



# Characteristics of Rural Veterans: 2014

## Data from the American Community Survey

Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

August 2016

# Data Source and Methods

- Data for this analysis come from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS).
  - The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides annual data on the social and economic characteristics of the U.S. population.
  - The ACS uses a series of monthly samples to produce annually updated data for the same small areas (census tracts and block groups) formerly surveyed via the decennial census long-form sample.
- The universe for this analysis is the civilian population 17 years and older living in the United States, unless otherwise specified.
  - This universe includes a weighted estimate of 19.4 million Veterans, of which 1.6 million were women.
- All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90% confidence level.
  - A “statistically significant difference” simply means there is statistical evidence that there is a difference; it does not mean the difference is necessarily large, important or significant in the usual sense of the word.
  - A “no statistically significant difference” means that there is statistical evidence that there is no difference in the comparative percentages/rate.

# Rural and Urban Definitions

- The U.S. Census Bureau defines “urban” and “rural” in the following way:
  - **Urban:** consists of two different sizes of urban areas
    - (1) Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people,
    - (2) Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.
    - 2014 ACS data combines UAs and UCs to define “urban”
  - **Rural:** encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.

# Rural and Urban Communities

Rural and urban communities differ in three main ways:

1. Demographic composition- in general, rural communities have less demographic diversity, especially racial and ethnic diversity, than urban areas.
2. Social ties and social capital- individuals in rural and urban communities have a similar amount of social ties, but rural residents are more likely to have strong ties (close connections with friends and family) than weak ties (loose connections with a variety of people).
3. Infrastructure and institutional support- Residents of rural communities do not have easy access to infrastructure within their daily living—such as public transportation, health care, government agencies, as well as recreational and entertainment outlets.

# About the Veteran Community

- Veterans are a unique subset of the U.S. population that differ from those who have never served in the military.
- In order to serve in the military, individuals must meet certain requirements which make Veterans a selective population based on certain characteristics such as education, physical fitness level, health, and criminal history.
- When making comparisons of Veteran and non-Veteran populations, it is necessary to recognize differences in gender, age, and racial/ethnic composition as a product of historical cohorts, social policies, and selection standards.
  - **The Veteran population is overwhelmingly male in comparison to the non-Veteran population.**
  - **Veterans, as a group, are much older than non-Veterans.**

# Why Rural Veterans?

- The Department of Veterans Affairs has identified rural Veterans as a population of interest.
- About 24 percent of the Veteran population today resides in rural areas compared to 18.6 percent of the civilian population.
- Rural Veterans represent 34 percent of the total enrolled Veteran population in VA health care system. Around 33 percent of those enrolled rural Veterans served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and Operation New Dawn.

# Rural Veteran and Urban Veteran Comparisons

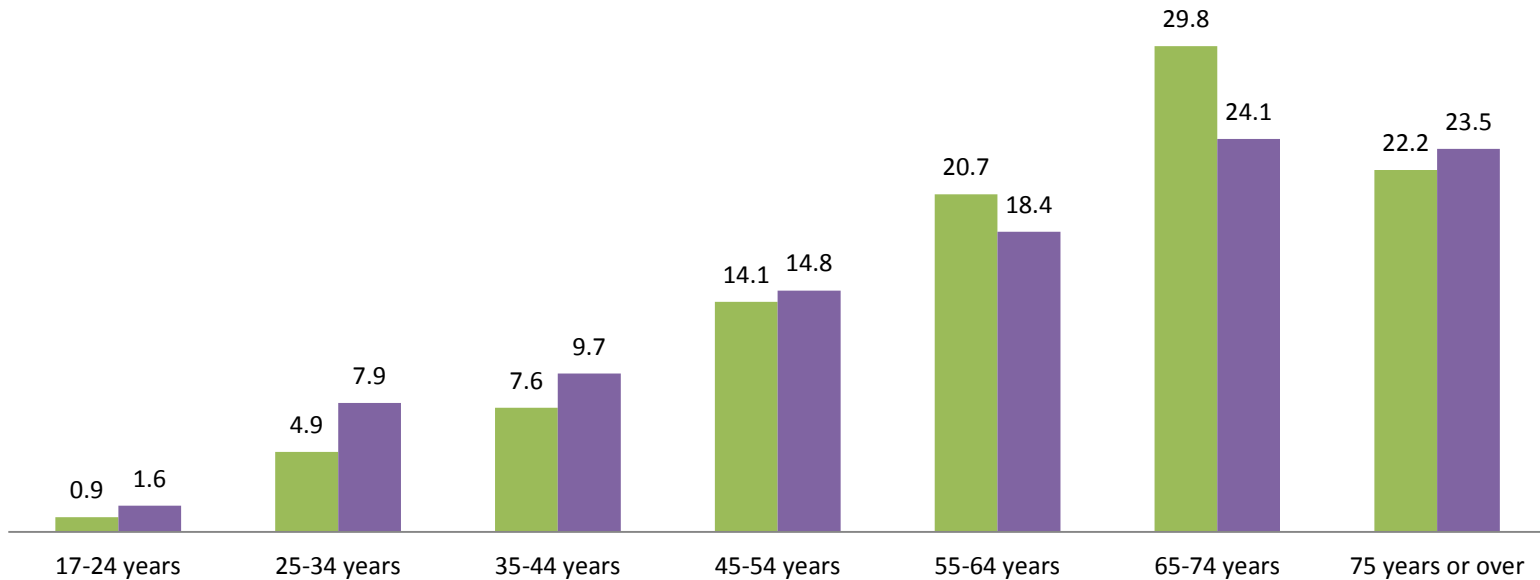
Rural Veterans = 4,638,709

Urban Veterans= 14,713,139

Rural communities had a higher percentage of Veterans in the age range of 55 to 74. Urban communities had a higher percentage of young Veterans (age 17 to 44) and elderly Veterans (75 and over) compared with rural Veterans. The median age for both rural and urban Veterans fell within the 55 to 64 year range.

**Age Distribution**  
Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans

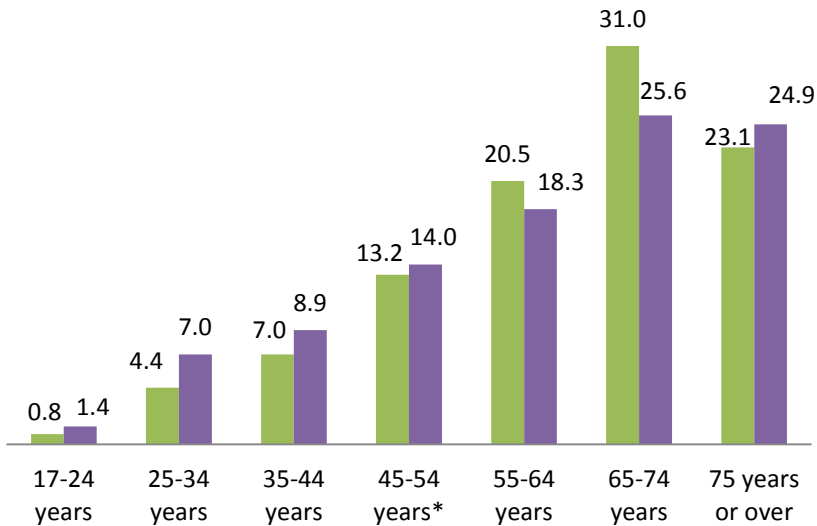




The age distribution of male rural and urban Veterans mirrors the overall age distribution, since men make up the majority of the Veteran population. Female Veterans are generally younger in comparison to male Veterans, and 50 percent of rural female Veterans were between the ages of 45 and 64. About 30 percent of female Veterans in rural communities were younger than age 45.

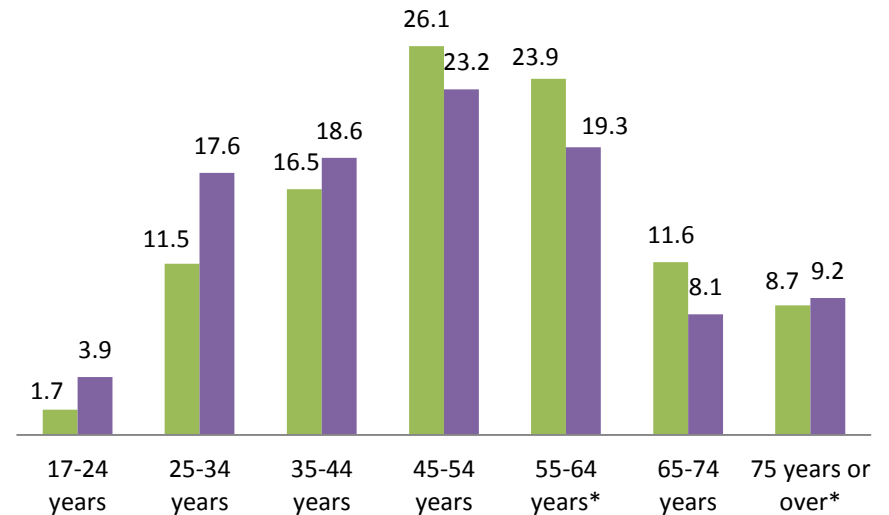
**Age Distribution of Male Veterans**  
Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



**Age Distribution of Female Veterans**  
Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



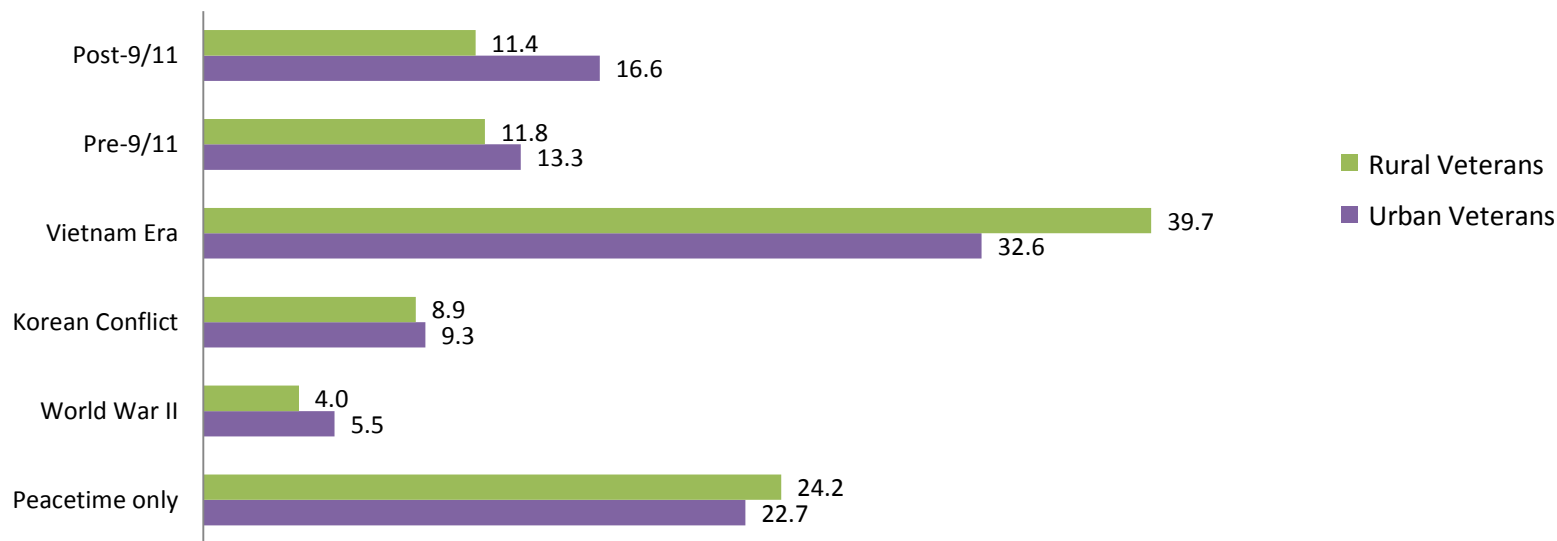
\* Denotes a no statistically significant difference.

**Rural Veterans were more white and less racially diverse than urban Veterans. This is not surprising considering that both rural areas and the Veteran population overall are generally less racially diverse.**

<b>Race and Ethnicity</b> Population 17 Years and Older (in percent)	<b>Rural Veterans</b>	<b>Urban Veterans</b>
White	89.9	74.9
Black	4.9	13.1
Hispanic	2.6	7.7
Asian	0.3	1.8
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1	0.5
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.2
Some other race	0.0	0.1
Two or more races	1.1	1.6

The most striking difference in period of service for rural and urban Veterans was the Vietnam Era. A higher percentage of Veterans living in rural communities were from the Vietnam Era compared with urban Veterans. A greater percentage of Veterans living in urban areas were from Post-9/11, Pre-9/11, Korean war, or World War II era than Veterans in rural areas. These period of service differences reflect some of the age distribution differences between rural and urban Veterans.

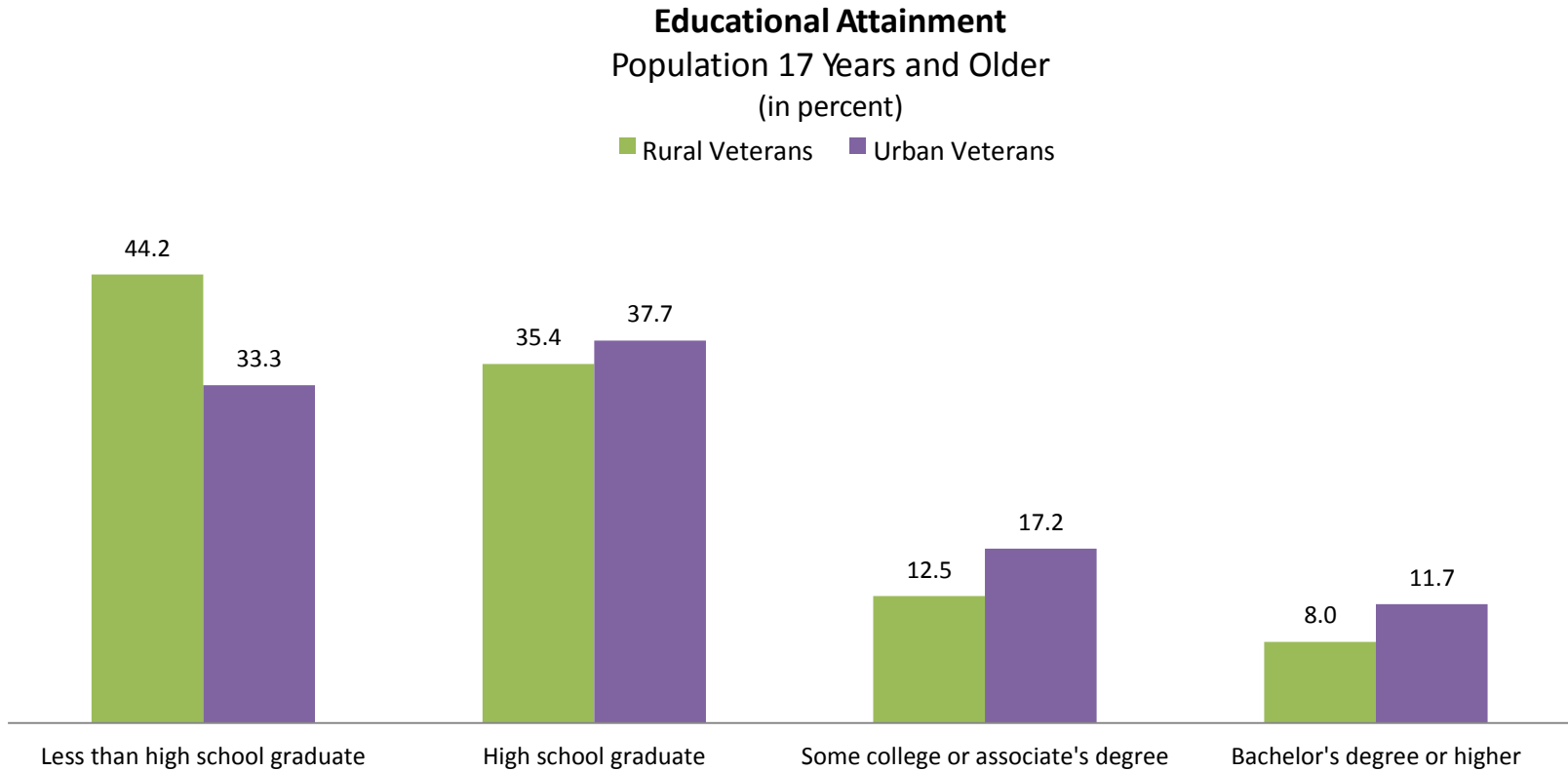
**Period of Service**  
Population 17 Years and Over  
(in percent)



Period of Service Dates: Post-9/11: Sept. 2001 to present; Pre-9/11: Aug. 1990 to Aug. 2001; Vietnam Era: Aug. 1964 to April 1975; Korean War: July 1950 to Jan. 1955; World War II: Dec. 1941 to Dec, 1946; Peacetimes: Jan. 1947 to June 1950; Feb. 1955 to July 1964 and May 1975 to July 1990.

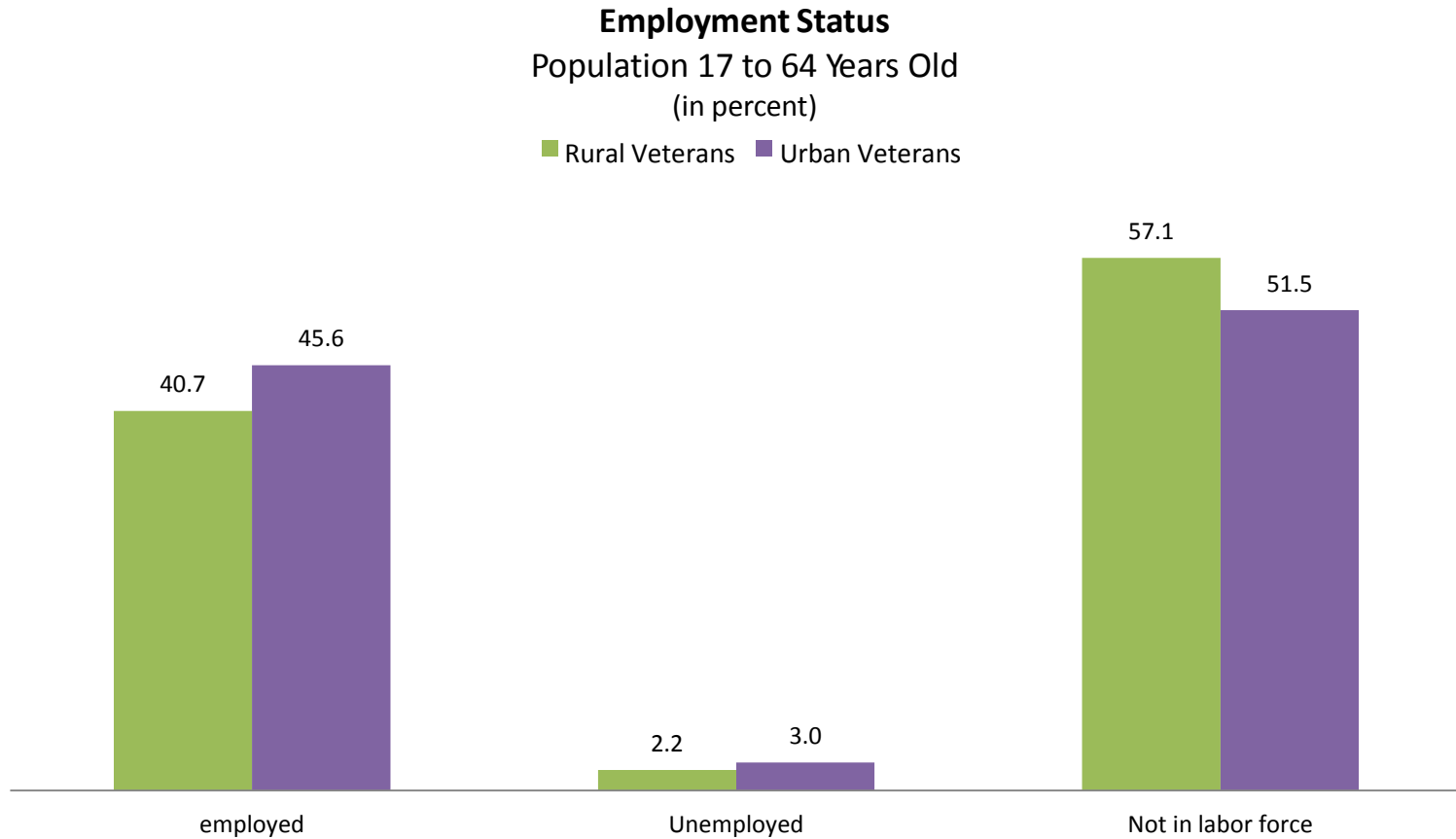
Note: Periods of service are not mutually exclusive. Veterans can serve in more than one period.

**Rural Veterans had higher concentrations in the lower-level education categories (less than high school degree) while urban Veterans had higher concentrations in the higher-level education categories (high school graduate, some college, and bachelor's degree or higher).**

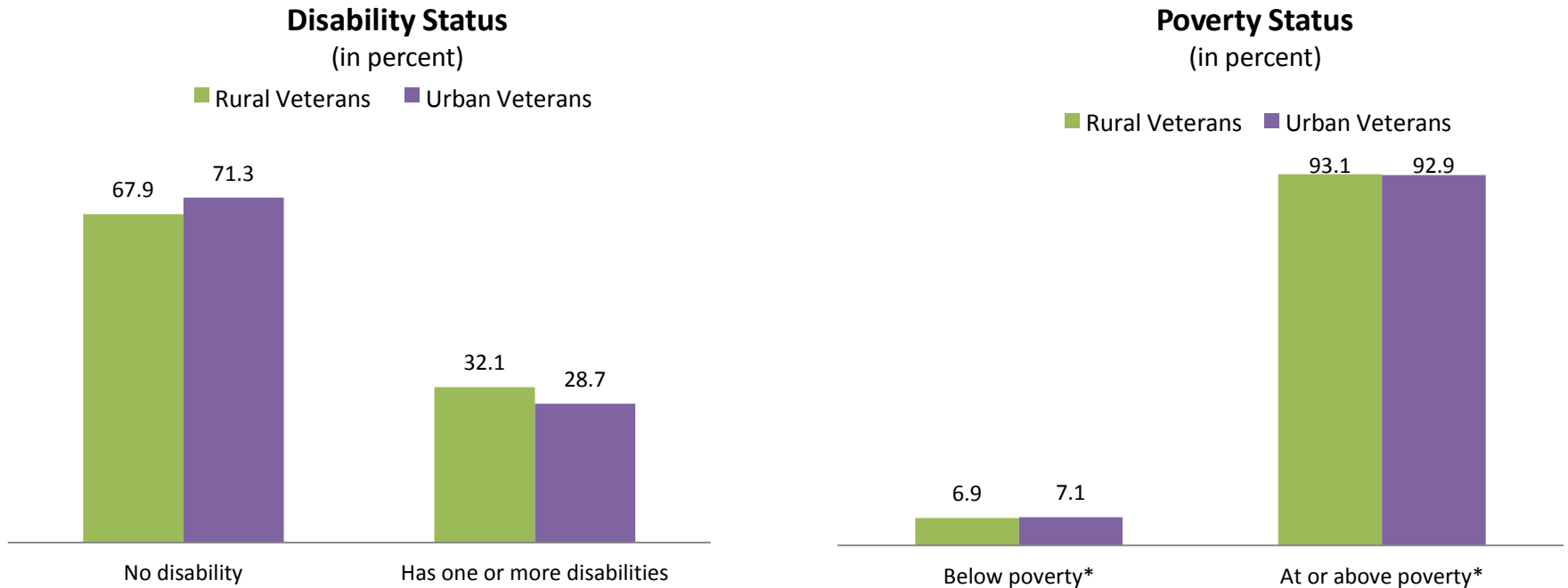


“Educational Attainment” refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed.

**A lower percentage of Veterans in rural areas were employed and unemployed compared with urban Veterans. Rural Veterans had a higher percentage who were not in the labor force—this is likely a reflection of the older adult population in rural areas.**



**A higher percentage of Veterans in rural areas reported having at least one disability compared with Veterans in urban areas. No real difference between Veterans living below poverty in urban areas and rural areas.**



\* Denotes a no statistically significant difference.

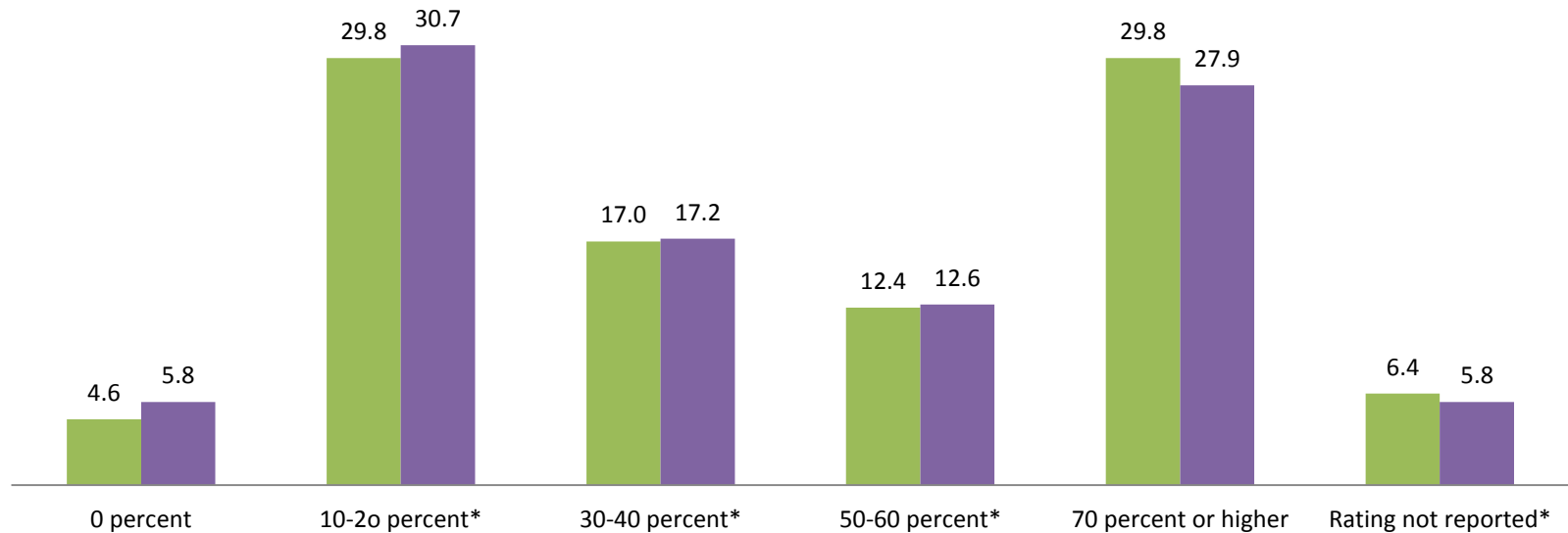
Poverty status cannot be determined for individuals living in institutional group quarters (i.e., prisons or nursing homes), college dormitories, military barracks, and non-conventional housing situation.

**A slightly higher percentage of Veterans residing in rural areas had a service-connected disability rating greater than 70 percent compared with urban Veterans. In contrast, urban Veterans had a slightly higher representation in the 0 to 60 percent service-connected disability ratings compared with rural Veterans.**

### Service-Connected Disability Rating Distribution

Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



\* Denotes a no statistically significant difference.

# **Rural Veteran and Non-Veteran Comparisons**

Veterans = 4,638,709

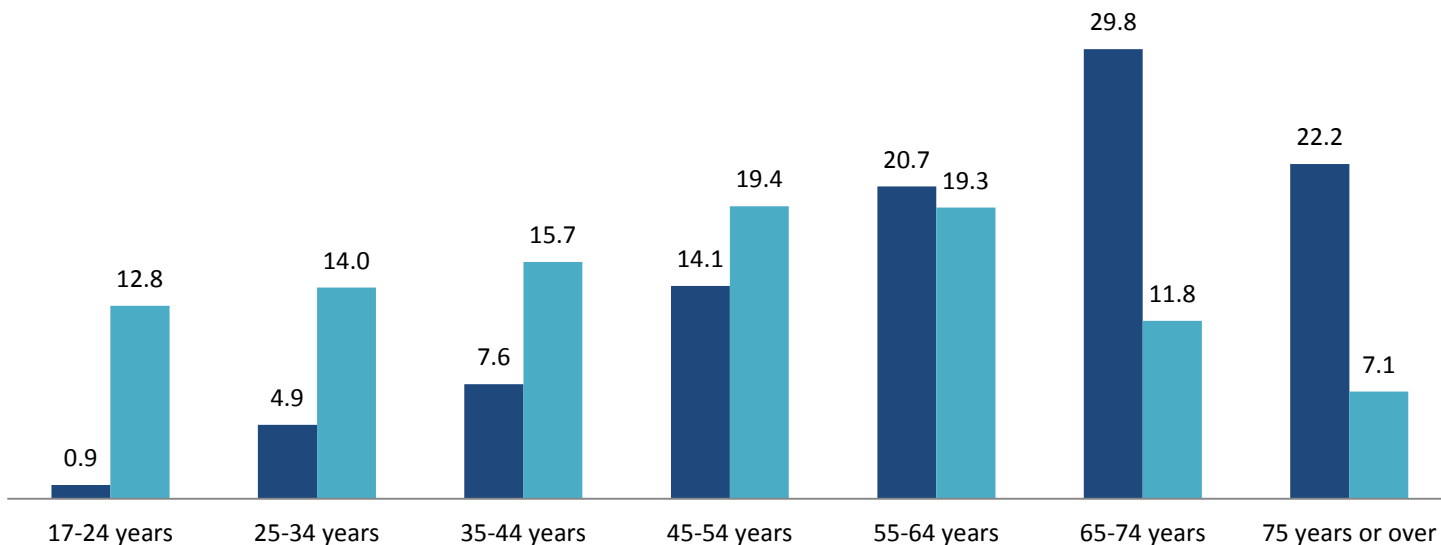
Non-Veterans = 43,365,700



Over 70 percent of Veterans living in rural communities were over the age of 55. Non-Veterans in rural communities were more highly represented in the younger age categories. The median age for rural Veterans fell within the 55 to 64 year range, while the median age for rural non-Veterans fell within the 35 to 54 year range.

**Age Distribution**  
Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

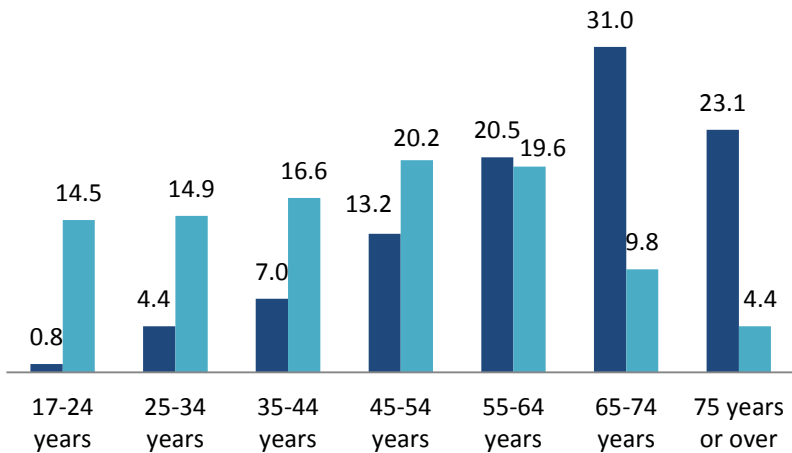
■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



The age distribution of rural Veteran men shows a high percentages of older male Veterans, due to large cohorts of World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era Veterans. Over 65 percent of male rural non-Veterans were under the age of 54 compared with only 25 percent of male rural Veterans. Across the age distributions, rural female Veterans were younger than rural male Veterans, 56 percent of rural female Veterans were under the age of 54.

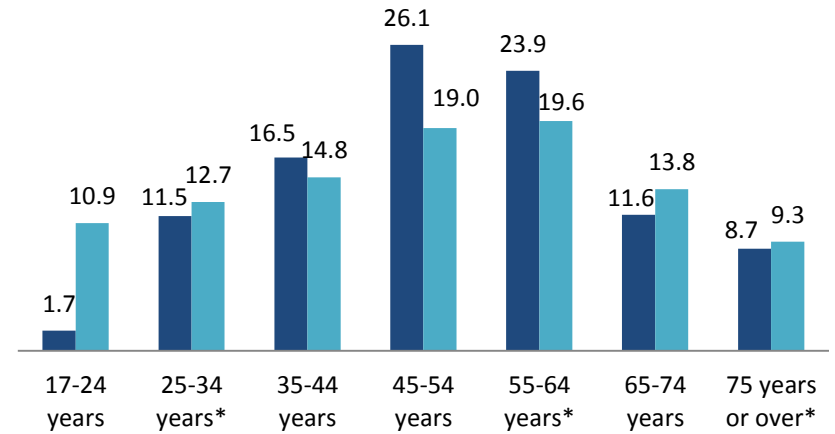
### Age Distribution of Rural Men

■ Rural Veterans    ■ Rural Non-Veterans



### Age Distribution of Rural Women

■ Rural Veterans    ■ Rural Non-Veterans



\* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

Rural communities tend to be less racially and ethnically diverse than urban communities in the United States.

**Race and Ethnicity**  
Population 17 Years and Older  
(in percent)

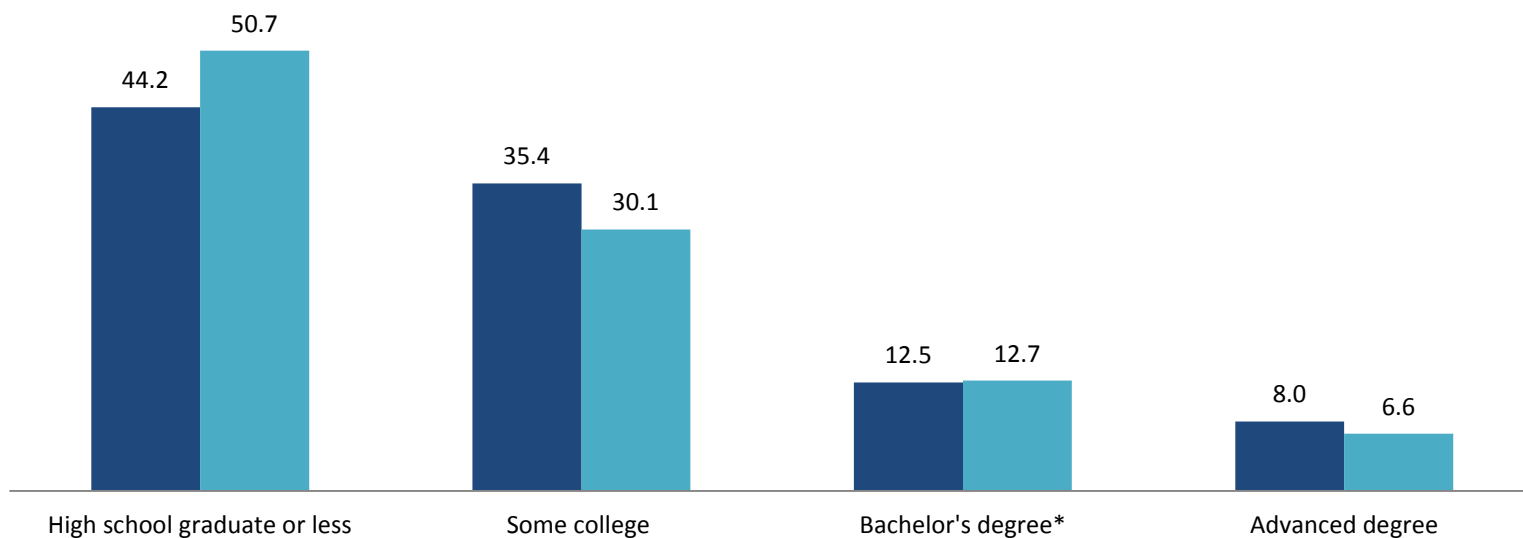
	Rural Veterans	Rural Non- Veterans
White	89.8	84.5
Black	4.9	6.1
Hispanic	2.6	5.8
Asian	0.3	0.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1	1.5
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander*	0.1	0.1
Some other race	0.5	0.1
Two or more races*	1.1	1.2

\* Denotes a no statistically significant difference.

Compared with rural non-Veterans, a lower percentage of rural Veterans had a high school degree or less and a higher percentage had some college or advanced degree. Rural Veterans had the same representation of those with a bachelor's degree compared with rural non-Veterans.

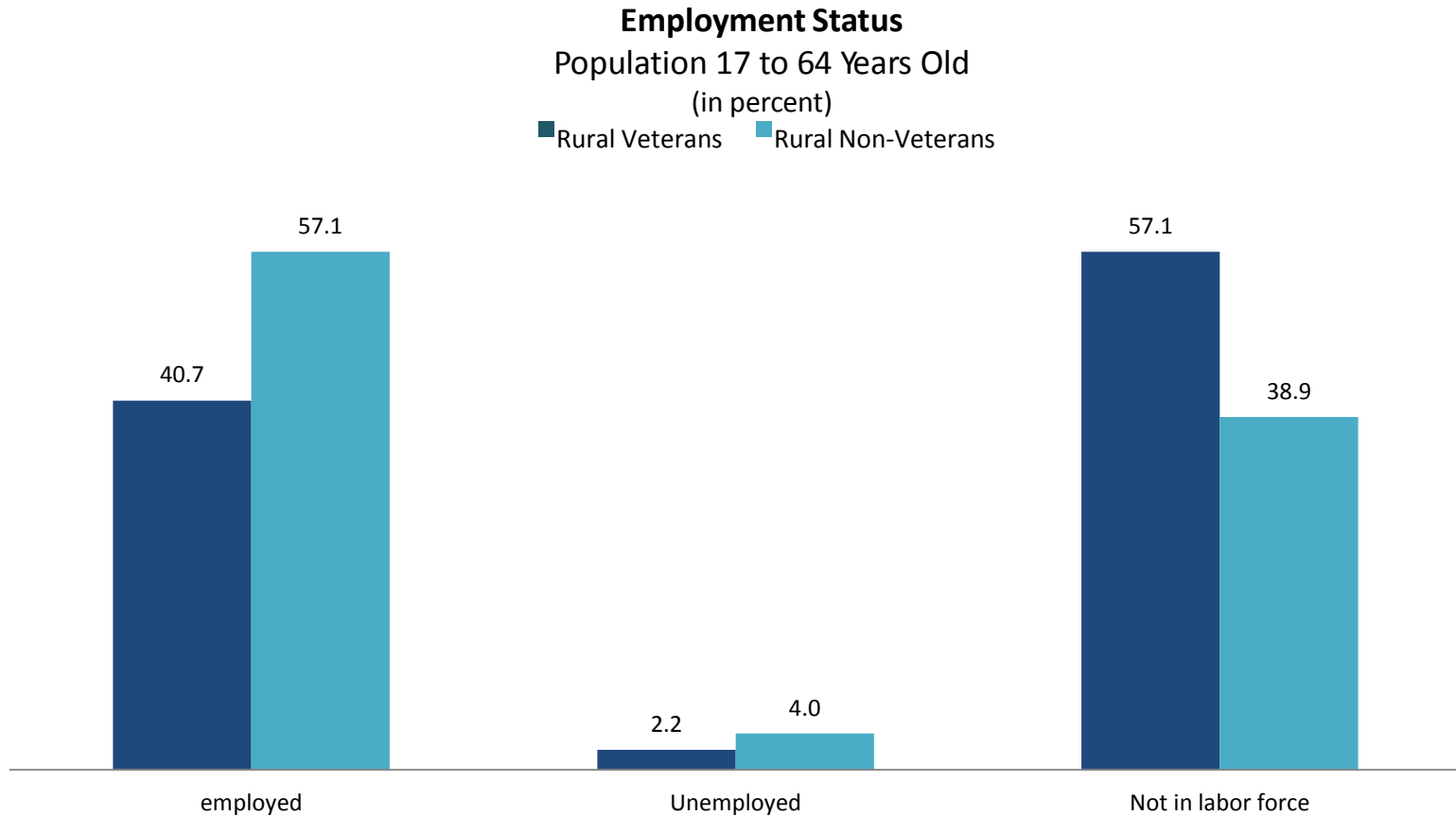
### Educational Attainment Population 17 Years and Older (in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



“Educational Attainment” refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed.

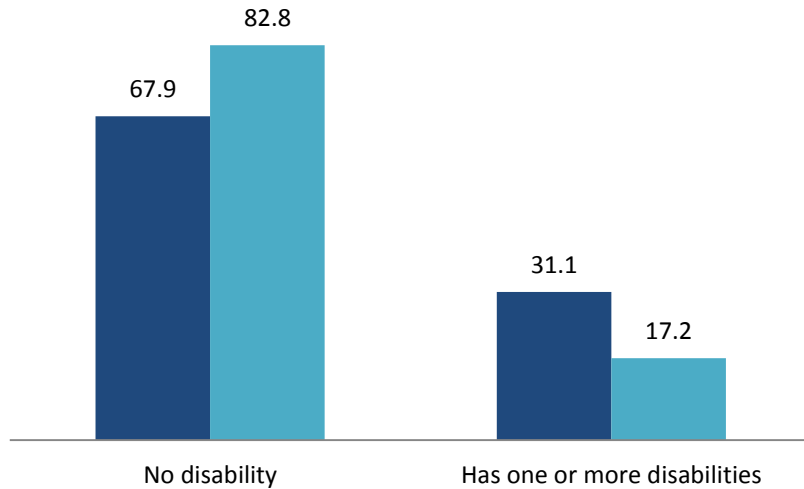
**A lower percentage of rural Veterans were employed and unemployed compared to rural non-Veterans. A higher percentage of rural Veterans were not in the labor force at all compared with rural non-Veterans.**



A higher percentage of Veterans in rural areas reported having at least one disability compared with non-Veterans living in rural areas. There were fewer rural Veterans living below poverty than rural non-Veterans. Only 7 percent of Veterans in rural areas were below the poverty line, compared with almost 12 percent of rural non-Veterans.

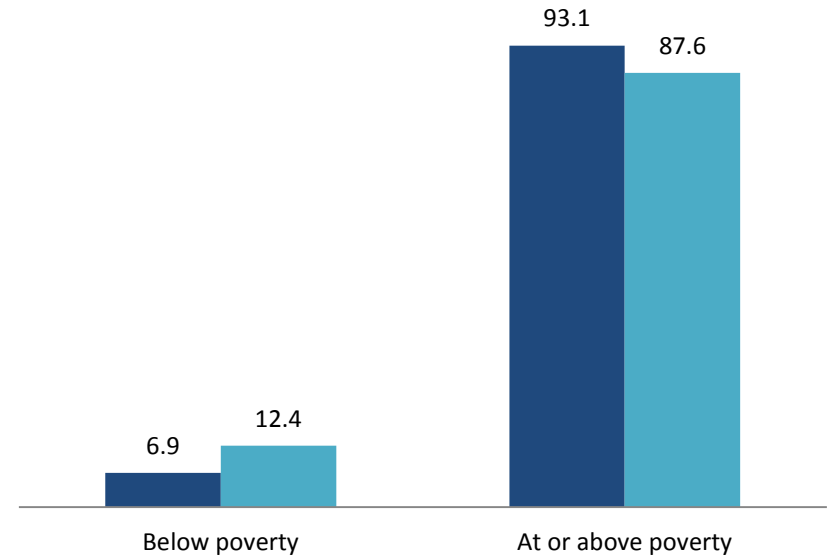
**Disability Status**  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans   ■ Rural Non-Veterans



**Poverty Status**  
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans   ■ Rural Non-Veterans



# Summary

The geographic isolation of rural areas creates different circumstances and challenges for people who live in these communities. Rural communities differ from urban communities in four distinct ways: demographic composition, social ties and social capital, culture, as well as infrastructure and institutional support.

The Veteran population today resides in rural areas at a higher level than the civilian population.

Compared with urban Veterans, rural Veterans were more white and less racially diverse, less educated, more disabled, less employed, less unemployed and less in poverty. Rural Veterans had higher representations in the age range of 55 to 74, greater use of VA health care services and a greater percentage served during the Vietnam Era or peacetime compared with urban Veterans. Rural Veterans had service-connected disability ratings at the same rate as the urban Veterans except at the 70% rate.

Compared with rural non-Veterans, rural Veterans were older, more white and less racially diverse, higher educated, more disabled, less employed, less unemployed and less in poverty. A higher percentage of rural Veterans were out of the labor force compared with rural non-Veterans. The overall age difference between Veterans and non-Veterans likely accounts for many of the observed differences.

# Contact Information

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