

Office of Health Equity

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs



REDUCING DISPARITIES AND BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO CARE IMPACTING HISPANIC/LATINO VETERANS

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans.

Hispanic Americans are one of the fastest growing racial groups in America. From 2019 to 2045, the racial and ethnic composition of Veterans will change. The projected proportion of Veterans who are Non-Hispanic White will decrease while it is expected that the percent of Veterans who are Hispanic will increase from 8% to 12%.

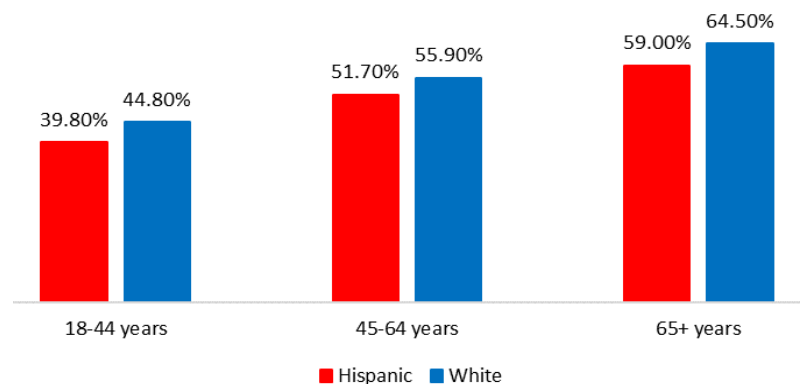
The National Veteran Health Equity Report 2021's Hispanic and Latino Veteran Chartbook provides comparative information on VHA patient experiences and health care quality by sociodemographic and health characteristics.

DIFFERENCES IN ACCESSING CARE FOR HISPANIC AND WHITE VETERANS

Accessing care without unnecessary delays can help improve health outcomes and reduce the harmful effects of many diseases and chronic conditions.

VA's Hispanic and Latino Veteran Chartbook indicate that Hispanic/Latino Veterans were less likely than non-Hispanic Whites to receive a routine care appointment as soon as they felt they needed one.

Hispanic and White VHA Users who Indicated That They Always Received an Appointment as Soon as Needed



Patient-centered care is essential for patient engagement and satisfaction. The Chartbook found that there was no difference in the percent of Hispanic Veterans who felt that their provider always spent enough time with them during their appointments and that Hispanic Veterans had the same experience of patient-centeredness as non-Hispanic White Veterans.



REDUCING LANGUAGE BARRIERS THAT IMPACT CARE ACCESS

Language barriers can contribute to increased patient anxiety and worse health outcomes in medical settings. One way to improve access to care to Veterans in Puerto Rico, who are mostly Hispanic, and to Hispanics Veterans receiving services at other VA facilities, is through Language Sensitive care. The VA Caribbean Healthcare System has directed research efforts to adapt, linguistically and culturally, a series of instruments and surveys and create different mechanism to study Language as a Social Determinant of Health.

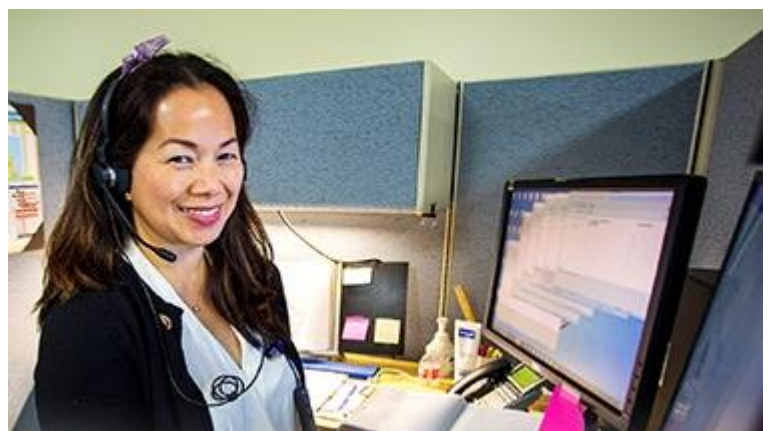
The VHA offers free Spanish interpreters for both Spanish speaking Veterans and their family members at VA health facilities. Another VA initiative to reduce language barriers is the inclusion of interpreters to VA telephone systems. When calling VA call centers or information lines, an interpreter can be requested at any time. VA telephone information lines and interpreters are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Veteran Health Administration is constantly working to identify and eliminate barriers to healthcare that impact Hispanic/Latino Veteran health.

REDUCING GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS TO ACCESSING CARE

For Veterans that reside in the USA Territories, in addition to disparities associated with language barriers, there are also geographical barriers to accessing care.

Residing in a USA territory instead of on USA Mainland brings a series of unique challenges. To address these challenges, Dr. Irma L. Molina-Vicenty, Associate Chief of Staff for R&D at the VA Caribbean Healthcare System, and her colleagues founded OUTREACH-E with the support of and sponsorship from VA's Office of Rural Health. They found that Veterans with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) residing in the USA territories had higher mortality rates compared to Veterans with TBI who live on the USA Mainland, Alaska, and Hawaii.

OUTREACH-E researchers are also exploring access to care and VA services utilization in Veterans residing in US territories. They are looking at Veteran satisfaction and the Veteran experience using telehealth technology to access medical care. They are also exploring how Veterans' satisfaction and experience are influenced by Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), and how outcomes and quality of life are impacted when using telehealth technologies. It is their goal to expand access to care in a more efficient way that will be easier for the Veterans to engage.



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