

## The State of the American Veteran: The San Francisco Veterans Study Fact Sheet

*Beginning spring 2016, the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families (USC CIR) conducted a survey of the San Francisco County military population. In total, 722 veteran responses were included in the survey.*

### Veteran Facts

- California is home to over 1.8 million former service members, making it the largest veteran population of any state in the U.S.
- More than 23,000 veterans reside in San Francisco County; however, almost 300,000 live in the Bay Area and may commute into and out of San Francisco for services.
- This is the fourth State of the American Veteran study—and the third in California—conducted by CIR. Previous state studies have focused on Los Angeles and Orange counties.

### Civilian Life Transition

- **Nearly three-quarters of all veterans surveyed reported difficulties adjusting to civilian life, and one-third reported that they do not know where to go or who to contact to get help.**
- Post-9/11 veterans reported higher rates of adjustment challenges at 71% when compared to 48% of pre-9/11 veterans.
- Just over 65% of pre-9/11 veterans and 80% of post-9/11 veterans reported they needed time to figure out what they wanted to do with their life.
- Nearly two-thirds of post-9/11 veterans indicated that civilians do not appreciate the sacrifices they've made, with more than 80% indicating that civilians don't understand their problems.

### Employment and Finances

- **Eight in 10 service members leave the military without a job, expecting to quickly find meaningful employment that provides adequate remuneration once they leave the military.**
- For 83% of post-9/11 veterans who work full-time, their annual salary is below \$60,000 a year. In San Francisco, the median household income is \$77,734 per year.
- Almost six in 10 post-9/11 veterans reported that their military skills and experiences are dismissed by employers.
- About four in 10 San Francisco veterans with jobs reported earned below \$36,000, with 11% pre- and 6% post-9/11 veterans earning at or below the poverty level.
- More post-9/11 veterans reported having financial difficulties during the past year.

## Housing and Food Insecurity

- **A majority of veterans leave the military without having identified permanent housing or living arrangements. For post-9/11 veterans, just 35% had lined up housing post-service.**
- Over 40% of post-9/11 veterans and 20% of pre-9/11 veterans reported being homeless in the past year.
- Food insecurity was a concern for all veterans, with 45% of pre-9/11 veterans and 62% of post-9/11 veterans reporting difficulty having enough money for food.
- Many veterans have unstable living arrangements, yet do not meet the Department of Housing and Urban Development definition of homelessness.

## Physical and Psychological Health

- **Five in 10 veterans surveyed reported a significant physical or mental health issue for which they are not receiving care.**
- One in three veterans have considered suicide or made a plan to end their life by suicide. Over 45% of post-9/11 veterans who are at risk of suicide have not received help.
- Post-9/11 veterans were more likely to screen positive for PTSD (53%) and depression (64%) than pre-9/11 veterans (PTSD: 41%, depression, 35%).
- Post-9/11 veterans are twice as likely as pre-9/11 veterans to engage in high risk-taking behaviors, like driving after drinking alcohol, carrying a weapon, or looking to start a fight.
- Nearly six in 10 post-9/11 veterans have a probable alcohol drinking problem.
- Nearly two-thirds (61%) of pre-9/11 female veterans and over one-third (35%) of post-9/11 female veterans reported being sexually assaulted while serving in the military.

## Getting Help

- **More than a third of post-9/11 veterans and a quarter of pre-9/11 veterans reported not knowing where to go to get help.**
- Over half of pre-9/11 veterans and 35% of post-9/11 veterans believe they can handle their mental health issues on their own.
- Half of post-9/11 veterans indicated that it was difficult to schedule an appointment and 37% said their workload didn't allow time off for treatment.
- Post-9/11 veterans are less likely than pre-9/11 veterans to seek treatment for physical or psychological issues.

## Non-Honorable Discharges

- **Veterans with a non-honorable discharge have much greater difficulty in nearly every area assessed, including employment, health, housing, and finances.**
- Almost 30% of veterans who responded to the survey had a non-honorable discharge, which was almost triple the rate of previous studies.
- Expanding the definition of 'veteran' to include those who have served honorably for one day of military service will allow these veterans to access needed federal, state and community services.