

MySay April 2025 Veterans' Health Survey Results

Background

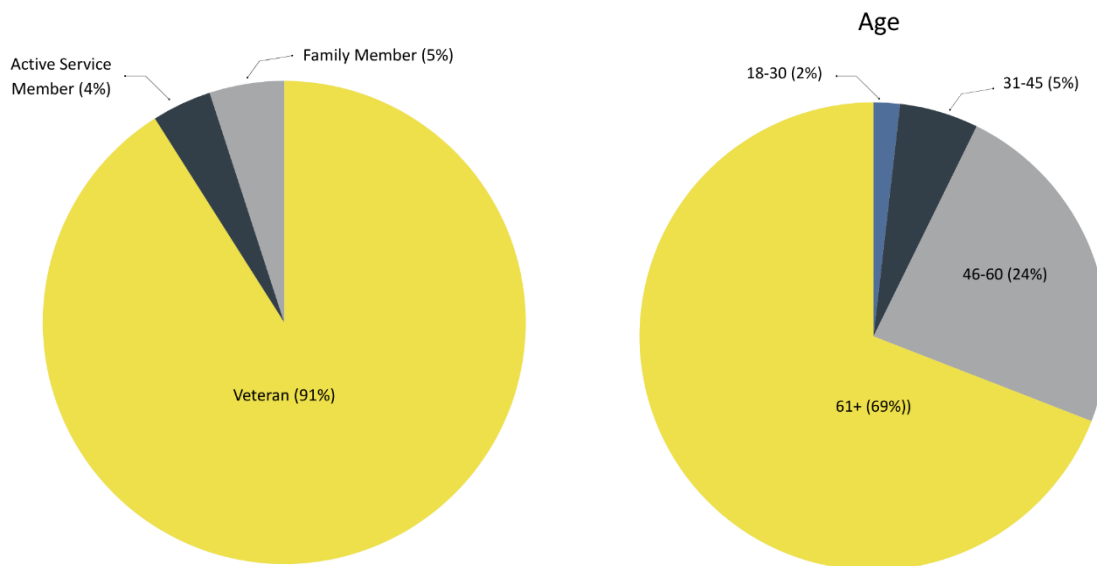
Veterans face unique physical and mental health challenges due to their exposure to combat and hazardous materials. These experiences can result in physical injuries and psychological conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), affecting not only the veterans and active service members but also their families. To ensure they receive the adequate support they need, it is crucial to identify and address any current gaps in the health system. In April 2025, we asked veterans, active service members and families to provide feedback on their experiences with the ACT primary health care system.

Results summary

Thank you to everyone who took part in the MySay Veterans' Health Survey in April 2025 to better understand what is working well, and what can be improved in the ACT primary health care system.

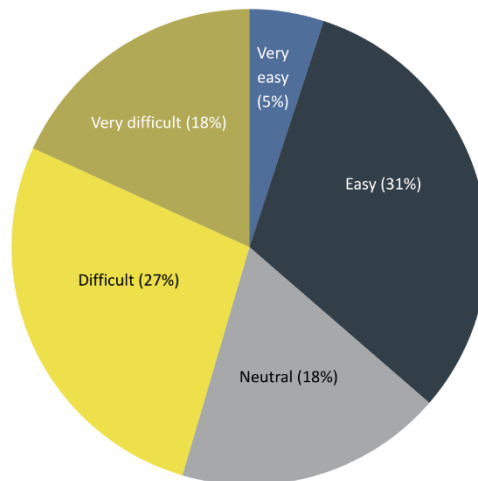
The responses have provided valuable insights into the challenges veterans face and highlight key areas where improvements can be made.

We had 55 people take part in our survey. The vast majority were veterans, with a few currently serving in the military and a small number who were family members of either group. Most of our respondents were older adults— with nearly 7 in 10 aged 61 or above.



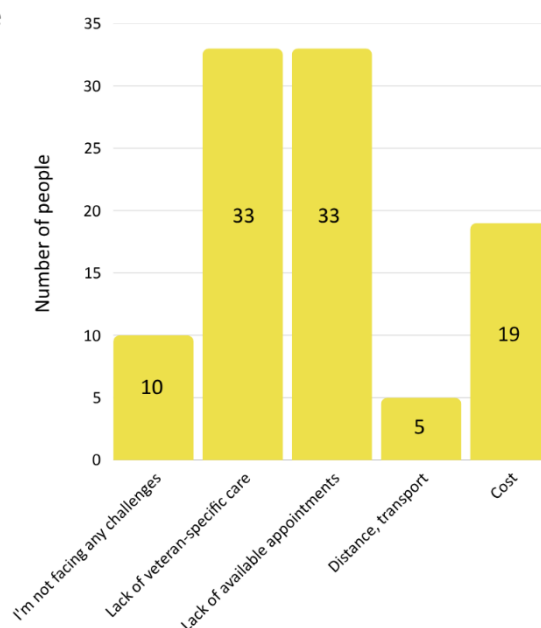
Notably, 36% of participants expressed concerns about future medical care, and while everyone reported visiting a general practice in the past year, nearly half found access to health care difficult or very difficult. Only around one third found access easy or very easy.

How easy is it for you to access health care services in the ACT when needed?



Participants highlighted several major obstacles to accessing care. Many felt that services tailored specifically for veterans were lacking, and that overall availability of support was limited. Cost was also a significant concern for a notable portion of respondents.

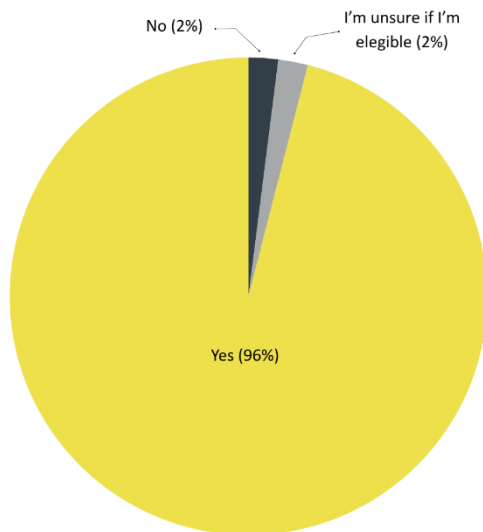
What are some of the barriers for you (or relatives) to access health care?



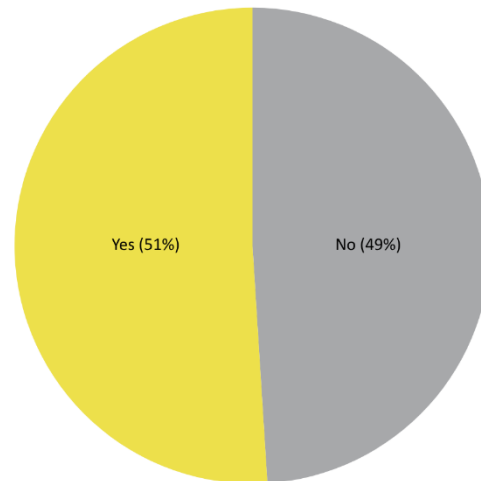
While the majority of respondents have a DVA card, many experience issues with accessibility and continuity of care, with around half of the respondents reporting difficulties finding GPs who accept their DVA card (mainly gold and white cards). Just over half of respondents were unaware of existing

programs or services designed specifically for veterans in the ACT, pointing to a need for improved communication about available services.

If eligible, do you have a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) health card?

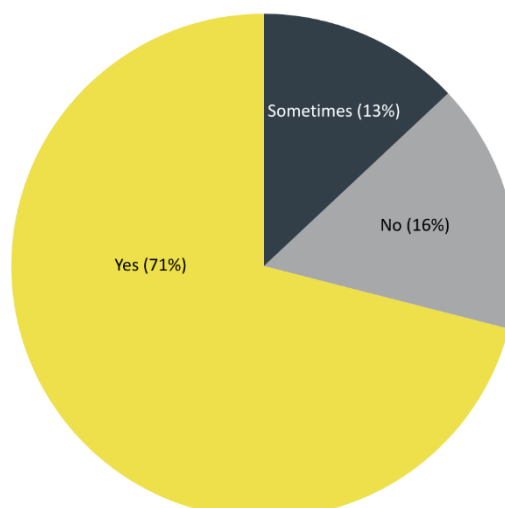


Have you had difficulty finding GPs who will accept your DVA cards in the ACT?



Mental health remains a critical area of concern with 16% of respondents saying they do not feel comfortable discussing mental health concerns with their GPs, and 13% saying that they only sometimes feel comfortable. While some of the most common health services accessed by respondents were psychologists and psychiatrists and other mental health care services, a significant number of respondents said they need better mental health support. This includes more available services, and more appropriate diagnoses, continuity of care and comprehensive plans to improve ongoing health management.

Do you feel comfortable discussing mental health concerns with your health provider?



Positive health care experiences were often linked to health professionals who understood veteran needs, particularly those with a service background themselves. This led to many suggesting the need for a veteran-specific clinic and a centralised resource that includes all those health services and supports that can be accessed by veterans and their families. In addition, there were suggestions

to have more activities and safe spaces where they can connect with other veterans and members of the community.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of comprehensive care that includes family support and more coordinated care. Many participants also advocated for having a workforce that is better trained to effectively and efficiently provide care to veterans and families.

What CHN will do with this information

CHN will share the survey findings with the Department of Veterans' Affairs and health organisations in the ACT that may help inform policies and procedures that improve health outcomes for our veterans. CHN will also highlight the Coordinated Veterans Care Program in communications and a general practice education event to be held later in 2025.

Veteran-specific care

Many respondents emphasised the need for veteran-specific health care support, highlighting the unique physical and mental health challenges that veterans experience due to combat exposure. They described positive experiences with GPs or health care professionals who were either former service members or well-informed about veterans' needs.

"I have a GP who is ex defence and has been able to provide me with empathy and shared frustration regarding the processes DVA expects"

"My Podiatrist is a young ex-army chap who is very supportive and dedicated to the treatment of veterans"

"When I retired from active service life in my late 60s, and from full-time work life in my mid-70s, I was concerned about entering into retirement, particularly being isolated from former comrades and disciplined lifestyle. (My GP) gave me good advice which I have put into practice and I am now enjoying my new life"

"Lack of understanding of particular problems that are unique to ex-service in military life"

"Our GP and physio are both military experienced as either former serving members or as spouses of serving or ex members. When using specialists, we tried to use the same specialists as those my spouse was referred to when in the regular military. Again, because these specialists understood the quirkiness of military members. By doing this, we have found that the health care service experience is far better"

"Help us make connections with other people. I'm medically retired, I am smart and interesting, but most people my age are still working. It's super lonely. I don't want to join groups for mentally ill or cognitively delayed people but there is not much else available during school hours"

"A clinic with a team of professionals who can provide whole of person medical treatment. This should include Physiotherapists, Psychologists, exercise Physiologists"

"The hospital in the home care at The Canberra Hospital was clearly well briefed on DVA Gold Card entitlements and were forward leaning in their advice during my stay"

Health care accessibility

Many veterans and family members expressed that they have experienced several challenges when trying to access health care. This includes a lack of veterans' specific care, a lack of available appointments and the high cost of care. These prolonged waiting times not only affect the ability of many to get adequate and timely support, but also cause an additional burden as they have to liaise with different organisations and services to get the care they need.

Challenges:

"Treatments like physiotherapy-directed hydrotherapy are too difficult to access due to limited locations, the distance and times offered. I had a prescribed program to do on my own. I did this successfully. I had to pay for equipment and to public pool access"

"Ability to find doctors willing to treat Gold Card holders within a reasonable timeframe and to high quality care"

"I've had no trouble to date with respect to accessing health care when needed"

"I often have to prioritise medical with food and housing"

"Easy only if I decide to use a practitioner not familiar with DVA or contemporary veteran issues"

"Injuries and conditions accepted in 2002 have only just been put on my White Card - an oversight by DVA I think. I have been without treatment for over 20 years when I (should) have been entitled to care and support"

"My Dr refuses my DVA card for most visits"

"The cost of medical, the gap between private health insurance payouts and the actual cost of medical treatment, and the time between diagnosis and treatment"

"Lack of understanding of particular problems that are unique to ex-service in military life"

"Lack of bulk billing is a major impediment"

"Just finding a provider was extremely difficult. Generally, most providers I rang were already fully booked out and it was a huge struggle to get through to someone"

"Normal planned appointment is ok but when you hurt yourself it is not a quick task to see a physio or doctor"

"My GP is awesome, I just have to wait weeks to see him and there's no alternative GP accepting my white card in Canberra"

"It is extremely difficult finding health care providers who are willing to treat someone with a DVA card. It would be excellent if services had to be explicit about whether or not DVA card were accepted at their practice. At least that way you know what you are in for financially"

Communication

Many respondents reported lack of good communication as a barrier to adequate support. This hindered fully “opening up” to their health care providers. However, there were also many positive comments around good experiences with health services, where needs have been properly understood.

Comments:

“Lack of comprehensive mental health diagnosis. This leads to years of failed and expensive mis-diagnosis and treatment”

“I was referred to a geriatrician who was offensive and veteran-unfriendly in the extreme. He had little to add here”

“Greater information especially targeting recently discharged veterans would help as the transition cell within ADF is not very helpful. The vast majority of information I have gained is through personal inquiry or provided by my advocate I feel the ADF is failing it's members in this regard”

“At the moment, my husband has severe PTSD and is sick of having to explain his symptoms over and over again. The lack of continuity of care and the lack of interaction between medical professionals in complex medical situations and also causes issues.

“Very easy to communicate with GP and he has an understanding of Veterans and their issues”

“Lack of understanding of particular problems that are unique to ex-service in military life”

“My doctor is a former military officer who is both sympathetic to the needs of DVA clients (and especially not prescribing interventions which are unnecessary) and capable of speaking our language”

“Easy only if I decide to use a practitioner not familiar with DVA or contemporary veteran issues

“Drs, Dentists, Physios, Eyecare and Hearing who will take a DVA Gold Card don't generally advertise the fact”

Additional supports and mental health care

While many people said they can find GP services easily, finding additional specialist support was often difficult. In particular, many people expressed the need for more mental health support, with some of the most common health supports sought by veterans (besides GPs) being psychiatrists, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Comments:

"There is something seriously wrong though when you struggle to find a provider that is not taking any more clients for mental health and it is already a recognised issue"

"There are insufficient medical resources available to active services members currently. An active service member shouldn't have to wait several months to see specialists and mental health doctors"

"I have extremely severe mental health (issues) and have been unable to find suitable psychological and psychiatric services on a weekly basis in the ACT for over 12 months. This is appalling"

"There is a severe lack of certain types of mental health care professionals. Often, they only deal with a few conditions but not all. This makes proper diagnosis almost impossible, and treatment often exacerbates underlying conditions"

"Due to GP movements and availability, I have had multiple GPs assess my health needs over the past 2 years. It is therefore difficult to establish a relationship for discussion around mental health"

"While I have made positive strides, it has taken approximately 20 years to be able to find someone who can treat me. I do not recommend this pathway. Because of the complete lack of assistance from DVA, in fact they threw up many barriers, suicide became a very real option"

"Please help us find connections by organising more free things to keep us in a good space, feeling less alone and help us reconnect. It'll stop the suicides"

Family support

It was clear throughout the survey that families need more information and support to help them understand some of the physical and mental health issues that a veteran in their household might be experiencing, and how to give them support. Additionally, it was highlighted that families are also likely to see their health affected due to the circumstances experienced by the veterans in their houses.

Comments:

"Need help setting up my home so that I can better live independently from aged care. Also, any support for my wife who does not understand PTSD and mental health issues has been very difficult to talk to her"

"Better care and income for spouses or partners as they also need to be cared for. My wife does a lot for me and only gets a state carers pension which is about \$140 per fortnight"

"Children of veterans should receive free mental health care as they have no choices in families and it leaves lasting impacts (often not considered at the time)"

"There is a severe lack of certain types of mental health care professionals. Often, they only deal with a few conditions but not all. This makes proper diagnosis almost impossible, and treatment often exacerbates underlying conditions"

"What you probably should have asked is am I aware of any programs or services specifically designed to support and assist a veteran's immediate family. The answer to that question is no, and the ones that I have seen look mostly like veteran-based products slightly changed to be for families, which defeats the purpose. If you are family of a veteran, you are effectively on your own"

"The military 'baggage' has a direct impact on the immediate family. And the more 'damaged' the veteran (physically, mentally and/or emotionally) the bigger the impact. When looking at care options, you need to think about what that option means for the family as well as the veteran. For example, do our public and private hospitals have a Veteran Support Officer - someone who understands the nightmare that is DVA processes and paperwork, understands the quirks of veterans as patients and can support the family and connect the family to outside services that accept DVA cards and/or are willing to service veterans?"

"Families actually need to be proactively and directly supported through the military discharge process. There is a big fat nothing in this space which means you are left dealing with the veteran's mental health through a cataclysmic change in their life and supporting your kids and extended family through it. It is astonishing to watch so many military members discharge, try civilian land and end up back in the Reserves which is within their comfort zone and means they really haven't 'left' the military"

Streamlining processes

Participants would like a centralised service that veterans can go to, that not only links them with health professionals, but also the services that DVA and other veteran services offer. Similarly, participants made suggestions to create a register of GPs and health care services who provide veteran-specific care. There were also recommendations for practices to explicitly describe whether their workforce has knowledge and experience in dealing with issues faced by veterans.

Recommendations:

"An up-to-date list of specialists that accept White + Gold card patients"

"DVA should be providing names of providers who are prepared to help. You need to be able to start somewhere"

"A centralised service that veterans can go to that not only links with professionals but also all of the services that DVA and Open Arms offer"

"A register of GPs, dentists, Exercise Physiologists, physios, Hearing people, optometrists, podiatrist and specialists who will accept Gold Cards"

"Some point of contact to contact for advice or advocacy when confronting a provider that does not accept Gold Card or understand how system works"