

Student Veterans Seek Mental Health Care More Often

Student veterans are reportedly obtaining mental health care at higher rates than the total veteran population, according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report

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In a report released in February, the Government Accounting Agency (GAO) said that student veterans who are receiving mental health care at VA facilities increased more rapidly than the overall veteran population. However, the GAO claims more work needs to be done to bring VA services to more veterans.

VA provides mental health care to veterans for conditions such as depression and substance use disorders.

The GAO analyzed student veterans from fiscal years 2017 to 2022. The agency added that most treatments for student veterans were for depression, post-traumatic stress and anxiety-related disorders. Veterans under the age of 34 were more likely to seek mental health care, according to the GAO.

The report also added that the COVID-19 pandemic “exacerbated mental health conditions for the general population,” including veterans.

“Mental health conditions are a persistent and growing issue for veterans,” the GAO said. “Student veterans can face unique challenges, including adjusting to the lack of structure in school and balancing multiple responsibilities, that may negatively affect their mental health.”

According to the report, about 261,000 student veterans received health care at VA in fiscal year 2022. Of those, about 70 percent of them received mental health care.

“In contrast, about 5,967,000 veterans received health care at a VA facility, and 40 percent

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of them received care related to a mental health condition,” according to the GAO.

The VA has reported that younger veterans seek mental health care at a higher rate than older veterans. The report noted that more than 96 percent of student veterans are younger than 34.

In its research, the GAO found that VA does not adequately communicate comprehensive information to its health care systems regarding the program, such as guidance on when and how to implement it and the necessary staffing requirements.

“Instead, VA communicates information about the program upon request,” the GAO stated. “By more regularly communicating comprehensive information across its health care systems, such as through guidance, VA could help ensure its systems all have the information they need to consider participating in the program.

“This, in turn,” the GAO continued, “would help ensure VA’s ability to support the mental health needs of its student veteran population.”

VFW National Veterans Service Director Michael Figlioli said now that more people are aware of their earned benefits, especially amongst veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and associated operations, it makes sense that this particular demographic is more likely to use VA healthcare benefits, not just for routine concerns but for mental health counseling as well.

“We have long advocated to remove the stigma associated with mental health diseases,” Figlioli said. “VFW views this as a positive and we will continue to work with VA to make sure that there are enough providers for those that seek treatment. We encourage anyone who may need assistance in accessing mental health care or other earned benefits to contact an accredited VFW Accredited Service Officer who is happy to help free of charge.” Find one at www.vfw.org/service-officers.

VFW also offers help to students through the VFW “Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship,” which provides qualified student veterans with up to \$5,000 in grant money. Applications to apply for the Spring 2025 semester are accepted from Aug. 1 to Nov. 15. Learn more about the the program at www.vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support.