

The Veterans of America's Wars: What Happens to U.S. Cannon Fodder?

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Despite the July 4 tributes, millions of US soldiers and veterans are in serious trouble.

Twenty two veterans [kill themselves](#) every day according to the Veterans Administration. A study by the *Los Angeles Times* found veterans are more than [twice as likely](#) as other civilians to commit suicide. Suicides among full-time soldiers, especially among male soldiers, are also well above the national civilian rate. USA Today [reported](#) a suicide rate of 19.9 per 100,000 for civilian men compared to rates of 31.8 per 100,000 for male soldiers and 34.2 per 100,000 for men in the National Guard.

Over 57,000 veterans are [homeless](#) on any given night according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Unemployment is [much higher](#) among post 911 veterans than the general population according to the Department of Labor.

More than 1.4 million veterans are [living](#) below the poverty line according to US Senate report, and another 1.4 million are just above the line. Of veterans between the ages of 18 and 34, 12.5 percent are living in poverty.

Over 900,000 veterans live in households which [receive food stamps](#) reports the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The use of food stamps by active duty service members appears to be [at an all-time high](#) according to CNN. In addition, many active duty service families [receive](#) a special military supplemental food allowance designed to replace food stamps for low income service families.

The VA reports over 3.5 million veterans are receiving [disability benefits](#) and well over 350,000 more survivors of veterans are receiving death benefits. More than 1.3 million are Gulf War vets, higher numbers than any previous war. Benefits run from just over a hundred dollars a month to three thousand per month.

Hundreds of thousands more vets are applying for help from the VA. The VA [reported](#) they have 555,180 open and pending disability and pension claims. Over a quarter million, 268,348, have been waiting more than 125 days. It was also [announced](#) by Nextgov that as many as 300,000 disability claims filed electronically in 2013 are incomplete and starting to expire. Additionally, over a quarter million vets are appealing their disability claims decisions. A veteran's appeal of a claim denied by the VA takes an average of [923 days to complete](#) the appeal process.

Veteran care, which has been much in the news recently for its well documented problems, [includes](#) services such as medical care for over 6.4 million people a year, compensation for 4 million veterans, survivors and children, education benefits for 700,000, guaranteed housing loans for 629,000. VA programs [cost](#) \$354 billion in 2013.

There has been a surge in demand by veterans for mental health services since returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq, with some local providers in California [reporting increases](#) of 40 to 60 percent in the numbers of vets seeking mental health treatment. The VA reported to Congress that over 11 percent of its health care was directed to [mental health care](#) as opposed to just over 7 percent for the rest of the US population.

Between 2000 and 2011 nearly one million vets were [diagnosed](#) with at least one psychological disorder and almost half had multiple disorders, according to a 2014 report of the Institute for Medicine. In another report, the Institute says an estimated [8 percent](#) of current and former service members deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq have a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis. Other congressional reports indicate national numbers of vets using mental health to be well over a million. The VA [spends](#) over \$3 billion annually on PTSD treatment but collect little information about the effectiveness or whether treatments are successful.

This is shameful.

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