

# Health Status of Veterans in Montana

## Key Messages

- Veterans experience a higher burden of chronic disease compared to non-veterans within the same age group.
- Health care providers should be aware of their patients' status as a veteran and consider any additional needs veterans might have.
- Refer qualifying patients to community-based programs to help patients prevent and manage chronic conditions. See: <https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/chronicdisease/CommunityBasedPrograms> for more details.

## Montana Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

1400 E Broadway

Helena, Montana 59260-2951

1-844-MTHLT4U (864-5848)

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/chronicdisease>



Healthy People. Healthy Communities.  
Department of Public Health & Human Services

## Background

Montana's population has one of the highest proportions of veterans in the nation. In 2013, nearly 83,000 (10%) Montana adults reported having served on active duty in the armed forces.<sup>1</sup> The Veterans Health Study, conducted by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) among VHA patients in the mid- to late 1990s, showed that veterans experienced a high prevalence of several chronic diseases and scored significantly worse on physical and mental functioning scales than patients seen in civilian health care systems.<sup>2</sup> More recently, an analysis of national Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data found a higher prevalence of arthritis among veterans compared to non-veterans.<sup>3</sup> This report describes the characteristics of veterans in Montana and assesses the burden of chronic disease among this group.

## Methods

This report used data from the 2011, 2012, and 2013 Montana BRFSS, a random digit dialing telephone survey of non-institutionalized adults. The survey asks respondents about demographic characteristics including veteran status and whether they have been diagnosed with a variety of chronic conditions. The three years of survey data were combined to ensure adequate sample size of veterans for sub-group analysis.

## Demographics

The veteran population of Montana has significantly different demographic characteristics than non-veterans (Table 1). Most veterans in Montana are men. Montana veterans have a higher proportion of older adults than non-veterans with 41% of veterans being aged 65 years or older compared to only 17% of non-veterans. Montana veterans had a higher proportion with a household income of \$25,000--\$49,999 and a lower proportion of both low (<\$15,000) and higher (≥\$75,000) income households compared to non-veterans. A higher proportion of veterans reported having a disability (35%) compared to non-veterans (26%).

**Table 1. Demographic Distribution among Veteran and Non-veteran Adults, Montana, BRFSS, 2011-2013.**

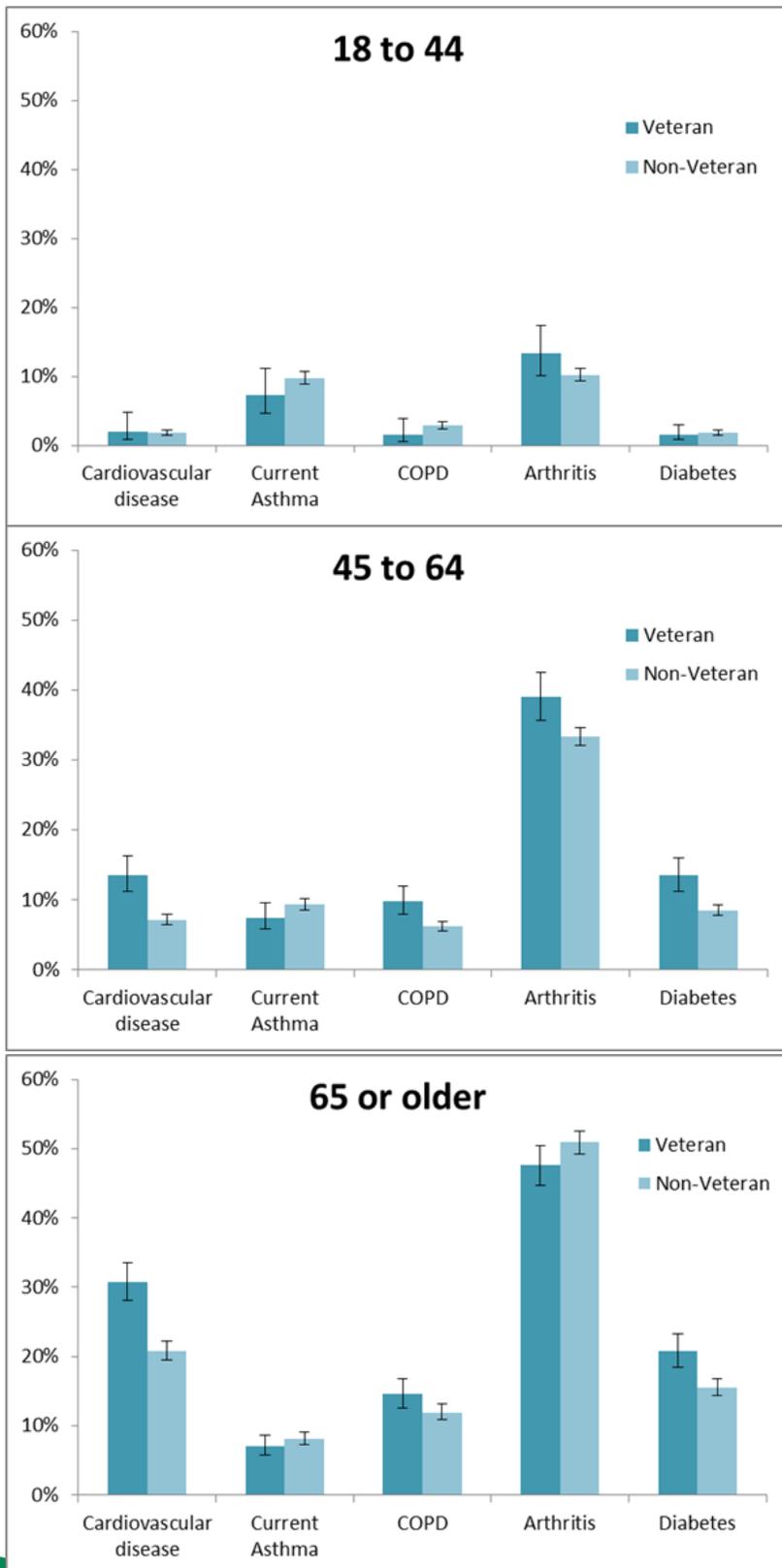
	Veteran			Non-Veteran		
	Percent	95% Confidence Interval		Percent	95% Confidence Interval	
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	92.7%	91.5%	93.7%	42.8%	41.9%	43.7%
Female	7.3%	6.3%	8.5%	57.2%	56.3%	58.1%
<b>Age Group</b>						
18 to 24	3.4%	2.6%	4.5%	14.2%	13.5%	15.0%
25 to 34	9.2%	7.9%	10.6%	17.0%	16.3%	17.7%
35 to 44	10.2%	8.9%	11.7%	15.2%	14.6%	15.9%
45 to 54	14.3%	12.7%	15.9%	18.7%	18.0%	19.4%
55 to 64	22.3%	20.6%	24.0%	17.8%	17.2%	18.4%
65 or older	40.6%	38.7%	42.6%	17.1%	16.5%	17.6%
<b>Race</b>						
White	91.0%	89.6%	92.2%	89.0%	88.4%	89.6%
American Indian	4.3%	3.5%	5.3%	5.3%	5.0%	5.7%
Other Race	4.7%	3.8%	5.8%	5.7%	5.2%	6.2%
<b>Household Income</b>						
<\$15,000	9.6%	8.4%	10.9%	13.4%	12.7%	14.1%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	20.5%	18.8%	22.3%	21.1%	20.3%	21.9%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	36.5%	34.5%	38.7%	28.9%	28.1%	29.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	16.7%	15.1%	18.3%	15.4%	14.7%	16.1%
\$75,000 or more	16.7%	15.3%	18.3%	21.2%	20.4%	22.0%
<b>Disability Status</b>						
Disabled*	34.6%	32.7%	36.6%	24.5%	23.7%	25.2%

\*Respondents were considered disabled if they answered yes to either of the following questions: Are you limited in any way in any activity because of physical, mental, or emotional problems? Do you now have any health problem that requires you to use special equipment, such as a cane, a wheelchair, a special bed, or a special telephone?

## Chronic Conditions

Montana veterans aged 45 years and older have a higher prevalence of several chronic conditions compared to non-veterans of the same age (Figure 1). A higher proportion of veterans aged 45 to 64 years reported having been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), arthritis, and diabetes than non-veterans. Similarly, a higher proportion of veterans aged 65 years or older reported cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

**Figure 1. Prevalence of Chronic Conditions among Veterans and Non-veterans by Age Group, Montana, BRFSS, 2011-2013.**



## Discussion

Veterans in Montana experience a higher burden of chronic disease than non-veterans and may require additional resources to manage their disease(s) and prevent complications. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) supports a wide variety of community-based programs that can help veterans prevent or manage chronic disease. These programs include exercise classes for adults with arthritis, chronic disease self-management education, intensive lifestyle change classes to prevent type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and many more. A full guide to community health programs in Montana is available at:

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/chronicdisease/CommunityBasedPrograms>

Health care providers should be aware of their patients' status as a veteran and consider any additional needs veterans might have. Qualifying patients can be referred to these programs by visiting the website above or by calling 1-844-MT-HLT4U (1-844-864-5848).

## References

- 1) U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2013 1-year estimates.
- 2) Lewis E. Kazis ScD, Xinhua S. Ren PhD, Austin Lee PhD, et. al. *Health Status in VA Patients: Results from the Veterans Health Study*. American Journal of Medical Quality, Jan/Feb 1999: 14(1);28-38.
- 3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Arthritis Among Veterans – United States, 2011-2013*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, November 7, 2014: 63(44);999-1003.