



CONNECTING VETERANS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

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# HEALTH RANKS TOP CONCERNS FOR VETERANS

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*. "It's about how we treat our veterans every single day of the year. It's about making sure they have the care they need and the benefits that they've earned when they come home. It's about serving all of you as well as you've served the United States of America."  
-- Barack Obama*

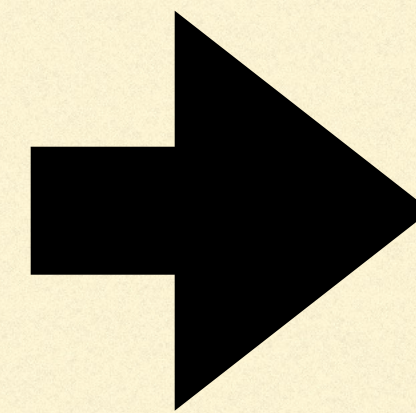
- More than 200,000 U.S. service members transition out of military service each year.
- Health concerns outweigh work or social relationships.
- Veterans greatest challenge is with chronic physical and mental health conditions.
- Studies show that three and nine months after leaving the military, 53% of veterans surveyed reported chronic mental health conditions at both time points and 33% reported chronic mental health conditions. Women were more likely to address mental health conditions at nine months and they more often faced depression and anxiety at both timepoints.



*"PTSD made me feel like I was drowning. The day I realized I needed help was the day I almost took my own life. If WWP hadn't been there when I finally decided to get help, I don't think I'd still be alive today."*

*–Chris Hoff, Wounded Warrior*

In 2022, WWP surveyed 165,967 registered wounded warriors. Significant findings included 94 percent of post 9/11 veterans experienced severe physical injuries, 91 percent have severe mental health conditions, and nearly a third need aid and attendance for everyday activities,



- Mental Health
  - 76% PTSD
  - 50% Co-occurring mental health conditions
  - 1 in 4 suicidal thoughts in the last year
- Physical Health
  - 76% Chronic pain
  - 80% Sleep deprivation
- Financial Health
  - 6,8% Unemployment
  - 3 in 5 struggle to make ends meet
- Social Connection
  - 4 in 5 feel isolate
- Spiritual Health
  - 35% have more appreciation of life
  - 4.8 Average resilience score out of 8

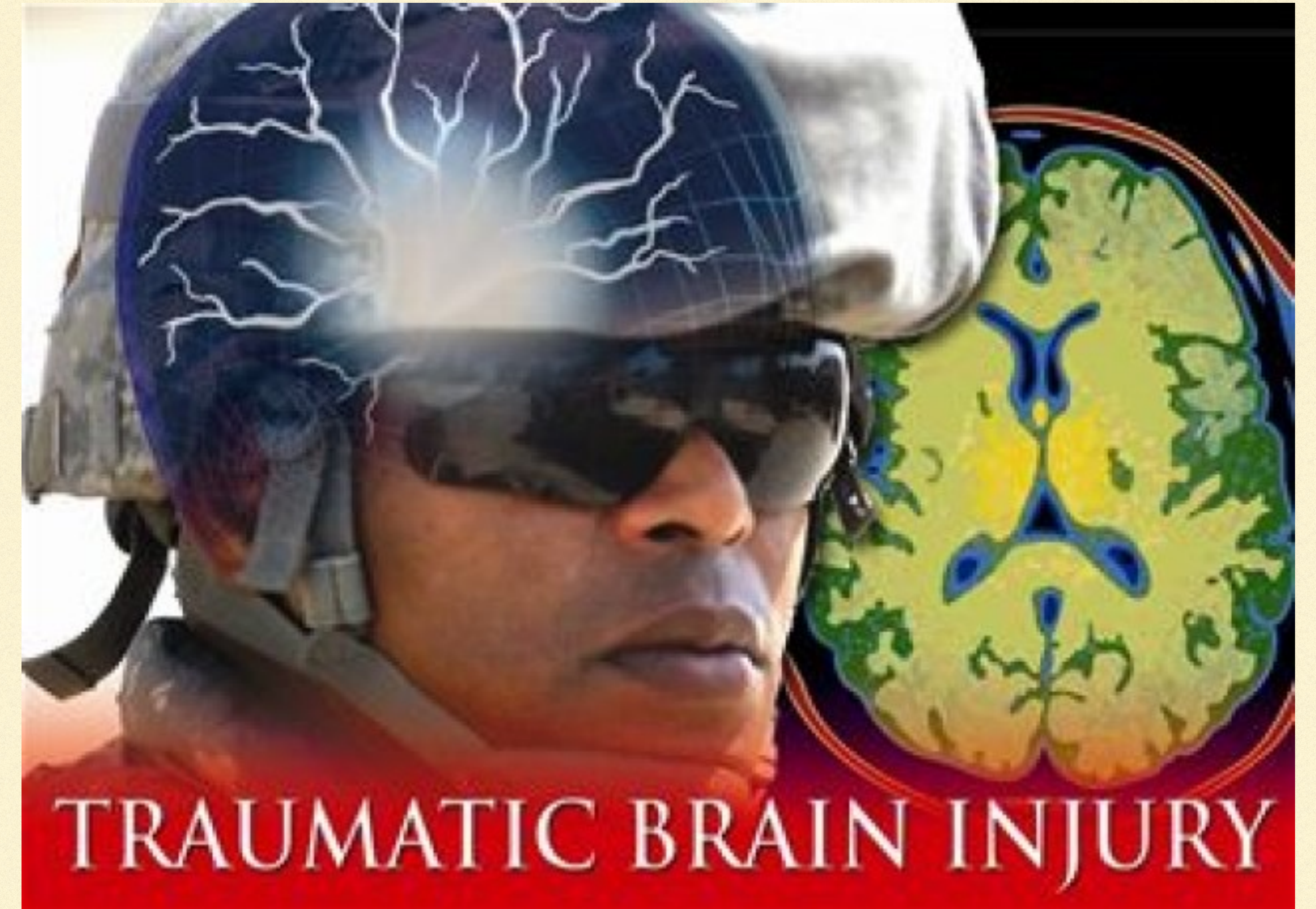


# TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)

- TBI is the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Veterans experience long-term complications and disability from TBI, in addition to comorbid mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die from TBI complications compared to civilians.





# TOBACCO USE AMONG VETERANS

- Smokers are more likely than nonsmokers to develop heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer.

Women Veterans who smoke are at a high risk for additional health effects from smoking, such as infertility, osteoporosis, breast cancer, and cervical cancer.

Most young smokers start smoking prior to age 18, yet many Veterans began smoking during their military service.

VA's Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Use of Health Care, found 55.5% of Veterans had smoked at some point and 12.9% of VA enrollees are current smokers.

58.3% of Veterans who currently smoke attempted to quit in the previous 12 months and 71.4% of all VA enrollees who have ever smoked have quit successfully.





# VETERAN SUICIDE

- In 2020, suicide was the 13th leading cause of death among Veterans overall, and it was the second leading cause of death among Veterans under age 45.

In 2020, there were 6,146 Veteran suicide deaths, which was 343 fewer than in 2019. The unadjusted rate of suicide in 2020 among U.S. Veterans was 31.7 per 100,000.

By 2020 end, COVID-19 was the 3rd leading cause of death in the United States, both overall and for Veterans. Despite the pandemic, the Veteran suicide rate in 2020 continued a decline that began in 2019.

Delaware 2020 total veteran suicides was 22 of 121 total suicide deaths in its overall population

Delaware 2020 veteran suicide rate was not significantly different than the national veterans on general population suicide rate





# WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH

- There are more than 2 million women Veterans in the United States today

Women are the fastest growing among veterans with 4% in 2000 and 18% by 2040,

Reportedly nearly 870,000 women and gender-diverse Veterans enrolled in care at VHA medical facilities in fiscal year 2021.

43% of the women who used VHA health services in FY20 belonged to a racial or ethnic minority group.

Over 120,000 women/gender-diverse Veterans are at risk for an unintended pregnancy,.

One in five women in the military report experiencing sexual trauma while serving their country (as opposed to one in 100 men).

“I think when you talk about men in the military, it’s easy to deal with it in isolation...men doing men stuff...running around with their guns... it’s hard core and cool. When you talk about women in the military you have to look at how the military touches our society...it speaks to us as a culture, a society and a Nation.”

*Journey to Normal  
documentary participant*





# SEXUAL MINORITY VETERANS

- Sexual minority Veterans are likelier to screen positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse

Approximately 66% of sexual minority Veterans who responded to the SHEP survey are 65 years of age or older.

Approximately 34% of sexual minority Veterans self-reported their sexual orientation as “other”.

Sexual minority Veterans reported more problems across multiple measures of person centered care, access to care, and care coordination.

Sexual minority Veterans tend to report poorer mental or emotional health.





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# EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHY EQUITY

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- **Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act**

- Allows Veterans who are unable to schedule an appointment within 30 days of their preferred date or the clinically appropriate date, or on the basis of their place of residence to elect to receive care from eligible non-VA health care entities or providers

- **COMPACT Act**

- Implements programs, policies, and reports related to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) transition assistance, suicide care, mental health education and treatment, health care, and women veteran care.

- **Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act**

- Expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substance such,

- **Governors' Challenge**

- The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA) partnered with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to continue the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families.
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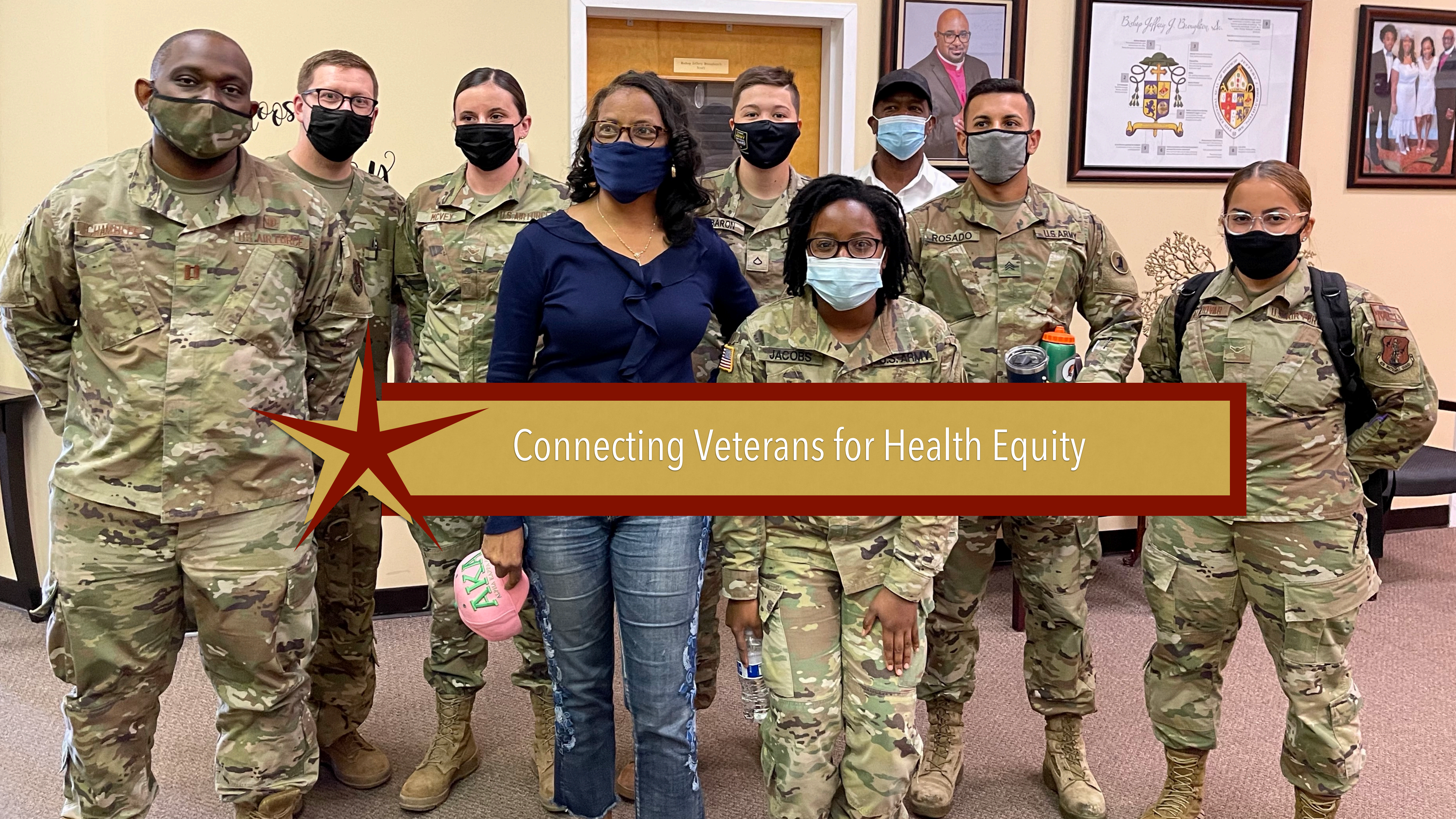
# FURTHER ACCESS TO HEALTH EQUITY

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- Mobile Apps
  - Enhance and expand access to TBI assessment of Veterans residing in rural areas
  - LGBTQ+ Health Postdoctoral Fellowship program.
  - Collect data in electronic health records on Veteran's sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as name-to-use and gender pronouns.
  - Expand access to oral contraceptives from 3 months to 12 months which could prevent 583 unintended pregnancies each year
- National Center for Veteran Financial Empowerment
- Implementation of Primary Care—Mental Health Integrated Collaborative Care Management and Behavioral Health
- Interdisciplinary Program Mental Health Care Coordination
- Integration of Mental Health into Pain Clinics
- Integration of Mental Health into Oncology Clinics
- Short-term evidence-based PTSD treatments in residential care settings

“What is now proved, was  
once only imagined.”  
William Blake





Connecting Veterans for Health Equity