

DESCRIPTION

Veterans begin as a self-selected healthier than average population given the physical and mental fitness required to join the military. Veteran benefits upon exiting the military may include access to health care, disability and pension benefits and education, which ideally supports good health throughout life. Military occupations are the most common cause of veterans being at higher risk for certain health conditions such as head and brain injuries, hearing loss or tinnitus, and hazardous environmental exposures. Veterans are also at greater risk for substance abuse and addiction, mental health conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide.¹

HOW WE ARE DOING

In 2016, Ramsey County was home to 25,000 veterans.² Minnesota has an average sized veteran population, ranking 24th in the nation for population size.³ Veterans in Ramsey County have served in times of peace and war eras including some who served in combat during World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam and in the Gulf War both before and after 9/11. Nearly half of all Ramsey County veterans served in the Vietnam war era, it is therefore not surprising that about 75 percent of veterans are over age 55 with a little over 50 percent over age 65.⁴

DISPARITIES

Mental health is a significant concern for veterans in the U.S. In 2014, 113 veterans died of suicide in Minnesota, contributing to the national figure of 20 veterans dying each day.⁵ Veterans in Minnesota are more likely to commit suicide using a firearm than civilian residents.⁶ Homelessness is another issue that is closely related to the mental health of veterans. Both female and male veterans have a greater likelihood of being homeless. Homeless veterans are three times more likely than their peers to be HIV positive.⁷ Between 2015-2016, Minnesota reported a 46 percent decline in homeless veterans contributing to a national declining trend.³ However, the January 2017 homeless survey in Ramsey County found an increase in homeless veterans including unsheltered individuals.⁸

RISK FACTORS

Veterans have different war time experiences which leads to different risks and conditions. The rates of PTSD are reported to be higher among Vietnam era veterans than for individuals serving in the gulf wars. Veterans who served in-country Vietnam also faced unique environmental exposures like agent orange which has been linked to higher rates of Type II Diabetes and Prostate Cancer.⁹ Gulf War veterans are more likely to have experienced multiple injuries from explosions resulting in disabling injuries or long-term impacts from traumatic brain injuries.¹⁰ National screening on military sexual trauma found that 1 in 4 female veterans and 1 in 100 male veterans were victims of sexual assault while serving in the military. Veterans who are victims of sexual assault in the military may be

Information to note

- Over half of Ramsey County veterans are over age 65 and three quarters are over age 55.
- Ramsey County veterans are more likely to have graduated high school and pursued an associate's degree but less likely to have graduated college or pursued a graduate degree.
- White Bear Lake, Mounds View and Little Canada have the greatest concentration of veterans in Ramsey County. Saint Paul has the largest total number of veterans (11,876).
- The number of sheltered and unsheltered veterans living in Ramsey County increased significantly between 2016 and 2017.

¹ U.S. National Library of Medicine. Veterans and Military Health. <https://medlineplus.gov/veteransandmilitaryhealth.html>. Accessed October 10, 2017

² Ramsey County Veterans Assistance data

³ Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. 2016 Annual Report. https://mn.gov/mdva/assets/2016-mdva-annual-report_tcm1066-285140.pdf. Accessed October 9, 2017.

⁴ U.S. Census American Community Survey 2012-2016. <https://factfinder.census.gov/>. Accessed December 29, 2017.

⁵ Suicide Among Veterans and other Americans (2001-2014). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf>. Published August 3, 2016. Updated August 2017. Accessed October 9, 2017.

⁶ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Minnesota Veteran Suicide Data Sheet. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/Suicide-Data-Sheet-Minnesota.pdf>. Accessed October 9, 2017.

⁷ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Research on Homelessness Fact Sheet. https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va_factsheets/Homelessness.pdf. Accessed October 9, 2017

⁸ Heading Home Ramsey. Ramsey County Point-in-Time (PIT) Homeless Count, January 2017. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1uxubiRbMOyNHhGNkFTYk5XSTg/view>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Research on Vietnam Veterans Fact Sheet. https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va_factsheets/VietnamVeterans.pdf. Accessed October 9, 2017.

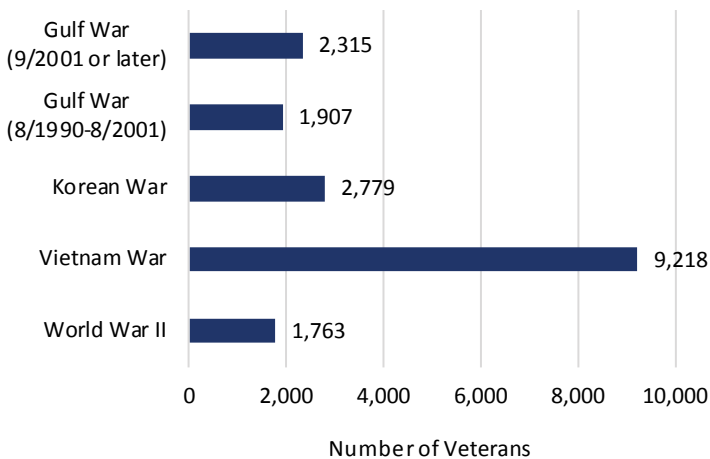
¹⁰ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Research on Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Fact Sheet. https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va_factsheets/AfghanistanIraqVets.pdf. Accessed October 9, 2017.

eligible for services from the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Care System even when they are not eligible for other VA services and benefits.¹¹

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

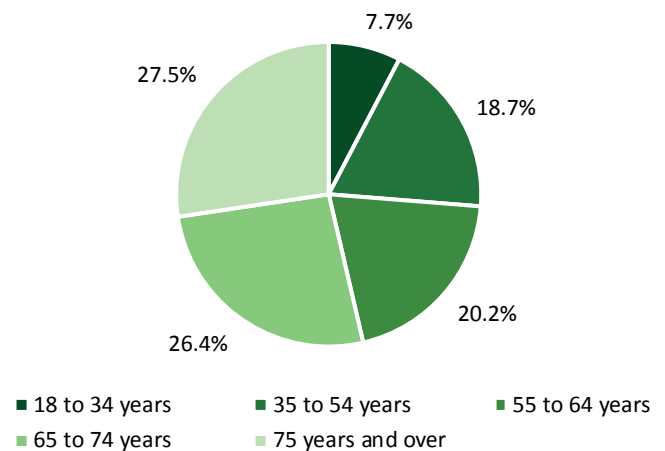
The Ramsey County Veterans Services department is focused on outreach and education with the goal of ensuring veterans are provided with information and assistance to access their earned benefits. These benefits include war era pension and disability benefits, health care, home care, emergency assistance, educational benefits and more. Now as part of the Health and Wellness Service Team (HWST), Veterans Services partners and collaborates with Public Health, Social Services, Financial Assistance Services and all HWST departments to ensure that veterans and their surviving spouses have access to a knowledgeable advocate to assist them with accessing help and support when they need it most. Ramsey County works directly with community partners to build a continuum of facilities, benefit programs and support services for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Period of Service, Ramsey County Veterans



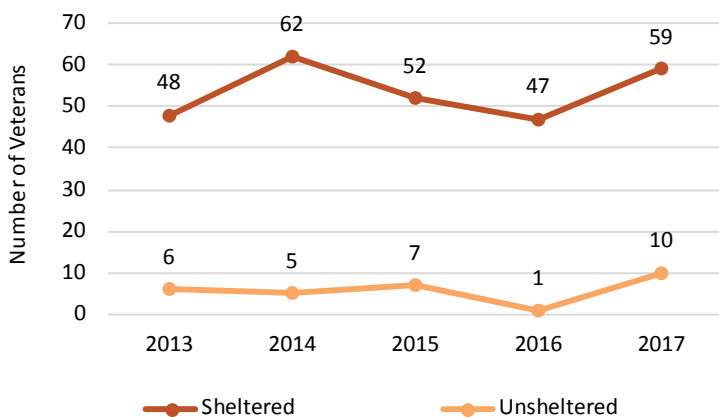
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.¹²

Age of Veterans, Ramsey County, 2016



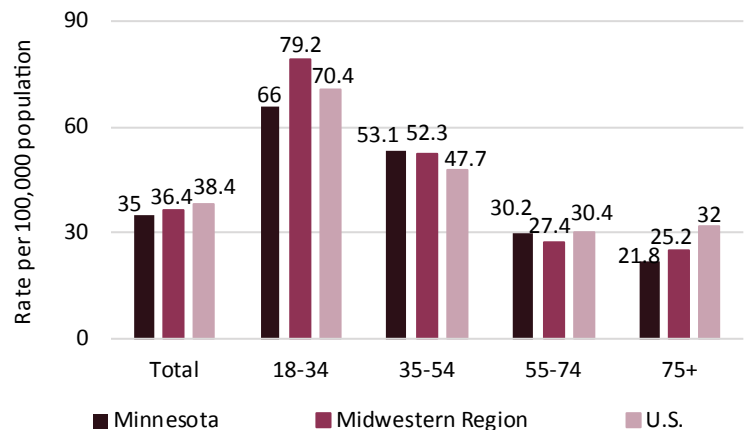
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.¹²

Homeless Veterans, Ramsey County



Source: Ramsey County Point-in-Time (PIT) Homeless Count, January 2017. Heading Home Web Site.

Veteran Suicide Rate by Age Group, 2014



Source: Minnesota Veteran Suicide Data Sheet. Mental Health.Gov¹³

¹¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Military Sexual Trauma. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/types/violence/military-sexual-trauma-general.asp>. Accessed October 31, 2017.

¹² Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau Web site. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>. Accessed December 29, 2017.

¹³ Source: Minnesota Veteran Suicide Data Sheet. Mental Health.Gov Web site. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/Suicide-Data-Sheet-Minnesota.pdf>. Accessed December 29, 2017.