



VA research on **VIETNAM VETERANS**

Vietnam Veterans are largest cohort of American Veterans in terms of service era. While most Vietnam Veterans successfully readjusted to postwar life, a substantial minority have coped with a range of psychological and adjustment problems.

ABOUT VIETNAM VETERANS

- According to Congress, the United States' military involvement in the Vietnam War began in February 1961 and lasted until May 1975. Some 2.7 million American men and women served in Vietnam. During the war, more than 58,000 servicemen and women lost their lives.
- During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military used more than 19 million gallons of various herbicides for defoliation and crop destruction in the Republic of Vietnam. Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime during the period beginning Jan. 9, 1962, and ending May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides.
- VA established an [Agent Orange Registry](#) to study the health effects associated with exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange. Veterans who served in Vietnam, or in other areas throughout the world where herbicide was sprayed, who are interested in participating in an Agent Orange Registry health exam should speak to the environmental health coordinator or patient care advocate at their local VA medical center.
- Congress established VA's [Vet Center](#) program in 1979, after recognizing that a significant number of Vietnam veterans were still experiencing readjustment

problems. Today, the Vet Center program provides a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to Vietnam Veterans, and to Veterans of other periods of armed hostilities after the Vietnam era.

VA RESEARCH ON VIETNAM VETERANS: OVERVIEW

- VA researchers have long recognized the importance of gathering reliable and generalizable information on Vietnam Veterans and those who served during the Vietnam era, in order to inform health care policies and practices. Investigators have carried out many studies of this kind, focusing on Vietnam Veterans' health and well-being. These studies include mental and physical health outcomes among both women and men.
- In 1983, VA collaborated with an external entity, the Research Triangle Institute, to conduct the [National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study](#) (NVVRS). Study researchers concluded that, across more than 100 indexes, the majority of Vietnam Veterans appeared to have successfully readjusted to postwar life, and the majority at the time of the study were experiencing few symptoms of psychological disorders.
- The NVVRS also revealed that a substantial minority of Vietnam-era Veterans were suffering from a variety

of psychological problems such as PTSD, and were experiencing a wide range of life-adjustment problems, such as marital trouble and work difficulties.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

- 1986** – Launched the [Vietnam Era Twin Registry](#)
- 1988** – Completed the [National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study](#)
- 1991** – [Established](#) that, in Vietnam Veterans, there does not appear to be a causal relation between homelessness and military service, including exposure to combat
- 2009** – Initiated the largest health [study](#) ever of Vietnam-era women Veterans (CSP #579)
- 2014** – [Found](#) that Vietnam Veterans with PTSD have diminished health functioning and increased disability today, compared with those who did not develop PTSD
- 2016** – Launched the [Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study](#) (VE-HEROeS), a large-scale nationwide study to assess the health and well-being of Vietnam-era Veterans, and compare their health to that of their counterparts who did not serve in the military.

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RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

• **Veterans exposed to Agent Orange are not only at higher risk for prostate cancer than other Veterans, but are more likely to have aggressive forms of the disease.** A study by Portland VA Health Care System researchers was based on the records of 2,720 VA patients who had undergone an initial prostate biopsy. Prostate cancer was diagnosed in a third of the Veterans. The chance of finding cancer was 52 percent higher in those whose records indicated Agent Orange exposure. Exposure to Agent Orange raised the risk of high-grade versions of the disease by 75 percent. ([Cancer](#), July 1, 2013)

• **The rate of non-melanoma invasive skin cancer among a sample of men who joined the Agent Orange registry was about twice as high as among men of the same age** in the general population, according to investigators at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center and the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. The rate among the registry sample was 52 percent, with the risk reaching 73 percent among Veterans involved in spraying Agent Orange. The researchers found no increase of malignant melanoma, the most dangerous type of skin cancer. ([Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery](#), February 2014)

• **Women Vietnam-era Veterans had a lower risk of death from all causes combined** and from diabetes, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diseases of the nervous system, compared with other American women of their age. Data for this study came from The [HealthVIEWS: Health of Vietnam Era Women's Study](#), conducted by VA's Cooperative Study Program (CSP #579), which is a study of approximately 10,000 women who served in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. ([American Journal of Epidemiology](#), March 15, 2014)

• **Vietnam Veterans with PTSD have diminished health functioning and increased disability today compared with those who did not develop PTSD**, according to researchers from VA's Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center. The same was true for Veterans who saw combat, compared with those who did not. Data for the study came from VA's [Vietnam Era Twin Registry](#), consisting of approximately 7,000 identical and fraternal male twin pairs, both of whom served in the military during Vietnam. ([Quality of Life Research](#), June 2014)

• **More than 20 percent of women Veterans who served in Vietnam developed PTSD either during or after their service.** By contrast, 11.5 percent of those who served near

Vietnam, and 14.1 percent of those who served in the United States, have developed PTSD at some time during their lives. According to data from VA's HealthVIEWS study, the prevalence of PTSD for women who served in Vietnam was higher than previously documented, and Vietnam service significantly increased the chances of developing PTSD relative to service in the United States. ([JAMA Psychiatry](#), November 2015)

• **As they age, many combat Veterans confront and rework their wartime memories in an effort to find meaning and build coherence**, investigators with VA's National Center for PTSD have found. Through reminiscence, life review, and wrestling with issues such as integrity versus despair, they intentionally re-engage with experiences they avoided or managed successfully earlier in their lives. While some Veterans can navigate this process alone or with their friends, others may benefit from support groups even if a half-century has passed since their combat experience. ([Gerontologist](#), February 2016)

For more information on VA studies on Vietnam Veterans and other key topics relating to Veterans' health, please visit www.research.va.gov/topics

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