

# 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.

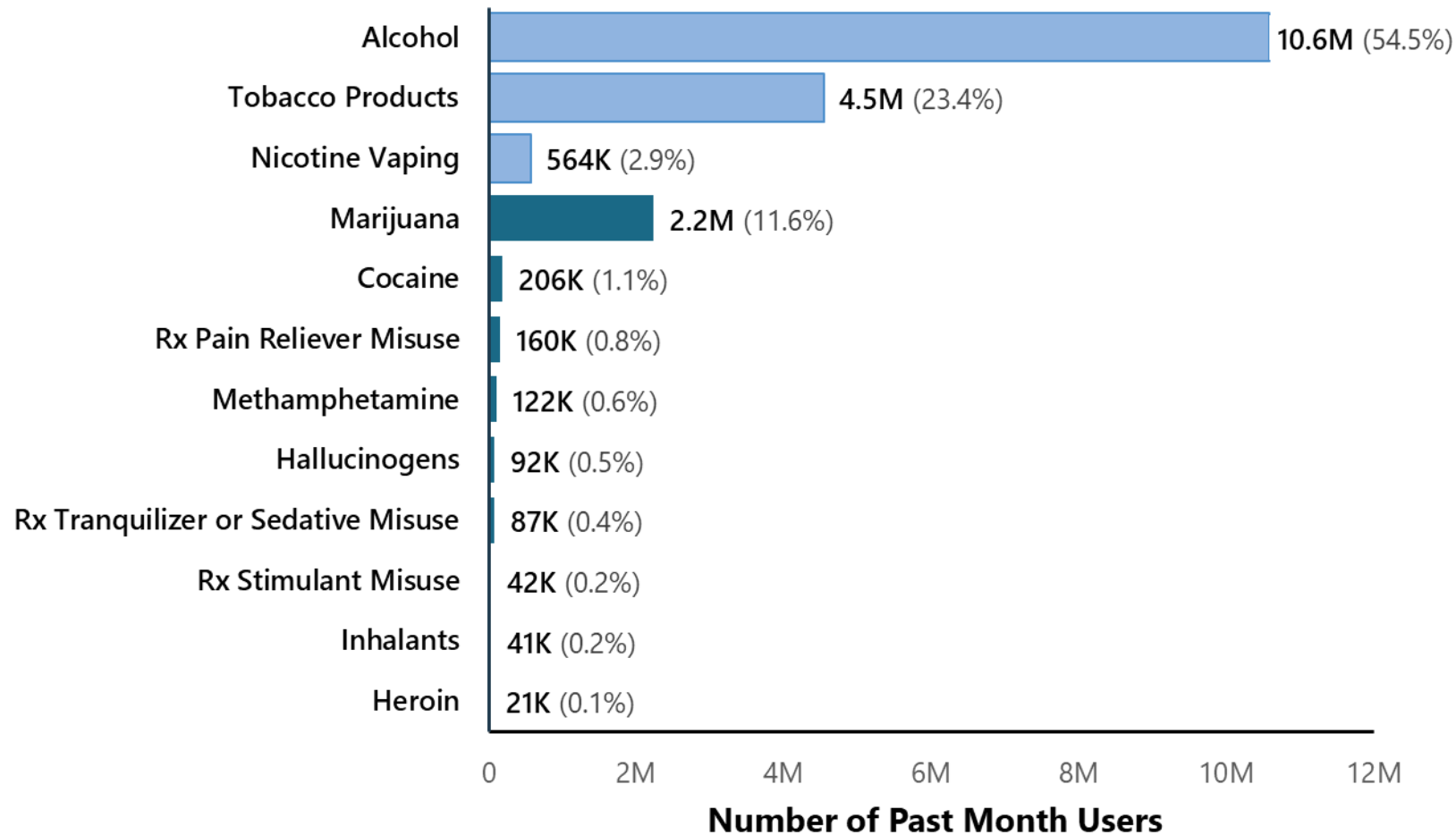
# About This Presentation

- 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> See Section 3.2.3 in the following reference: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2022). 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological summary and definitions. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-methodological-summary-and-definitions>

# Substance Use in the Past Month

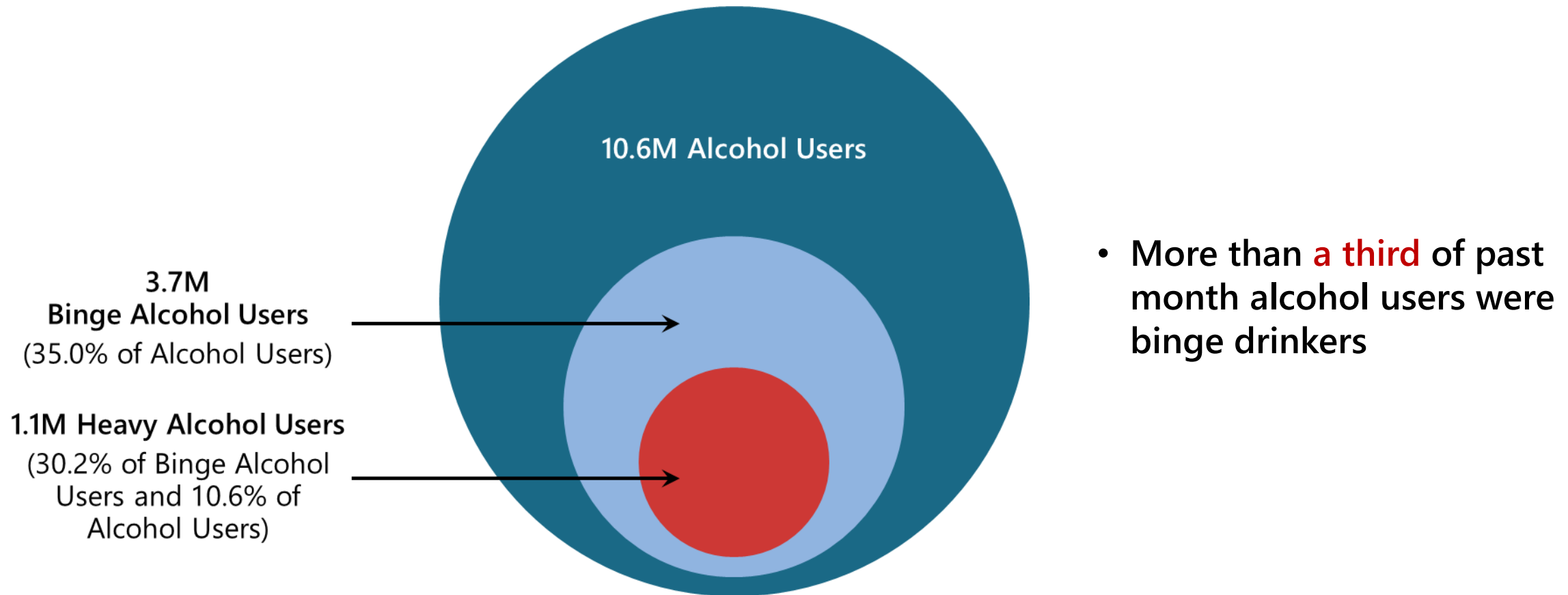
# Past Month Substance Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



Rx = prescription.

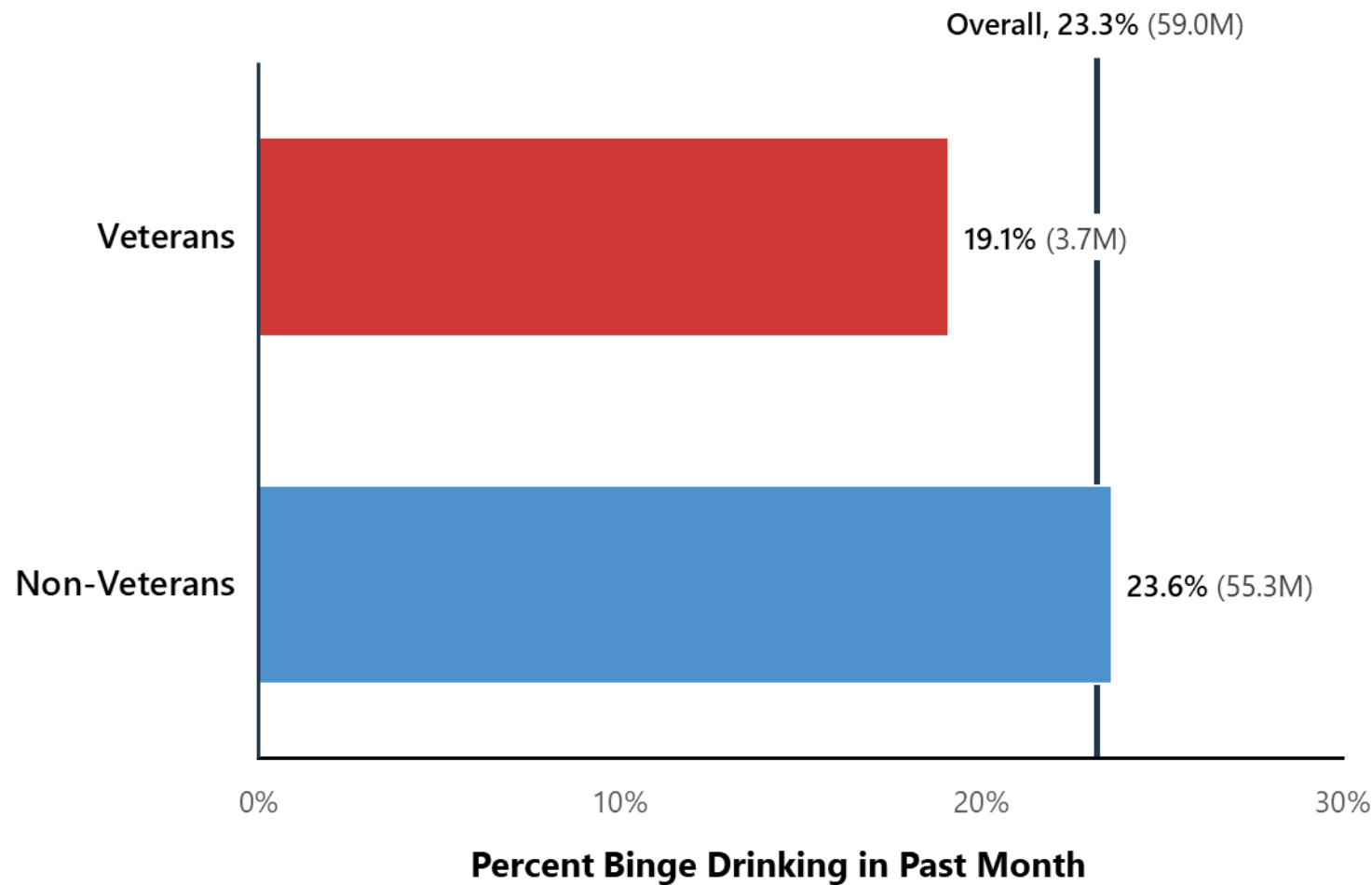
Note: The estimated numbers of current users of different substances are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of substance in the past month.

# Past Month Alcohol Use, Binge Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



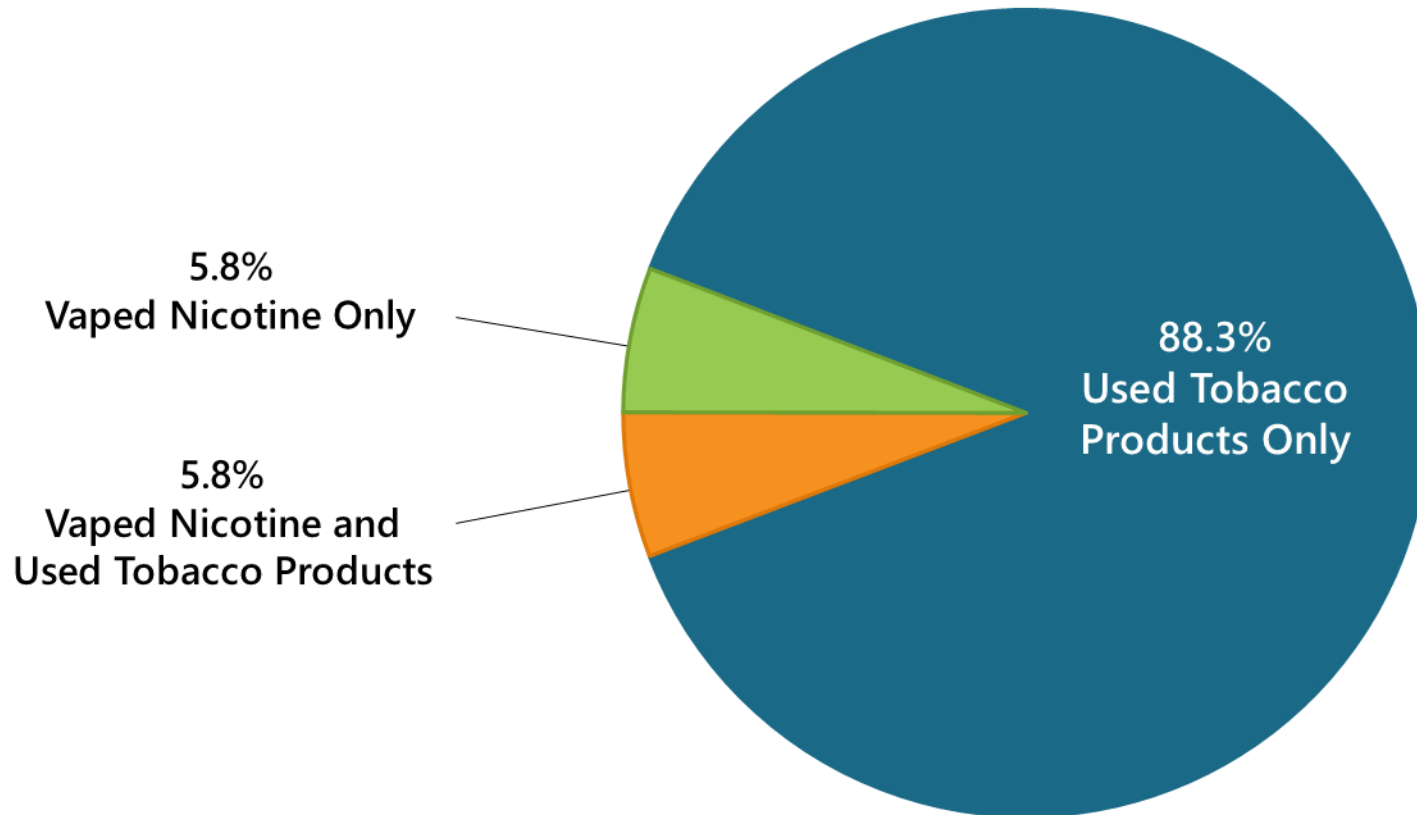
Note: Binge Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks (for males) or four or more drinks (for females) on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. Heavy Alcohol Use is defined as binge drinking on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol 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

# Type of Tobacco Use and Nicotine Vaping: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used Nicotine Products in the Past Month

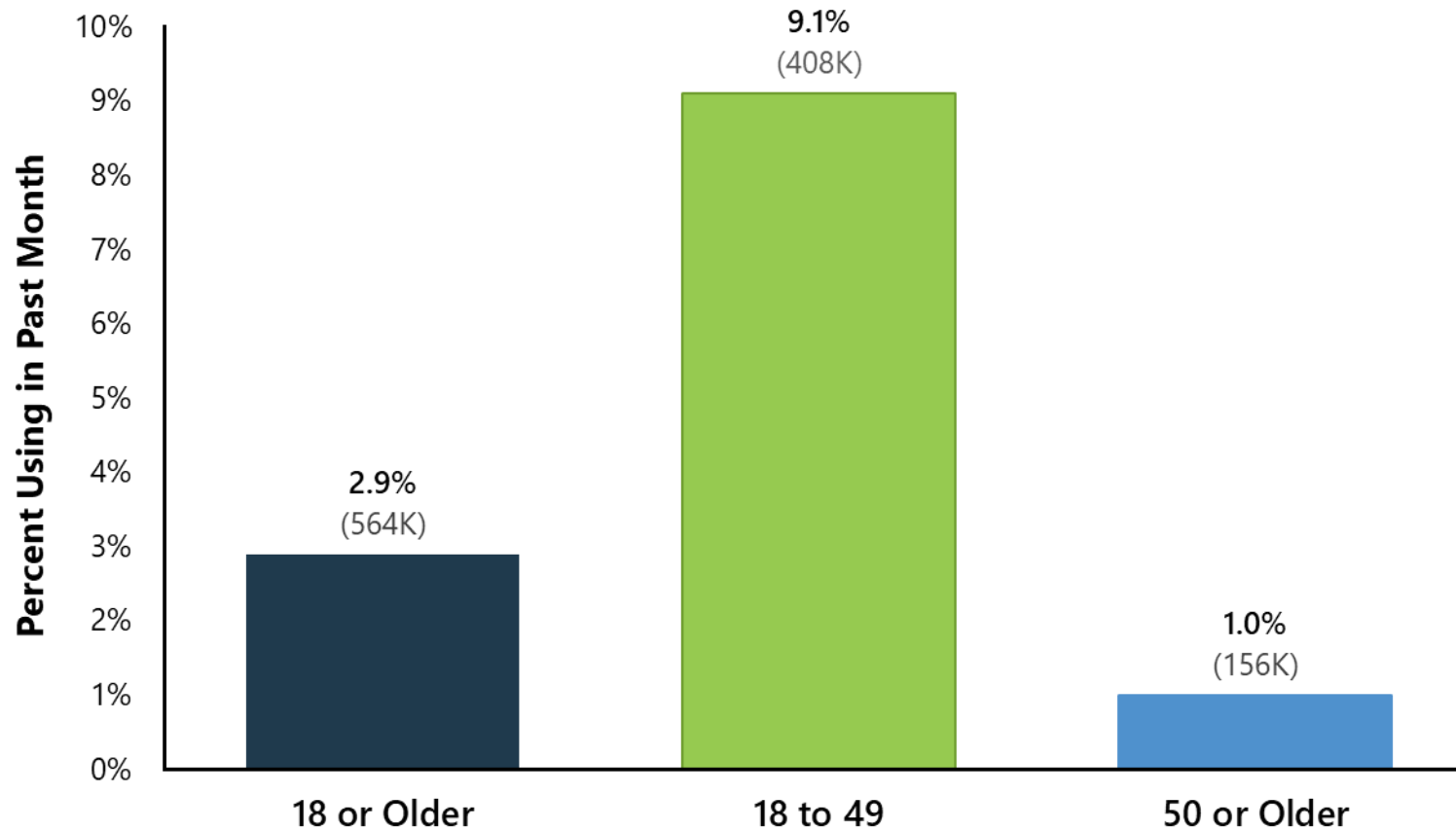


- Nearly **90%** of past month nicotine product users used tobacco products only

**4.8 Million Veterans Used Nicotine Products in the Past Month**

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

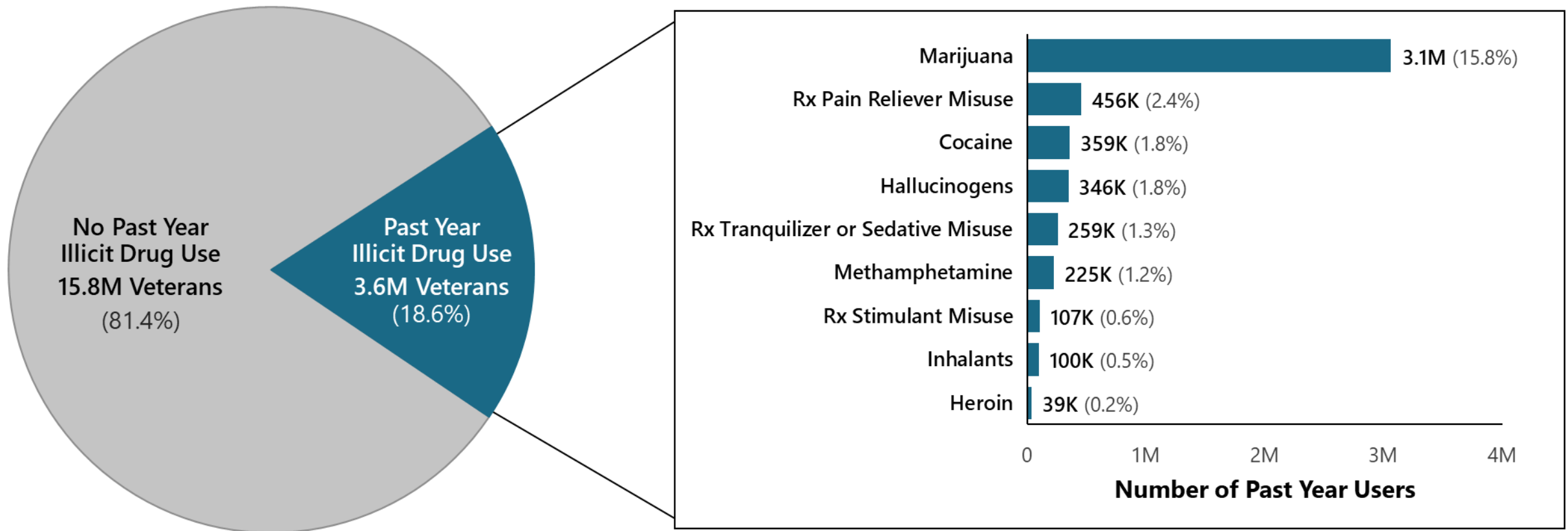
# Past Month Nicotine Vaping: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



- The percentage of people who vaped nicotine was **highest among Veterans aged 18 to 49**

# Past Year and Past Month Illicit Drug Use

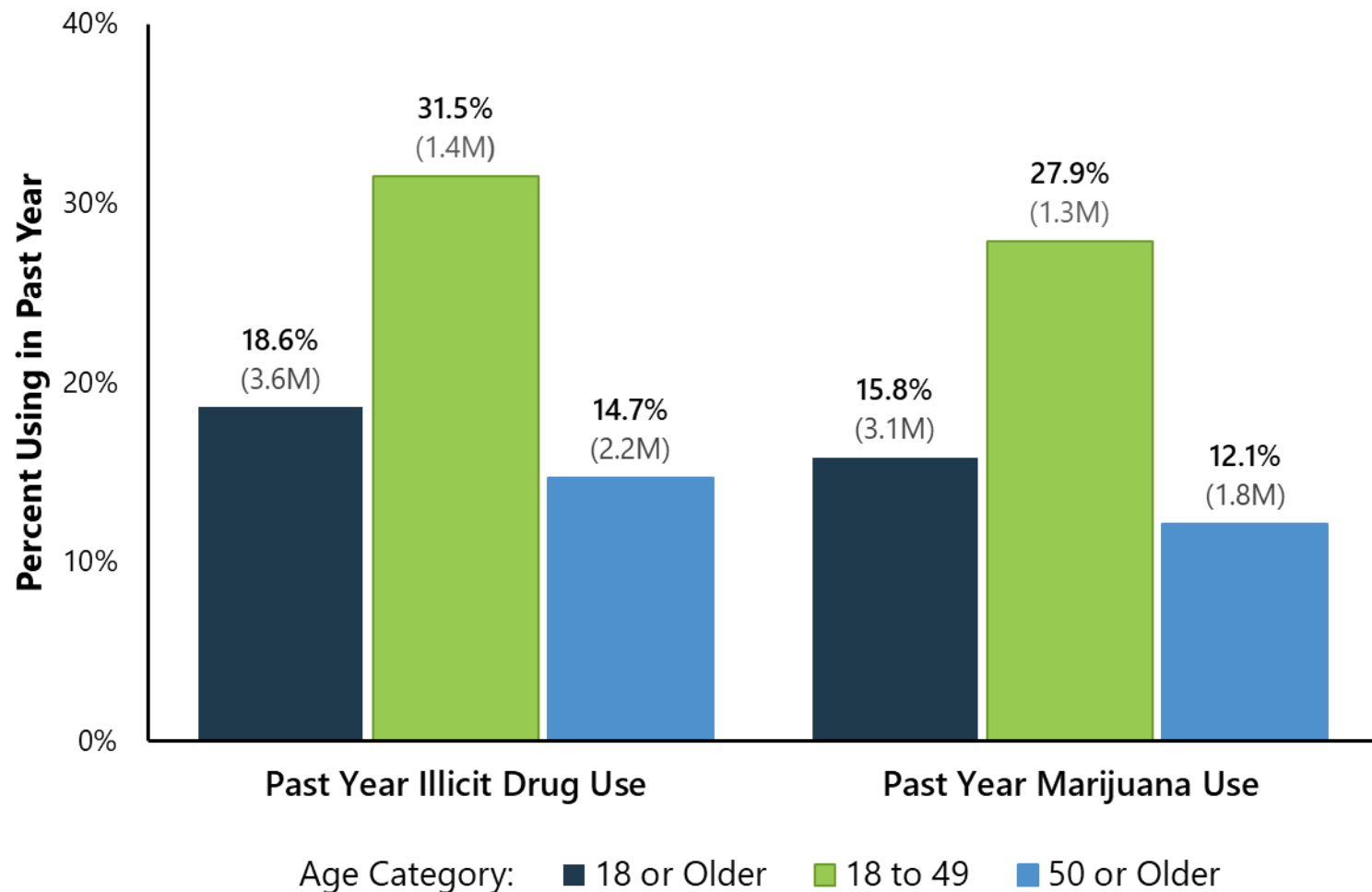
# Past Year Illicit Drug Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



Rx = prescription.

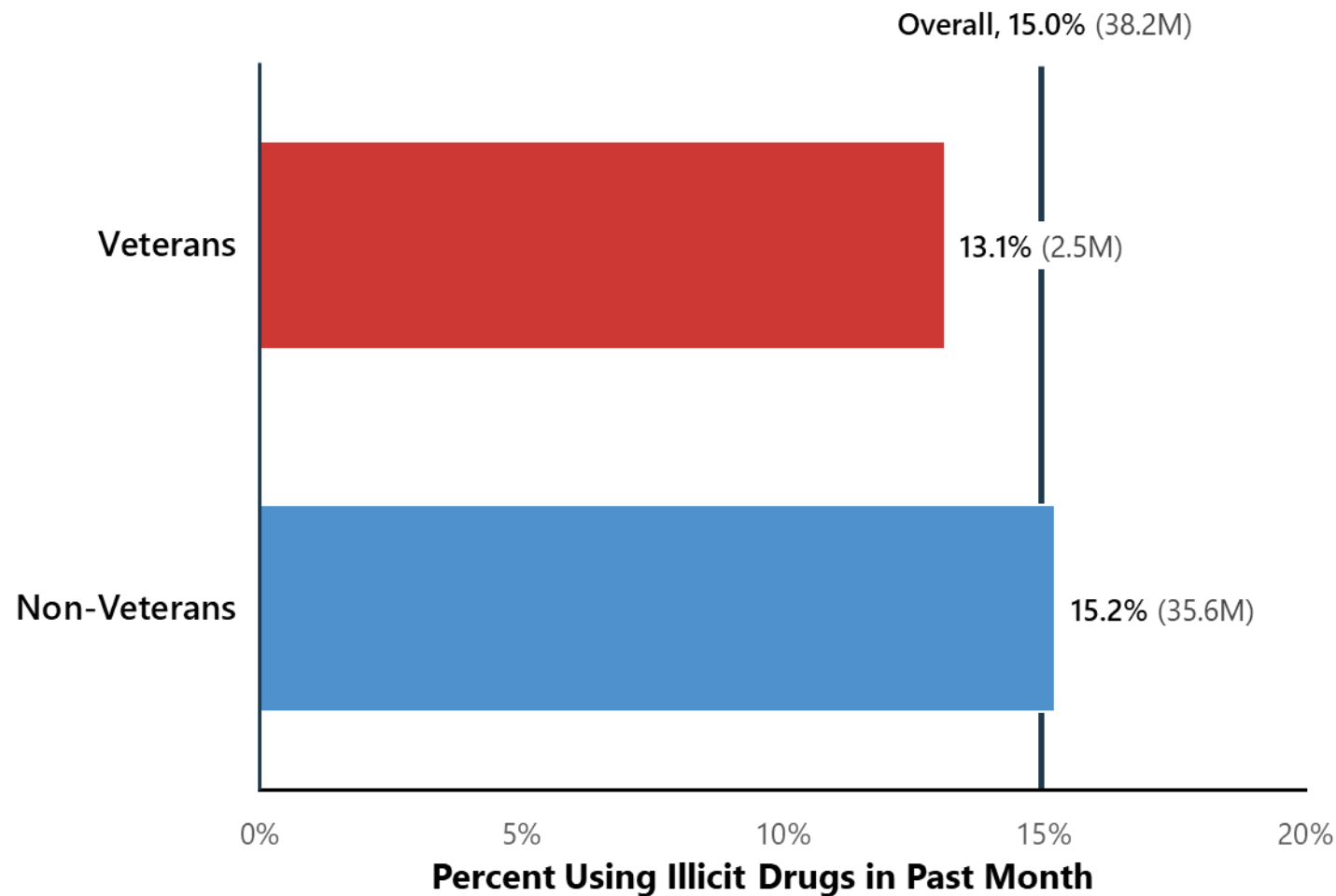
Note: The estimated numbers of past year users of different illicit drugs are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of illicit drug in the past year.

# Past Year Illicit Drug Use and Marijuana Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



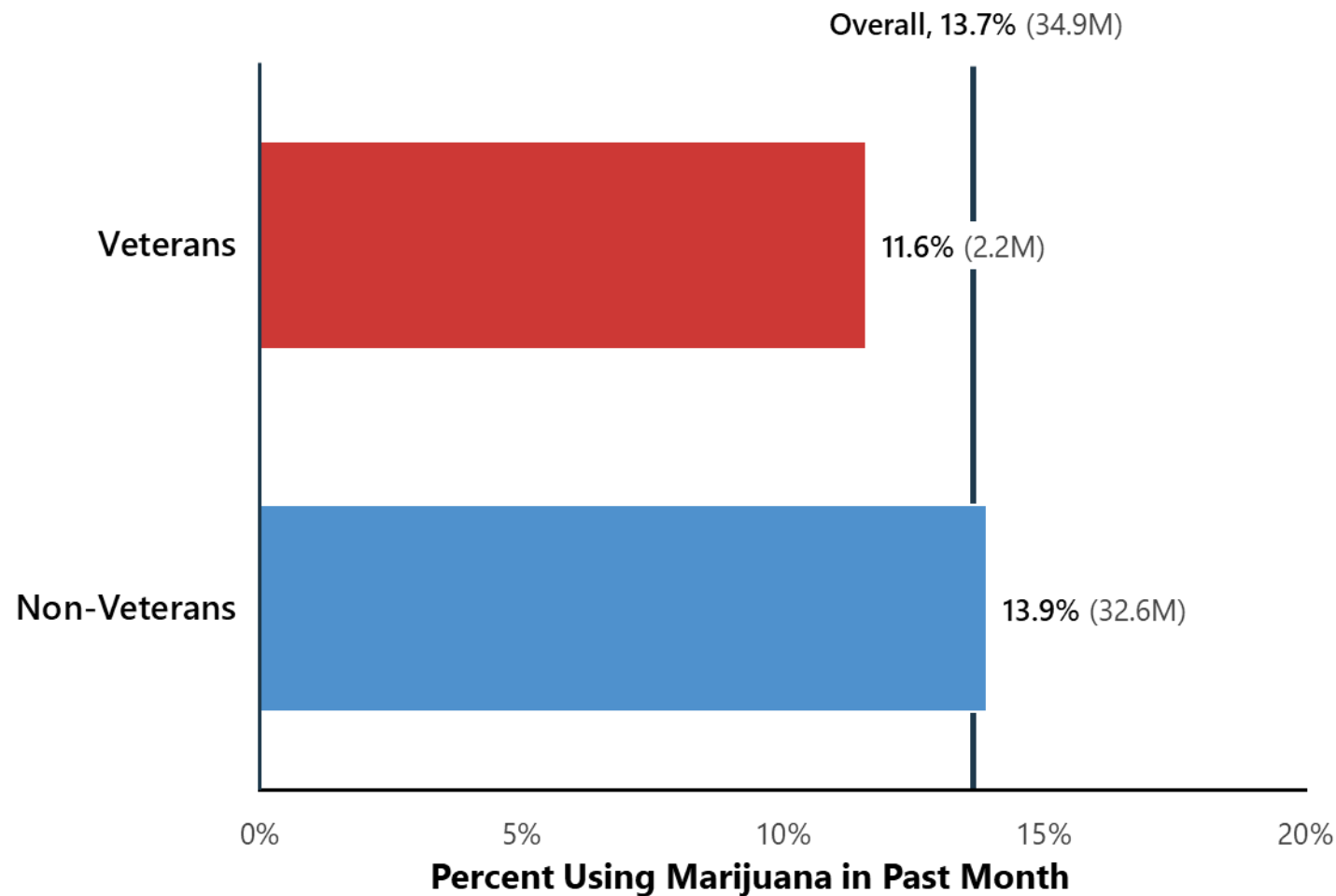
- Among Veterans aged **18 to 49**, **31.5%** used **illicit drugs** and **27.9%** used **marijuana** in the past year

# Illicit Drug Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



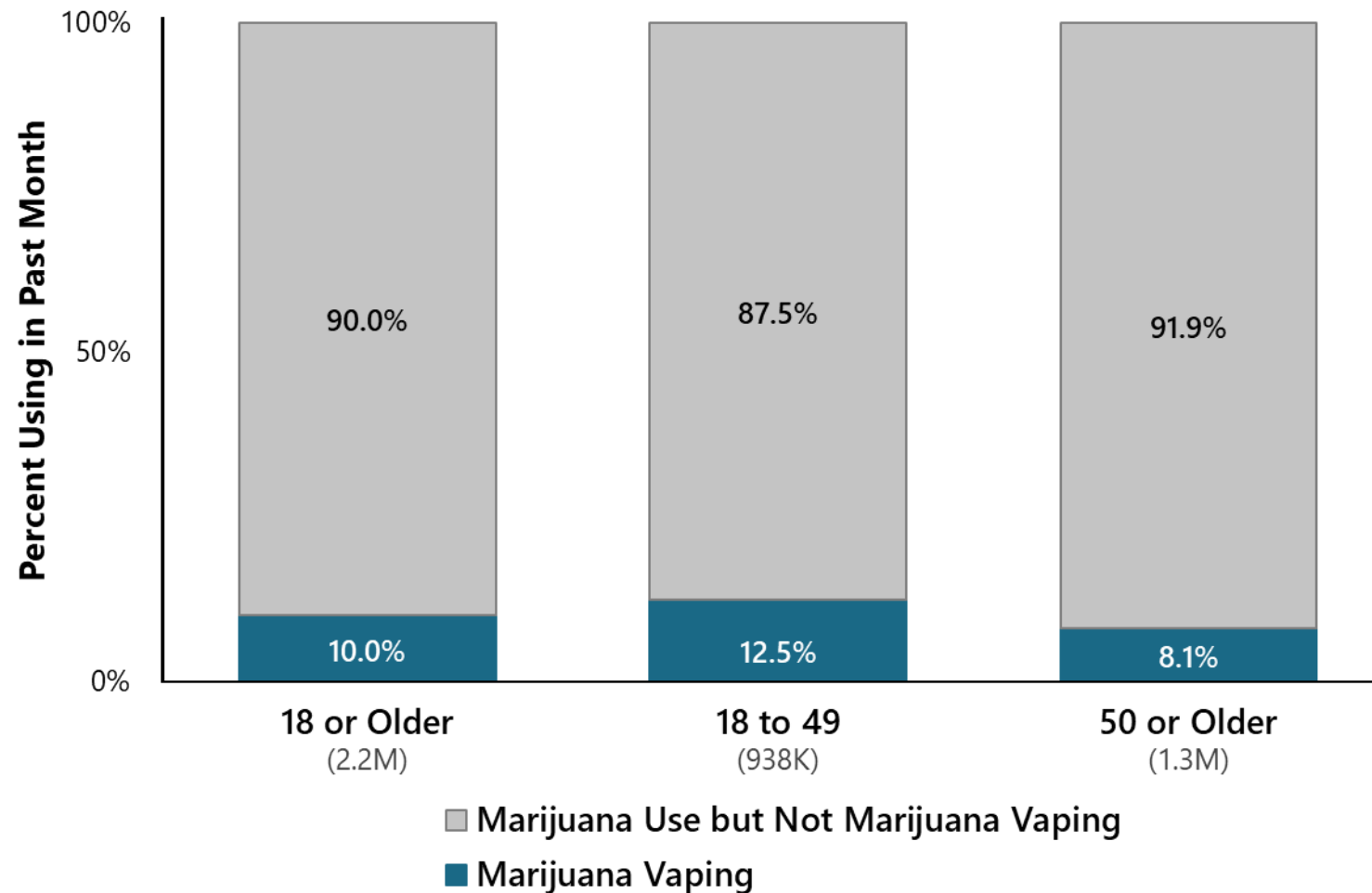
- **No significant differences** in prevalence of illicit drug use between **Veterans** and Non-Veterans

# Marijuana Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



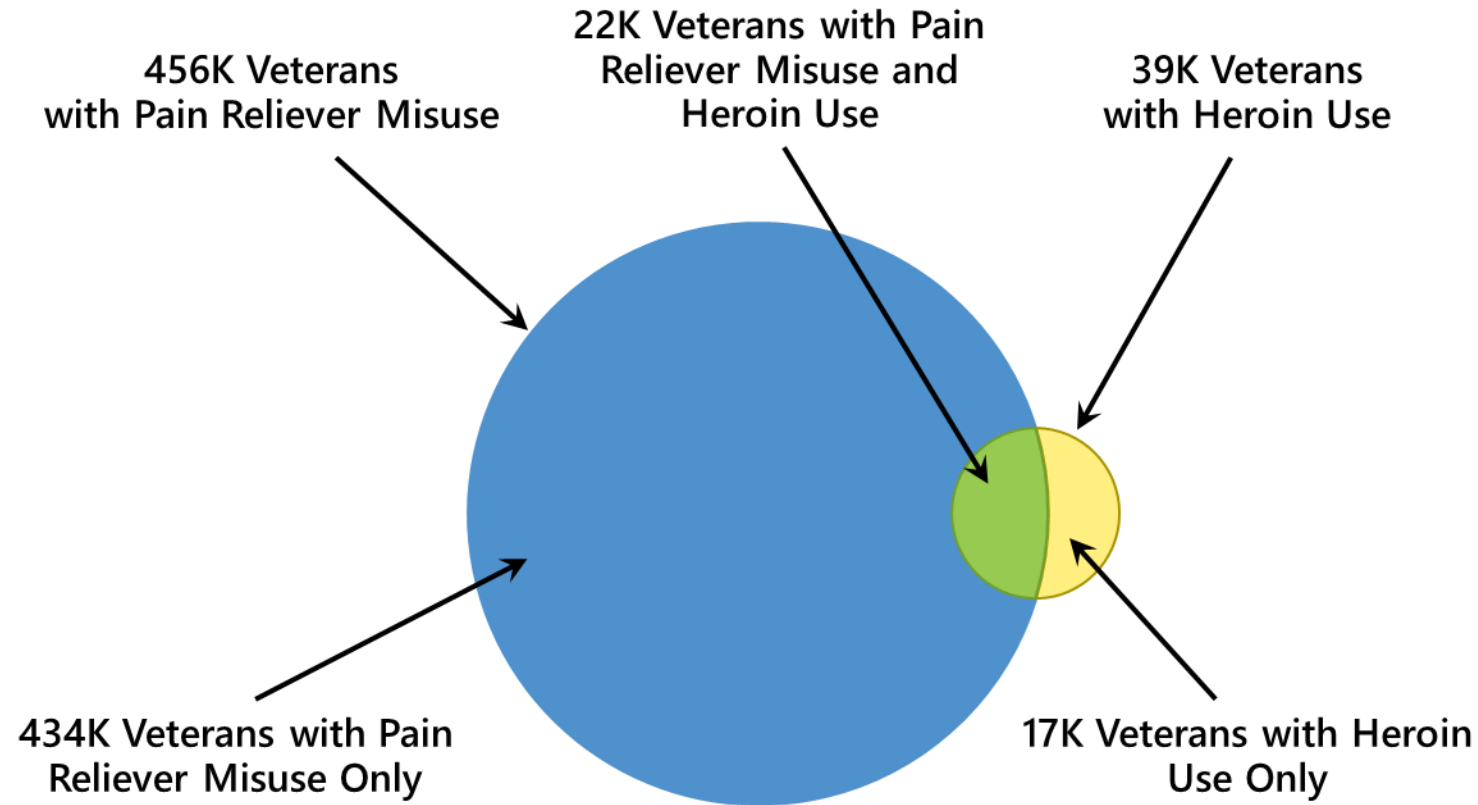
- **No significant differences** in prevalence of marijuana use between **Veterans** and Non-Veterans

# Type of Marijuana Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used Marijuana in the Past Month



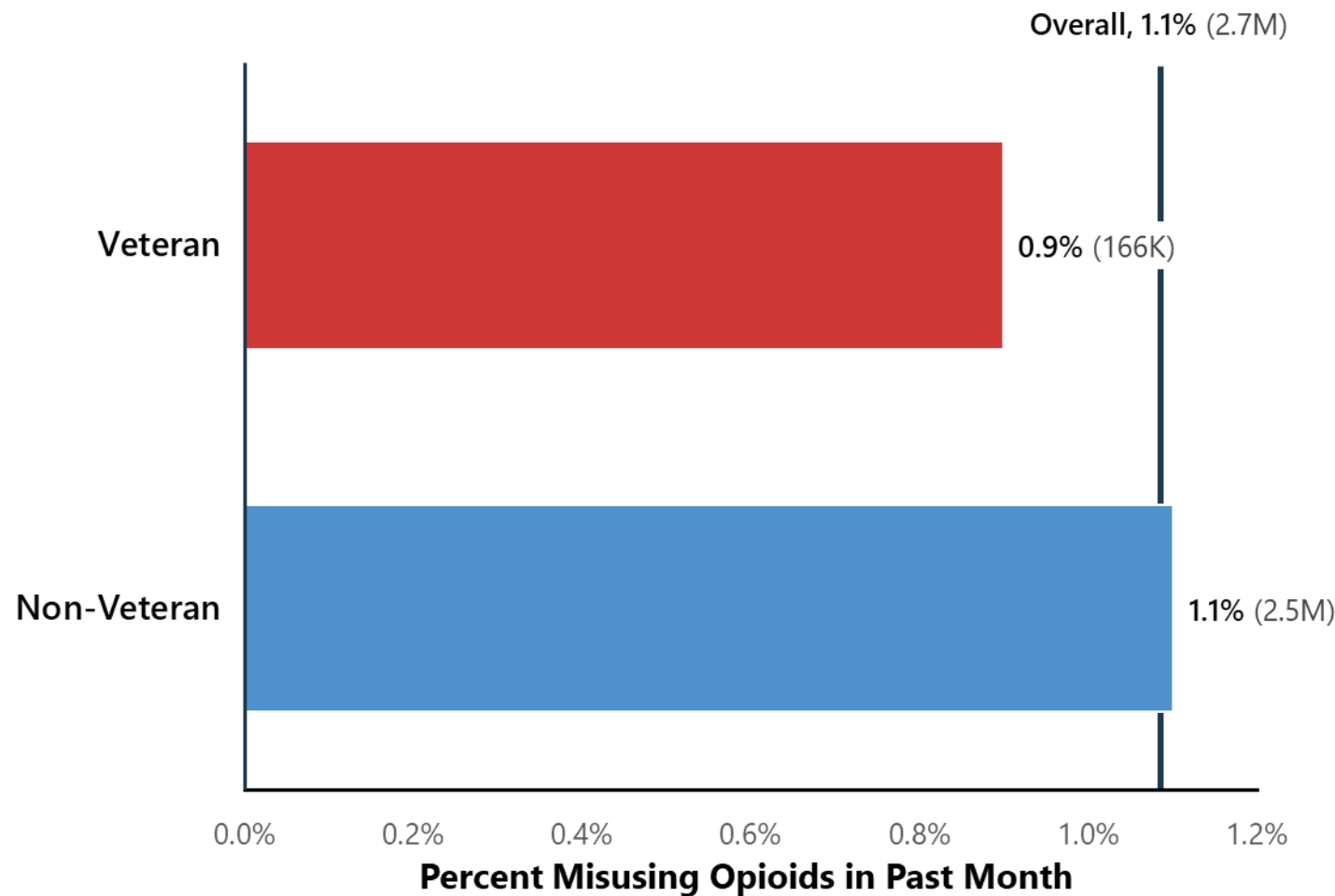
- 1 in 10 current marijuana users aged 18 or older **vaped marijuana** in the past month

# Past Year Opioid Misuse: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



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

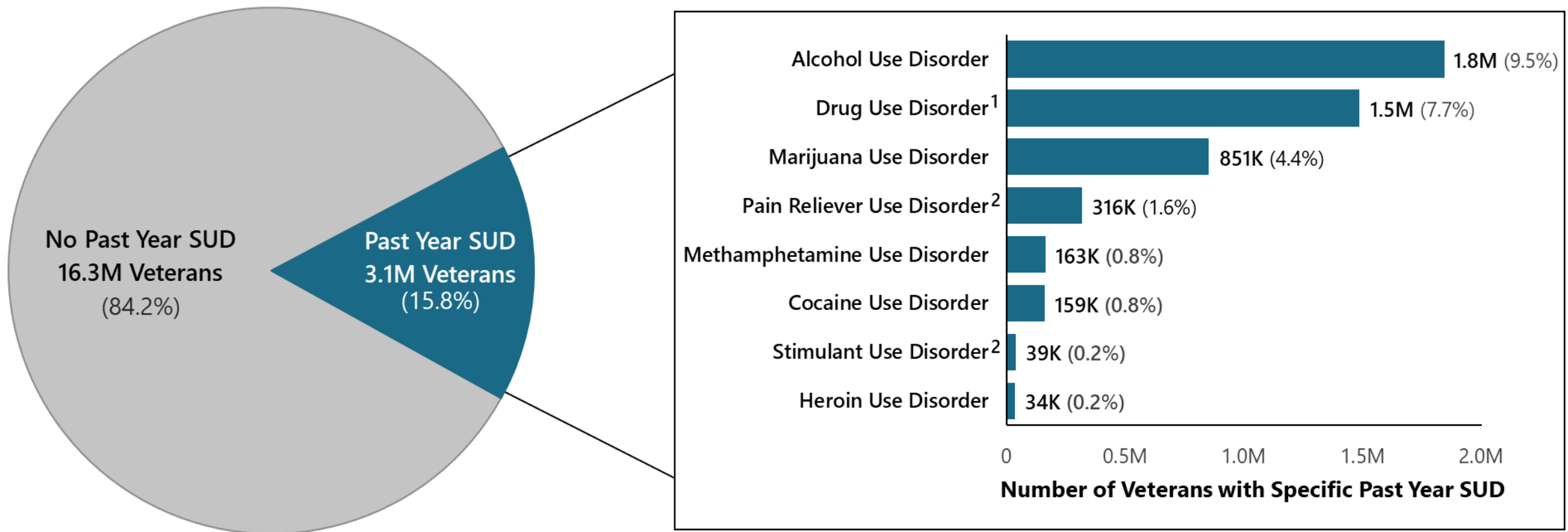
# Opioid Misuse in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



- **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

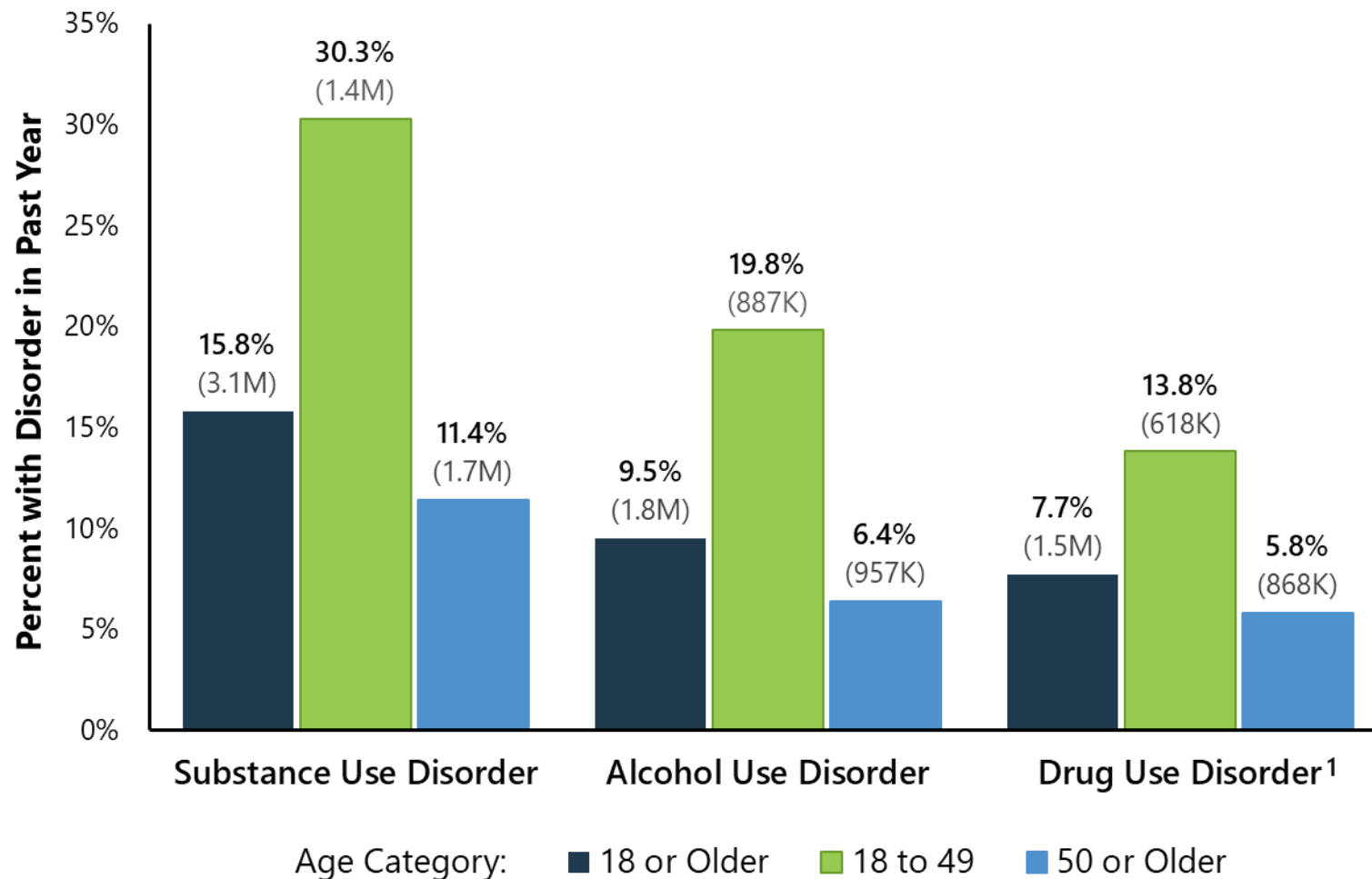


Note: The estimated numbers of people with substance use disorders are not mutually exclusive because people could have use disorders for more than one substance.

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> Includes data from all past year users of the specific prescription drug.

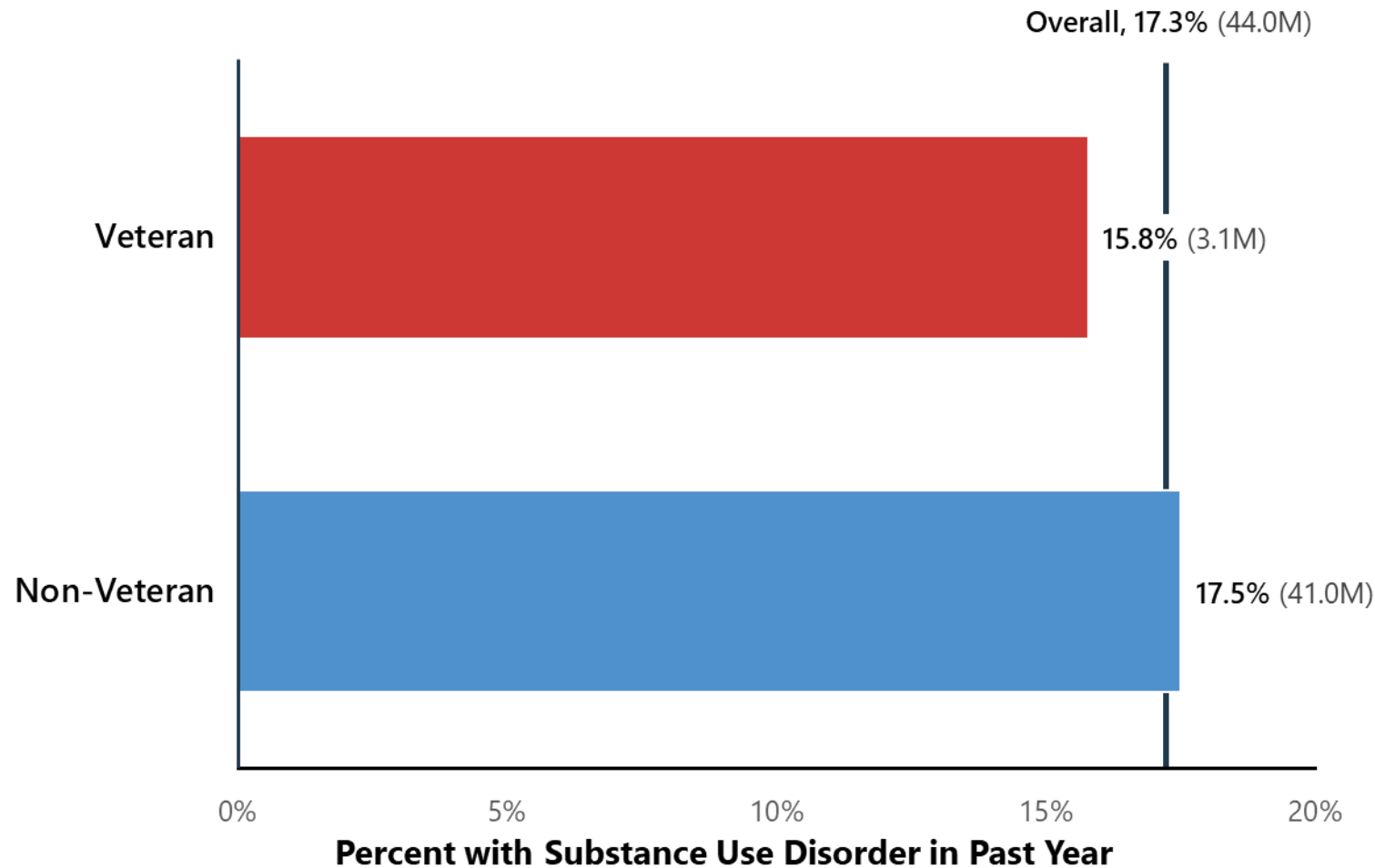
# Past Year Substance Use Disorder: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



- Veterans aged **18 to 49** were the **most likely** to have a past year substance use disorder, alcohol use disorder, or drug use disorder

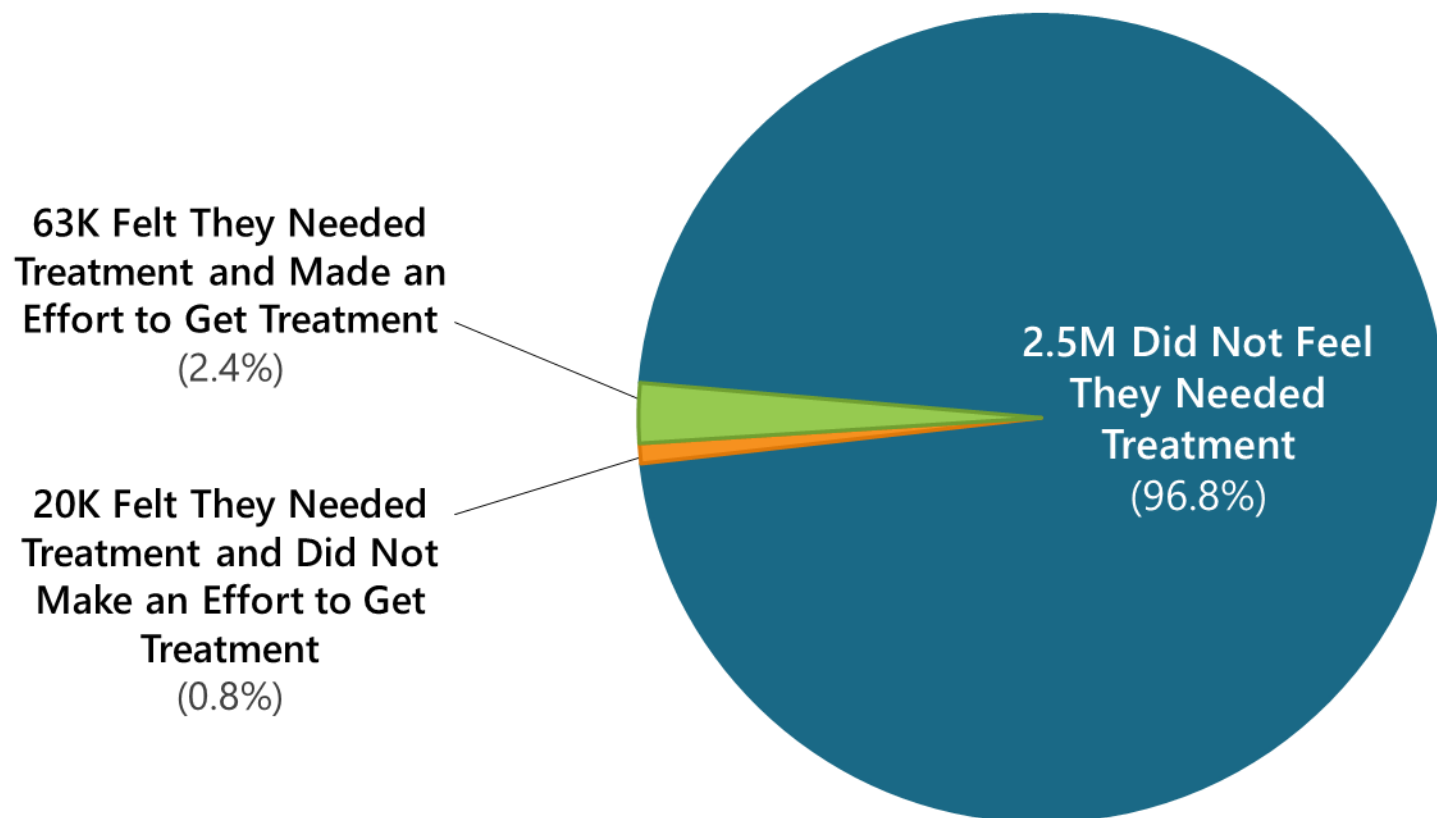
<sup>1</sup> Includes data from all past year users of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, methamphetamine, and prescription psychotherapeutic drugs (i.e., pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives).

# 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



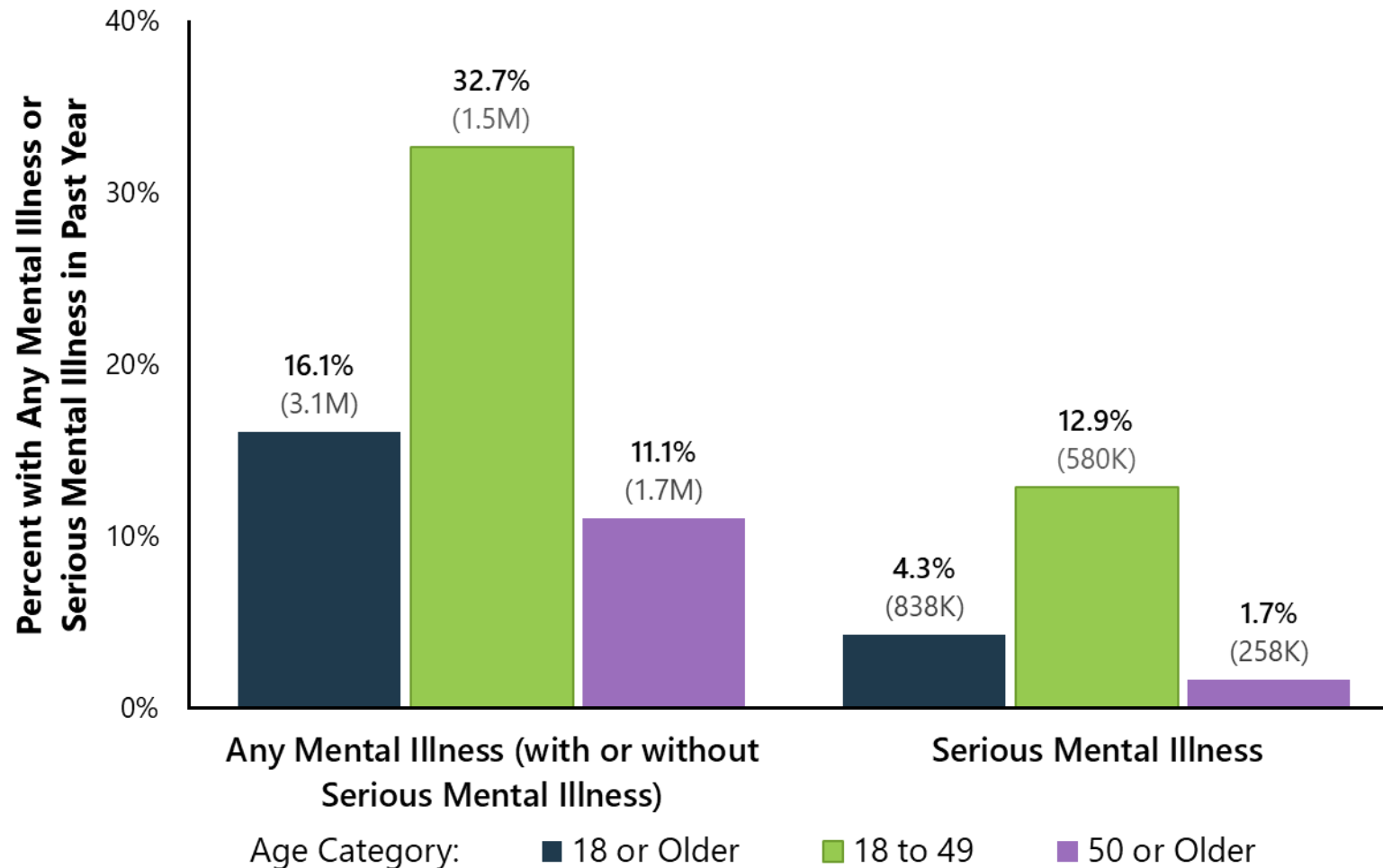
- Nearly all Veterans with a substance use disorder who did not get treatment at a specialty facility **did not think they needed treatment**

**2.6 Million Veterans with an Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder Who Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment at a Specialty Facility**

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

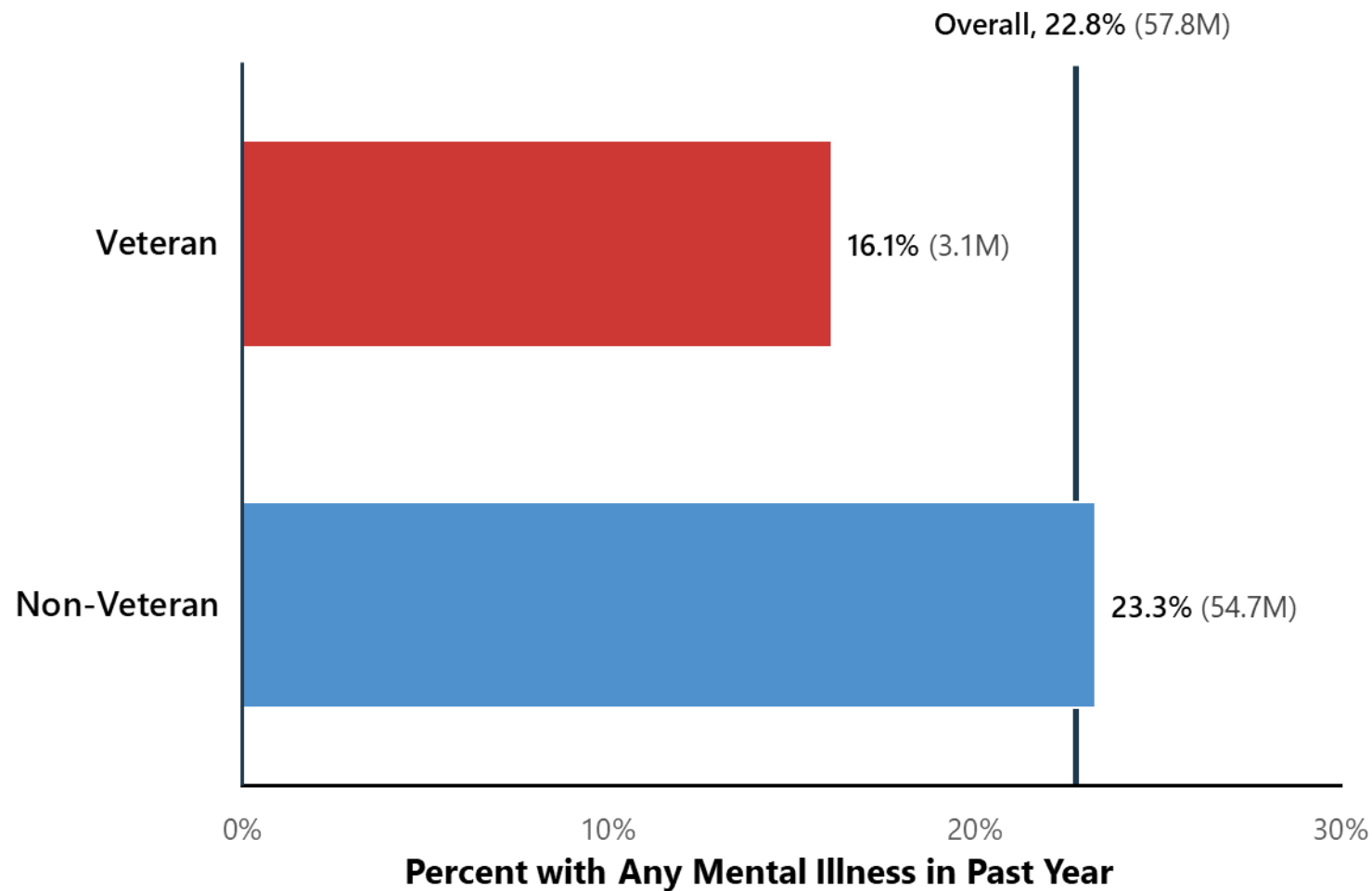
# Any or Serious Mental Illness: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

# Past Year Mental Illness: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



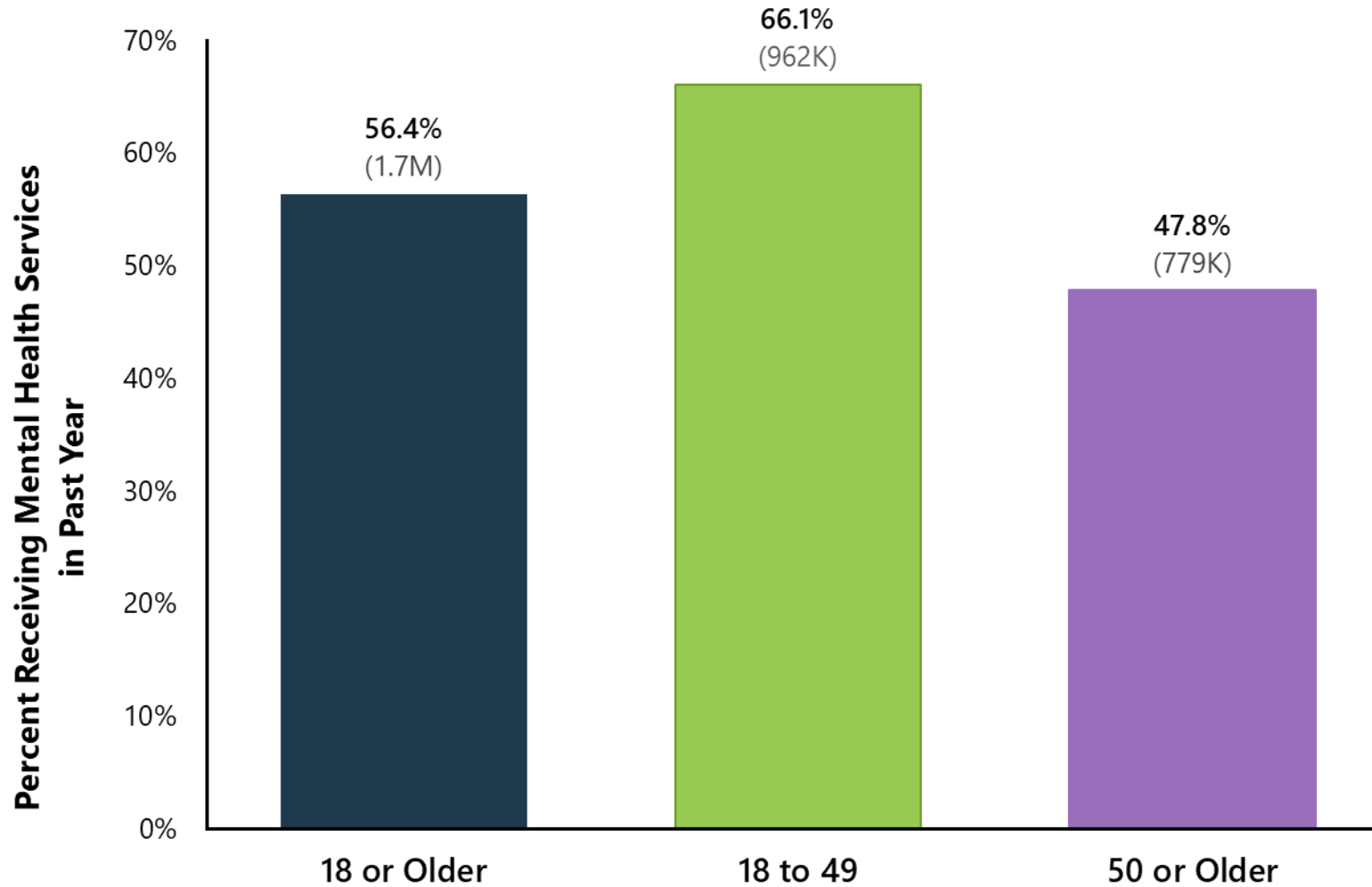
- The prevalence of mental illness was **highest** among Veterans aged **18 to 49**, for both any mental illness and serious mental illness

# 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

# Receipt of Mental Health Services in the Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older with Mental Illness in the Past Year

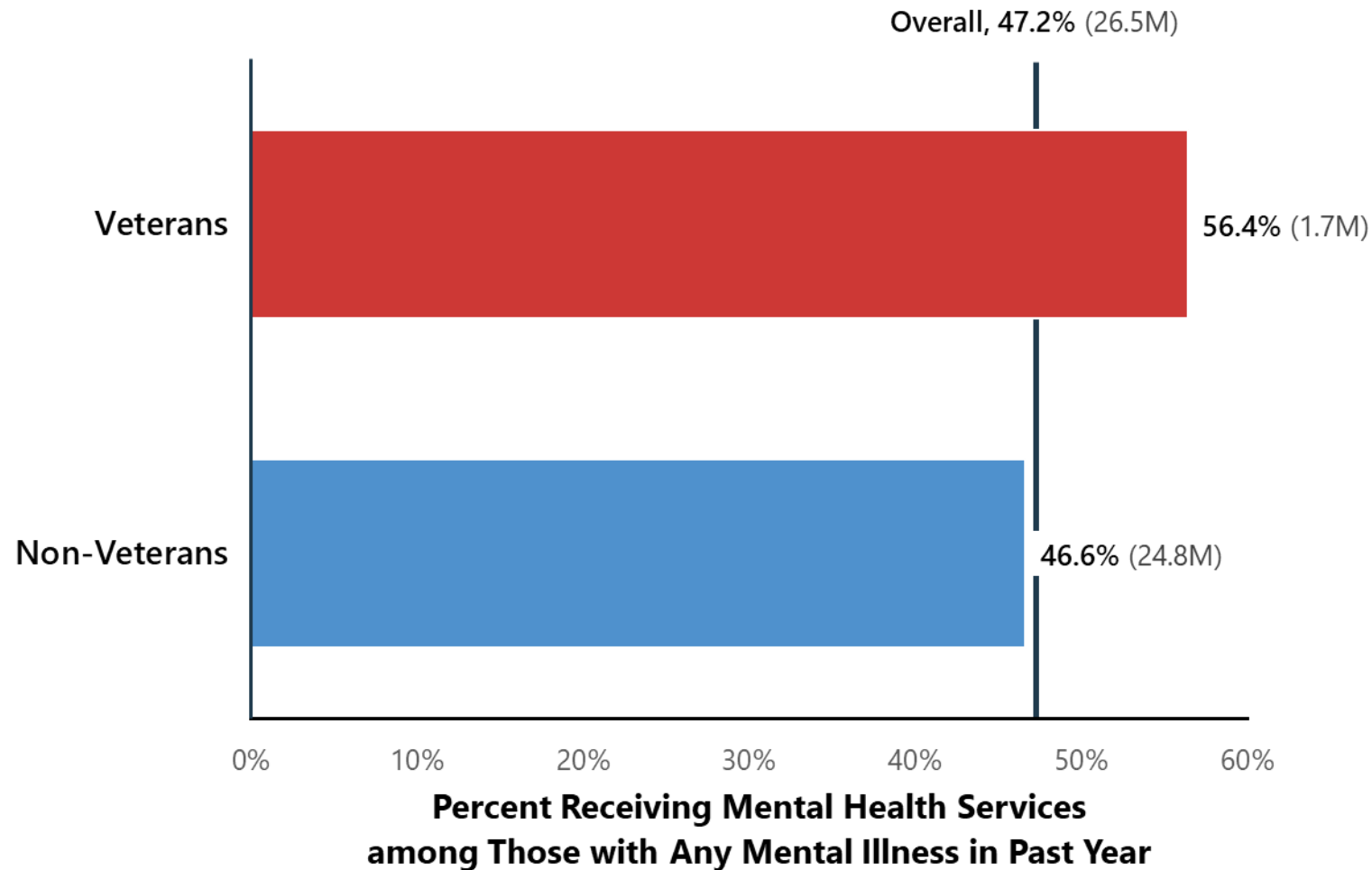


- More than **half** of Veterans with AMI received mental health services in the past year

AMI = any mental illness.

Note: Mental Health Services include any combination of inpatient or outpatient services, receipt of prescription medication, or virtual services.

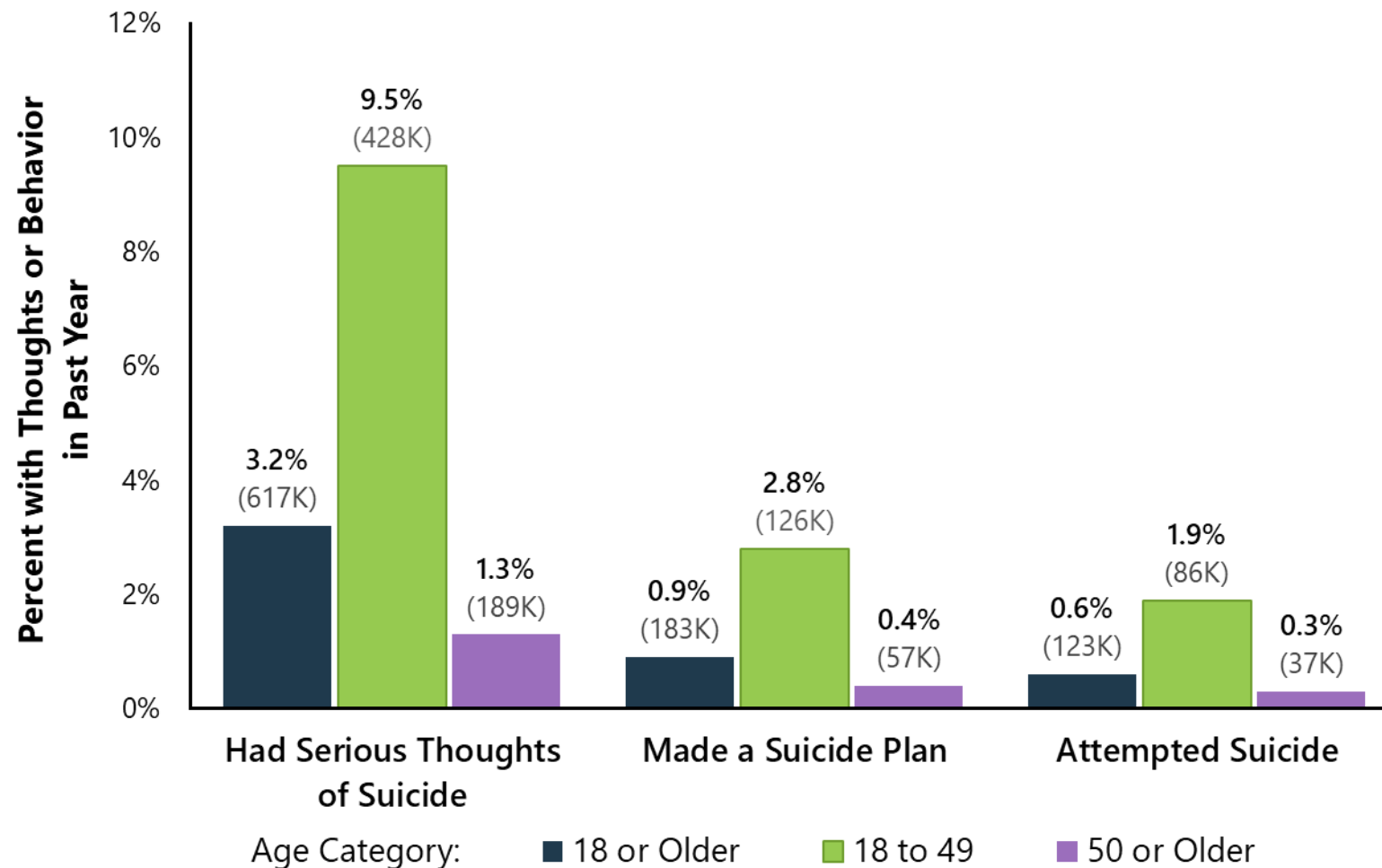
# Receipt of Mental Health Services by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older with a Past Year Mental Illness



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

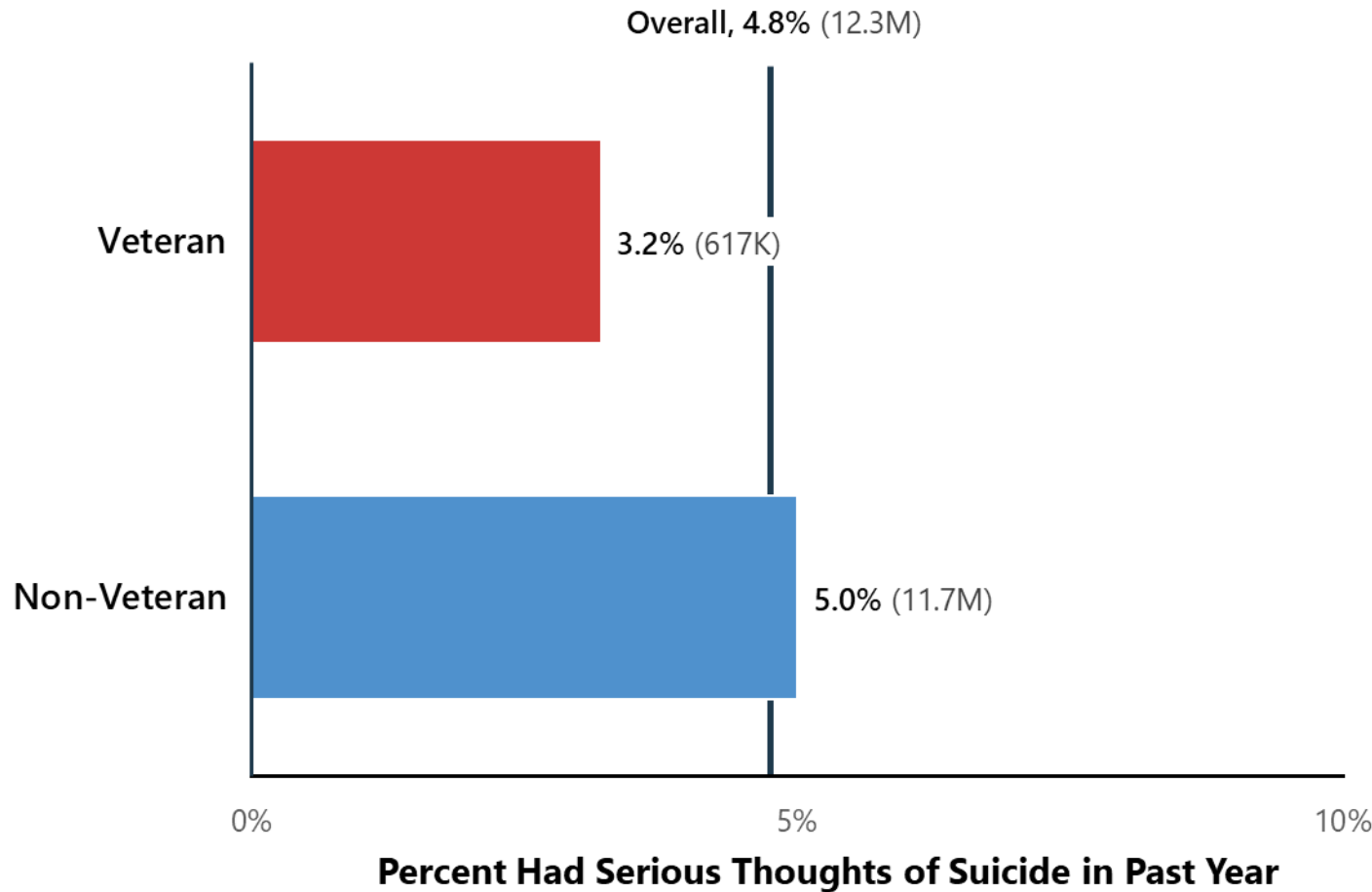
# Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Suicide Plans, and Suicide Attempts

# 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**

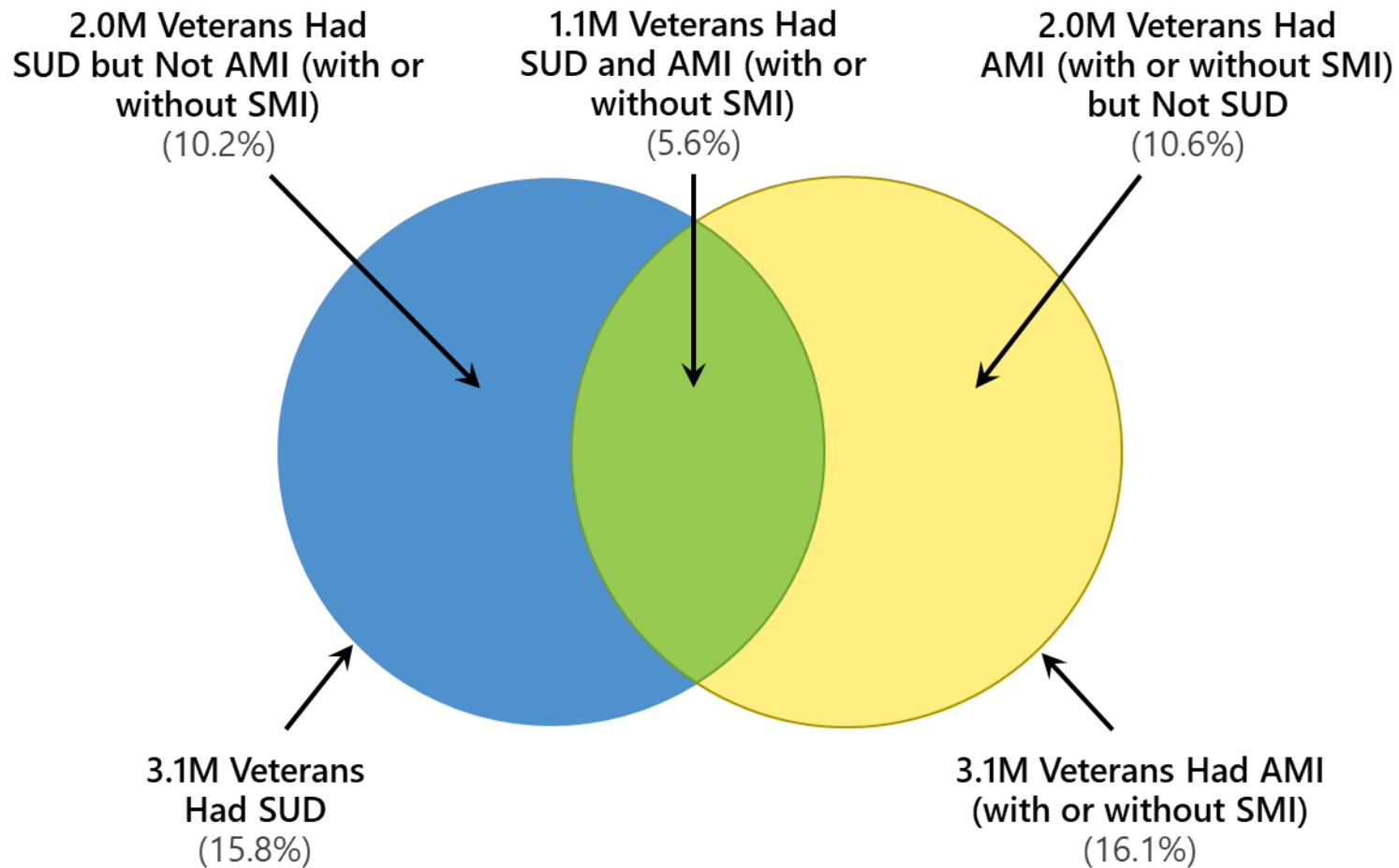
# Serious Thoughts of Suicide in the Past Year by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



- **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

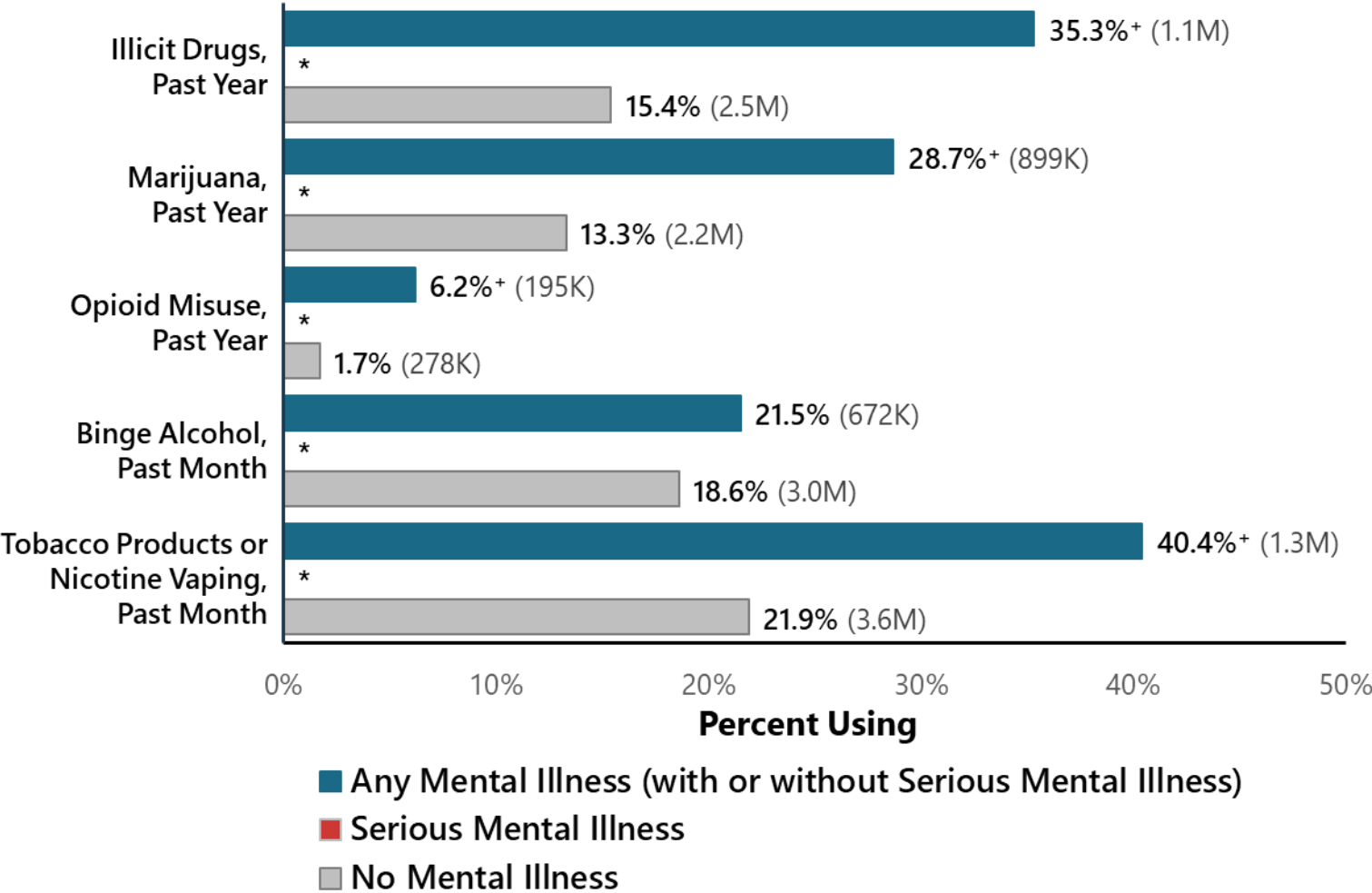
# Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder and Any Mental Illness: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



**5.1 Million Veterans Had Either SUD or AMI (with or without SMI)**

- **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**

# Past Year Substance Use by Mental Illness: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



- 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

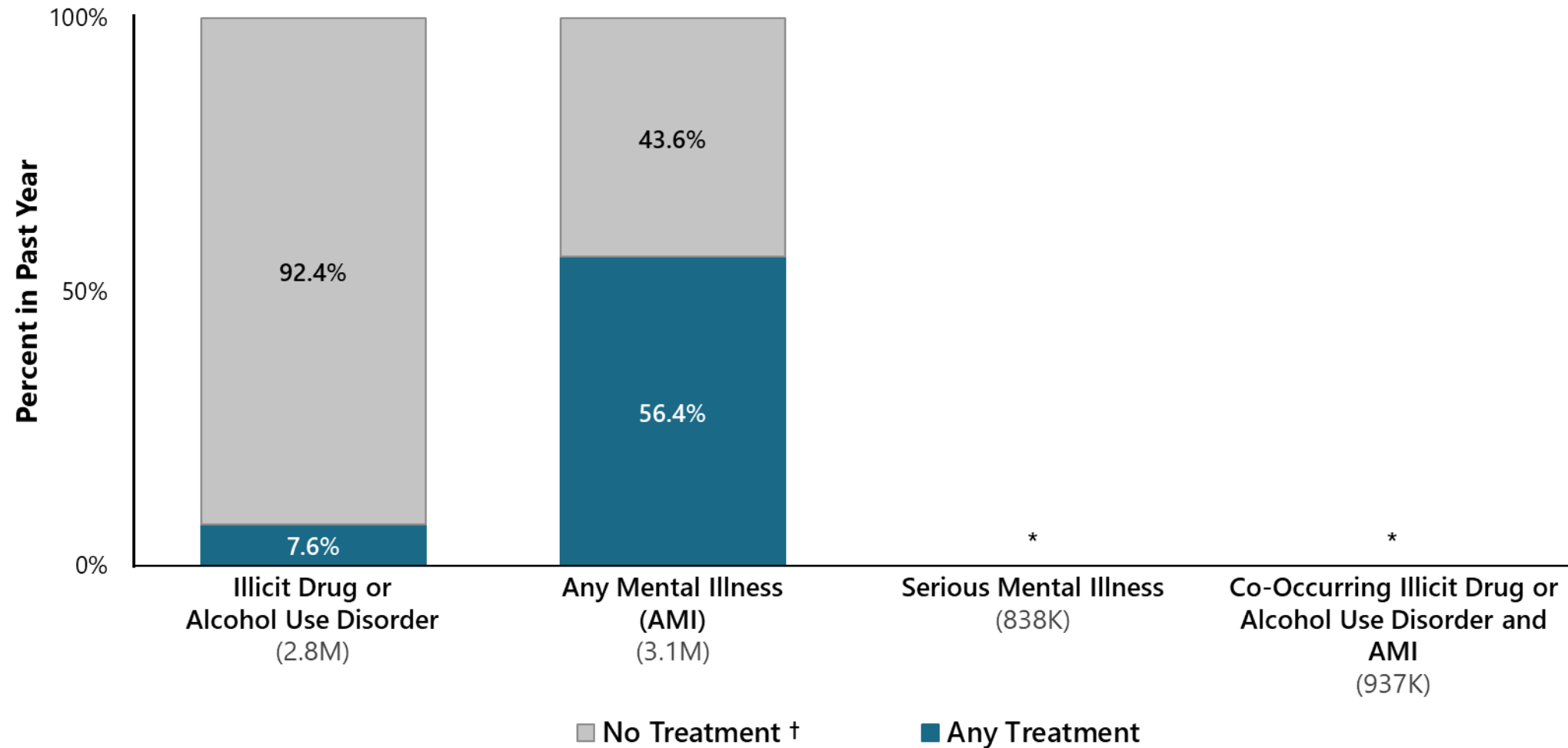


- **3 in 4 (77.6%)** Veterans who ever had a **substance use problem** considered themselves to be **recovering or in recovery**



- **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



\* 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.