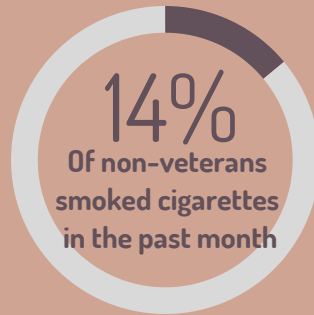
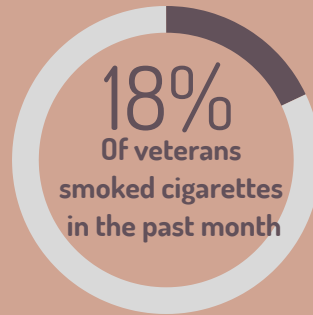
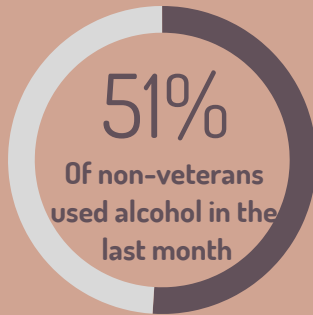
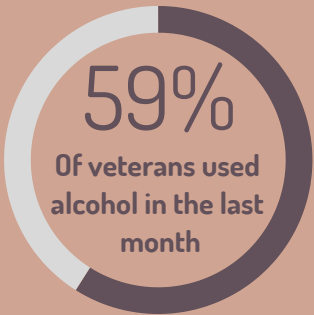




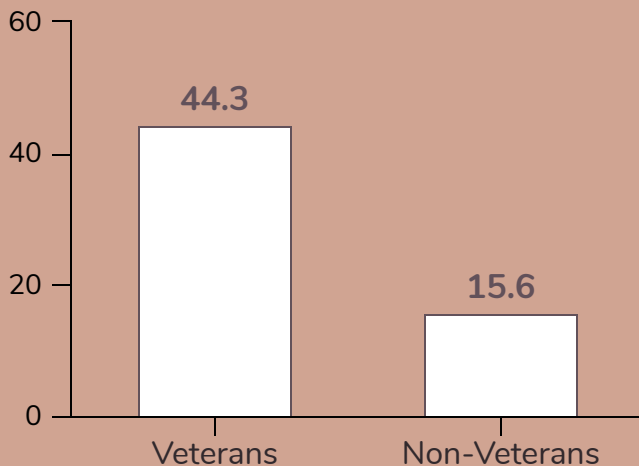
Substance Use & Suicide: Veterans in Arizona



The 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* indicated that veterans report significantly more alcohol and tobacco use in the past month than non-veterans:



Arizona Suicide Rates per 100,000 (2017)

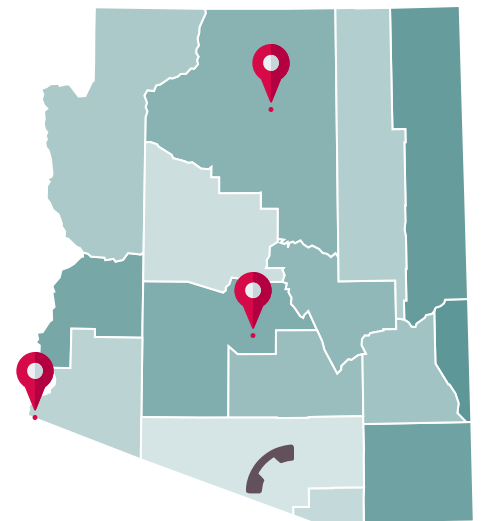


The suicide rate among veterans are 3X higher than non- veterans in Arizona**.

For male veterans, suicide rates are 2X higher than for non-veterans.

For female veterans suicide rates are 5X higher, compared to non-veteran females.

As part of the 2018 Arizona Statewide Substance Use Prevention Needs Assessment, 3 focus groups were conducted with veterans in Flagstaff, Phoenix and Yuma. Veterans were asked about what current and most harmful substance issues existed in their community, what they thought caused substance use/and or misuse, and what would be effective prevention programming to combat these issues. In addition, one phone interview was conducted with a veteran Key Informant in Pima County.



* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016.

** ASU Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety. Arizona Violent Death Reporting System. Data-At-A-Glance, Violent Deaths Involving Veteran Victims. January 1, 2017 to August 31, 2017.

Causes of Substance Use and/or Misuse: *Thoughts from Veterans*

1

Veterans use substances to self-medicate for untreated mental health issues related to military service including PTSD and other trauma.

In the military you can't bring up mental health issues because you would be kicked out and now you're trying to figure out navigating the V.A. system on your own when you're suffering from depression and you have financial strain. (Interview with Pima County Key Informant)

2

Untreated chronic pain and dental pain leads to street drug use

We have a lot of people who have chronic pain. Up here in rural AZ, we don't have the level of care other areas have. If you think of a vet in a rural area, where are those people with chronic pain going to get treatment? If they don't have the eligibility to get treatment, where are they going to go? (Flagstaff veteran focus group)

3

Veterans miss the adrenaline rush they got in the service; that's why many turn to drugs.

When you are in the military, you have your good time boys to have fun together. You may be drinking excessively but are in good shape. When you are out, it's a downer without your buddies and new stresses... and you don't have the adrenaline rush from when in the service. There is nothing comparable to that which you did in the military, that can give you that kind of rush. (Yuma veteran focus group)

4

Substance use is normalized and encouraged in the military which leads to substance misuse.

When I was in the NAVY, right next to the soda machine was a beer machine... you could get a beer out of the thing any time day or night. Everything you did was around drinking. The macho thing was how much can you drink and how much can you party and not miss a day of work. (Flagstaff veteran focus group)

5

The difficulty in reintegrating into society once out of the military leads to substance use and/or misuse.

... So I get out service, I run around, I get a job at Target or whatever... it's not enough... Those barriers of life start to become an issue...because I've been somewhere being catered to... I could go get a chow, I don't pay for anything when I'm in the service, and when I come out, now I need a job. And for a lot of us, it's our first time [trying to find a job]. (Phoenix veteran focus group)

Substance Use Prevention Recommendations from Veterans

Help vets get involved with something meaningful

More education and peer support before discharge and right after to let vets know the resources available for them

Educate VA Doctors about opioid issues and how to approach patients individually

Improve access and reduce stigma of mental health services for vets

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