

# 2023 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

2024



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# 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 2023 sample included 67,679 people (including 2,550 Veterans)

# Comparing Data Across Years

- A new trend line began in 2021 due to NSDUH data collection changing to a multimode design (web and in-person).
  - Do not compare 2021-2023 data with data from prior years.
- In 2022, weighting procedures were updated to stabilize the effect of mode on estimates across years.<sup>1</sup>
  - These procedures also were applied to the 2021 analysis weights.
  - Updated 2021 estimates were generated for the 2022 Detailed Tables to facilitate comparisons with 2022 estimates.
  - These updated 2021 estimates should be used for comparison with 2022 and 2023 estimates.

<sup>1</sup> See Section 3.3.3 in the following reference: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2023). *2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-methodological-summary-and-definitions>.

# About This Presentation

- Veterans are defined as those separated or retired from the United States Armed Forces or from a Reserve component.
- Statistical testing was performed for comparisons of estimates across age groups and veteran status groups according to procedures described in the 2023 Methodological Summary and Definitions report.<sup>2</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.
- Because of differences in the age distributions for veteran status groups in the NSDUH sample, estimates used for comparison were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population in accordance with federal agency best practices.<sup>3</sup> Figures in this presentation present both the unadjusted and age-adjusted estimates; the unadjusted estimates indicate the actual prevalence estimates among veteran status groups before differences in age distributions were taken into account.

<sup>2</sup> See Section 3.2.3 in the following reference: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2024). *2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-methodological-summary-and-definitions>.

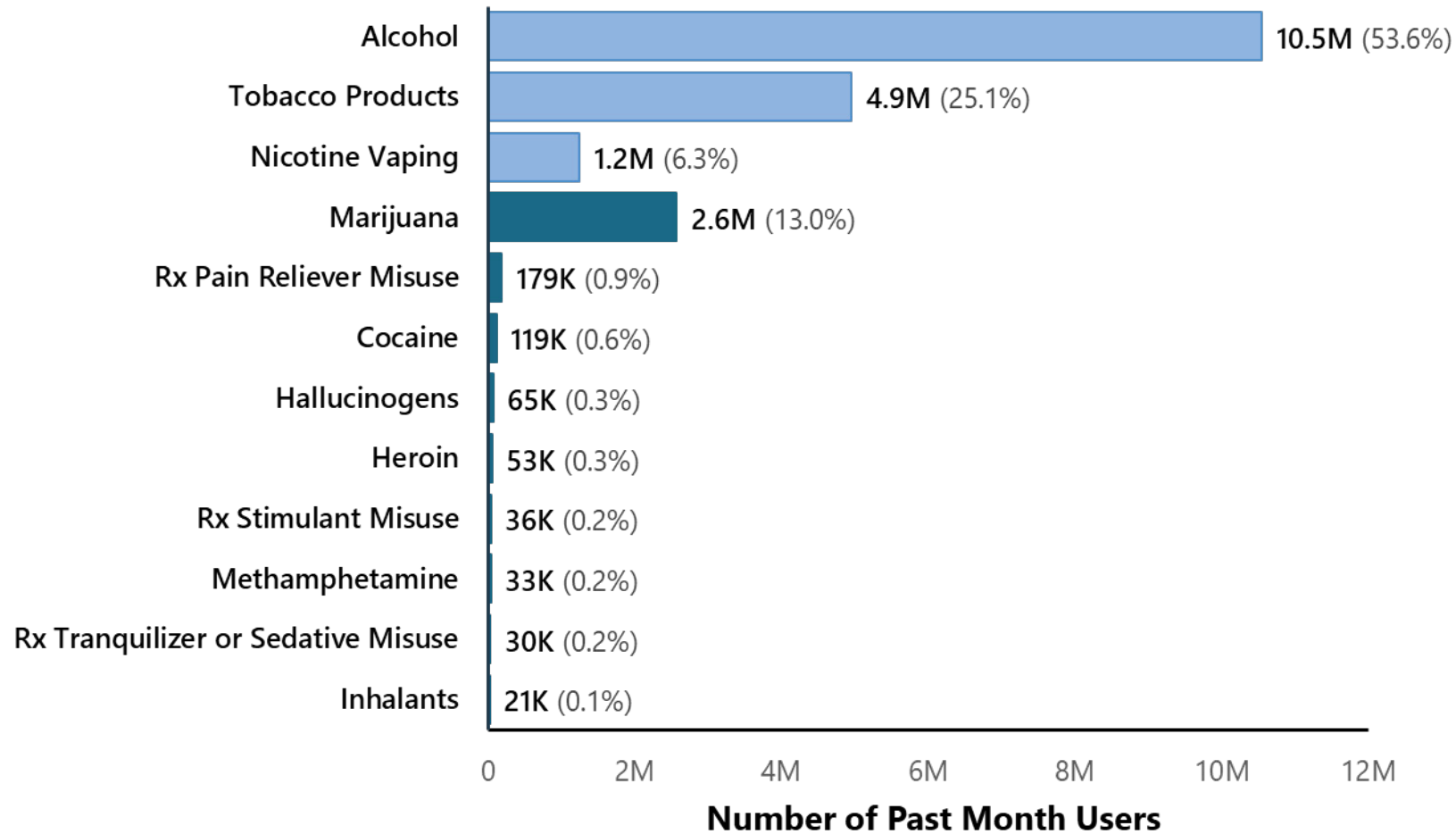
<sup>3</sup> Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. (n.d.). *Use of the 2000 U.S. standard population for age-adjustment*. National Cancer Institute. <https://seer.cancer.gov/stdpopulations/2000stdpop-use.html>.

# Suppression Due to Low Precision

- The following estimates for Veterans are not presented due to low precision:
  - Substance use disorder by severity level
  - Pain reliever use disorder by severity level

# Substance Use in the Past Month

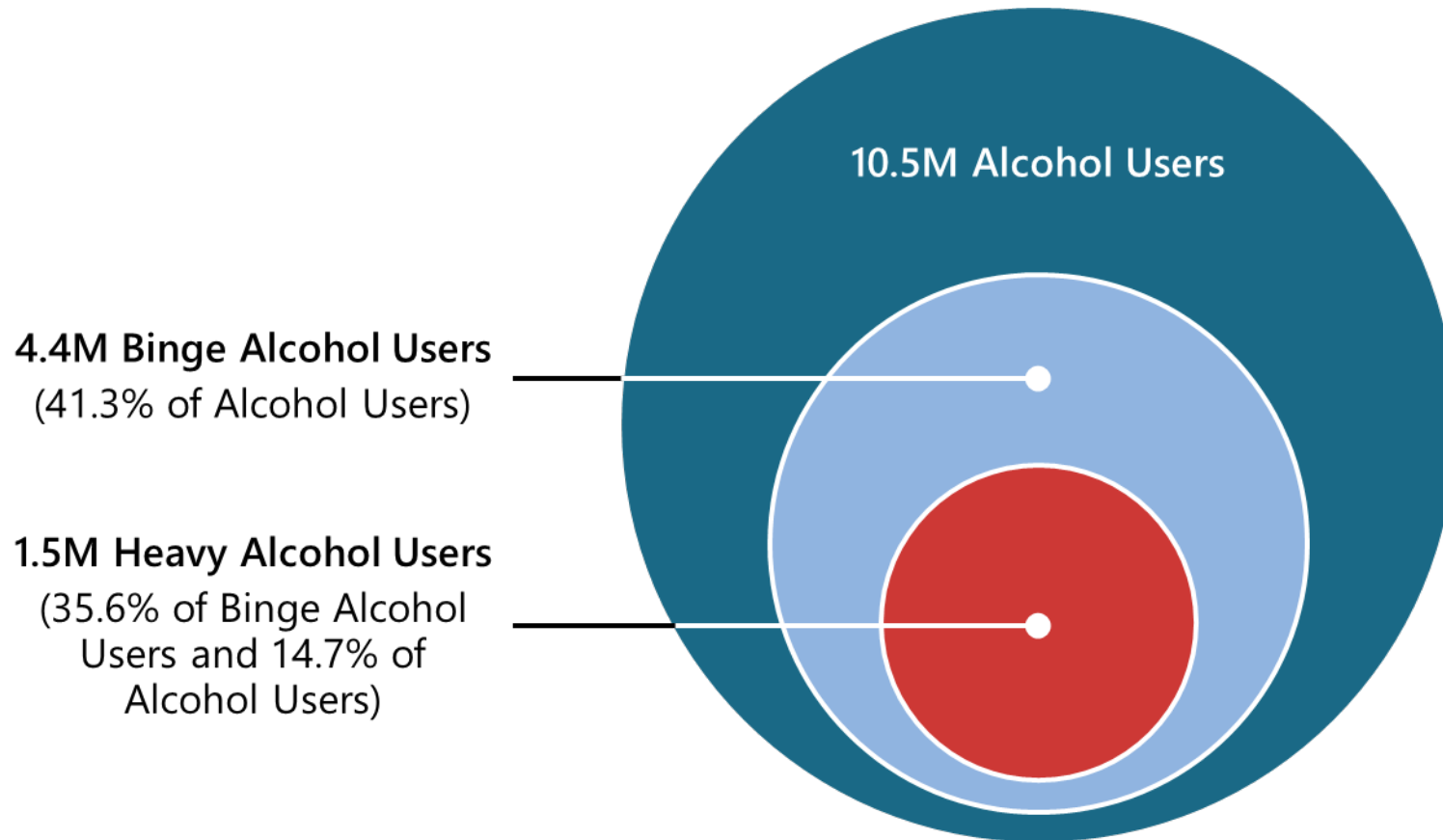
# Past Month Substance Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



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

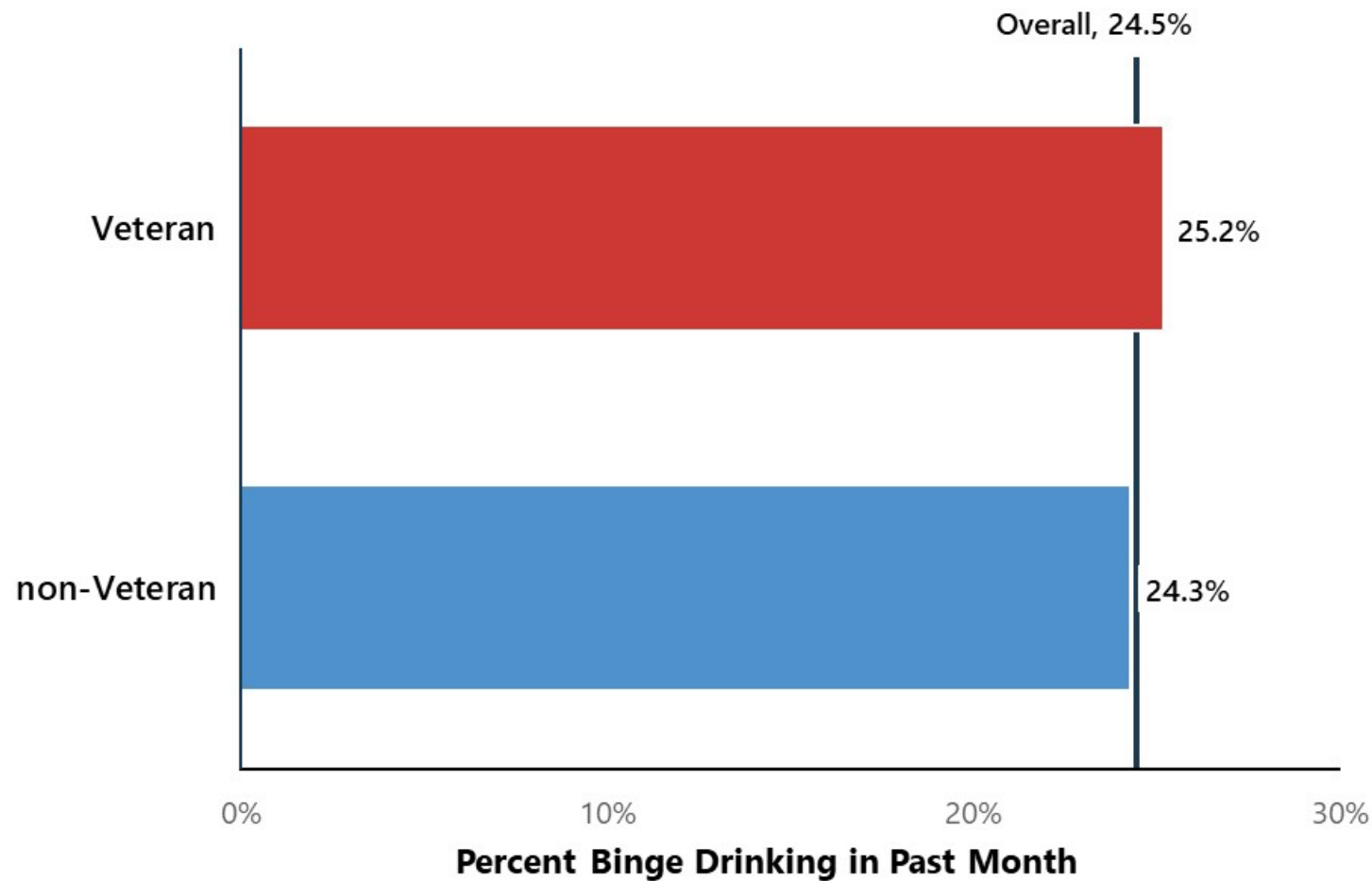


- **2 in 5** past month alcohol users among Veterans were binge drinkers

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

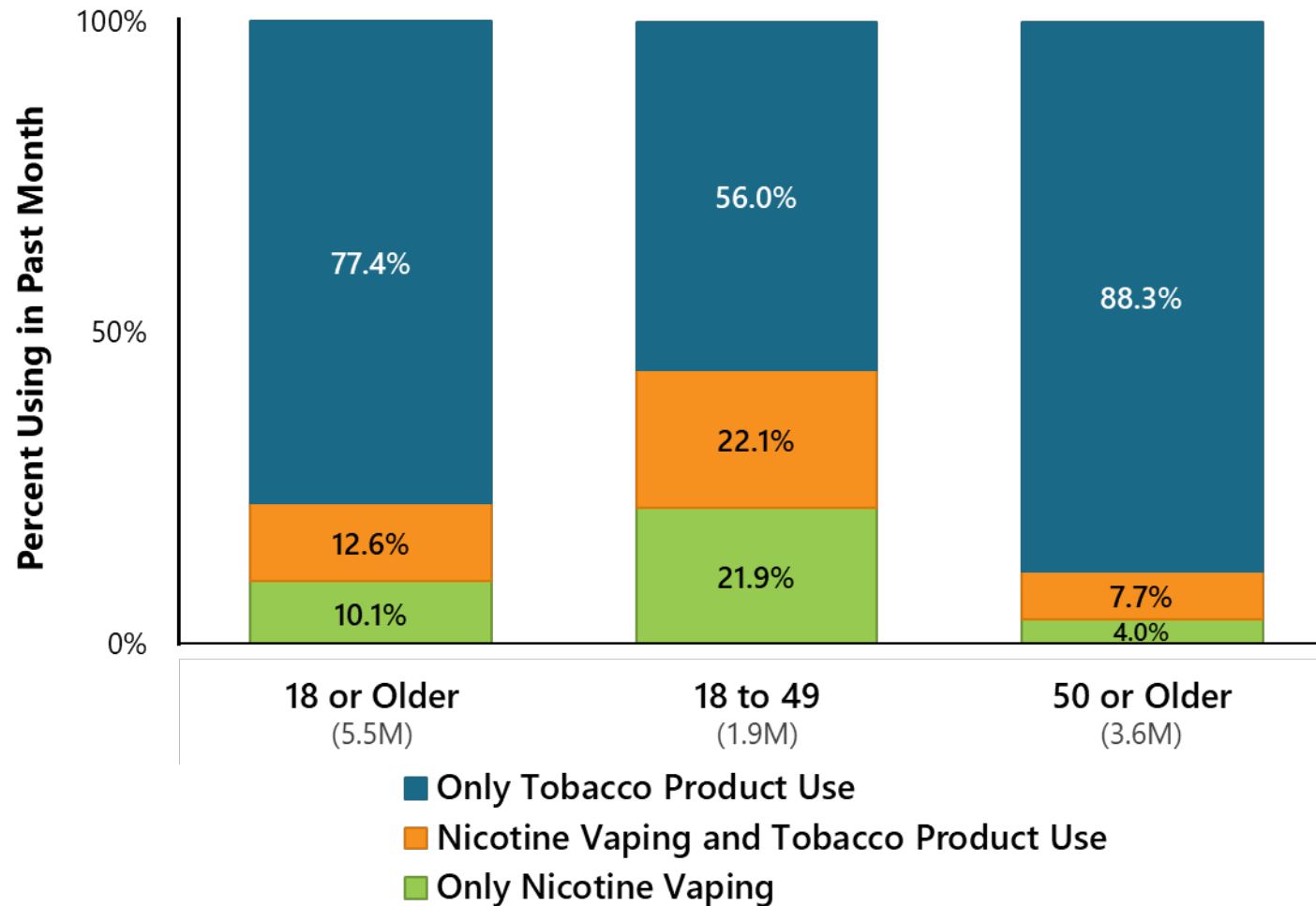


- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to binge drink as Non-Veterans

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the 18 or older age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

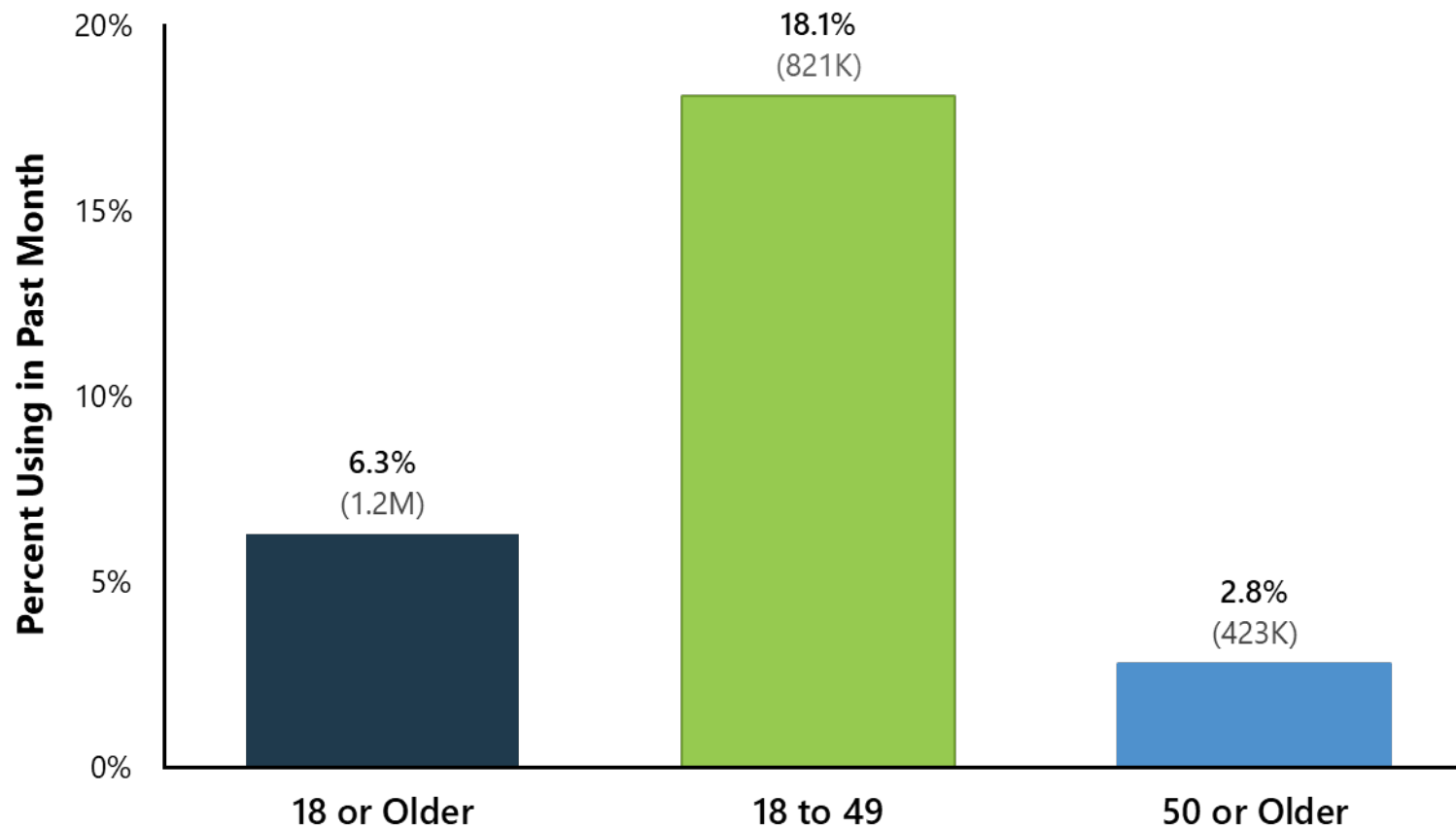
Note: Binge Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks (for males) or four or more drinks (for females) on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

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



- **Nearly 80%** of Veterans aged 18 or older who used nicotine products in the past month used only tobacco products

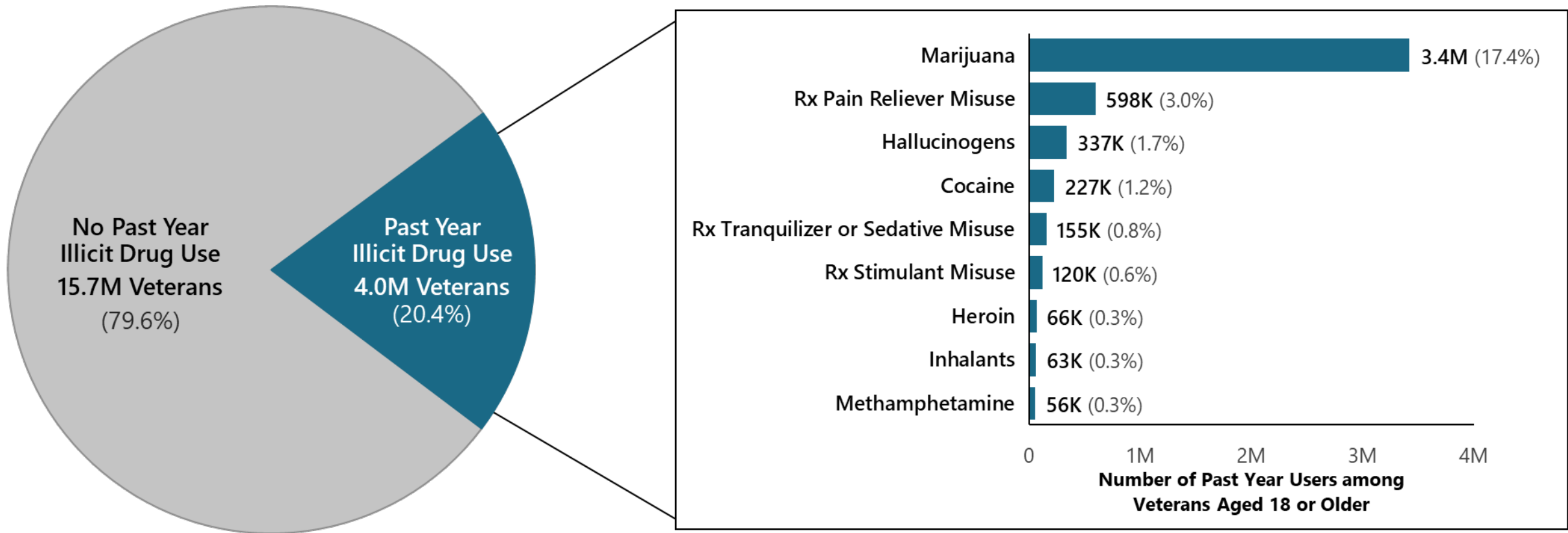
# Past Month Nicotine Vaping: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



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

# Past Year and Past Month Illicit Drug Use

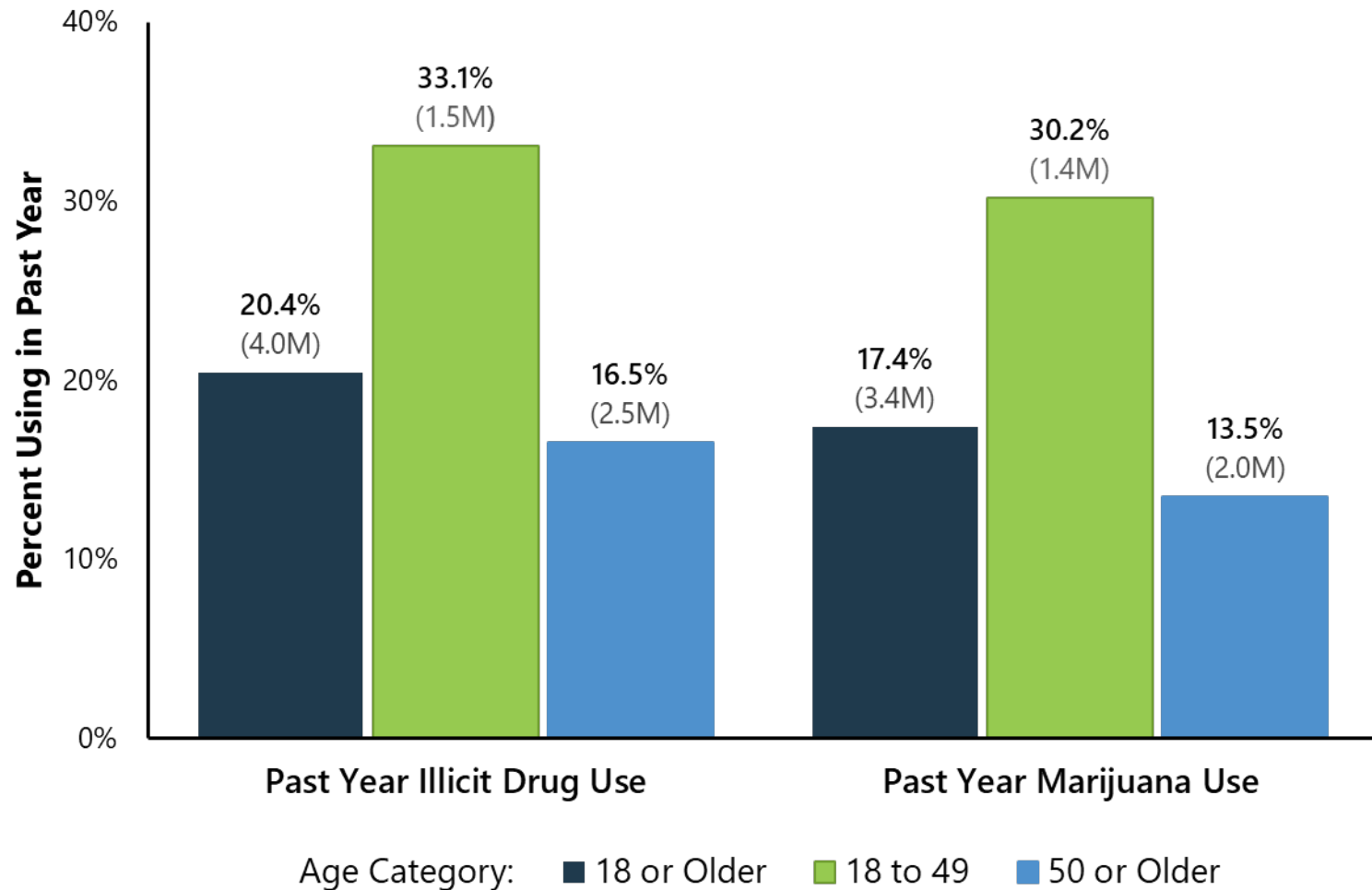
# Past Year Illicit Drug Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



Rx = prescription.

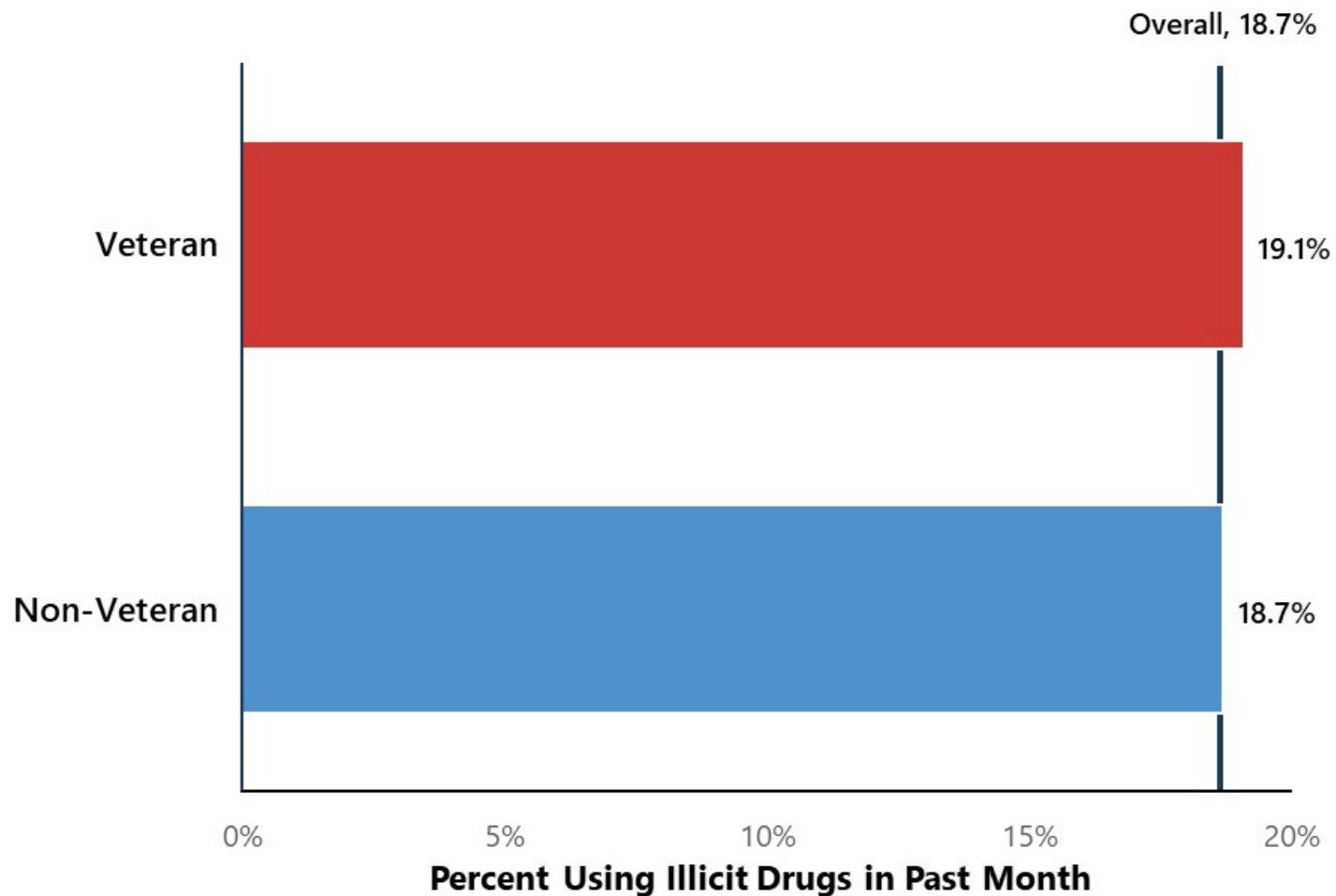
Note: The estimated numbers of past year users of different illicit drugs are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of illicit drug in the past year.

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



- Among Veterans aged **18 to 49**, **33.1%** used **illicit drugs** and **30.2%** used **marijuana** in the past year

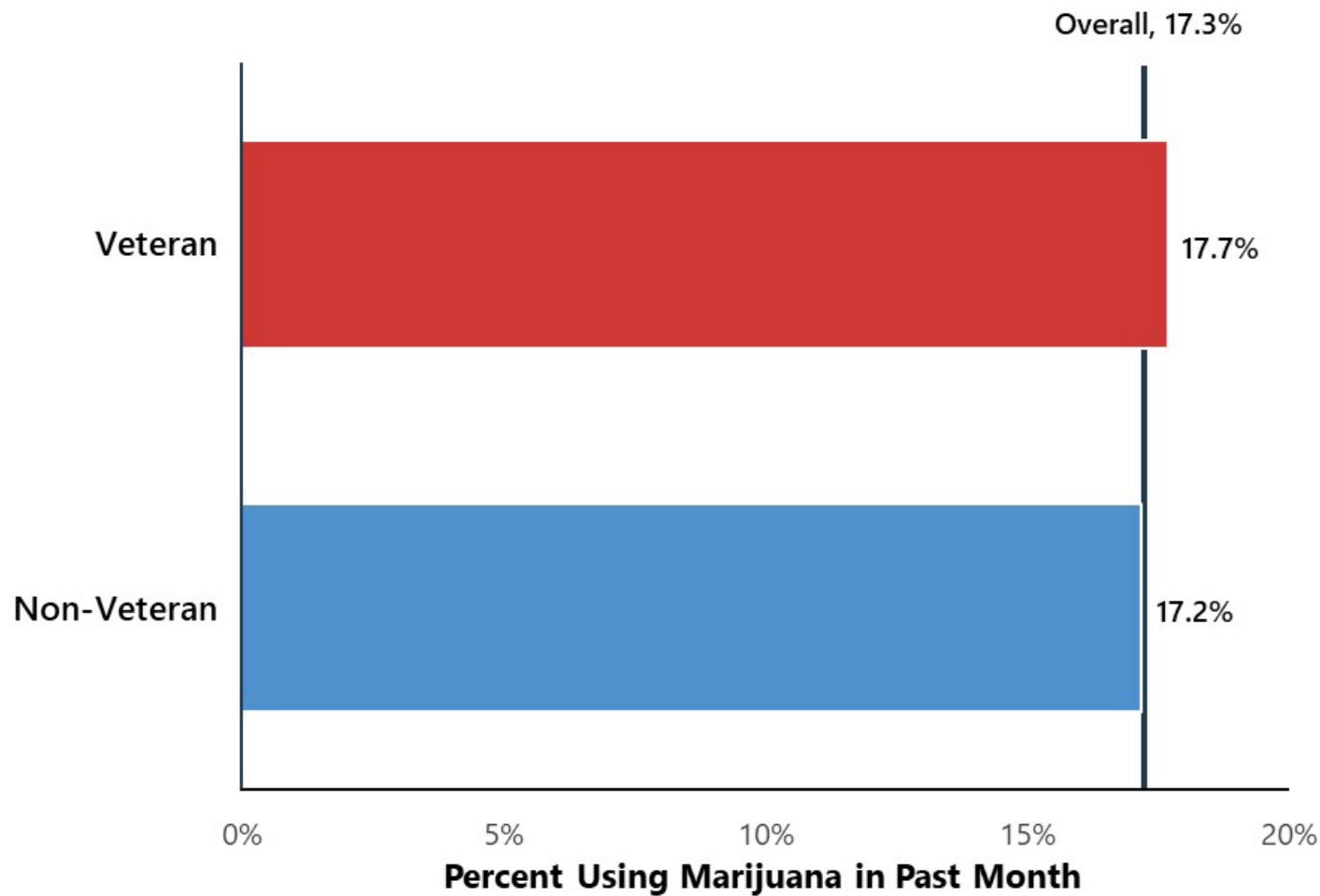
# Illicit Drug Use in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to use illicit drugs as Non-Veterans

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the 18 or older age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

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

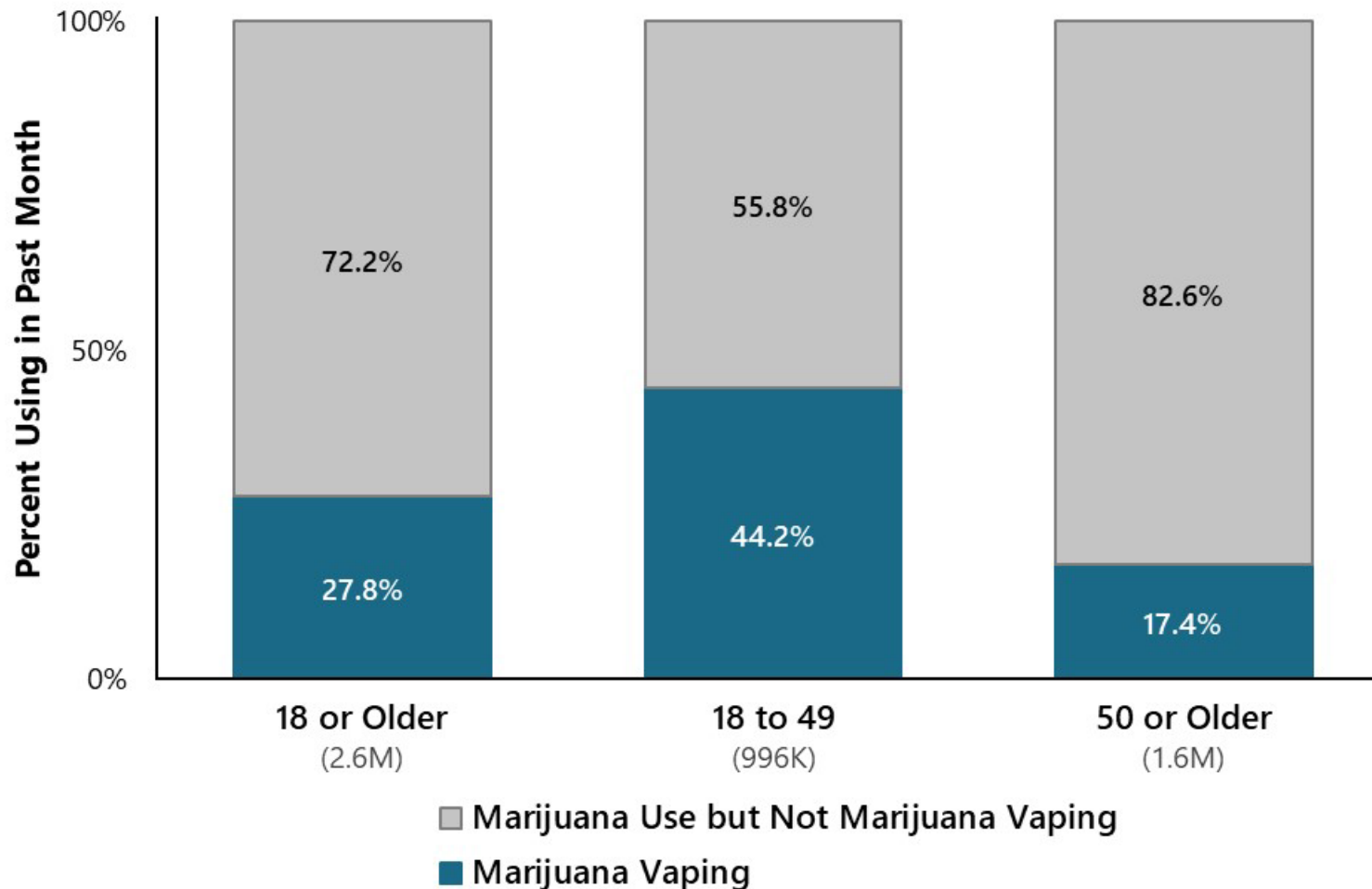


- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to use marijuana as Non-Veterans

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the 18 or older age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

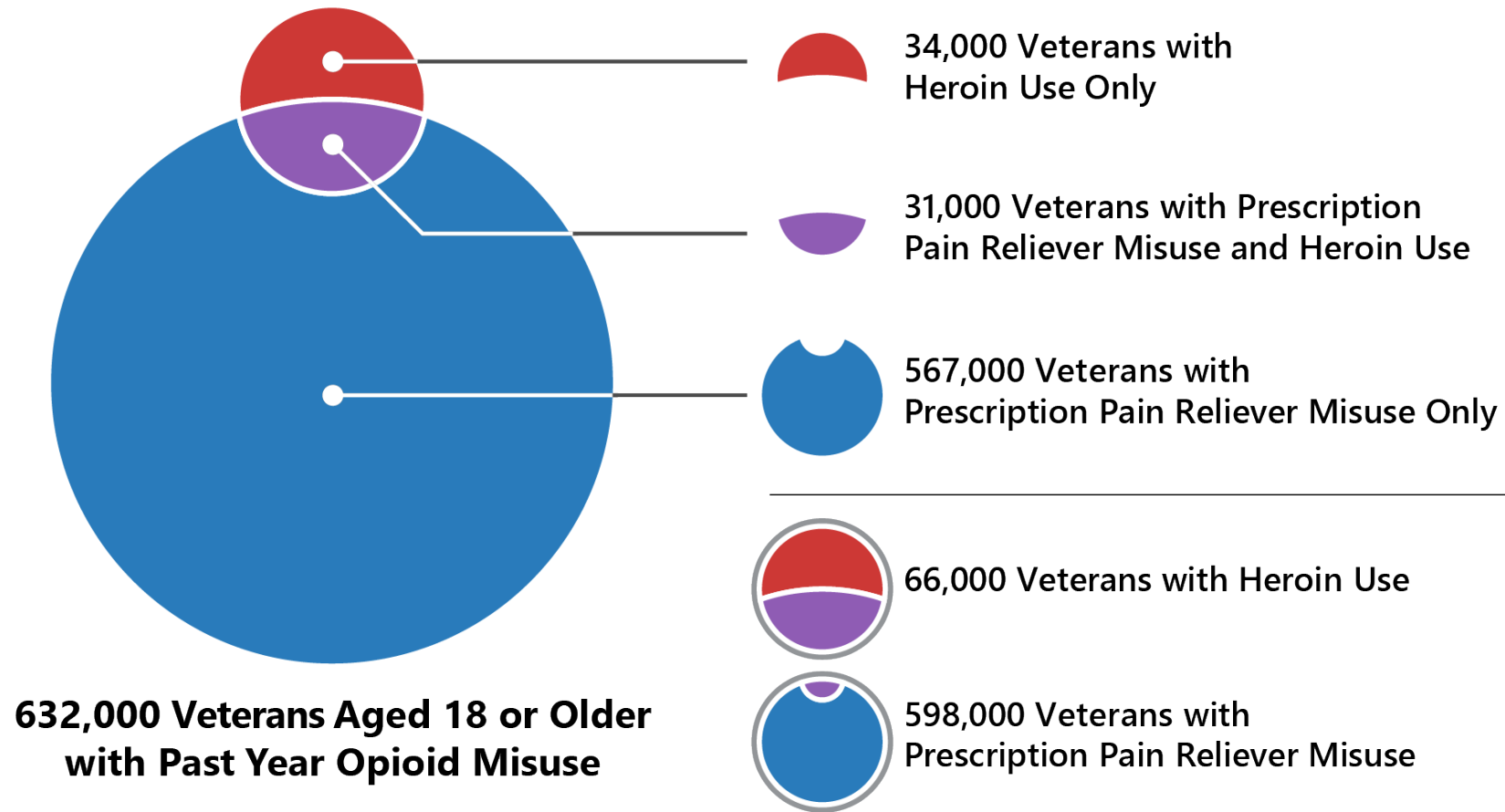


# Type of Marijuana Use: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used Marijuana in the Past Month

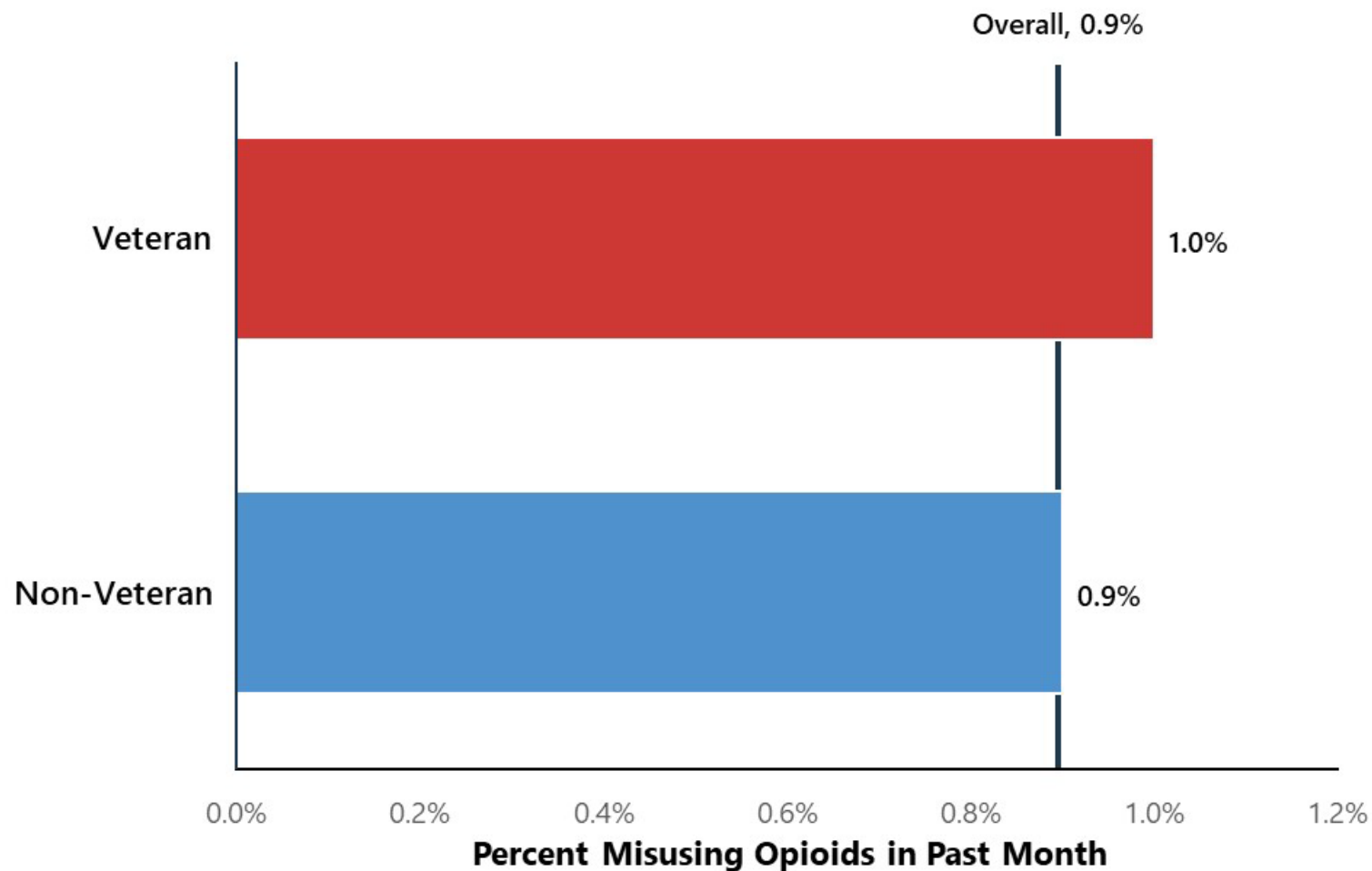


- **1 in 4** current marijuana users among Veterans aged 18 or older **vaped marijuana** in the past month

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



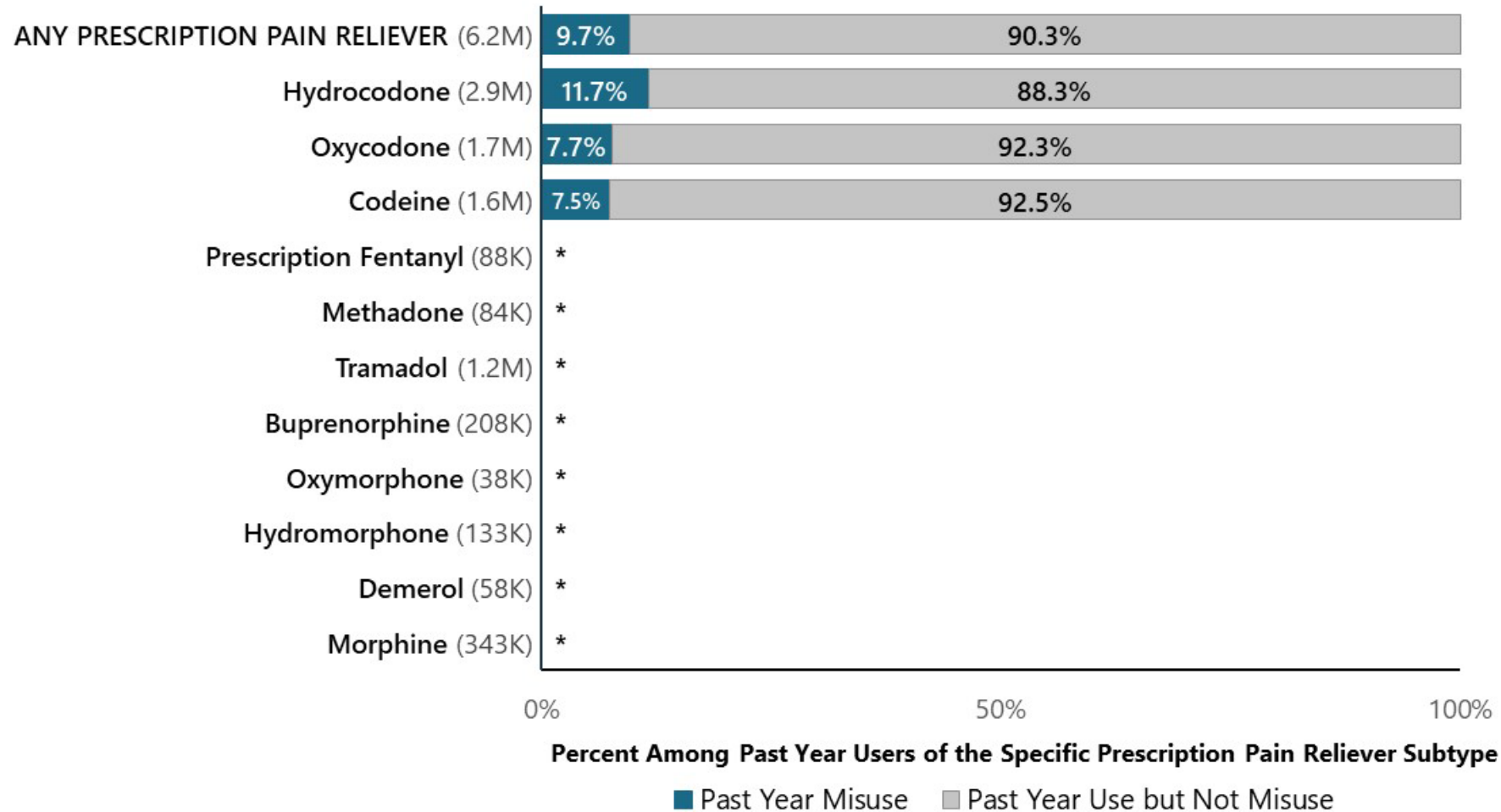
# Opioid Misuse in the Past Month by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to misuse opioids as Non-Veterans

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the 18 or older age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

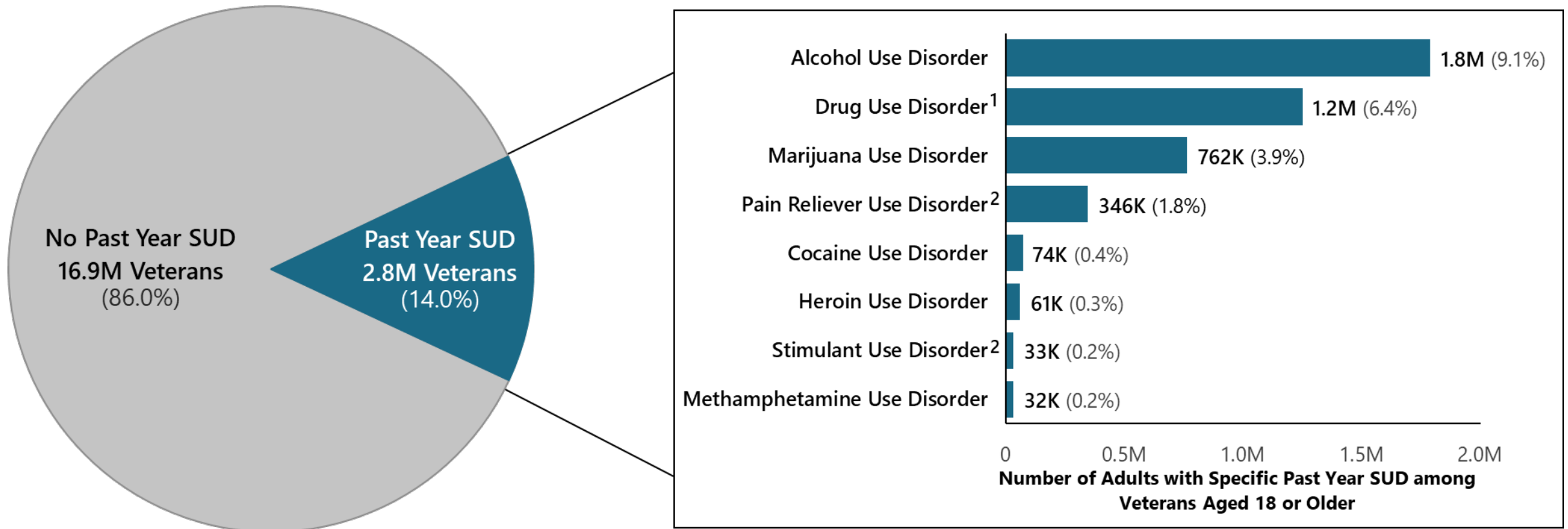
# Past Year Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older Who Used the Specific Prescription Pain Reliever Subtype in the Past Year



\* Low precision; no estimate reported.

# Substance Use Disorder

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

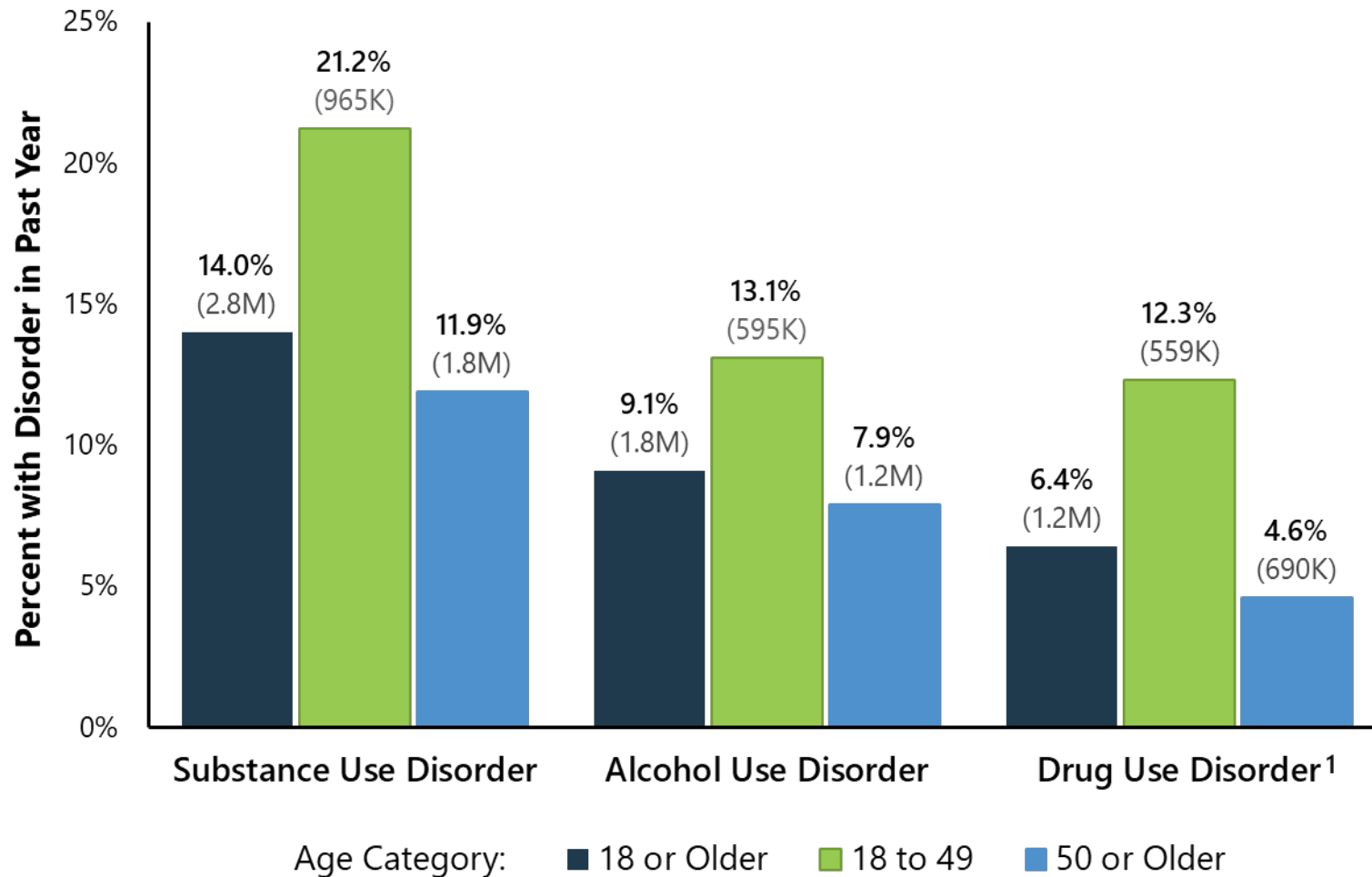


Note: The estimated numbers of people with substance use disorders are not mutually exclusive because people could have use disorders for more than one substance.

<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.

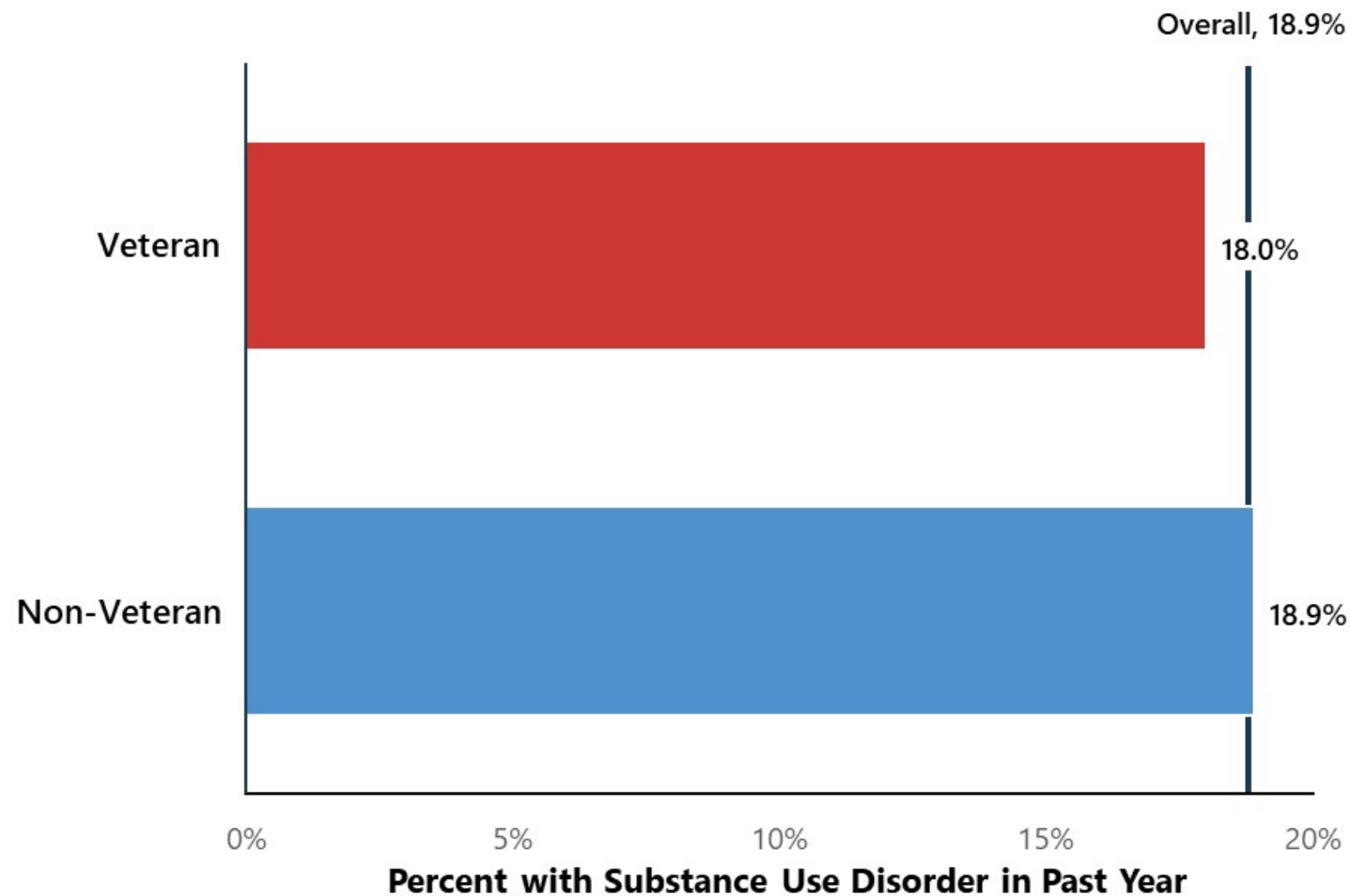
# Past Year Substance Use Disorder: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



- Veterans aged **18 to 49** were **more likely** to have a past year substance use disorder, alcohol use disorder, or drug use disorder than Veterans aged 50 or older

<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

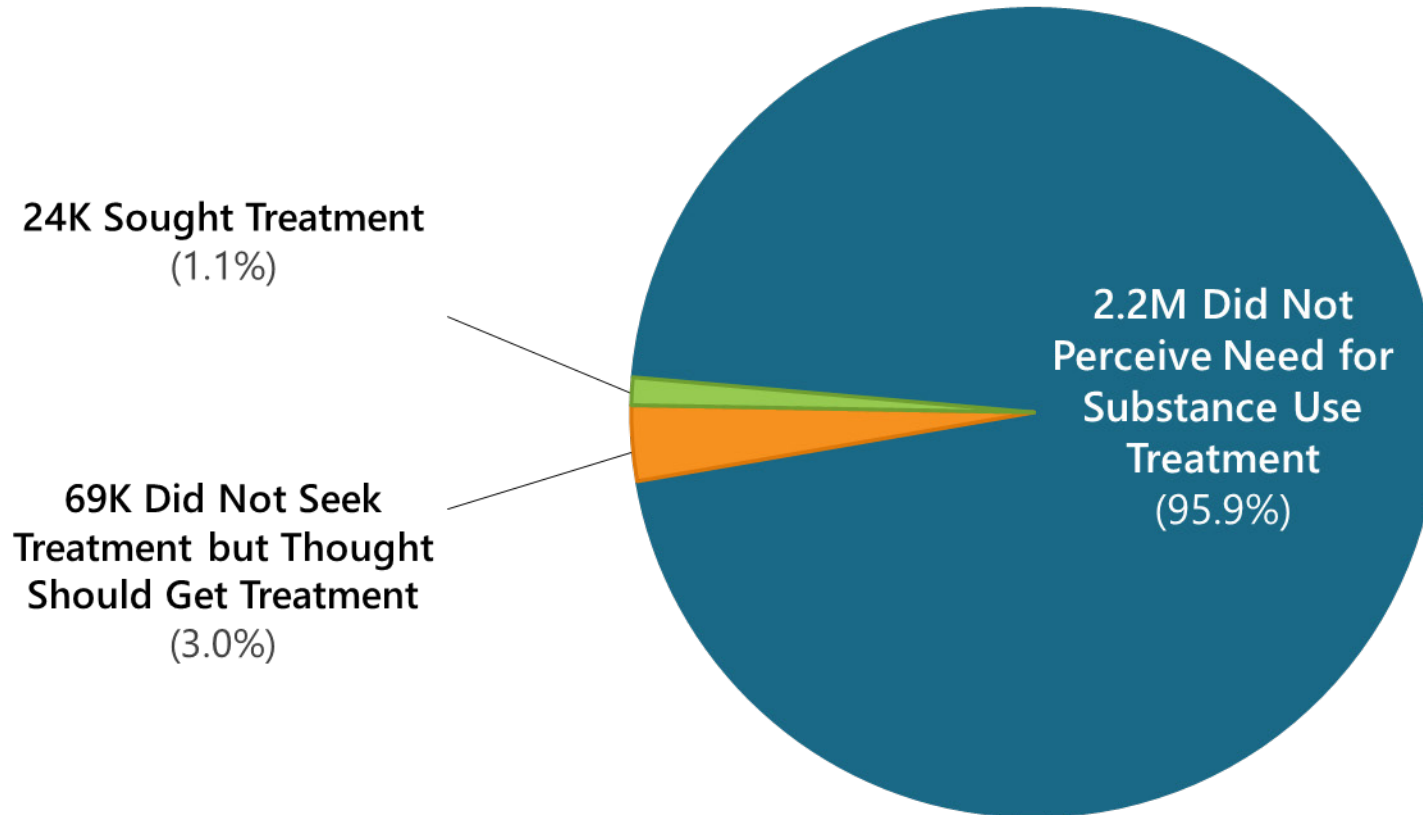


- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to have a substance use disorder as Non-Veterans

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the 18 or older age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.



# Perceived Need for Substance Use Treatment: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older with a Past Year Substance Use Disorder Who Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment in the Past Year



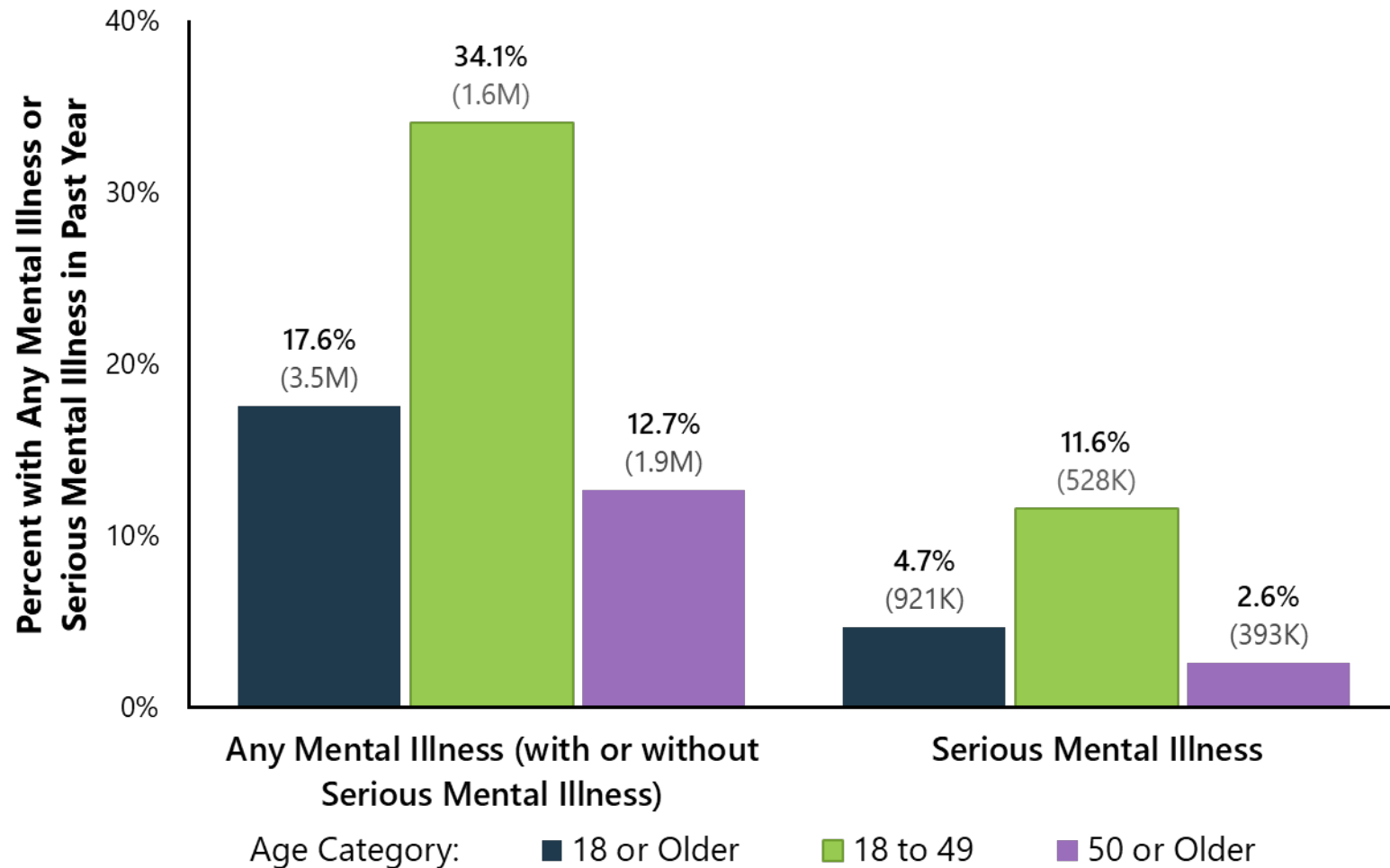
- Nearly all Veterans with a substance use disorder who did not receive substance use treatment **did not think they needed treatment**

## 2.3 Million Veterans with a Substance Use Disorder Who Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment

Note: Respondents with unknown information for perceptions of need for substance use treatment were excluded from the analyses.

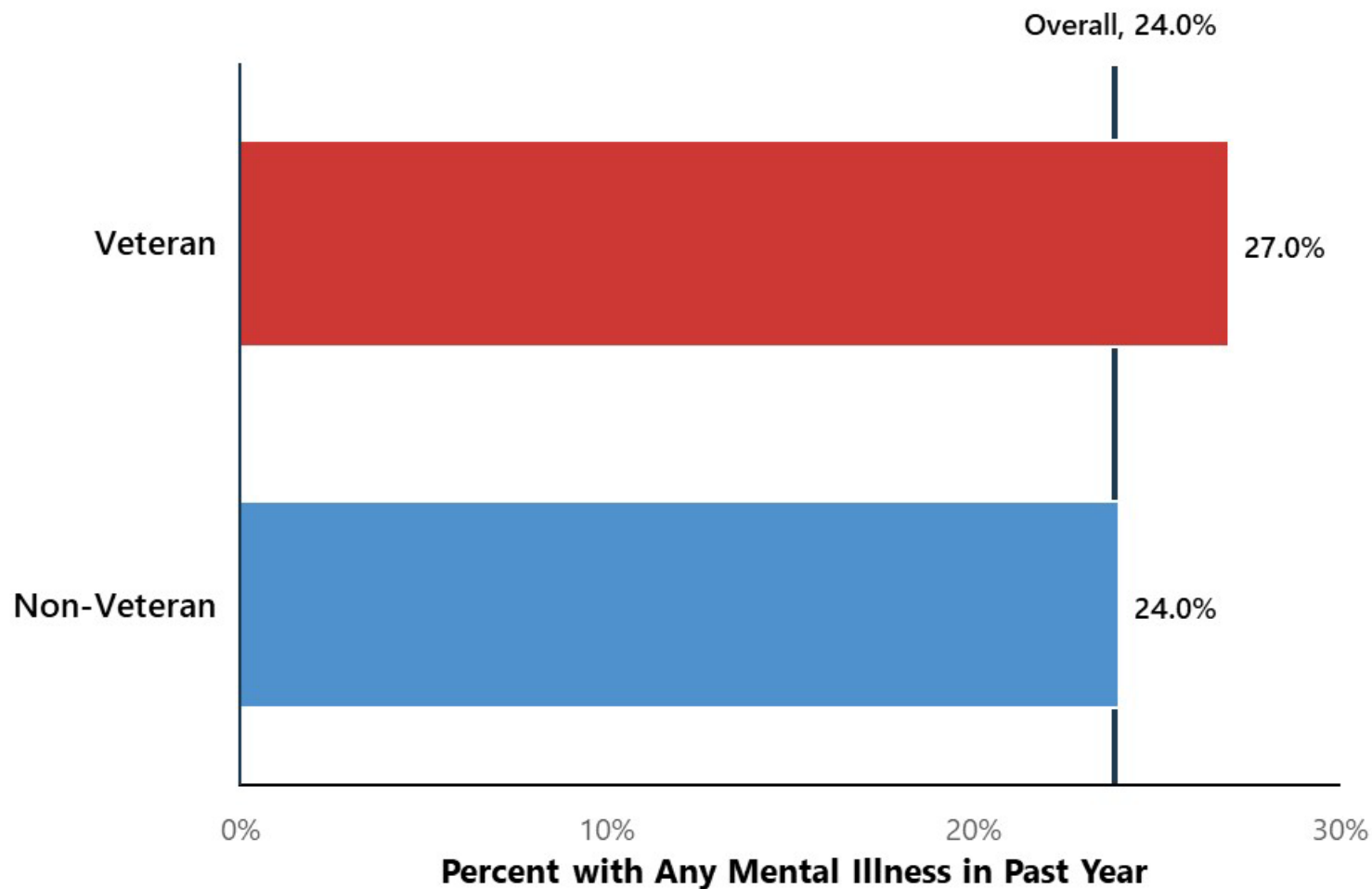
# Any or Serious Mental Illness: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

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



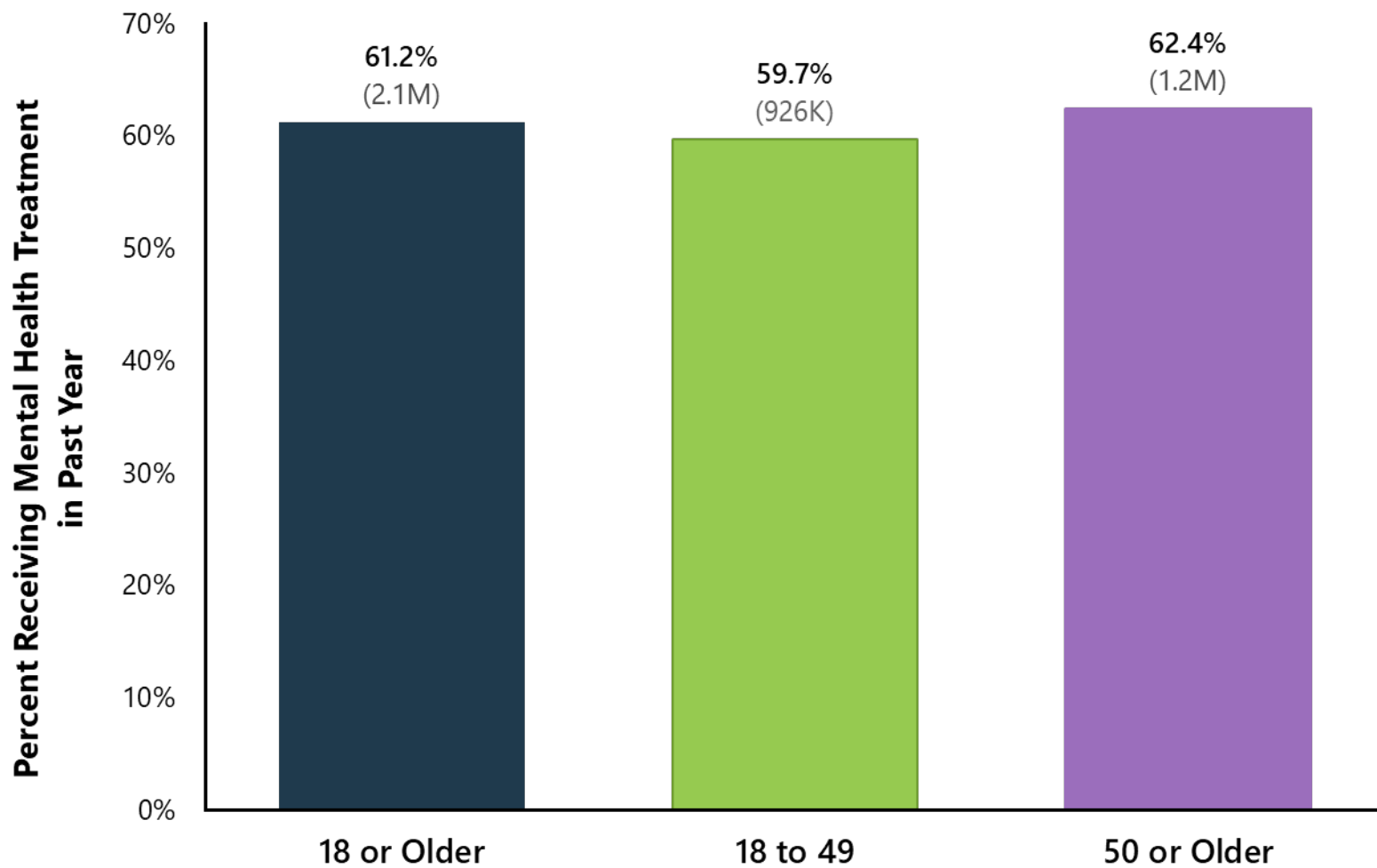
- The prevalence of mental illness was **higher** among Veterans aged **18 to 49**, for both any mental illness and serious mental illness, than among Veterans aged 50 or older

# Any Mental Illness in the Past Year by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older



- **Veterans** were **just as likely** to have any mental illness as Non-Veterans

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

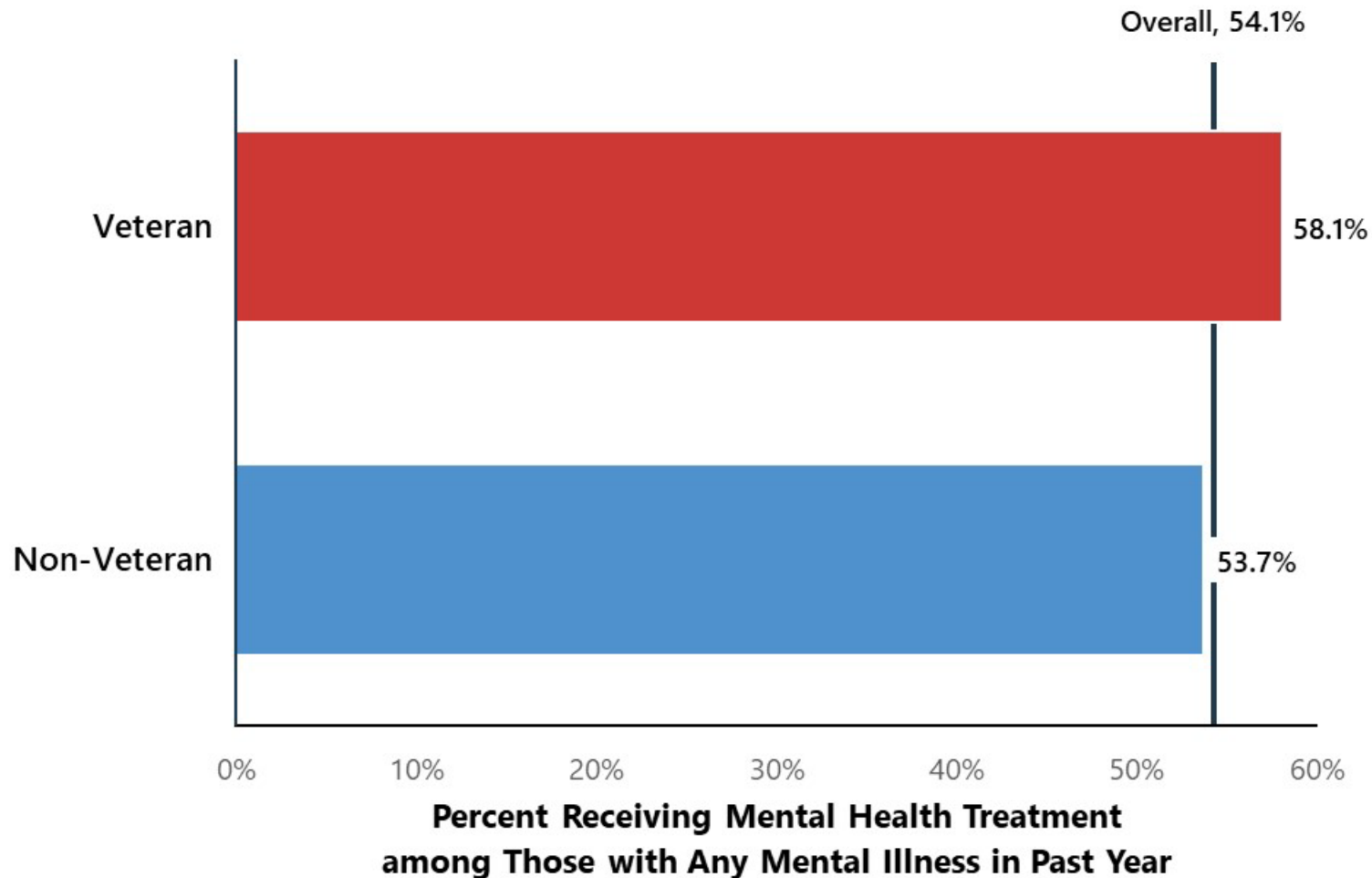


- **More than half** of Veterans in each age group with AMI received mental health treatment in the past year

AMI = any mental illness.

Note: Mental health treatment includes treatment/counseling received as an inpatient or as an outpatient; use of prescription medication to help with mental health; telehealth treatment; or treatment received in a prison, jail, or juvenile detention center.

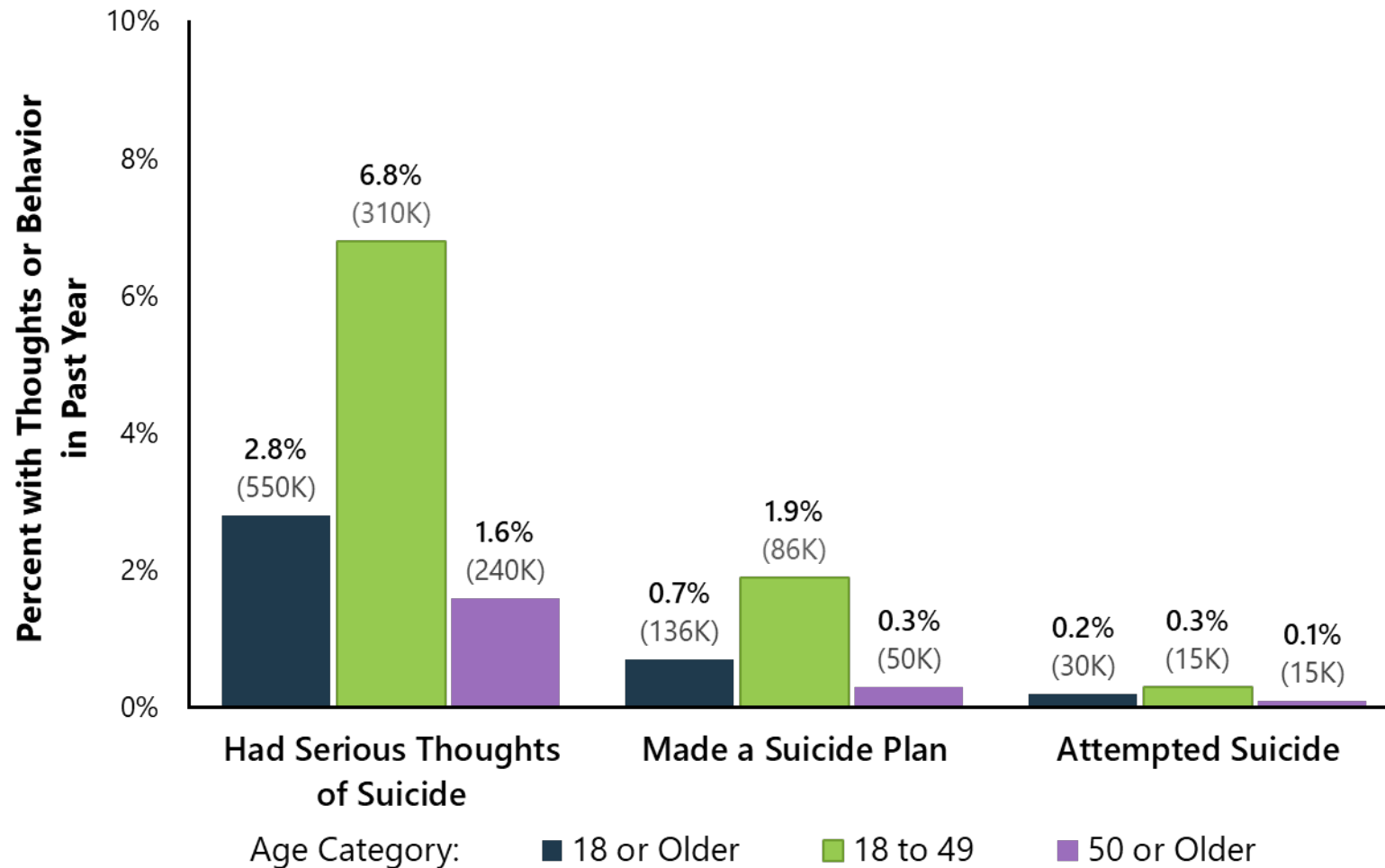
# Receipt of Mental Health Treatment by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older with a Past Year Mental Illness



- **Veterans** who have a mental illness were **just as likely** to receive mental health treatment as Non-Veterans who have a mental illness

# 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



- Veterans aged **18 to 49** were **more likely** to have had serious thoughts of suicide and made a suicide plan than Veterans aged 50 or older

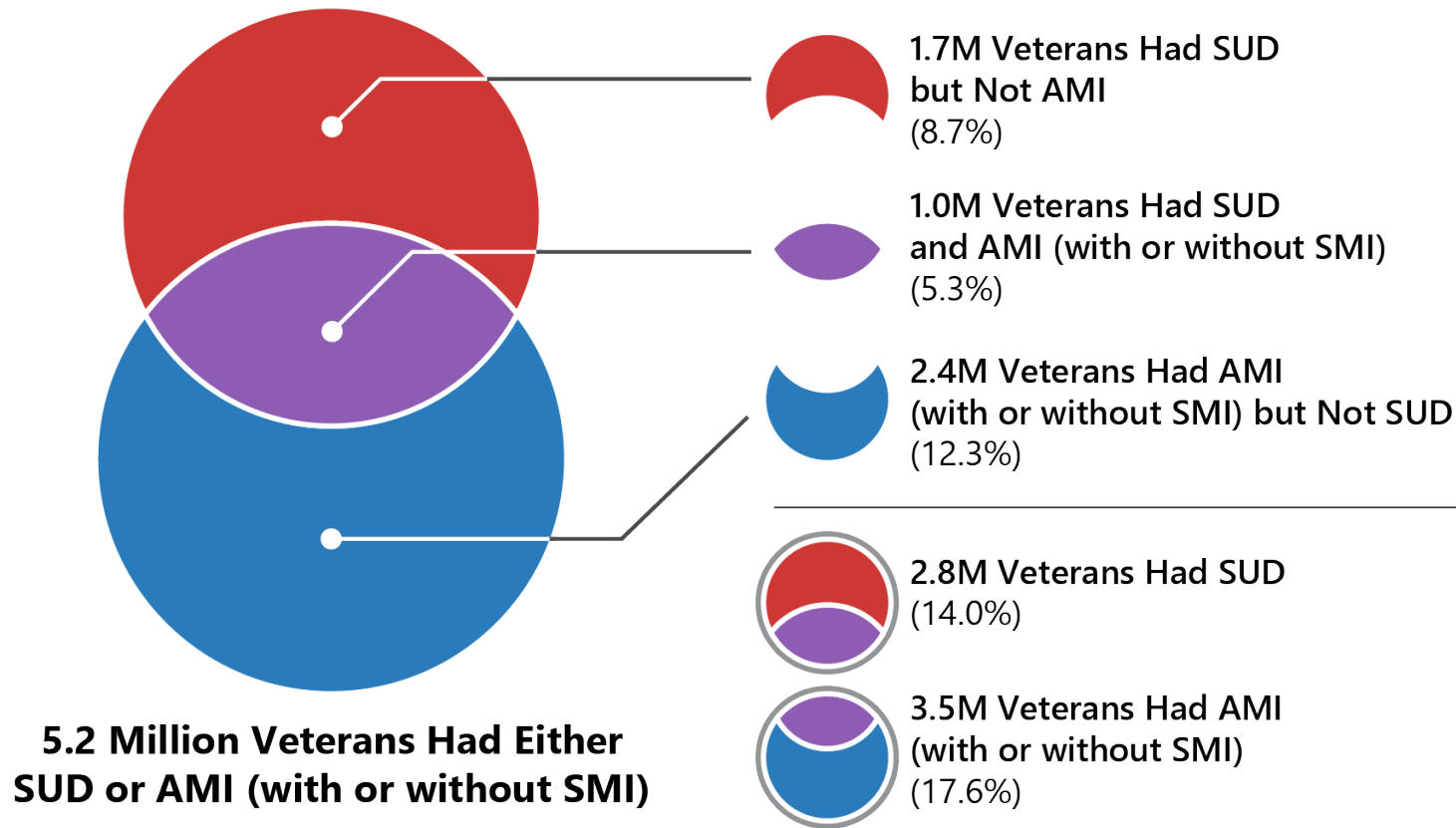


# Suicidality by Veteran Status: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

- No differences were found for suicidality by veteran status

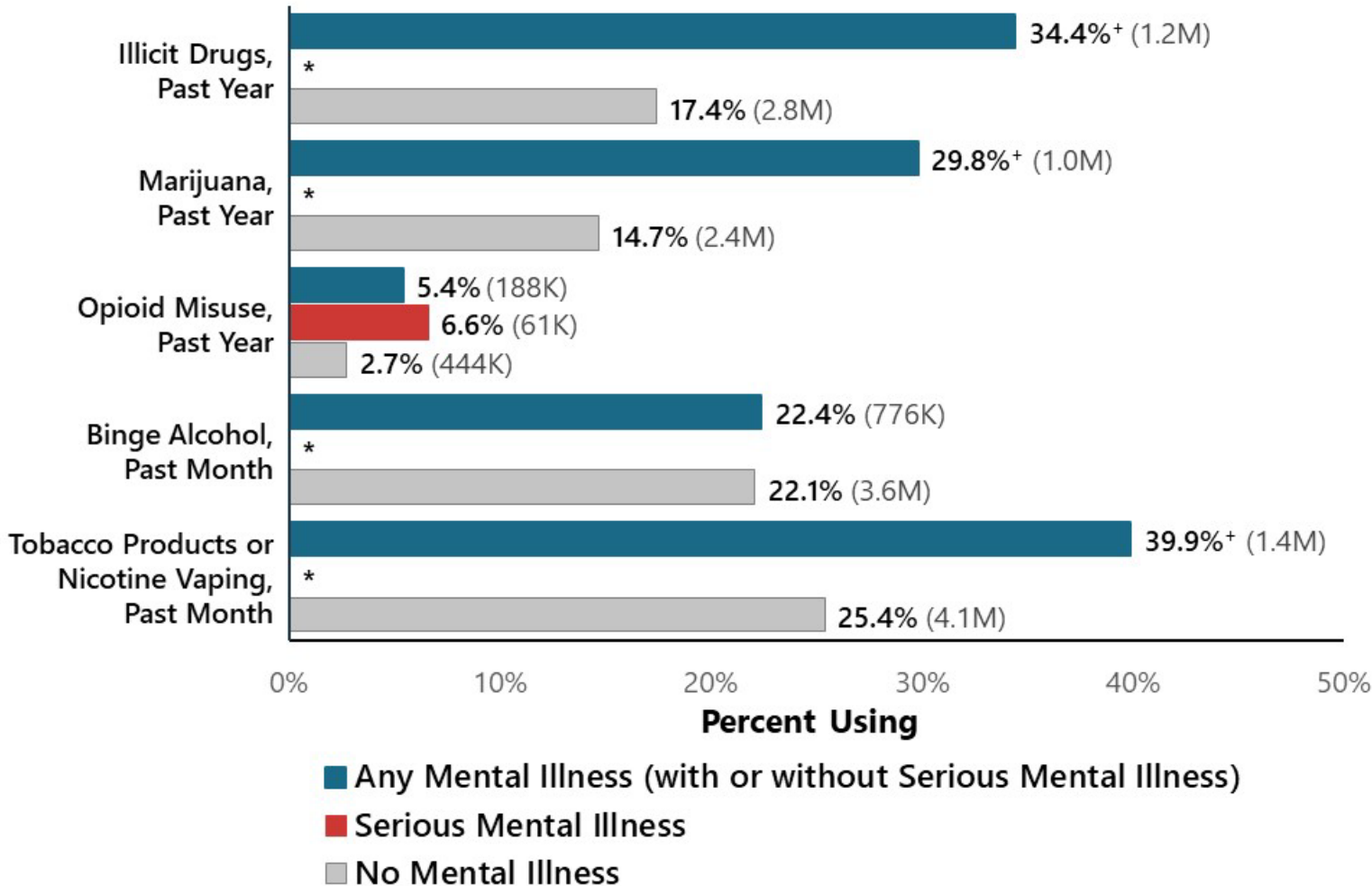
# Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder and Mental Illness: Among Adults Aged 18 or Older

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



- **1.0 million (5.3%)** Veterans aged 18 or older had **co-occurring SUD and AMI**
- About half (**51.3%**) of all Veterans aged **18 to 25** had **SUD or AMI**

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



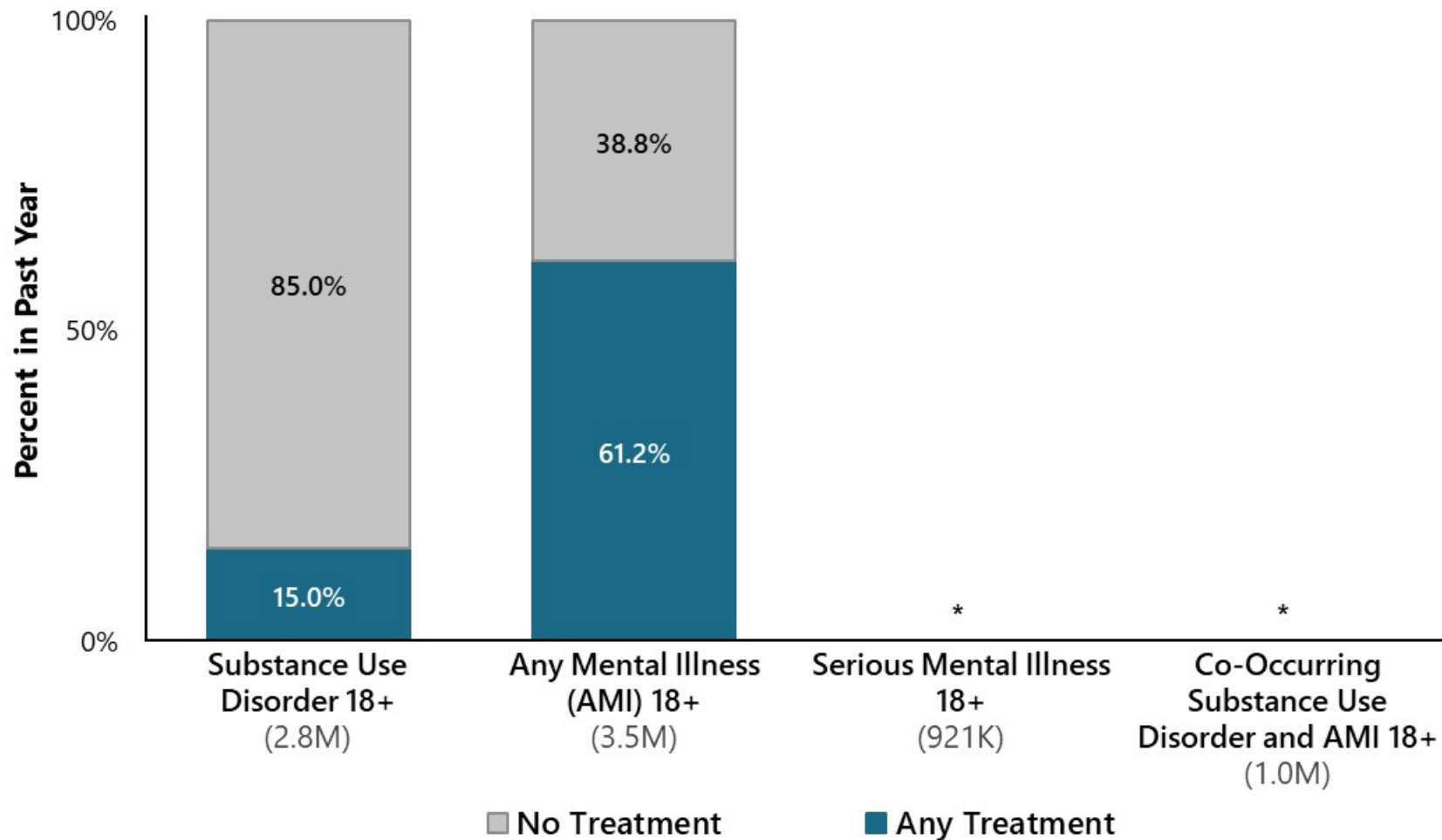
- Compared to Veterans without mental illness, Veterans with AMI were **more likely** to have:
  - Used illicit drugs in the past year
  - Used marijuana in the past year
  - Used tobacco products or vaped nicotine in the past month

\* 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.

# Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment or Mental Health Treatment in the Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



\* Low precision; no estimate reported.

# Recovery: Among Veterans Aged 18 or Older



- **4 in 5** (79.3%) Veterans who thought they ever had a **substance use problem** considered themselves to be **recovering or in recovery**



- **2 in 3** (67.6%) Veterans who thought they ever had a **mental health issue** considered themselves to be **recovering or in recovery**