magazines. Firearm safety and storage is a continuing topic of conversation in the veteran community, particularly how access to lethal means is related to suicide.

### **68%** of IAVA Membership Survey Participants own Personal Firearm(s)

Please select your primary method of storage for your firearm.



Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

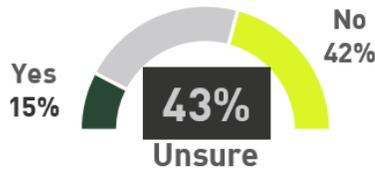




### Military Sexual Assault and Intimate Violence

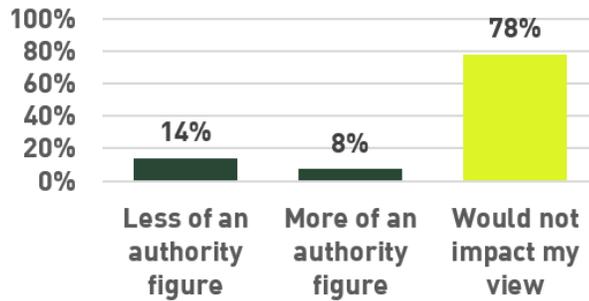
Military sexual trauma affects an estimated one in four women veterans and one in one hundred male veterans, according to VA. While there has been much attention on the issue from Department of Defense and VA, sexual assault continues to plague the services. By better understanding the past experience of these survivors, IAVA is dedicated to understanding the experiences of survivors so that we can better advocate for policies that will stop sexual assault in the future.

**Do you believe the Department of Defense is effectively addressing the problem of military sexual assault?**



**Currently, the final decision to send someone to court martial for military sexual assault lies with the commanding officer.**

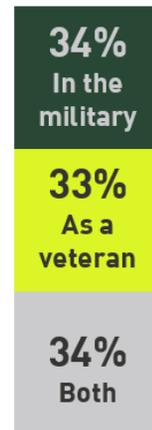
**If this decision was instead given to a trained military prosecutor, would you view the commander as:**



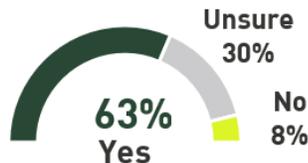
**Have you ever been in an intimate relationship in which...**



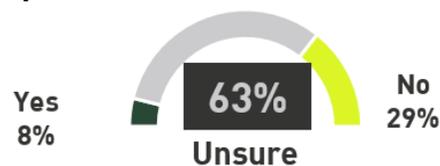
**When did this happen:**



**Do you think domestic violence is a serious problem within the military?**



**Do you think the VA does enough to support veterans or spouses who experience domestic violence?**



**12%** of IAVA Membership Survey Participants are survivors of military sexual assault

Survivors are:

30% Male

70% Female

4% of men and 58% of women report having experienced sexual assault or things like unwanted touching, someone exposing themselves, or unwanted sexual contact

Only 34% reported the incident

Sexual assault incidents were reported to authorities by:

24% of the men

who had these experiences

37% of the women

63% of those who reported

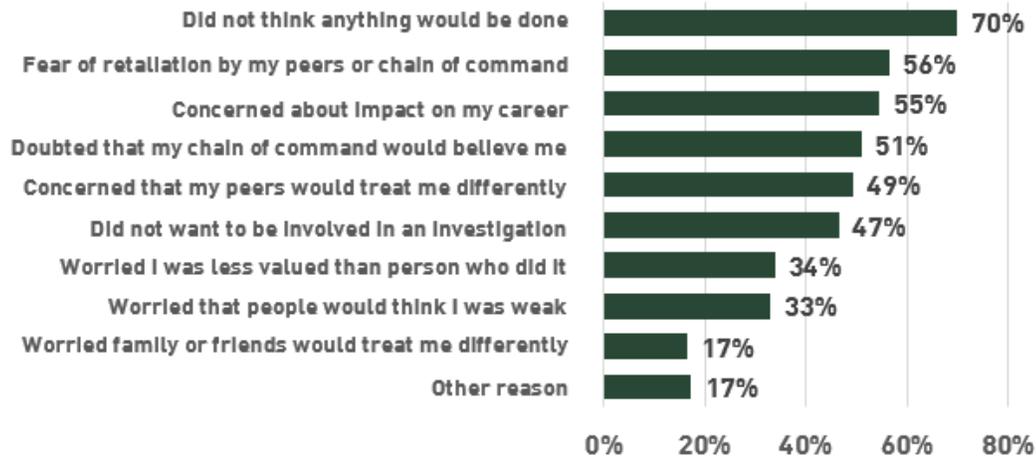
Experienced retaliation after reporting

47% of men

67% of women

reported retaliation after reporting the incident

**If you did not report the incident, why did you not report this?**



**If instead of your commander, a trained military prosecutor had the authority to make the decision to move forward with your case, which of the following impacts would it have had on your decision to report?**





# Post-Service Career

The opportunities of post-9/11 veterans as they transition into their post-service careers have been shaped by key opportunities like the post-9/11 GI Bill, making education possible for veterans and their dependents. In this section, IAVA members report their experiences with understanding, accessing, and using these important benefits.

Veterans also describe their employment situation as the nation continues to navigate the economic impact of COVID-19. At the time of the survey, members reported a 5.1% unemployment rate (those looking for work), significantly higher than the national unemployment rate of 3.9%, and another 2.7% were unemployed but not looking for work (“discouraged workers”). This section highlights the importance of education, veteran-friendly employers, and entrepreneurship to veterans’ post-service lives and work.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Around 1 in 7 IAVA members (14%) are currently enrolled in a higher education program; 63% of veterans have enrolled in higher education since separating from the military and 74% of active-duty members have pursued a degree since joining.
- Only 1 in 8 veterans (13%) reported feeling like they could afford higher education without the GI Bill – 73% said no and 14% were unsure.
- Around 3 in 10 veterans considered themselves underemployed, that is, not having enough paid work or not doing enough work that makes full use of their skills or abilities.
- Veteran entrepreneurs made up 6% of survey participants, and 16% of non-business owners were planning to start their own business or non-profit enterprise.

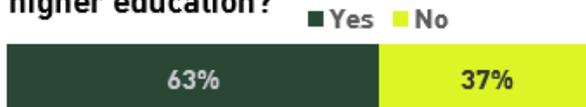
GI Bill and Education

Are you eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)?



Veterans

Since separating from the military, have you enrolled in any form of higher education?



Did you graduate?



**14%** of IAVA Membership Survey Participants are currently enrolled in an education program for a certificate or degree

Active Duty

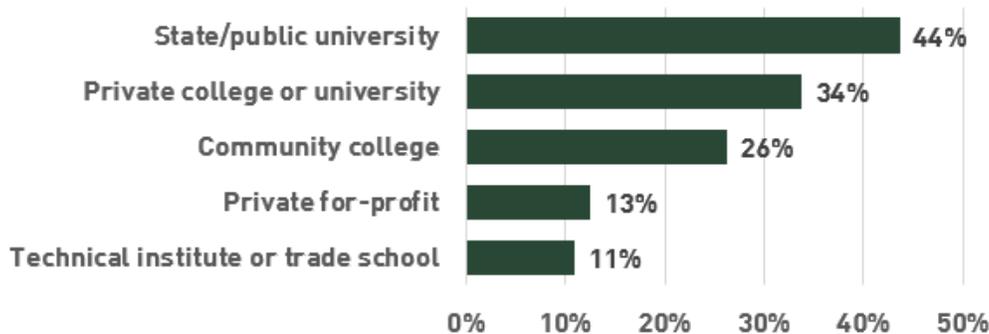
Have you pursued a degree since joining the military?



Did you graduate?



What type of school are you/did you attend? (select all that apply)



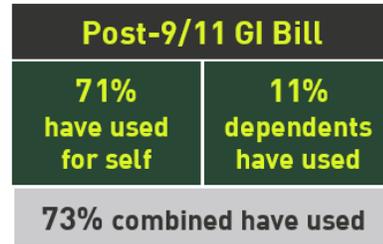
Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with your educational program(s):



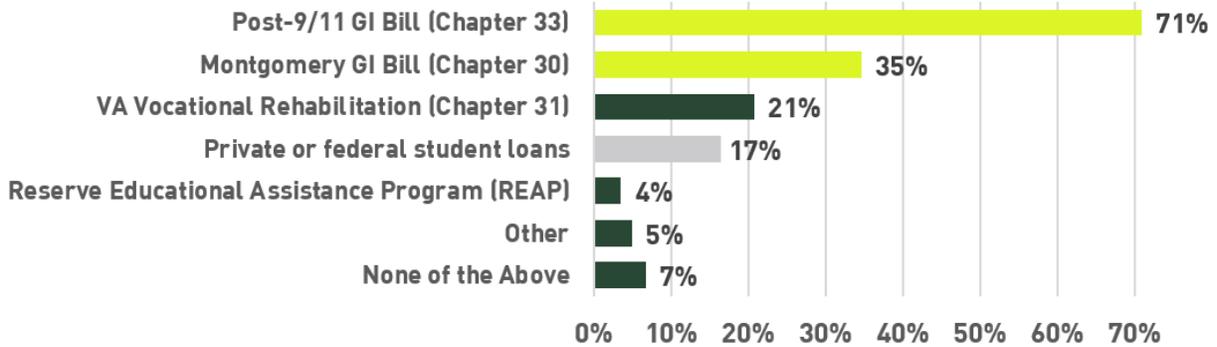
**Could you afford school without the GI Bill?**



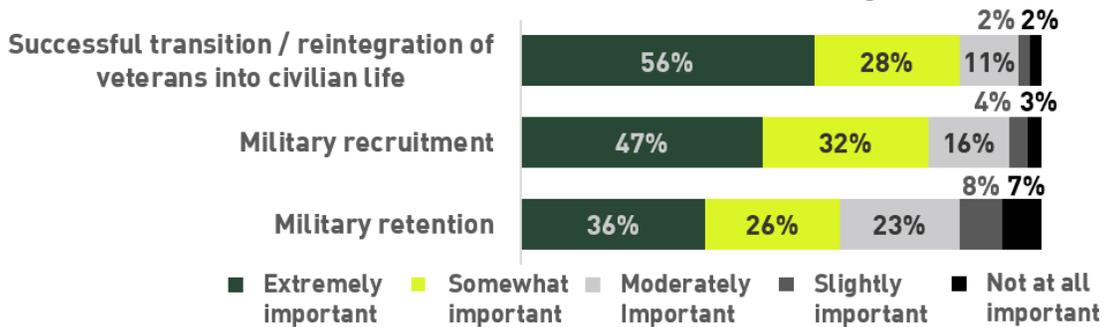
**No**  
**73%**



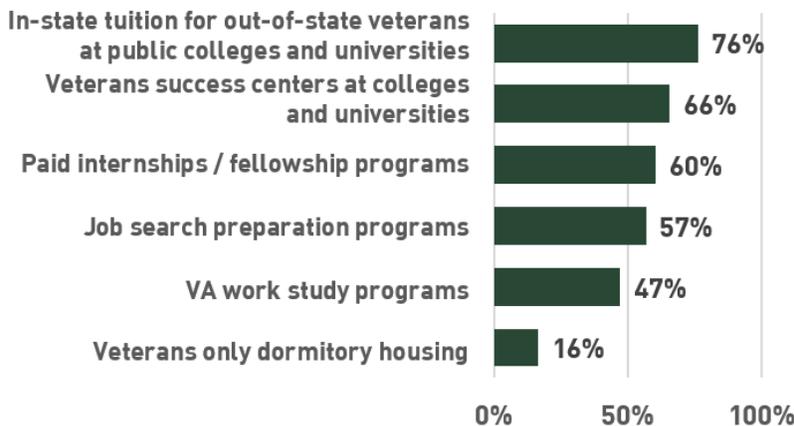
**Which, if any, of the following VA Educational Benefits did you use to support your education after transitioning out of service? (select all that apply)**



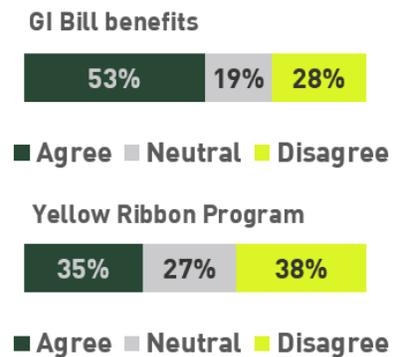
**How important is the Post-9/11 GI Bill for the following:**



**Which, if any, do you believe best improves veteran education outcomes? (select all that apply)**



**Schools provided enough information for you to get the most out of:**

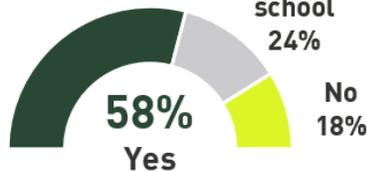


DEPENDENTS USING THE POST-9/11 GI BILL

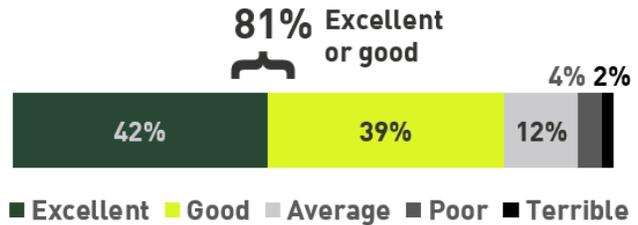
**11%**  
Of dependents have used

**17%**  
Of dependents have not used but intend to

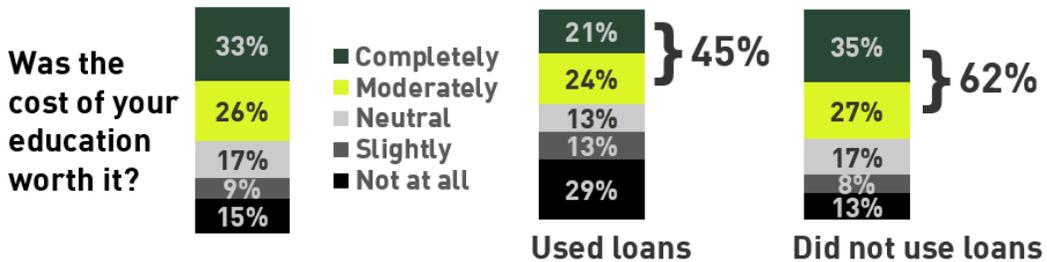
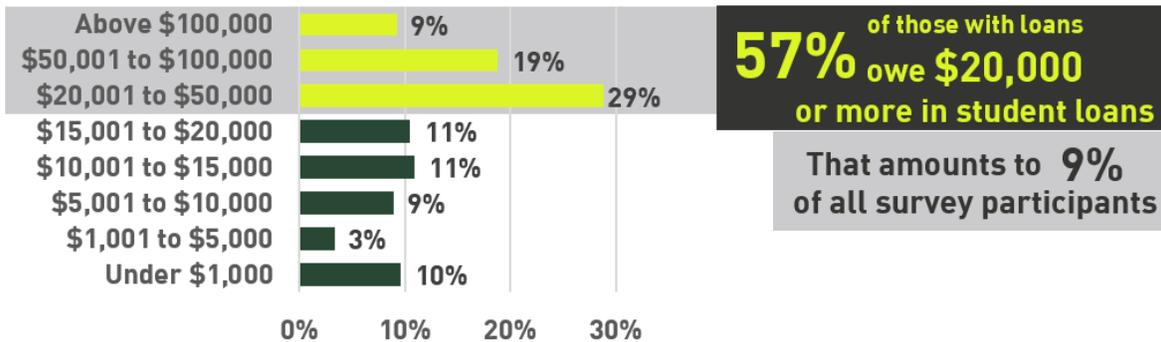
Did your dependent graduate?



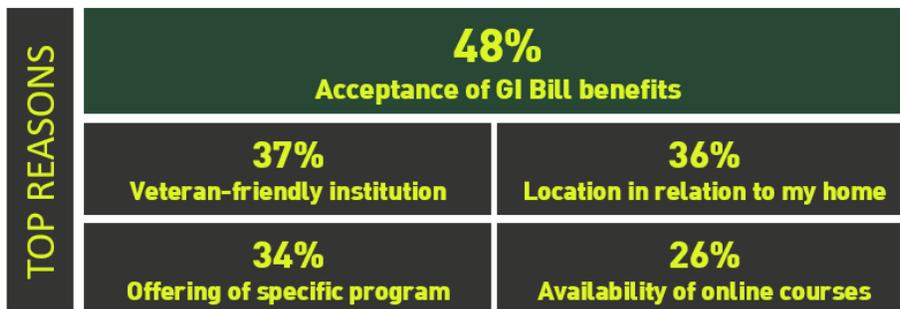
Overall, how would you rate your dependent's experience with the Post-9/11 GI Bill?



Of the 17% of veterans with private or federal student loans: How much debt have you accrued through student loans?



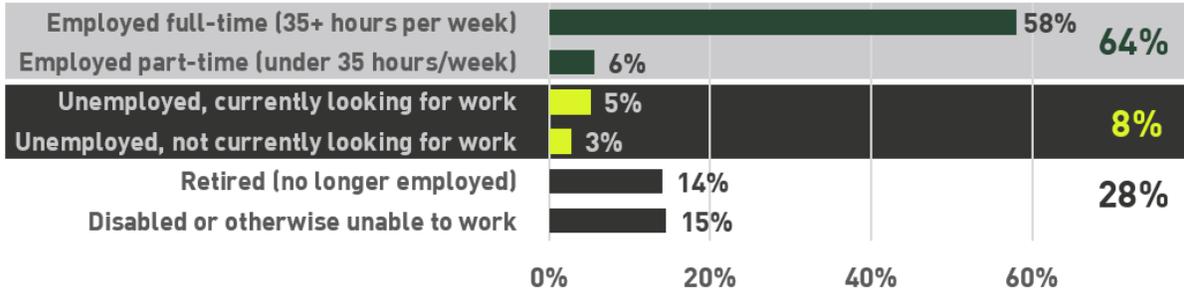
Select the top three reasons why you chose your institution(s):



**Employment**

**Which best describes your current employment situation?**

Data collected between 9/3/21 and 10/28/21

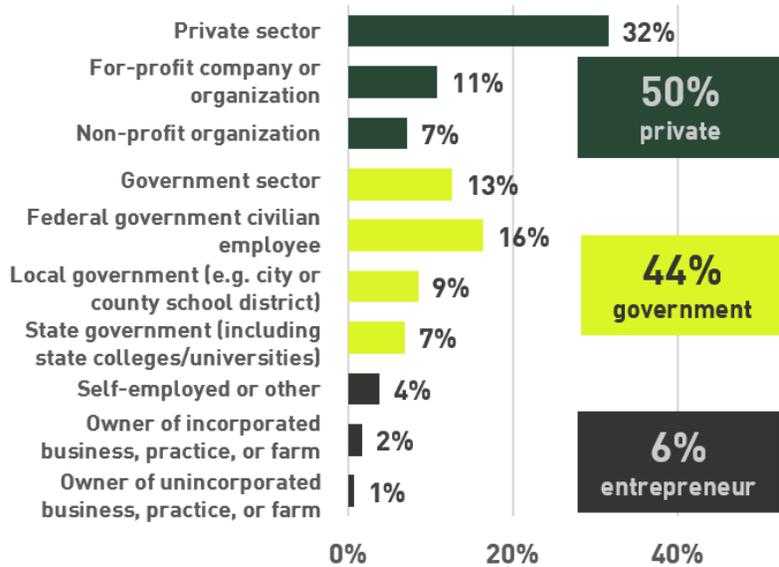


**Which best describes your current or most recent employer?**

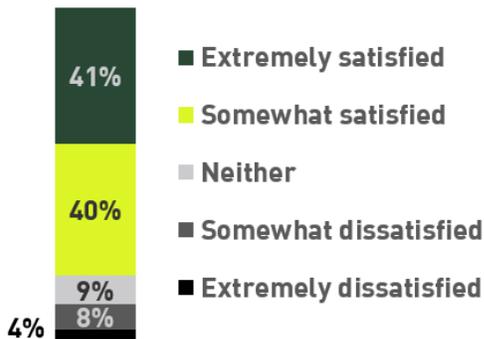
**Do you consider yourself currently underemployed?**



**Underemployment is defined as not having enough paid work or not doing enough work that makes full use of your skills or abilities**



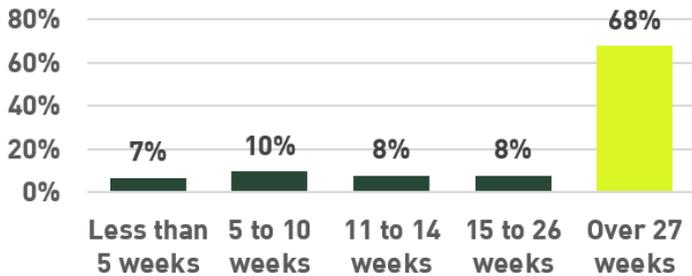
**Considering everything, are you satisfied with your current job?**



**5.1%** were **unemployed** and currently looking for work

Note: The Bureau of Labor statistics reported a 4.8% unemployment rate for veterans in October 2021 when this survey was conducted.

For how long have you been unemployed?



**2.7%** were **unemployed** and not looking for work

What is the main reason you are not looking for work? (select all that apply)



What is the main challenge you have faced in finding work? (select all that apply)

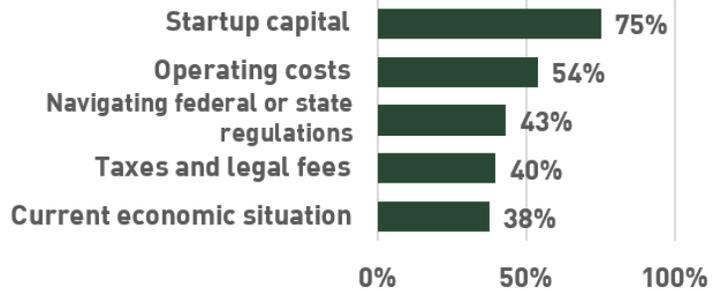


**Entrepreneurship**

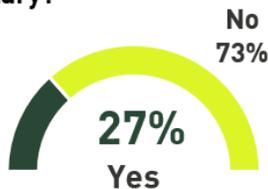
16% of those who are not business owners are planning to start their own business or non-profit enterprise

68% of those planning to start a business are not aware of VA / Dept of Labor small business support programs

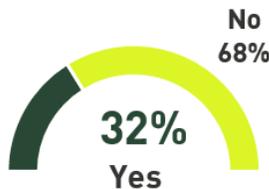
What challenges do you anticipate for starting your business/non-profit?



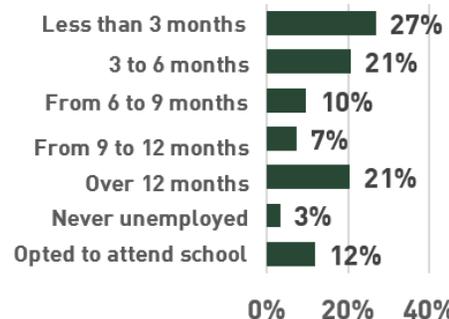
Did you receive support/training for transitioning to the civilian workforce before leaving the military?



Did you have a job secured before you left the military?



How long were you without a job after transitioning out of the military?



# Health & Wellbeing

Many post-9/11 veterans experience health challenges after separating from the military – over 53,000 servicemembers have been wounded in action in Iraq and Afghanistan, including 86% of IAVA members who have continuing issues such as illnesses from toxic exposures, traumatic brain injury, and post-traumatic stress. Mental health injuries impact the post-9/11 generation at an alarming rate. Ensuring access to effective treatment options for mental health injuries is paramount to the long-term health of post-9/11 veterans.

Many of these issues can be exacerbated by substance abuse. IAVA applauds the efforts of DoD and VA in their efforts to reduce alcohol and tobacco consumption by military personnel and veterans.

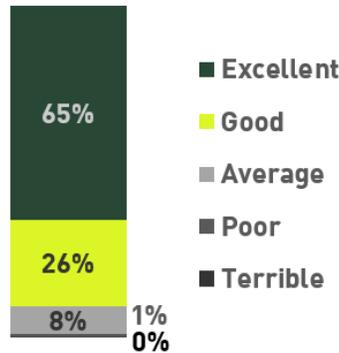
IAVA is committed to ensuring that veterans receive the same level of care as their civilian counterparts. To this end, IAVA members sound off on alternative therapies such as cannabis.

## **KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

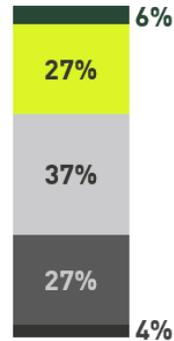
- 86% of IAVA members report a service-connected physical injury or illness, and 61% report a service-connected mental health injury.
- About two-thirds of IAVA members have used alternative therapies to treat service-connected injuries; 7 in 10 veterans have at least some interest in cannabis or cannabinoid products as a treatment option if it were available.
- 82% of IAVA members report that during their service they were exposed to burn pits and/or airborne toxic materials. Around half have had their exposure documented in a Periodic Health Assessment or other report (53%), and 59% are registered with the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits Registry.
- More than two-thirds of IAVA members personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide, and 64% know a post-9/11 veteran who has died by suicide.

General Health

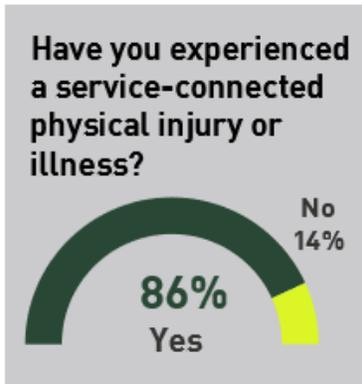
How would you rate your overall health before you joined the military?



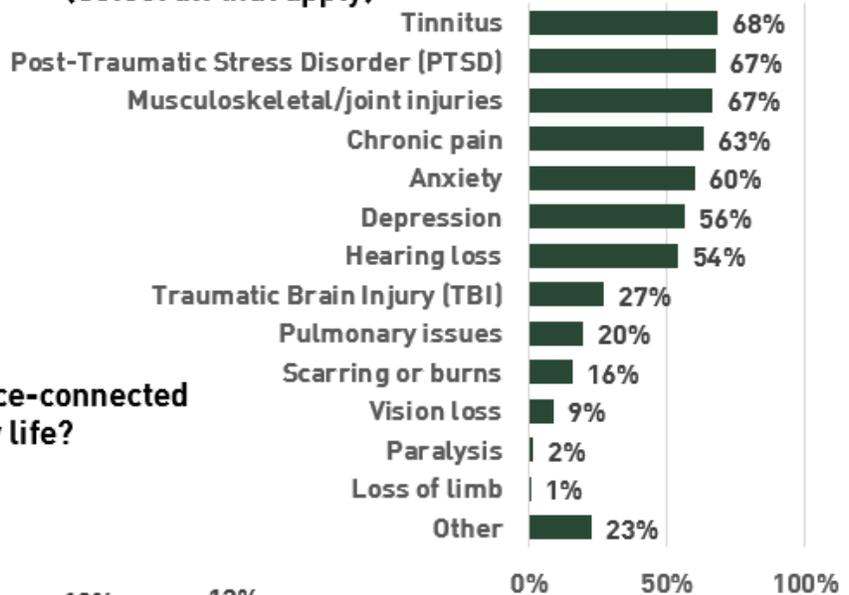
How do you rate your current overall health?



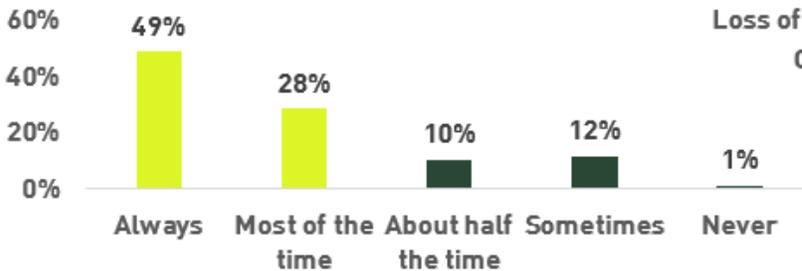
How important is maintaining your health to you?



Did you sustain any of the following injuries or illnesses as a result of your service? (select all that apply)

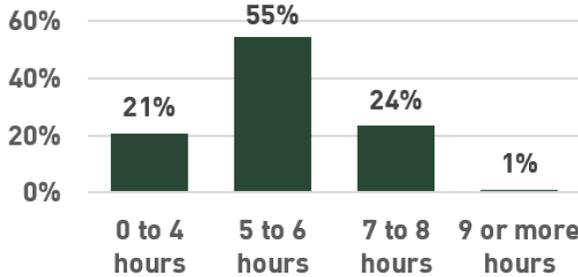


How often do your service-connected injuries affect your daily life?



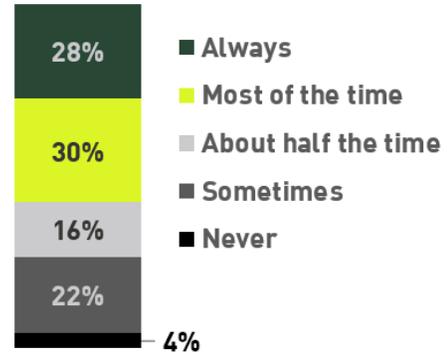
**Sleep Issues**

On average, how many hours of sleep do you get per night?

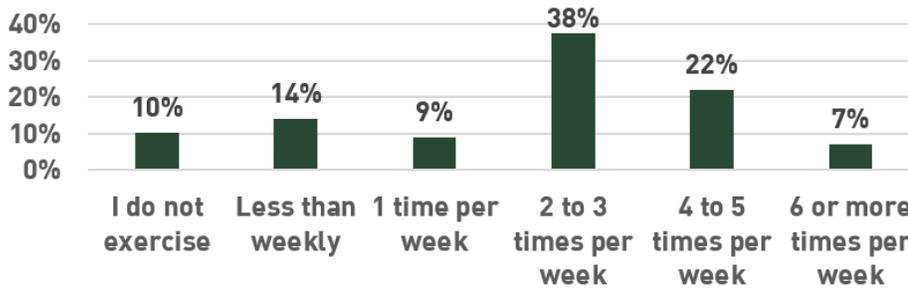


**47%** have ever been diagnosed with a sleep condition

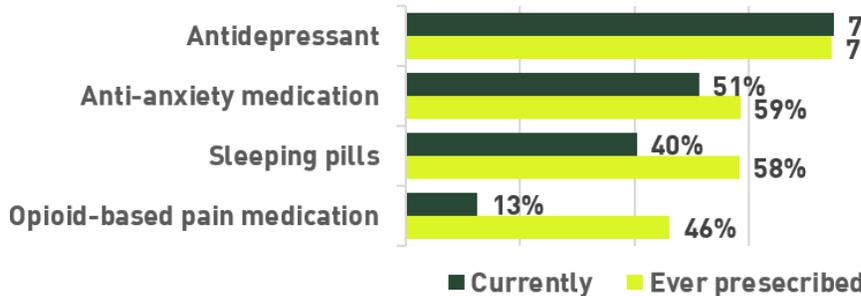
How often do you have trouble sleeping at night (i.e. falling or staying asleep, rising too early?)



How many times a week do you exercise?



Are you currently, or have you in the past, taken any of the following for a service-related injury?



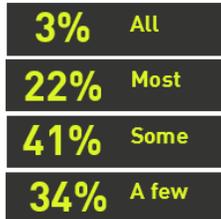
Examples
Prozac, Celexa, Zoloft Paxil, Lexapro, Effexor, Cymbalta
Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan, Valium, Buspirone
Ambien, Lunesta, Rozerem, Sonata, Halcion, Restoril
Oxycodone, Naloxone, Codeine, Morphine, Fentanyl

**Caregiving**

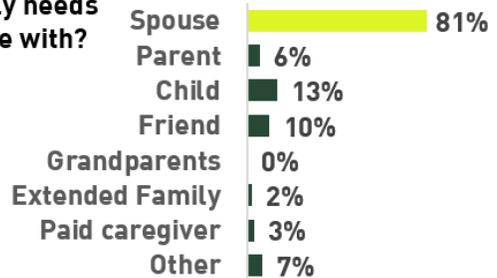
**24%** have someone assisting with some aspect of their daily personal needs

Such as: health, mental health, chores, finances

How much of your daily needs do you need assistance with?

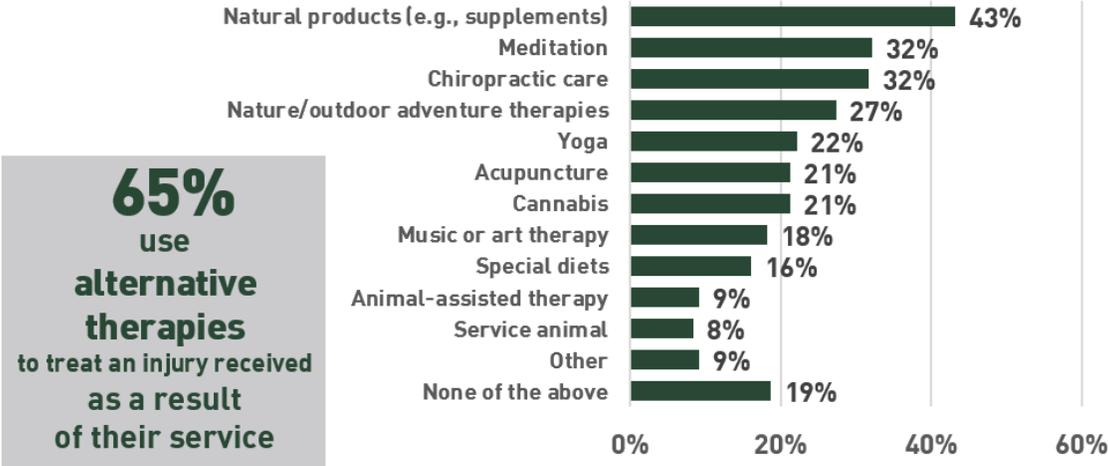


Is this person a:





Are you using or have you used any of the following supplemental or alternative therapies as part of your care regimen? (Select all that apply)



Cannabis

Have you ever used cannabis or other cannabinoid products for recreational use?



Have you ever used cannabis or other cannabinoid products for medicinal use?

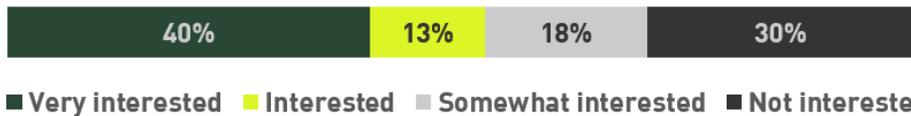


How comfortable do you feel discussing medical cannabis as a treatment option with your primary care doctor?

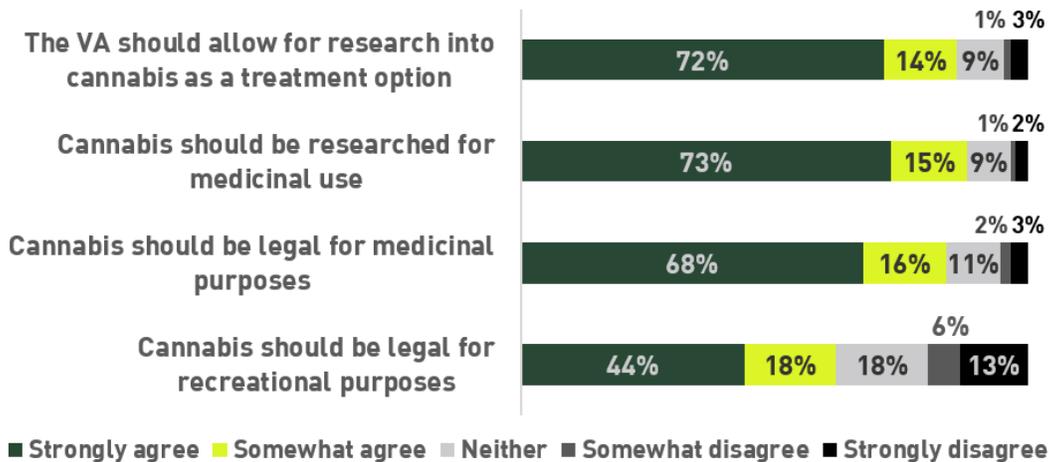


**16%** have discussed medical cannabis with their current primary care doctor

Would you be interested in using cannabis or cannabinoid products as a treatment option if it were available to you?



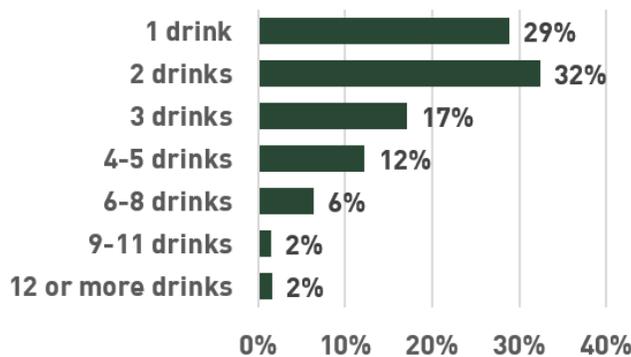
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:





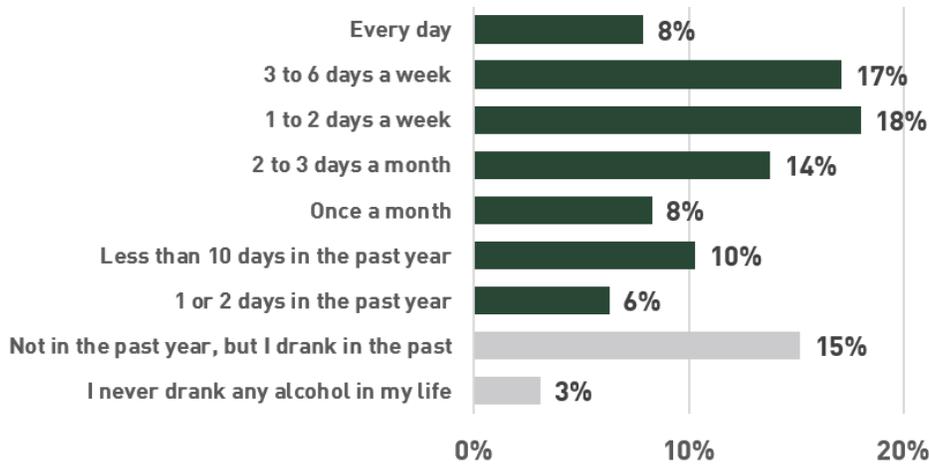
Alcohol and Tobacco

During the last 12 months, how many alcoholic drinks did you have on a typical day when you drank alcohol?

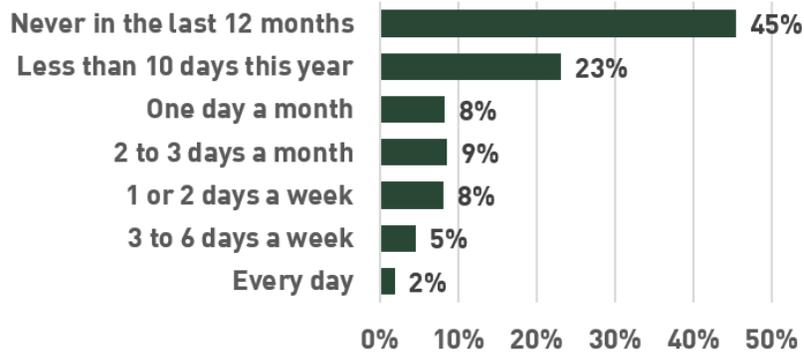


An alcoholic drink is defined as:  
 a 12 ounce beer  
 a 5 ounce glass of wine  
 or  
 1 shot of liquor

During the last 12 months, how often did you usually have any kind of drink containing alcohol?

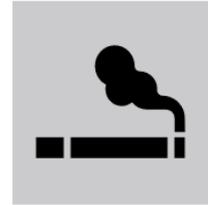


During the last 12 months, how often did you have 5 or more (males) or 4 or more (females) drinks containing any kind of alcohol within a two-hour period?



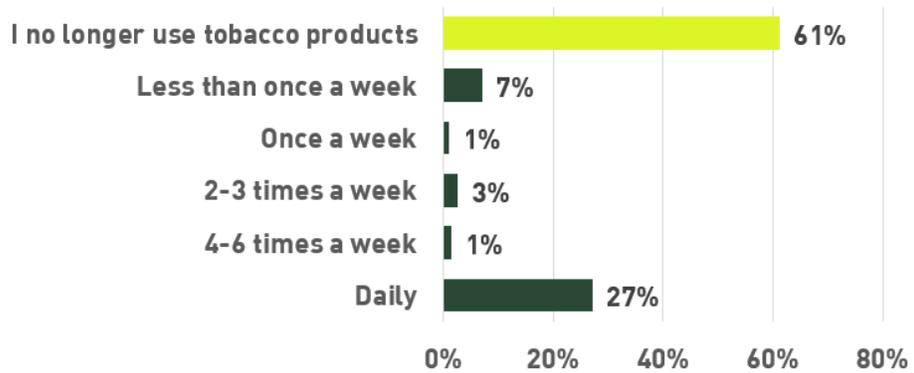


### Have you ever used tobacco products?

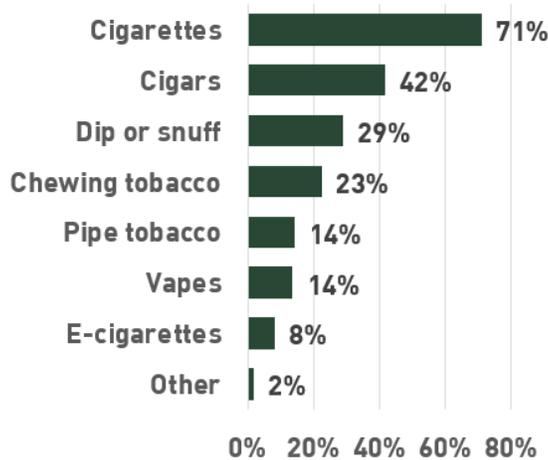


among those who have ever used tobacco products

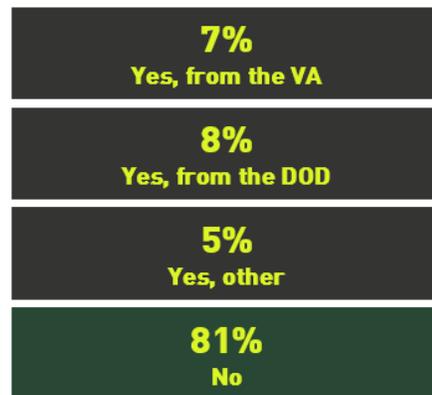
### How often do you currently use tobacco products?



### What form of tobacco products have you used? (Select all that apply)



### Have you ever taken part in a tobacco cessation program?



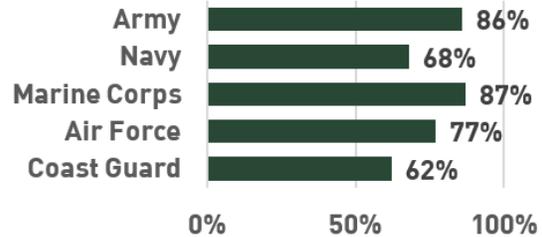


Burn Pits and Toxic Exposure

During your service, were you exposed to burn pits and / or airborne toxic materials?



Percent exposed in each branch



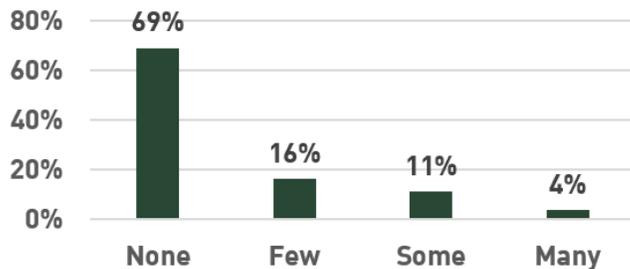
Among those exposed to burn pits or airborne toxic materials

**53%**  
have had their exposure documented with DOD in a Periodic Health Assessment or other report

**49%**  
believe they have symptoms associated with burn pit or toxic exposure  
another **41%** are unsure

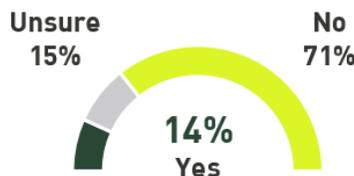
**76%**  
are aware of the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits Registry  
**59%** are registered

Did you have any issues when registering with the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry?



To learn more about the VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry visit <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp>

Have you completed the optional in person medical evaluation that is offered to veterans on the Registry?



Does your VA medical provider discuss your exposures and any symptoms you may be experiencing?



**Mental Health**

**Do you have a service-connected mental health injury?**



**76%** of those with a service-connected mental health injury are seeking care for it

among the 24% not seeking care

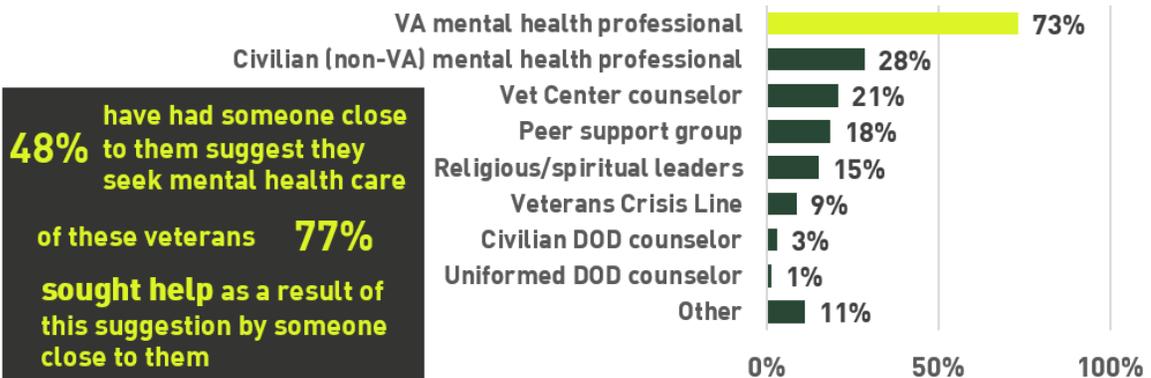
**Top 3 reasons you are not seeking care for a mental health injury:**

**29%**  
Have not found a mental health professional that understands my needs

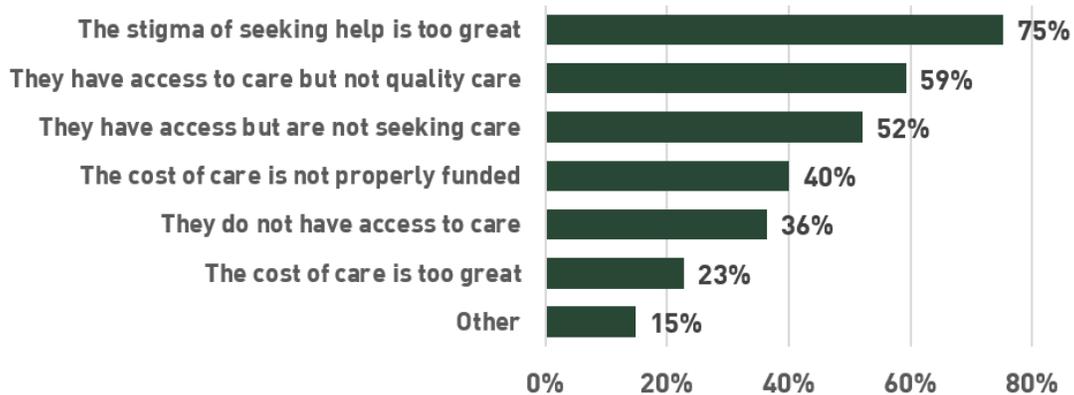
**26%**  
Started treatment but decided to stop

**19%**  
Rather talk to friends or family

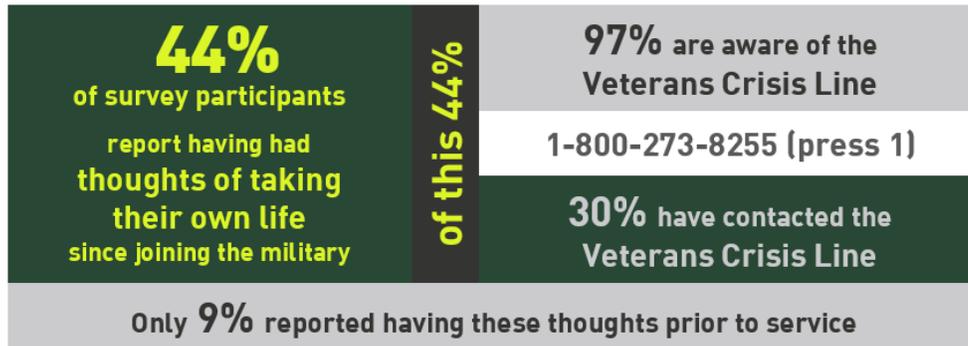
**Where are you seeking care? (select all that apply)**



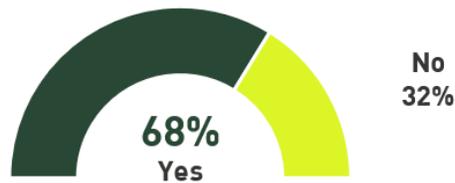
**What are the most important reasons that you believe contribute to the military / veteran community not getting the mental healthcare they need? (Select all that apply)**



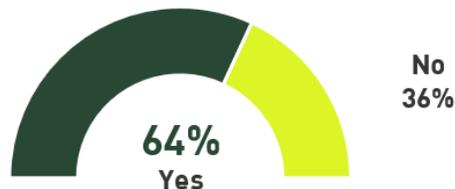
Suicide



**Do you personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide?**



**Do you personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has died by suicide?**



**Do you believe as a nation we are making progress in combating military/veteran suicide?**



**In general, do you believe that the military / veteran community are getting the care they need for mental health injuries?**





# VA Healthcare

IAVA members who are enrolled in VA healthcare continue to tell us they want less paperwork, more accountability and easier access to care. However, VA healthcare has come a long way and IAVA members report that their healthcare experiences are improving. The 84% of IAVA members enrolled in VA healthcare sound off on their experiences while using the VA.

While many think of healthcare when it comes to VA, many veterans and their families rely on VA for earned benefits, such as pension and disability compensation. The process to access these earned benefits can be daunting and leaves many veterans waiting for months or longer for a decision. Progress has been made, but long wait times and lagging technology continue to plague veterans waiting on their earned benefits.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

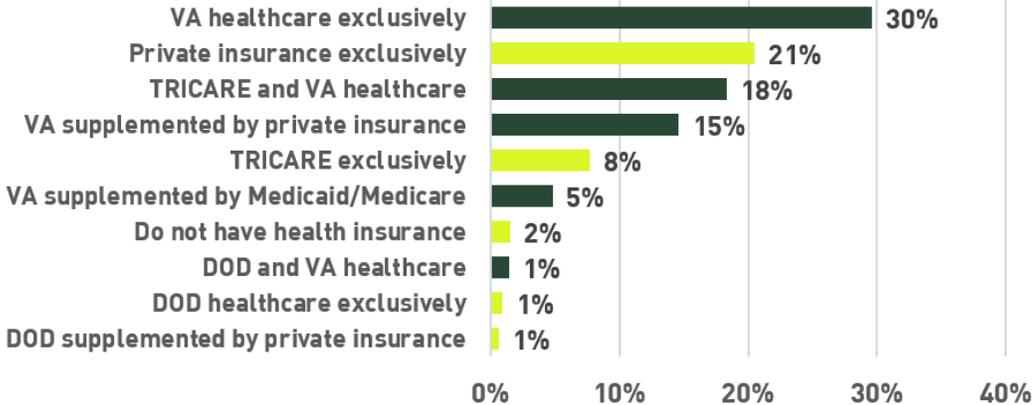
- 86% of IAVA members report a service-connected physical injury or illness, and 61% report a service-connected mental health injury.
- About two-thirds of IAVA members have used alternative therapies to treat service-connected injuries; 7 in 10 veterans have at least some interest in cannabis or cannabinoid products as a treatment option if it were available.
- 82% of IAVA members report that during their service they were exposed to burn pits and/or airborne toxic materials. Around half have had their exposure documented in a Periodic Health Assessment or other report (53%), and 59% are registered with the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits Registry.
- More than two-thirds of IAVA members personally know a post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide, and 64% know a post-9/11 veteran who has died by suicide.

Rating VA Healthcare

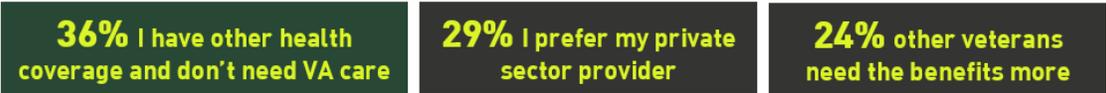
Are you enrolled in VA healthcare?



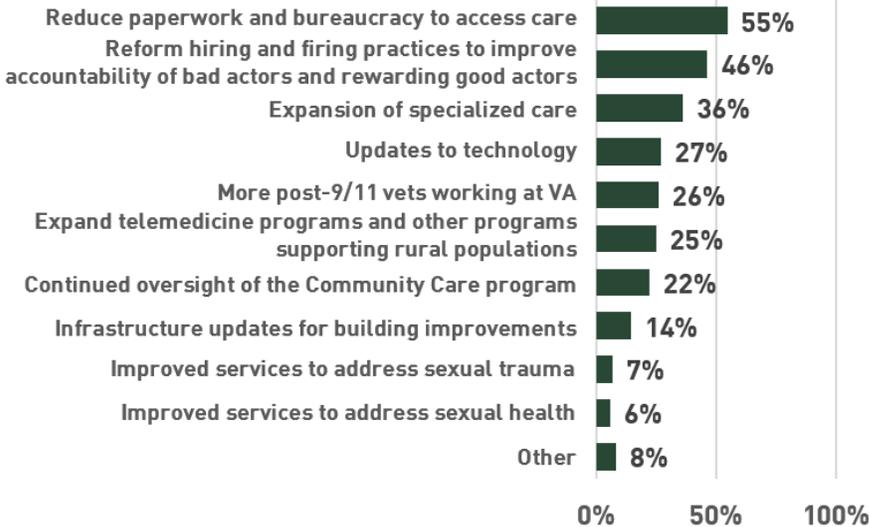
What do you currently use for healthcare coverage?



Among the 16% not enrolled in VA healthcare, what are the top three reasons you are not enrolled?



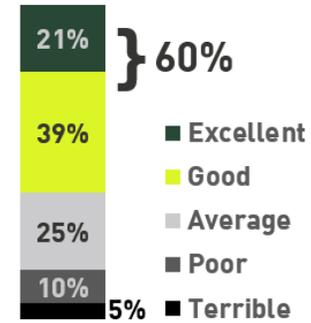
Please select the most important reforms needed to address improvements to VA healthcare (select up to three)



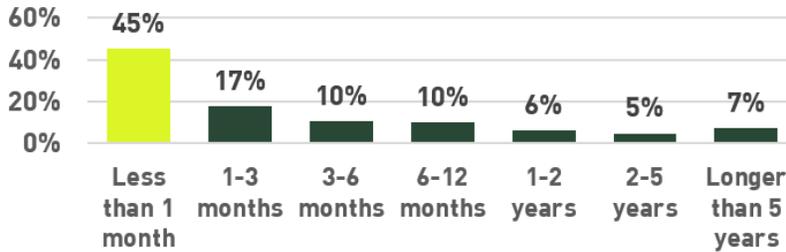
**Who is your primary source of healthcare?**



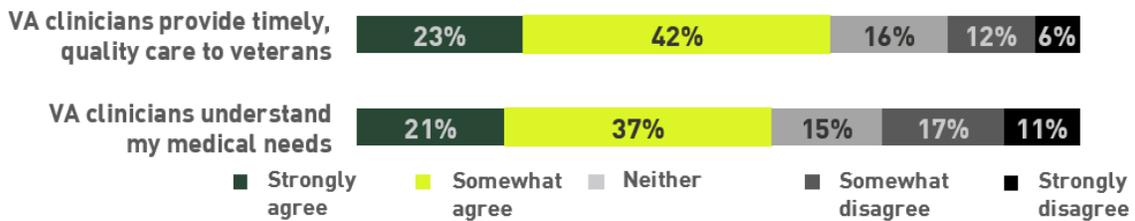
**Rate your overall experience with VA healthcare:**



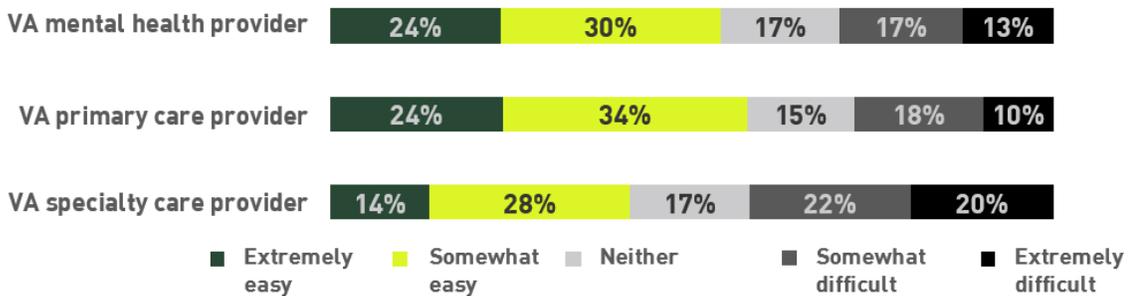
**When was the last time you sought healthcare from the VA?**



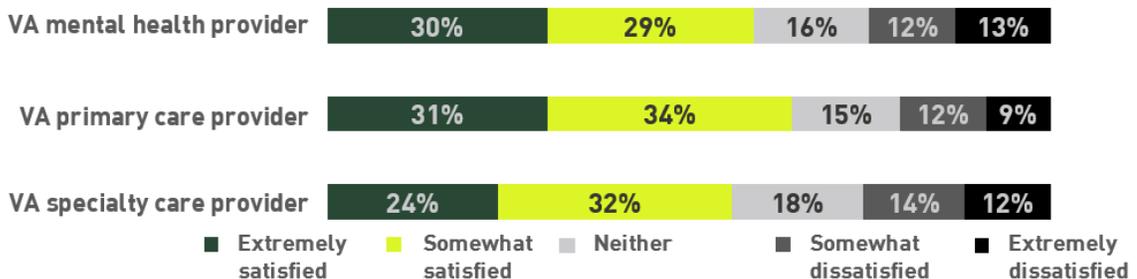
**Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:**



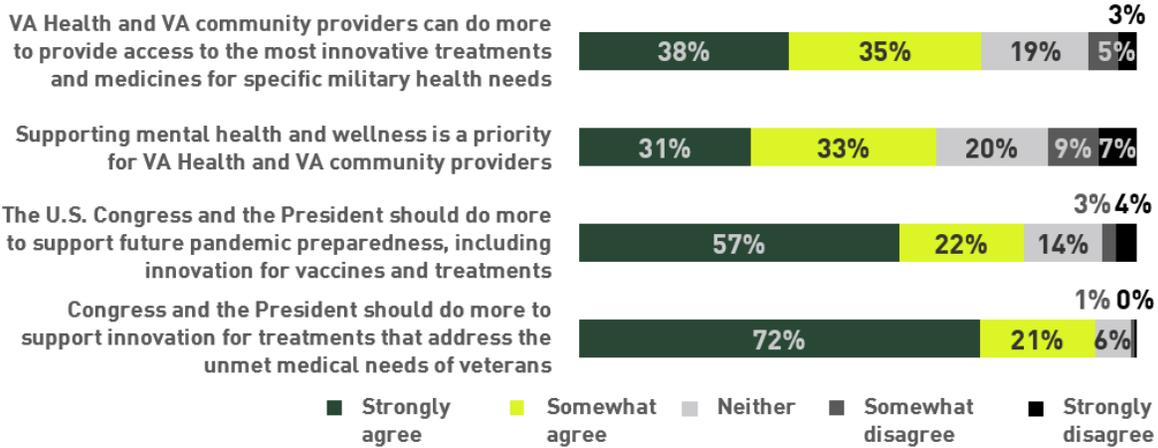
**Which statement best describes your experience scheduling appointments with the following providers:**



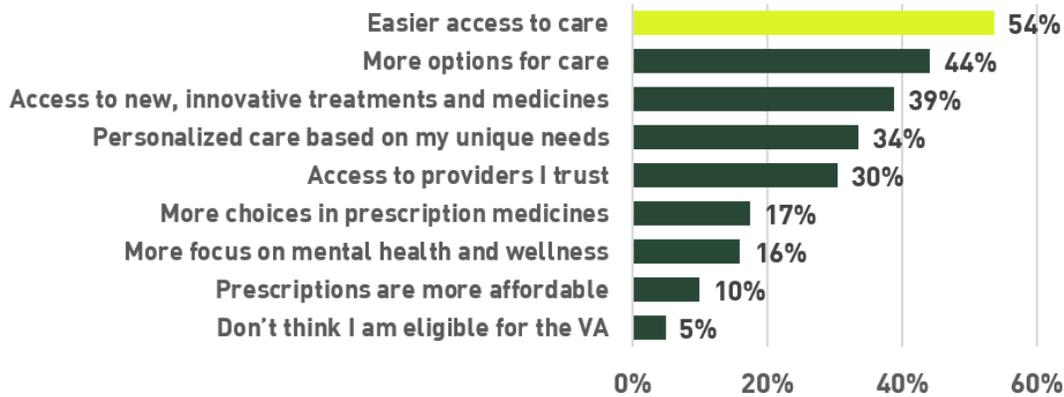
**Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following providers:**



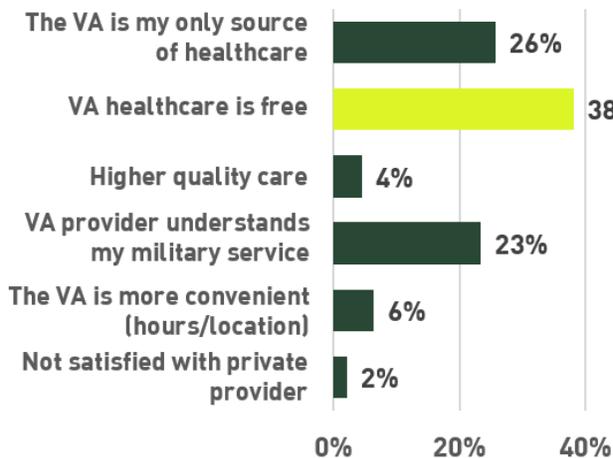
**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



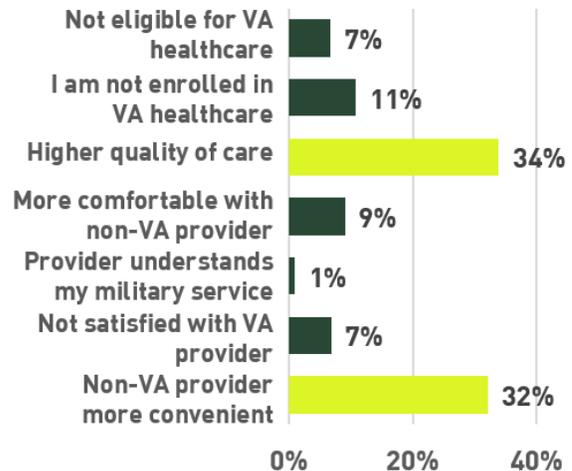
**In your opinion, which of the following are reasons to use health care services other than those provided or paid for by VA? (select all that apply)**



**Why did you choose your VA Provider as your primary source of care?**



**Why did you choose your Non-VA Provider as your primary source of care?**

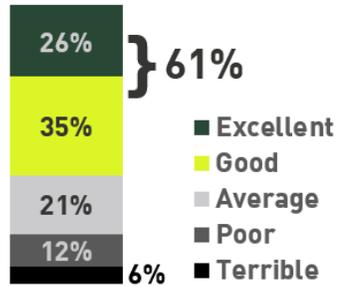


Community Care Program

Have you used the VA Community Care Program?

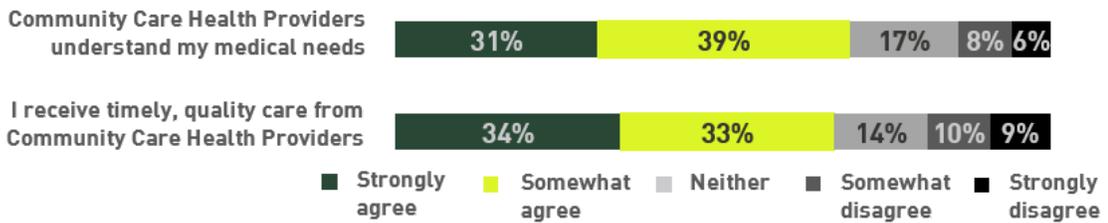


Rate your experience with the Community Care Program.

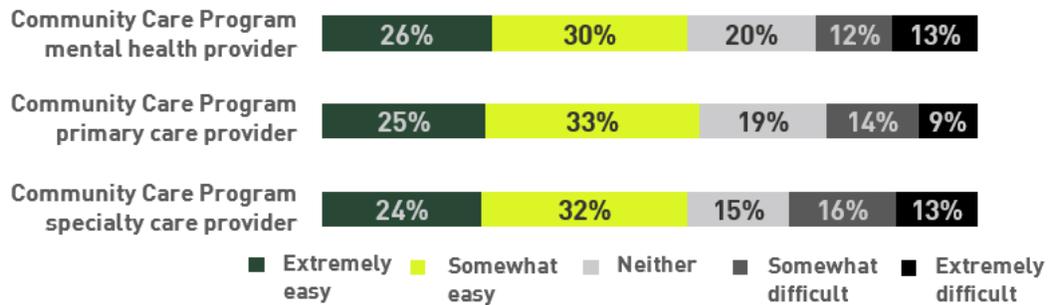


Among the 31% of veterans who have used the Community Care Program

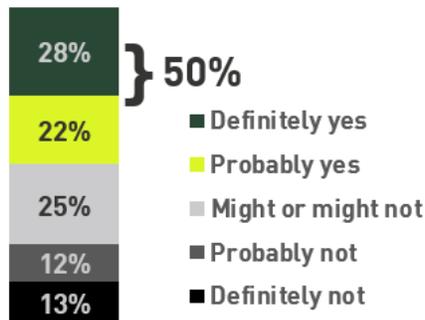
Rate your level of agreement with the following statements:



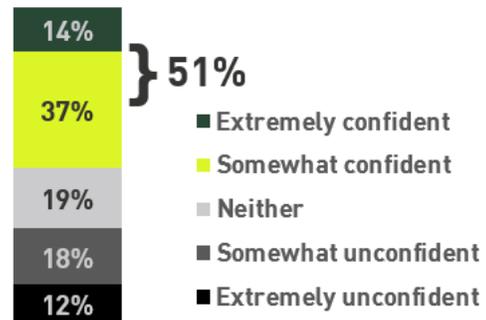
Which statement best describes your experience scheduling appointments with the following providers:



Of those who have used the Community Care Program, do you support the expansion of privatizing care at VA?



How confident are you in the VA's ability to successfully operate its Community Care Program?

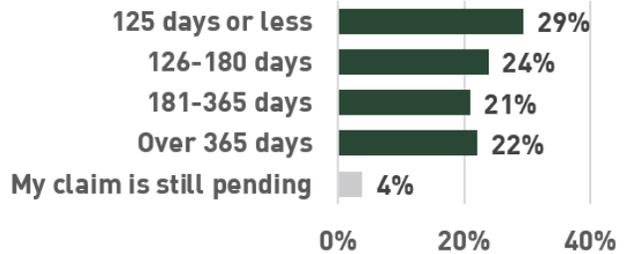


VA Disability Benefits

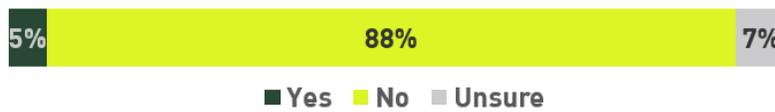
Do you have a service-connected disability rating from VA?



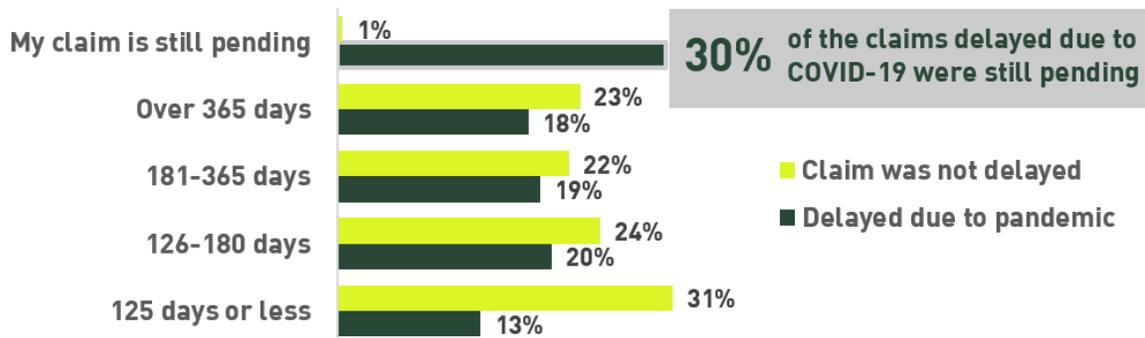
How long did it take for the VA to notify you of a decision on your claim?



Was your claim delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

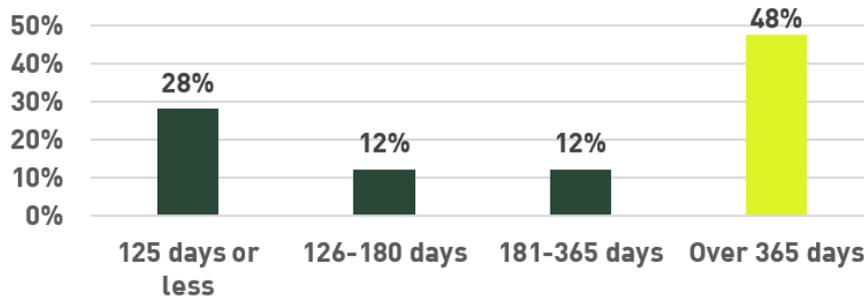


How long did it take for the VA to notify you of a decision on your claim?



Of the 4% of all claims still pending

How long has your claim been pending?



Of the 96% of claims with a decision

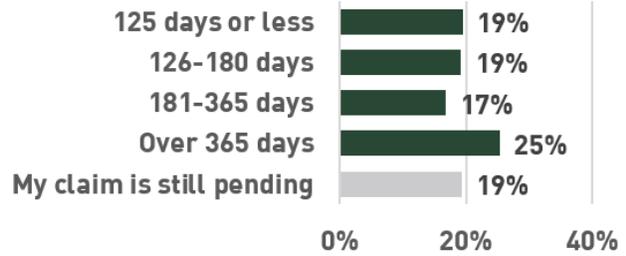
Were you satisfied with the outcome of your claim?



Have you ever appealed a VA disability compensation claim decision?

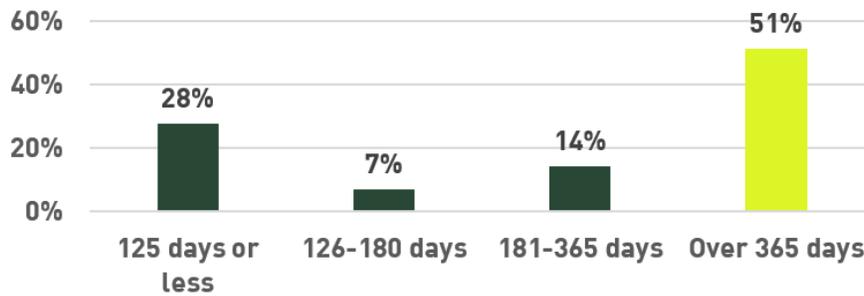


How long did it take to receive a final decision on your appeal?

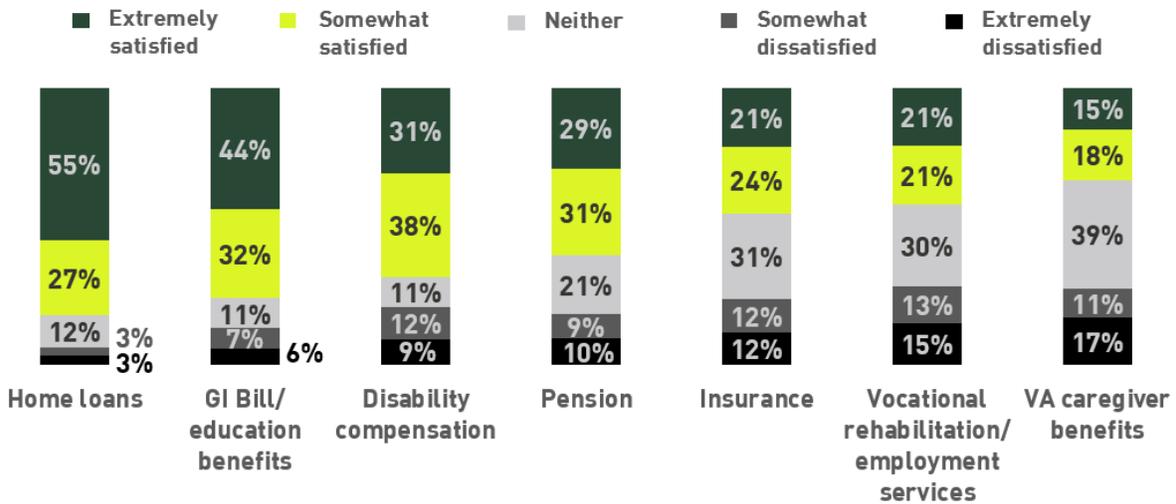


of the 19% of appeals still pending

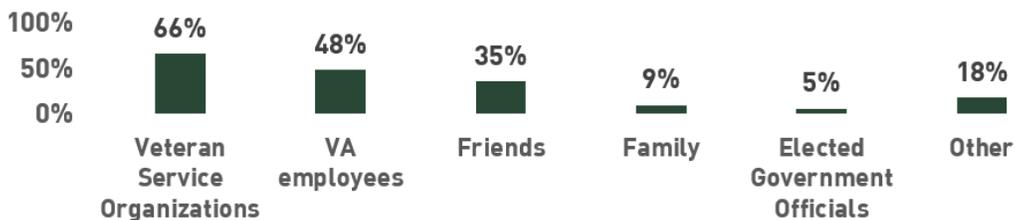
How long has your appeal been pending?



Please rate your satisfaction with the following VA benefits.



When you have questions about VA benefits, who do you ask? (Select all that apply)



VA Healthcare Sexual Misconduct

Do you feel safe when going to a VA facility?

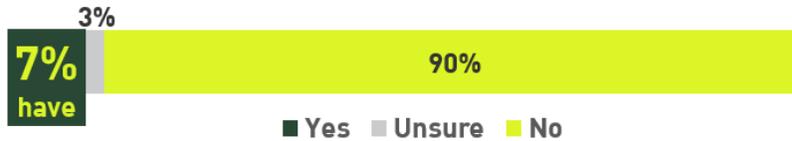
male veterans



female veterans



Have you ever witnessed or personally heard about sexual misconduct someone else experienced while seeking care at the VA?



<p><b>3.5%</b> Report having experienced <b>sexual harassment</b> while seeking care at VA</p> <p>This includes things like inappropriate remarks of a sexual nature, unwanted sexual advances, or offers in exchange for sexual favors</p> <p>23% are men   77% are women</p> <p>35% reported or sought help in response to this sexual harassment experience</p> <p>9% believe that the sexual harassment was resolved appropriately</p>	<p><b>0.8%</b> Report having experienced <b>sexual assault</b> while seeking care at VA</p> <p>This includes things like unwanted touching, someone exposing themselves, or unwanted sexual contact</p> <p>50% are men   50% are women</p> <p>52% reported or sought help in response to this sexual assault experience</p> <p>10% believe that the sexual assault was resolved appropriately</p>
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## Methodology

The 2022 IAVA Member Survey was designed and conducted in collaboration with the D’Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. Researchers at IVMF fielded the IRB-approved online survey from September 3, 2021 through October 28, 2021 via direct emails to registered IAVA members, including any new members registered during a concurrent social media member recruitment campaign. Participation was incentivized with the opportunity to register for one of five Southwest Airlines vouchers for a domestic flight.

The final valid sample includes 5,174 respondents; the survey completion rate was 74%.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the IAVA Members who took the time to participate in this survey. Thank you to all the IAVA and IVMF staff who worked tirelessly to design, edit, and provide feedback on this survey.

This project would not have been possible without the creative vision and talents of Adam Pritchard, Neil Connors, Dennis Kulis, and Kerry Manahan. Thank you all for your work and sharing your talents to make this project a success.

## About the Authors

### Adam J. Pritchard

Adam is a Research Associate at the D’Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) working to understand the employment, education, and wellness needs of veterans and their families.

Prior to joining IVMF, he spent 15 years as a researcher in the violence against women field, studying topics like domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault and other victimization among college students, and non-fatal strangulation. As the former Research Coordinator for the University of Kentucky Center for Research on Violence Against Women (CRVAW), he also worked on research, policy, and state legislative issues related to protective orders and the training needs of advocates and mental health professionals. As sociology faculty at the University of Central Florida, he partnered with law enforcement and university victim services to study and improve systemic responses to victimization. He has over 50 research publications, including 19 peer-reviewed articles in the domestic violence field.

Dr. Pritchard holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Kentucky and lives with his wife and son in Syracuse, NY. His father is a retired Gulf War veteran who served in the Air Force.

## Samantha Powell

Samantha is the Vice President of Revenue Operations for IAVA. She joined the IAVA team in November 2015 as the Salesforce Director and quickly expanded her role to oversee all of IAVA's technology needs. As VP, Revenue Operations, she drives strategic planning and execution of cultivation efforts, revenue systems, and related processes.

Prior to joining the nonprofit world in 2015, Samantha worked in the retail, aviation, and high-tech industries. She has extensive experience in leading and enacting transformational change.

Samantha graduated from Boston College with a B.A. in Philosophy and a minor in Mathematics. While she is a civilian, she has close ties to the post-9/11 veteran community, having two siblings who served in the Army.

When Samantha is not at work, she is usually hiking with her dog, Rudy, at the gym, or on the lake.

## Travis Horr

Travis serves as IAVA's Sr. Director of Government Affairs where he helps lead IAVA's Washington DC Legislative and Policy efforts. He has delivered testimony on Capitol Hill, conducted interviews with various media outlets, and has met with senior leadership at VA, DoD, and Department of Education in order to advocate for the post-9/11 generation of veterans.

Prior to joining the IAVA team, Travis worked at a consulting firm in Portland, Maine assisting Fortune 500 clients, as well as political campaigns in both Maine and Delaware.

Travis graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a B.A. in Political Science, thanks to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Prior to college, Travis served in the Marine Corps Infantry, and was stationed at the historic Marine Barracks "8th & I" in Washington, DC, as well as Camp Pendleton. He served on one tour to Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2010-2011.

When Travis is not at work he is usually with his dog, Asha, watching football, or playing board games with friends.

## Support IAVA

IAVA relies on the generosity of our corporate and foundation partnerships and the support of individual contributors to amass the resources necessary to fulfill our mission. This Member Survey is the most comprehensive non-governmental survey of post-9/11 veterans and is an important snapshot of the veteran community that no other organization has the ability to replicate. IAVA is the leading voice advocating on behalf of post-9/11 veterans because our community takes the time to share their point of view and they trust IAVA to execute on their behalf. Help us continue this vital work by donating to support IAVA's mission today!



D'Aniello Institute for  
Veterans & Military Families

JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is the first national institute in higher education singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, and with the support of founding partner JPMorgan Chase Co., the IVMF delivers leading programs in career and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports veterans and their families, once they transition back into civilian life, as they navigate the maze of social services in their communities, enhancing access to this care working side-by-side with local providers across the country. The Institute is committed to advancing the post-service lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families.

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IN COLLABORATION WITH:



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN  
VETERANS OF AMERICA

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