

Office of Health Equity

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs



OVERCOMING FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO MEETING EXERCISE GUIDELINES

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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.

HEALTH DISPARITIES

Regular physical activity lowers the risk of depression, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, colon cancer, breast cancer, and chronic pain.

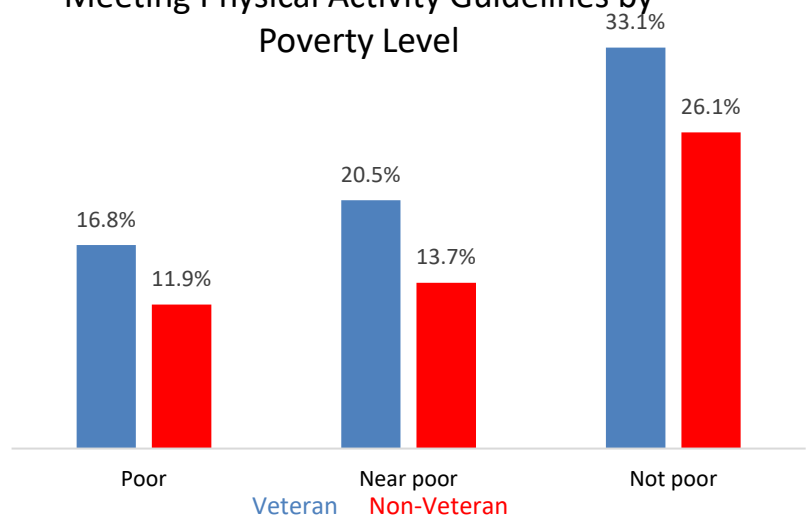
According to the [Second Edition of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, like brisk walking or fast dancing, each week and to engage in some kind of muscle-strengthening activity, like lifting weights or doing push-ups, at least 2 days each week.

There are differences in the amount of physical activity that Americans participate

in. Some factors that may contribute to these disparities include a lack of opportunities to participate in sports and fitness programs, not having the time or money to engage in activities, and no access to safe spaces to exercise.

According to National Health Interview Survey data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Veterans of all income levels are more likely to meet Physical Activity Guidelines than non-Veterans, although poorer Veterans are still less active than their more affluent counterparts.

Percent of Veterans and non-Veterans Meeting Physical Activity Guidelines by Poverty Level



From [Veteran's Health Statistics Tables: National Health Interview Survey 2015-2018](#)



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REDUCING DISPARITIES

The Office of Health Equity supports efforts across VA working to reduce health disparities by targeting interventions aimed at Veteran groups at higher risk for poor health outcomes.

In VHAs across the country, Veterans can participate in physical activity, recreation, and leisure-based programming, so ability to pay is not a barrier to living an active lifestyle including:

VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System



The Greater Los Angeles VA Recreation Therapy Section in conjunction with Brentwood School and select community partners offers a low to no-cost fitness program for Veterans challenged with displacement, addiction, and other comorbidities who are admitted to Domiciliary, a community reintegration residential program, and Veterans who access Wellness and Recovery Programming. This 40+ year relationship offers services in physical recreation, health and wellness, education, as well as a range of special programs and events, all on facilities built and maintained by Brentwood School. Veterans and their families can use the athletic facilities by signing up for a membership.

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

Joining is free and Veterans' membership never expires. A complimentary shuttle circles the West LA campus every 15 minutes for ease of access. The Greater Los Angeles VA Recreation Therapy Section aims to scale this program to their Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

VA New Jersey Health Care System

The VA New Jersey Health Care System partnered with Freedom Horse Farm in Long Valley, NJ, a therapeutic riding facility that is dual certified in EAGALA and PATH, International. Freedom Horse Farm works hand in hand with the VA Recreation Therapy Team to provide programs for Veterans receiving treatment as part of the inpatient Women's Treatment Unit (WTU) and the Combat PTSD treatment programs.

Veterans participate in unmounted Equine Assisted Learning activities in an 8-week treatment program (4 consecutive 1.5-hour sessions). These programs are based on VA's Whole Health Model.

Veterans who utilize wheelchairs, rollators, and canes are offered adaptive activities at the Farm.

Veterans are encouraged to speak with their primary care providers and recreation therapy departments for physical activity programming that may be available at their local VA facility.

