

# Office of Health Equity Veterans Health Administration Department of Veterans Affairs



## AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE VETERANS FACT SHEET

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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.

The Office of Health Equity-QUERI Partnered Evaluation Center examines and evaluates health outcomes and healthcare quality across the entire VA healthcare system paying special attention to whether gender, geographical location, or individuals that are members of minority population groups experience disparities in care.

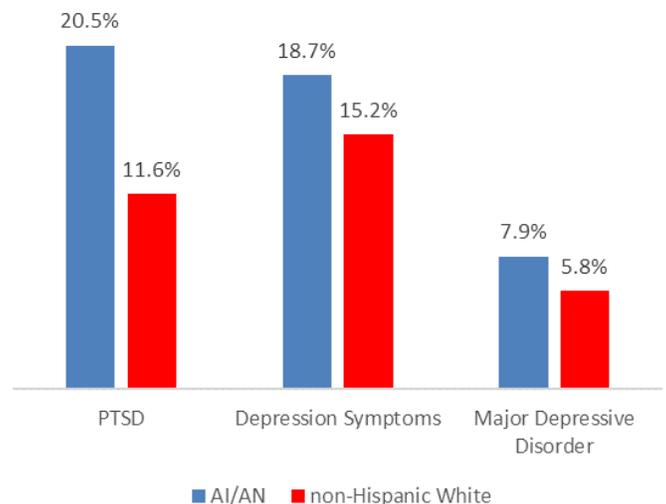
American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) serve in the U.S. Armed Services at a higher rate than any other group. There are currently more than 140,000 AI/AN Veterans living in the United States.

### HEALTH DISPARITIES

Almost three-quarters (74.3%) of American Indian/Alaska Natives who are service-connected utilize VA health care.

Roughly 33% of American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans using VA care access VA mental health services. AI/AN Veterans who use the VA, experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at a greater rate than all other Veteran groups; AI/AN Veterans have almost double the rate of PTSD as non-Hispanic white Veterans (20.5% versus 11.6%). A 2016 VA tribal consultation with all 567 federally recognized tribes identified treatment for PTSD and mental health as a top priority for Veterans in Indian Country.

Rates of Mental Health Disorders, American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans Compared to Non-Hispanic White Veterans, FY14



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AI/AN Veterans also experience chronic pain, especially low back and lower extremity pain, and are diagnosed with diabetes at higher rates than non-Hispanic white Veterans. The risk of having a pregnancy complicated by hypertension or diabetes is two times higher in AI/AN women than non-Hispanic white women.

### QUALITY OF CARE

Patient-centered medical homes (PCMHs) are used by the VA to deliver primary care through an integrated, team-based approach that can be particularly helpful in managing care and addressing social determinants of health and is especially important for individuals with mental health conditions. The VA Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System found that AI/AN Veterans with mental health conditions, compared to non-Hispanic White Veterans, had similar assessments of the comprehensiveness of care, self-management support, and medication decision-making support provided by their PCMHs and comparable overall ratings of their providers.

### REDUCING DISPARITIES

The health of American Indians and Alaska Natives is shaped by language, culture, and other social determinants of health. Because health outcomes

are so closely connected to social environment and socioeconomic status, culturally tailored health initiatives can help improve health outcomes in the AI/AN community. These may include seeking more culturally appropriate meeting locations than clinical exam rooms and ensuring that providers are aware of the unique challenges that AI/AN Veterans may have experienced, including stress related to racial stereotypes.



To encourage AI/AN Veterans to seek treatment for PTSD and other mental health conditions, VA consults and partners with tribes and engages in outreach to ensure that Veterans are aware of opportunities to receive care. VA together with its partners work to minimize barriers to care by integrating mental health care providers locally. In areas where local providers are scarce, telehealth mental health services are offered.

**For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit:** <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

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#### References

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