WHO ARE VETERANS?

- Veterans include anyone who has served or currently serves in the military, regardless of whether he or she saw combat.
- Branches of service: U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Reserves.
- Total U.S. Veteran population: 22,328,000
- Massachusetts: Veterans comprise 6.2% of the state population.
- Worcester: Veterans comprise 7.1% of the city population.
- Veterans serve in many different capacities.
- Any one could be a veteran. Never make assumptions.
- 10% of veterans are female.
- 70% of male veterans are 65 years old.
- There are 1,420,953 active members, with an additional 884,880 serving in Reserve component.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE: EQUAL PLAYERS AT THE TABLE

75% of veterans do not receive their care at the VA.

Why Ask About Veteran Status

- Veterans comprise 7% of the total U.S. population.
- 75% of veterans seek care in the private healthcare setting.
- Veterans have unique medical needs due to unique exposures.

High Risk for Suicide:

- 22 deaths every day are veteran suicides.
- 50 veterans attempt suicide each month.
- More veterans die from suicide than in service related combat.
- Suicide rates are highest among those never deployed and those one year post-deployment.

Elevated risk for Substance Abuse Disorders:

- Untreated substance abuse among veterans may be as high as 55%.
- Alcohol is the primary substance of abuse accounting for 20%.
- Veterans substance abuse admissions to the ER.

High Incidence of HIV:

- The among veterans is much higher than among civilians.
- Over 5% of veterans that did not occur in the deployed setting.

Incidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

- Vietnam veterans: 20.8% of men, 26.9% of women.
- Korean war veterans: 10.1%.
- Desert Storm/vietnam veterans: 13.5%.
- Currently, over 60,000 veterans are homeless.
- 10% of homeless veterans are over 50 years old.
- 65% are between the ages of 31-50.
- 1.4 million veterans are considered at risk for homelessness.

Theater Specific Conditions:

- Tetanuse veterans are at risk for diabetes, lymphoma, amongst other conditions due to Agent Orange exposure.
- Prophylactic pneumococcal vaccination has been linked to Gulf War Syndrome.
- Burns of rubber, trash, and fierce in combat zones has been linked to respiratory problems.

How to Ask - Military Background as Part of the Social History

1. Have you ever been in the military?
   - A. What branch? (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, as well as reserves and National Guard)
   - B. What theater? (WW II, Vietnam, Korean War, Gulf War, OIF/ OEF/DV)
   - C. What most? (i.e. their job, or military "specialty")

2. Are you enrolled in the VA?

3. Is there anything related to your service that you'd like to share with me?

4. Did you see combat?

5. Many people I know who have a military background have seen some really terrible things. I'm wondering whether that might be true for you too?

6. How have you found the adjustment to being back home?

7. Has anyone in your family served in the military?

Remember to also say: Thank you so much for your service!

Important Veteran Resources:

PTSD SUPPORT:
- National Center for PTSD (www.ptsd.va.gov/ptsd)
- Make the Connection (www.maketheconnection.net/ptsd)
- Department of Veterans Affairs (www.va.gov)

Housing Assistance:
- Shared Housing Program (www.sharedhousing.va.gov)
- New England Center for Homeless Veterans (www.nechv.org)

Advocacy for Veterans:
- National Organization of Veterans Advocates (www.ownvad.org)
- Massachusetts Advocacy Advisor (www.maadvocacy.org)

Key Points

- Veterans comprise 6.2% of the state population.
- 75% of veterans do not receive their care at the VA.
- Key veterans have never been asked about their military advice by their private healthcare providers.

References:
- National Center for PTSD. (2020). "Veterans and the Public: Educating the Community About PTSD." https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/education/Public_Education.asp