

CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS: SERVING ON THE HOMEFRONT

Key Findings

Caregiving for Veterans Is a Woman's Issue

Compared to all caregivers, caregivers of veterans are overwhelmingly women.

- Nine in 10 (96 percent) of caregivers of veterans are women, and 70 percent provide care to their spouse or partner. By contrast, 65 percent of national family caregivers are women and only 6 percent provide care to their spouse or partner.*

Caregiving for a veteran, especially with PTSD or TBI, places a strain on the entire family.

- Among the 30 percent who have children under the age of 18 living at home, nearly 70 percent report having spent less time with their children than they would like.
- Further, 57 percent of these caregivers report that their children or grandchildren had emotional or school problems as a result of their caregiving or the veteran's condition.
- Of those who are currently married, separated or divorced, nearly three-quarters say caregiving or the veteran's condition placed a strain on their marriage.

Caregivers of Veterans Bear Greater Burden of Care

Caregivers of veterans bear a heavier burden, for a considerably longer period of time than the typical family caregiver.

	Caregivers of Veterans	Caregivers Nationally*
Caregiver for 10 years or more	30%	15%
Caregiver for one year or less	8%	38%
In high-burden situation	65%	31%
Consider their situation highly stressful	68%	31%
Have a high degree of physical strain associated with caregiver role	40%	14%

**National caregiver statistical comparisons are from "Caregiving in the U.S." (2009, NAC in collaboration with AARP) and they reflect the subset of caregivers who provide care to an adult age 18 or older.*

These veterans suffer more frequently from conditions such as PTSD, TBI, depression or anxiety.

- 70 percent of caregivers reported that their veteran experiences depression or anxiety, and 60 percent report post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compared to only 28 percent of caregivers nationally whose care recipients suffer from mental or emotional health problems.
- Other top conditions these veterans suffer from include traumatic brain injury (TBI) (29 percent), diabetes (28 percent) and paralysis or spinal cord injury (20 percent).

Caregivers of Veterans Sacrifice, But Are proud to Serve

Like other family caregivers, caregivers of veterans' own health is widely impacted by their caregiving role.

- 88 percent feel increased stress or anxiety as a result of caregiving, and 77 percent report sleep deprivation.
- A majority of caregivers of veterans report declines in their own healthy behaviors, such as exercising (69 percent), good eating habits (56 percent) and going to one's own doctor and dentist appointments on schedule (58 percent). Similar proportions have weight gain/loss (66 percent) or experience depression (63 percent).

Caring for their veteran is a full-time job, often to the detriment of the caregivers' own employment and financial stability. Of the 68 percent who were employed while caregiving, nearly half had to take early retirement or stop working entirely. Sixty-two percent had to cut back on hours in their regular work hours.

	Caregivers of Veterans	Caregivers Nationally*
Provide more than 40 hours of care per week	43%	15%
Stopped working entirely or took early retirement (of those employed)	47%	9%
Feel they have a high degree of financial hardship	50%	13%

**National caregiver statistical comparisons are from "Caregiving in the U.S." (2009, NAC in collaboration with AARP) and they reflect the subset of caregivers who provide care to an adult age 18 or older.*

Caregivers of veterans are overwhelmingly proud of the service they provide to their loved one.

- Two-thirds feel they are the only person who can provide adequate care for their veteran.
- Only one-third has received help from paid caregivers.
- At the same time, 94 percent feel proud of the support they provide, 78 percent feel a sense of reward from having gained knowledge and skills through caregiving, and 67 percent find caregiving to be fulfilling.

Caregivers of Veterans Use Word of Mouth, Online Forums for Information and Support

Caregivers turn most often to word-of-mouth for information and support.

- Caregivers most often depend on word-of-mouth for information on caregiver resources and information (70 percent), which 63 percent find helpful.
- Two-thirds of the caregivers of veterans who had a care manager say that a care manager has been helpful locating, arranging and coordinating care and resources for the veteran (65 percent). A smaller portion (43 percent) feel the care manager has been helpful finding support for the caregiver her/himself.
- Online forums, groups or blogs are rated as helpful (74 percent) by the 48 percent of caregivers of veterans who turn to them. Caregivers taking care of younger veterans are more likely to turn to online forums, the D.O.D. military system, and Military OneSource, whereas those caring for an older veteran are more likely to turn to local government or community organizations.
- Other sources of information rated as particularly helpful include disease-specific organizations and in-person support groups.