

# Office of Health Equity

## Veterans Health Administration

### Department of Veterans Affairs



## TOBACCO USE AND TREATMENT RESOURCES TO PROMOTE EQUITY

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### INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is 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

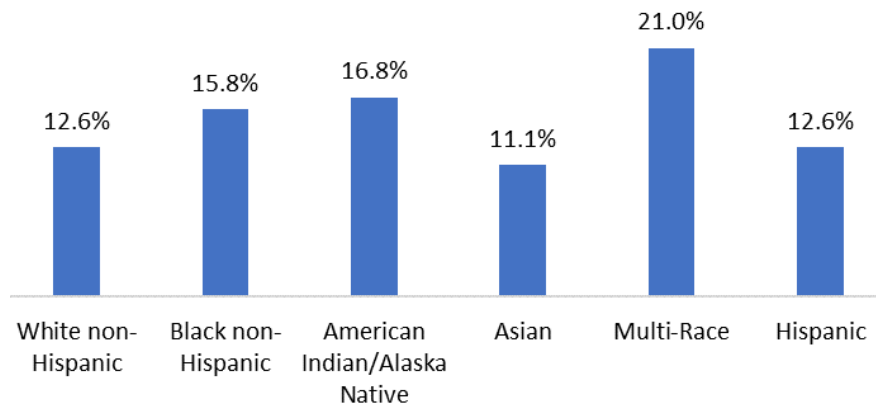
Smoking is a significant health problem for Veterans and remains an important measure in assessing the health of VA enrollees. Smokers are more likely than nonsmokers to develop heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. Although most young smokers start smoking prior to age 18, many Veterans began smoking during their military service.

Each year, the VA Office of Strategic Planning and Analysis conducts the annual Survey of Enrollees. In 2020, 44,135 enrollees returned a completed survey. Their responses help VA better understand the health care needs of the Veterans it serves. Enrollees were asked a series of questions about their smoking status in the 2020 survey.

More than half (56.6%) of the Veterans who responded had smoked at some point in their lives. However, only 13.3% of these Veterans currently smoked. This percentage of Veterans who smoke is lower than the most recent smoking rate of adults in the U.S. age 18 years or older (14.2%).

There are racial and ethnic differences in smoking rates across Veteran groups. Black non-Hispanics, American Indian/Alaska Native non-Hispanics, and Multi-Racial non-Hispanics had the highest current smoking rate. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and there are documented differences in tobacco treatment access across racial and ethnic groups

Smoking Rates in Veterans by Race/Ethnicity, 2020



From: 2020 Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Use of Health Care – Data Findings Report



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## REDUCING DISPARITIES

Smoking is a preventable cause of most of the leading causes of death. Black non-Hispanics are more likely to die from smoking-related illness despite beginning to smoke later in life and smoking less cigarettes per day than white, non-Hispanic smokers.

The Office of Health Equity supports efforts across VA working to reduce health disparities by supporting efforts that to ensure Veterans who smoke have the resources they need to quit using tobacco.

## RESOURCES TO HELP VETERANS QUIT

It can take many attempts to quit. VA offers evidence-based resources to help Veterans successfully stop smoking, including medications

and behavioral counseling. In 2020, more than 767,000 (8.8%) VHA enrollees identified as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a and 12.6% (96,448) of these enrollees reported they were a current smoker. Through offering the same resources to help Veterans stop using tobacco in Spanish and English, VA can help more Veterans who want to become tobacco free.

These resources include:

- VA's [SmokefreeVET](#) text message program is available in English and Spanish. Review the How-To Guides online or get started by simply texting VETesp to 47848 for Spanish (VET to 47848 for English).
- Veterans can begin quitline counseling in English or in Spanish by calling [1-855-QUIT-VET \(1-855-784-8838\)](#) Monday through Friday, 9 am-9 pm EST.
- Quit for Good with Nicotine Replacement Therapy webpages in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- [Information sheets](#) in both English and Spanish are another great resource that help Veterans better understand how specific health conditions are affected by tobacco use.



For more information about these resources to help quit tobacco, visit: [Tobacco and Health - Mental Health \(va.gov\)](#)

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

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### References

2020 Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Use of Health Care – Data Findings Report ([2020 Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Use of Health Care \(va.gov\)](#))