

Deaths from Suicide among U.S. Veterans & Armed Forces in 16 States

A Special Report with Data from the National Violent Death Reporting System, 2010-2014

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

▶ THE NATIONAL VIOLENT DEATH REPORTING SYSTEM (NVDRS)

The NVDRS is the only national state-based surveillance reporting system that compiles data from multiple sources on all deaths from violence – including **homicides, suicides, legal intervention deaths, unintentional firearm deaths, and deaths of undetermined intent**. **Primary data sources** are death certificates, coroner/medical examiner reports, toxicology reports, and law enforcement reports. **Types of data collected** include more than 600 variables in six categories, such as violent death circumstances (e.g., mental health status, relationship/life stressors, crime/criminal activity, history of suicide attempts).

▶ KEY FINDINGS

This report provides a detailed snapshot of suicide deaths among veterans and U.S. armed forces members in the 16 states that reported 2010-2014 data to the NVDRS. In these states, **10,039 (19%)** suicide victims were identified as veterans or current armed forces members.

Veteran/armed forces vs non-veteran civilians. The overall suicide rate among veterans/armed forces (33.7/100,000) was **2.2 times higher** than the non-veteran civilian suicide rate (15.5/100,000) in the 13 states with complete veteran variable data for all five years (2010-2014).

Males vs females. The overall veteran/armed forces suicide rate in the 13 states for males (35.7/100,000) was **2.6 times higher** than females (13.6/100,000).

Homicide-suicide deaths. A total of **222 homicide-suicide incidents** involved male veterans/armed forces members, **totaling 485 deaths** (263 homicides, 222 suicides). In **197 (89%) incidents**, a male veteran/armed forces member was the perpetrator and died by suicide.

Method of suicide. **Firearms were used in the overwhelming majority (70%)** of veteran/armed forces suicide deaths (71% of males, 43% of females).

Mental health problems. Among veteran/armed forces suicide victims with known circumstances, **58% of females and 39% of males** were identified as currently having a mental health problem; PTSD was higher among these veterans/armed forces (14%) than non-veteran civilians (2%).

▶ TECHNICAL NOTES

Occurrent suicide rate. Occurrent deaths are those in which the decedent was fatally injured in the reporting state, whether or not the decedent was a resident of the reporting state. This report uses occurrent rates rather than mortality rates based on residency status because occurrent rates provide a more comprehensive description of a state's burden of deaths from violence. These rates are presented per 100,000 veteran and armed forces residents and per 100,000 non-veteran civilian residents.

Overall rate calculations. Only 13 of the 16 states with complete (<10% missing/unknown) veteran variable data for all five years (2010-2014) were included in the overall rate calculations (AK, CO, KY, MD, NJ, NM, NC, OK, OR, RI, UT, VA, WI). State-specific rates were calculated for all 16 states and presented in state profiles.

Veteran/armed forces status. The veteran/armed forces status of suicide victims was identified through the "veteran/military" variable in the NVDRS. This variable is collected from death certificates and includes both veterans and persons currently serving in one of the five armed services branches; it does not distinguish between decedents who were veterans and those currently serving in the armed forces at the time of death. For this reason, veteran/armed forces rates were calculated by combining American Community Survey (ACS) population estimates for veterans and current armed forces personnel. ACS population estimates were used to calculate rates for veterans/armed forces and non-veteran civilians. Due to limitations of the ACS data explained in the report's *Analysis Considerations* section, veteran/armed forces suicide rates among persons 18-34 years of age will likely be underestimated.

See the full report for detailed Analysis Considerations, Methods and Definitions. The data included in this report is descriptive. Statistical testing was not performed, and differences may not be statistically significant. The full NVDRS case definition was used to determine the total number of deaths due to violence.

The NVDRS creates a more complete picture of violent deaths by collecting data on the entire violent incident, then linking all victims and alleged suspects associated with the incident in a single record.

Each year, thousands of veterans and active duty U.S. military personnel die by suicide. Historically, suicide rates in the U.S. military have been lower than in the U.S. population. However, since 2001, suicide rates have steadily increased for both active duty military personnel and veterans.

Currently, 40 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are funded by the NVDRS. Only data from the 16 NVDRS states that contributed 2010-2014 data to the CDC Restricted Access Database (RAD) are included in this report. They are Alaska – Colorado – Georgia – Kentucky – Maryland – New Jersey – New Mexico – North Carolina – Ohio – Oklahoma – Oregon – Rhode Island – South Carolina – Utah – Virginia – Wisconsin

NVDRS data can be accessed through the [NVDRS page](#) of CDC's interactive, online Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)



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