

## Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among US Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Veterans

### Operation Enduring Freedom Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF)

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## Casualty Comparisons by Conflict

Source: <http://www.va.gov/opa/epidemiology/CASUALTYComparisons.htm>

§ From October 7, 2001 to June 2, 2007

Category	WWII	Korea	Vietnam	Gulf War 1	OEF-OIF§
Total Deployed Service Members	16,112,566	5,720,000	3,403,000	694,550	1,400,000
Battle Deaths	291,557	33,741	47,424	147	4,143
Non-battle deaths	113,842	2,833	10,785	235	806
Non-fatally wounded in action	671,846	103,284	153,303	467	27,122

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## Current DoD Roster of Recent War Veterans

- Evolving roster development by DoD Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)
  - In September 2003, DMDC developed an initial file of “separated” troops who had been deployed to the Iraqi and Afghan theater of operations using proxy files: Active Duty and Reserve Pay files, Combat Zone Tax Exclusion, and Imminent Danger Pay data.
  - In September 2004, DMDC revised procedures for creating periodic updates of the roster and now mainly utilizes direct reports from service branches of previously deployed OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom) and OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom) troops.
  - DMDC is actively addressing the limitations of the current roster to improve the accuracy and completeness of future rosters

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## Current DoD Roster of Recent War Veterans

- Latest Update of roster
  - Provided to Dr. Han Kang, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Environmental Epidemiology Service, on **February 22, 2008**
- Qualifications of DoD’s OEF/OIF deployment roster
  - Contains list of veterans who have left active duty and does not include currently serving active duty personnel
  - Does not distinguish OEF from OIF veterans
  - Roster only includes separated OEF/OIF veterans with out-of-theater dates **through November 2007**
  - **4,143** veterans who died in-theater are not included

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## Updated Roster of OIF and OEF Veterans Who Have Left Active Duty

- **837,458** OEF and OIF veterans who have left active duty and become eligible for VA health care since FY 2002
  - **50% (414,588)** Former Active Duty troops
  - **50% (422,870)** Reserve and National Guard

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## Use of DoD Roster of War Veterans Who Have Left Active Duty

- This roster is used to check the VA’s electronic health records for VHA enrollment and the ICD-9 diagnostic codes are used to classify health problems. This determines **which OEF/OIF veterans have accessed VA health care as of December 31, 2007.**
- The data available for this analysis are mainly administrative information and are **not based on a review of each patient record or a confirmation of each diagnosis.** These data are important mainly for health care planning purposes. These data cannot be considered epidemiologic research data.
- These are administrative data and must be interpreted with caution because they **only apply to OEF/OIF veterans who have accessed VHA health care.** These data do not represent all 837,458 OEF/OIF veterans who have become eligible for VA healthcare since FY 2002 or the approximately 1.6 million troops who have served in the two theaters of operation since the beginning of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- These data are **cumulative totals** since FY 2002 and **do not represent data from any single year.**

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## VA Health Care Utilization from FY 2002 through 2008 (1<sup>st</sup> QT) Among OEF and OIF Veterans

- Among all 837,458 separated OEF/OIF Veterans
  - **39% (324,846)** of total separated OIF/OEF veterans have obtained VA health care since FY 2002 (cumulative total)
    - **96% (311,730)** of 324,846 evaluated OEF/OIF patients have been seen as outpatients only by VA and not hospitalized
    - **4% (13,116)** of 324,846 evaluated OEF/OIF patients have been hospitalized at least once in a VA health care facility

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## VA Health Care Utilization for FY 2002-2008 (1<sup>st</sup> QT) by Service Component

- **414,588** Former Active Duty Troops
  - **40%** (165,578) have sought VA health care since FY 2002 (cumulative total)
- **422,870** Reserve/National Guard Members
  - **38%** (159,268) have sought VA health care since FY 2002 (cumulative total)

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## Comparison of VA Health Care Requirements

The cumulative total of 324,846 OEF/OIF veterans evaluated by VA over approximately 6 years from FY 2002 through FY 2008 (1<sup>st</sup> QT) represents about **6% of the 5.5 million** individuals who received VHA health care in any one year (total VHA patient population of 5.5 million in 2007).

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## Geographic Distribution of OEF and OIF Veterans According to the VISN (VA Regional Networks)

Treatment Site	OEF-OIF Veterans Treated at a VA Facility* Frequency	%
• VISN 1	VA New England Healthcare System	15,363 4.7
• VISN 2	VA Healthcare Network, Upstate New York	8,982 2.8
• VISN 3	VA New York/New Jersey Healthcare System	12,354 3.8
• VISN 4	VA Stars & Stripes Healthcare System	15,562 4.8
• VISN 5	VA Capital Health Care System	9,119 2.8
• VISN 6	VA Mid-Atlantic Healthcare System	13,640 4.2
• VISN 7	VA Atlanta Network	23,890 7.4
• VISN 8	VA Sunshine Healthcare Network	26,419 8.1
• VISN 9	VA Mid-South Healthcare Network	18,748 5.8
• VISN 10	VA Healthcare System of Ohio	3,321 1.0
• VISN 11	Veterans in Partnership Healthcare Network	12,630 3.9
• VISN 12	VA Great Lakes Health Care System	19,307 5.9
• VISN 15	VA Heartland Network	12,064 3.7
• VISN 16	South Central VA Health Care Network	28,585 8.8
• VISN 17	VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network	21,492 6.6
• VISN 18	VA Southwest Healthcare Network	16,462 5.1
• VISN 19	VA Rocky Mountain Network	13,729 4.2
• VISN 20	VA Northwest Network	18,019 5.6
• VISN 21	VA Sierra Pacific Network	14,694 4.5
• VISN 22	VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network	26,100 8.0
• VISN 23	VA Midwest Health Care Network	10,531 3.3

\* Veterans can be treated in multiple VISNs. A veteran was counted only once in any single VISN but can be counted in multiple VISN categories. The total number of OEF/OIF veterans who received treatment (n = 324,846) was used to calculate the percentage treated in any one VISN.

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## Demographic Characteristics of OEF and OIF Veterans Utilizing VA Health Care

	% OEF/OIF Veterans (n = 324,846)
Sex	Male 88 %
	Female 12
Age	<20 7
	20-29 51
	30-39 23
	≥40 19
Branch	Air Force 12
	Army 65
	Marine 12
	Navy 11
Unit Type	Active 51
	Reserve/Guard 49
Rank	Enlisted 92
	Officer 8

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## ICD-9 Data

- Veterans of recent military conflicts have presented to VHA with a wide range of possible medical and psychological conditions.
- Health problems have encompassed more than 8,000 discrete ICD-9 diagnostic codes.
- Data available for this analysis are mainly administrative information and are **not based on a review of each patient record or a confirmation of each diagnosis.**
- As in other outpatient populations, the ICD-9 diagnostic category, "Symptoms, Signs and Ill-Defined Conditions," was commonly reported.

Note: It is important to understand that this is not a diagnosis of a mystery syndrome or unusual illness. This ICD-9 code includes symptoms and clinical finding that are not coded elsewhere in the ICD-9. It is a diverse, catch-all category that is commonly used for the diagnosis of outpatient populations. It encompasses more than 160 sub-categories and primarily consists of common symptoms that do not have an immediately obvious cause during a clinic visit or isolated laboratory test abnormalities that do not point to a particular disease process and may be transient.

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## Frequency of Possible Diagnoses Among OEF and OIF Veterans

Diagnosis (Broad ICD-9 Categories)	Frequency*	%
(n = 324,846)		
Infectious and Parasitic Diseases (001-139)	37,268	11.5
Malignant Neoplasms (140-208)	2,890	0.9
Benign Neoplasms (210-239)	12,365	3.8
Diseases of Endocrine/Nutritional/ Metabolic Systems (240-279)	68,090	21.0
Diseases of Blood and Blood Forming Organs (280-289)	6,866	2.1
<b>Mental Disorders (290-319)*</b>	<b>133,633</b>	<b>41.1</b>
Diseases of Nervous System/ Sense Organs (320-389)	109,765	33.8
Diseases of Circulatory System (390-459)	51,569	15.9
Disease of Respiratory System (460-519)	63,345	19.5
Disease of Digestive System (520-579)	101,720	31.3
Diseases of Genitourinary System (580-629)	33,688	10.4
Diseases of Skin (680-709)	50,813	15.6
<b>Diseases of Musculoskeletal System/Connective System (710-739)</b>	<b>151,323</b>	<b>46.6</b>
<b>Symptoms, Signs and Ill Defined Conditions (780-799)</b>	<b>124,223</b>	<b>38.2</b>
Injury/Poisonings (800-999)	66,157	20.4

\*These are cumulative data since FY 2002, with data on hospitalizations and outpatient visits as of December 31, 2007; veterans can have multiple diagnoses with each healthcare encounter. A veteran is counted only once in any single diagnostic category but can be counted in multiple categories, so the above numbers add up to greater than 324,846.

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## Frequency of Possible Mental Disorders Among OEF/OIF Veterans since 2002\*

Disease Category (ICD 290-319 code)	Total Number of GWOT Veterans**
PTSD (ICD-9CM 309.81)+	67,525
Nondependent Abuse of Drugs (ICD 305)++	54,415
Depressive Disorders (311)	45,155
Neurotic Disorders (300)	35,605
Affective Psychoses (296)	25,399
Alcohol Dependence Syndrome (303)	11,245
Special Symptoms, Not Elsewhere Classified (307)	6,654
Sexual Deviations and Disorders (302)	6,239
Drug Dependence (304)	5,062
Acute Reaction to Stress (308)	4,070

\* Note - These are cumulative data since FY 2002. ICD diagnoses used in these analyses are obtained from computerized administrative data. Although diagnoses are made by trained healthcare providers, up to one-third of coded diagnoses may not be confirmed when initially coded because the diagnosis is "rule-out" or provisional, pending further evaluation.

\*\* A total of 133,633 unique veterans received a diagnosis of a possible mental disorder. A veteran may have more than one mental disorder diagnosis and each diagnosis is entered separately in this table; therefore, the total number above will be higher than 133,633.

+ This row of data does not include information on PTSD from VA's Vet Centers or data from veterans not enrolled for VHA health care. Also, this row does not include veterans who did not receive a diagnosis of PTSD (ICD 309.81) but had a diagnosis of adjustment reaction (ICD-9 309).

\*\* 61% of these veterans (43,524) had a diagnosis of tobacco use disorder (ICD-9CM 305.1).

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## New Veterans and Current VA Population

	General VA Population (FY06)	OIF/OEF Population (2002-2006 1 <sup>st</sup> Q)
<b>Median Age</b>		
Active Duty	65	28.6
Reserve/Guard		35.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	95.2%	87%
Female	4.8%	13%

As a population, OIF/OEF veterans are approximately:

- **Less than HALF the age** of the median VA population
- **Triple the percent of women**

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## Population Diagnoses: OIF/OEF Veterans and All Veterans

### Leading Five Diagnoses

All VHA Users (2006)	OIF/OEF Veterans
Hypertension	Musculo/Skeletal
Diabetes	Mental Health
Lipids	Digestive (dental)
Adjustment Reaction	Ill-defined
Ischemic Heart Dx	Nervous System /Sensory

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## Summary - 1 Important Points to Remember

- The rate of VA health care utilization by OIF/OEF veterans may reflect the fact that these veterans have ready access to VA health care - free of charge for two to five years following separation for any health problem possibly related to wartime service.
- VA engages in significant outreach to inform these veterans of their benefits, including two personal letters from the VA Secretary and a personal phone call inviting them to enroll for VA health care to each new veteran when they separate from active duty.
- These data may reflect a high degree of one-time VA access for establishing VHA enrollment, evaluation for VA benefits.

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## Summary - 2

- The number of new veterans are using VA health care is steadily increasing
- 39% of separated OIF/OEF veterans are enrolled for VA health care
- OIF/OEF veterans currently represent a small component of VHA health care - capacity is not an issue
- OIF/OEF veterans are presenting to VA with a wide range of possible medical and psychological conditions

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## Summary - 3

- OIF/OEF veterans as a population are very different than the average VHA user
- OIF/OEF veterans have very different health care needs than average VHA user
- VA is making major changes to meet these veterans needs:
  - Major expansion of mental health services
  - Suicide Hotline
  - Polytrauma care network
  - Significant increase in women's health services
  - OEF/OIF Care Coordination at each VA medical center
  - OEF/OIF Polytrauma/TBI individual case coordinators

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## Caveats

- This analysis is reflective only of those veterans who sought VA care.
- Because the 324,846 OEF and OIF veterans who have accessed VA health care were not randomly selected and represent just 20% of the approximately 1.6 million recent OEF/OIF veterans, **this analysis does not constitute a representative sample of all OEF/OIF veterans.**
- Reported ICD-9 diagnostic data are only applicable to the 324,846 VA patients – a population actively seeking health care -- and not to all OEF/OIF veterans.

For example, the fact that about 40% of VHA patient encounters were coded as related to a possible mental disorder does not indicate that approximately 2/5 of all recent war veterans are suffering from a mental health problem. Only well-designed epidemiological studies can evaluate the overall health of OEF/OIF war veterans.

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## Follow-Up

- VA will continue to monitor the health care utilization of recent Global War on Terrorism veterans using updated deployment rosters provided by DoD to ensure that VA tailors its health care and disability programs to meet the needs of this newest generation of OEF/OIF war veterans.
- VA has initiated prospective surveillance programs to assess the long-term health consequences of OEF/OIF deployment specifically; polytrauma/TBI, mental health, women's health, infectious disease.

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## Additional Slides

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## VA Eligibility Categories

### Hierarchy of Priority for VA Service reset annually

- **Priority Group 1:** Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more disabling
- **Priority Group 2:** Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40% disabling
- **Priority Group 3:** Veterans who are former POWs, Purple Heart, or with service-connected disabilities rated 10% or 20%
- **Priority Group 4:** Veterans who are receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits or who have been determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled

## VA Eligibility Categories

- **Priority Group 5:** Non-service-connected veterans with income below VA Means Test thresholds (approximately \$30,000 for veterans with 1 dependent)
- **Priority Group 6:** WWI, Mexican Border War, certain exposures (Agent Orange) and Gulf War illness
- **Priority Group 7:** Veterans with income above the VA Means Test threshold & income below the HUD geographic index (Copayments apply)
- **Priority Group 8:** Veterans with income above the VA Means Test threshold and the HUD geographic index (Copayments apply)

**As of Jan 17, 2003, VA is not accepting new Priority Group 8 veterans for enrollment**