2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Among the Veteran Population Aged 18 or Older

Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
NSDUH Scope and Target Population

• Conducted by the Federal Government since 1971
• Comprehensive household interview survey of substance use, substance use disorders, mental health, and the receipt of treatment services for these disorders in the United States
• Produces estimates representative of the population at national and state levels
• Covers the civilian, noninstitutionalized population aged 12 or older in all 50 states and Washington, DC:
  – Includes households, college dorms, homeless in shelters, civilians on military bases
  – Excludes active military, long-term hospital residents, prison populations, homeless not in shelters
• NSDUH 2021 sample included 69,850 people
Data from 2021 should not be compared or pooled with data from prior years

Why not?

1. **Mode effect:** Web data collection began in 2020. There were significant differences in estimates between web and in-person modes of data collection.

2. **Seasonal effect:** There were systematic differences between two-quarter estimates from 2015 to 2019 and corresponding four-quarter estimates. Because 2020 data were mostly collected in only two quarters, these data cannot be compared with the full year of 2021 data.

3. **Substance Use Disorder (SUD) definition changes:** Starting in 2020, SUDs were defined according to criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-5). Therefore, SUD estimates cannot be compared with 2019 or earlier.
• Statistical testing was performed for comparisons of estimates across age groups and among sexual identity groups according to procedures described in the 2021 Methodological Summary and Definitions report.¹ Differences were considered statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. Statistically significant differences resulting from these testing procedures are described using terms such as “higher,” “lower,” “more likely,” or “less likely.” Statements use terms such as “similar” or “the same” when a difference was not statistically significant. When estimates are presented without reference to differences across groups, statistical significance is not implied.

Substance Use in the Past Month
Past Month Substance Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- Alcohol: 10.6M (54.5%)
- Tobacco Products: 4.5M (23.4%)
- Nicotine Vaping: 564K (2.9%)
- Marijuana: 2.2M (11.6%)
- Cocaine: 206K (1.1%)
- Rx Pain Reliever Misuse: 160K (0.8%)
- Methamphetamine: 122K (0.6%)
- Hallucinogens: 92K (0.5%)
- Rx Tranquilizer or Sedative Misuse: 87K (0.4%)
- Rx Stimulant Misuse: 42K (0.2%)
- Inhalants: 41K (0.2%)
- Heroin: 21K (0.1%)

Rx = prescription.

Note: The estimated numbers of current users of different substances are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of substance in the past month.
Past Month Alcohol Use, Binge Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- More than a third of past month alcohol users were binge drinkers

Note: Binge Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks (for males) or four or more drinks (for females) on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. Heavy Alcohol Use is defined as binge drinking on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users.
Binge Alcohol Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- Binge drinking among Veterans was lower than among Non-Veterans

Note: Binge Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks (for males) or four or more drinks (for females) on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.
Type of Tobacco Use and Nicotine Vaping: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used Nicotine Products in the Past Month

Note: The percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

- Nearly 90% of past month nicotine product users used tobacco products only

5.8% Vaped Nicotine Only
5.8% Vaped Nicotine and Used Tobacco Products
88.3% Used Tobacco Products Only

4.8 Million Veterans Used Nicotine Products in the Past Month

Note: The percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Past Month Nicotine Vaping: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- The percentage of people who vaped nicotine was highest among Veterans aged 18 to 49.
Past Year and Past Month Illicit Drug Use
Past Year Illicit Drug Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

No Past Year Illicit Drug Use
15.8M Veterans (81.4%)

Past Year Illicit Drug Use
3.6M Veterans (18.6%)

- Marijuana: 3.1M (15.8%)
- Rx Pain Reliever Misuse: 456K (2.4%)
- Cocaine: 359K (1.8%)
- Hallucinogens: 346K (1.8%)
- Rx Tranquilizer or Sedative Misuse: 259K (1.3%)
- Methamphetamine: 225K (1.2%)
- Rx Stimulant Misuse: 107K (0.6%)
- Inhalants: 100K (0.5%)
- Heroin: 39K (0.2%)

Rx = prescription.
Note: The estimated numbers of past year users of different illicit drugs are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of illicit drug in the past year.
Among Veterans aged 18 to 49, 31.5% used illicit drugs and 27.9% used marijuana in the past year.
Illicit Drug Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- No significant differences in prevalence of illicit drug use between Veterans and Non-Veterans.
Marijuana Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- No significant differences in prevalence of marijuana use between Veterans and Non-Veterans
Type of Marijuana Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used Marijuana in the Past Month

- 1 in 10 current marijuana users aged 18 or older vaped marijuana in the past month.
Past Year Opioid Misuse: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

473,000 Veterans Aged 18 or Older with Past Year Opioid Misuse

- 456K Veterans with Pain Reliever Misuse
- 22K Veterans with Pain Reliever Misuse and Heroin Use
- 39K Veterans with Heroin Use
- 434K Veterans with Pain Reliever Misuse Only
- 17K Veterans with Heroin Use Only
Opioid Misuse in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

• No significant differences in prevalence of opioid misuse between Veterans and Non-Veterans
Substance Use Disorder
Past Year Substance Use Disorder (SUD): Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

Note: The estimated numbers of people with substance use disorders are not mutually exclusive because people could have use disorders for more than one substance.

1 Includes data from all past year users of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, methamphetamine, and prescription psychotherapeutic drugs (i.e., pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives).

2 Includes data from all past year users of the specific prescription drug.

No Past Year SUD
16.3M Veterans
(84.2%)

Past Year SUD
3.1M Veterans
(15.8%)

Number of Veterans with Specific Past Year SUD

- Alcohol Use Disorder: 1.8M (9.5%)
- Drug Use Disorder\(^1\): 1.5M (7.7%)
- Marijuana Use Disorder: 851K (4.4%)
- Pain Reliever Use Disorder\(^2\): 316K (1.6%)
- Methamphetamine Use Disorder: 163K (0.8%)
- Cocaine Use Disorder: 159K (0.8%)
- Stimulant Use Disorder\(^2\): 39K (0.2%)
- Heroin Use Disorder: 34K (0.2%)
Past Year Substance Use Disorder: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- Veterans aged 18 to 49 were the most likely to have a past year substance use disorder, alcohol use disorder, or drug use disorder.
Substance Use Disorder in the Past Year by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

• No significant differences in prevalence of substance use disorder between Veterans and Non-Veterans.
Perceived Need for Substance Use Treatment:
Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older with a Past Year Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder
Who Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment at a Specialty Facility in the Past Year

Note: People who had an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder were classified as needing substance use treatment.

- Nearly all Veterans with a substance use disorder who did not get treatment at a specialty facility did not think they needed treatment.

63K Felt They Needed Treatment and Made an Effort to Get Treatment (2.4%)

20K Felt They Needed Treatment and Did Not Make an Effort to Get Treatment (0.8%)

2.5M Did Not Feel They Needed Treatment (96.8%)

2.6 Million Veterans with an Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder Who Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment at a Specialty Facility
Any or Serious Mental Illness:
Among Adults Aged 18 or Older
The prevalence of mental illness was **highest** among Veterans aged **18 to 49**, for both any mental illness and serious mental illness.
Any Mental Illness in the Past Year by Veteran Status:
Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- Veterans were less likely to have a mental illness than Non-Veterans

Overall, 22.8% (57.8M)

Veteran: 16.1% (3.1M)
Non-Veteran: 23.3% (54.7M)
More than half of Veterans with AMI received mental health services in the past year.

AMI = any mental illness.
Note: Mental Health Services include any combination of inpatient or outpatient services, receipt of prescription medication, or virtual services.
Receipt of Mental Health Services by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older with a Past Year Mental Illness

- Veterans with mental illness were more likely to have received services than Non-Veterans

Overall, 47.2% (26.5M)

Veterans: 56.4% (1.7M)

Non-Veterans: 46.6% (24.8M)

Percent Receiving Mental Health Services among Those with Any Mental Illness in Past Year
Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Suicide Plans, and Suicide Attempts
Past Year Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Suicide Plans, or Suicide Attempts: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- Thoughts of suicide and suicide plans were highest among Veterans aged 18 to 49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>18 or Older</th>
<th>18 to 49</th>
<th>50 or Older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide</td>
<td>3.2% (67K)</td>
<td>9.5% (428K)</td>
<td>1.3% (189K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a Suicide Plan</td>
<td>0.9% (183K)</td>
<td>2.8% (126K)</td>
<td>0.4% (57K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Suicide</td>
<td>0.6% (123K)</td>
<td>0.3% (37K)</td>
<td>1.9% (86K)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Serious Thoughts of Suicide in the Past Year by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- Veterans were less likely to have had serious thoughts of suicide than Non-Veterans
- No significant differences in prevalence of making suicide plans or attempting suicide between Veterans and Non-Veterans
Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder and Mental Illness: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older
Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder and Any Mental Illness:
Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- **1.1 million (5.6%)** Veterans aged 18 or older had co-occurring SUD and AMI
- **Nearly 2 in 5 (38.7%)** of all Veterans aged 18 to 25 had SUD or AMI

AMI = any mental illness; SMI = serious mental illness; SUD = substance use disorder.
Past Year Substance Use by Mental Illness: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>AMI (Any Mental Illness)</th>
<th>Without Mental Illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illicit Drugs, Past Year</td>
<td>35.3% (1.1M)</td>
<td>15.4% (2.5M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana, Past Year</td>
<td>28.7%* (899K)</td>
<td>13.3% (2.2M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opioid Misuse, Past Year</td>
<td>6.2%* (195K)</td>
<td>1.7% (278K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge Alcohol, Past Month</td>
<td>21.5% (672K)</td>
<td>18.6% (3.0M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco Products or Nicotine Vaping, Past Month</td>
<td>40.4%* (1.3M)</td>
<td>21.9% (3.6M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Veterans with AMI in the past year were more likely to have used or misused these substances (except binge alcohol use) than those without mental illness.

* Low precision; no estimate reported.
AMI = any mental illness.
+ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for adults aged 18 or older without mental illness is statistically significant at the .05 level.
Perceived Recovery: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

- 3 in 4 (77.6%) Veterans who ever had a substance use problem considered themselves to be recovering or in recovery

- 2 in 3 (65.1%) Veterans who ever had a mental health issue considered themselves to be recovering or in recovery
Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment or Mental Health Services in the Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>No Treatment †</th>
<th>Any Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder (2.8M)</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Mental Illness (AMI) (3.1M)</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Mental Illness (838K)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Occurring Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder and AMI (937K)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Low precision; no estimate reported.
† No Treatment for Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder is defined as not receiving treatment at any location, such as a hospital (inpatient), rehabilitation facility (inpatient or outpatient), mental health center, emergency room, private doctor’s office, self-help group, or prison/jail.