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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Meet the VetPop of 2030: Size and Diversity

February 7, 2020 | By Rhiannon Guzelian, NVI

PART I:

At the turn of this new decade, we've been thinking about what's ahead for our nation's veterans. Statistics tell us that the veteran population in 2030 will look quite different than it does today. So what will it look like, and what do these changes mean for communities serving veterans? This series of blogs compares the demographic makeup of the 2020 veteran population to that of 2030. We'll consider the circumstances driving these demographic shifts, imagine the challenges and opportunities they present, and offer considerations for collaboratives as they work to create communities in which veterans and their families can thrive after service. Here's what we know about 2030...

The veteran population will be significantly smaller.

Total Estimated Population of U.S. Veterans

	2020	2030
Veteran population	18,823,868	15,466,321

Source: [VA VetPop data](#)

A large swath of the veteran population—particularly, those veterans who served in WWII and Korea—are aging and, inevitably, reaching the end-of-life stage. As we lose these veterans, whose numbers are larger than most service eras because of the massive scale of those war efforts, the veteran population will shrink by more than 3M people.

Forward-looking communities should prepare for these possibilities:

- A shrinking pool of senior veteran volunteers and mentors, especially in programs using vet-to-vet driven models.
- A potential widening effect in the civ-mil divide. As we lose veterans—especially those of the draft era, when being called up for service was a widespread reality—the chances of a community member having a direct connection with a service member or veteran may decrease.
- The number of veterans served by your collaborative may decrease, so documenting the intensity of service will be increasingly important.



We will have the most diverse US veteran population in history.

Diversity of the Veteran Population

	2020	2030
Ethnic & Racial Diversity	27%	32%
Women Veterans	10.3%	13.5%

Source: [VA VetPop data](#)

In 2020, VetPop data estimates that 27% of veterans identify as minorities, or racial or ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic white. Over the next decade, that number will increase 5%. By 2030, “Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” will comprise 32% of the veteran population. Representation of women will increase, too, jumping from around 10% to nearly 14% by 2030 (and continuing to grow through 2045).

Communities might want to prepare for these changes by:

- Intentionally assessing the unconscious bias and privilege that have defined the culture in many veteran-serving organizations for decades.
- Modeling equity by recruiting women and people who identify with a racial or ethnic minority into leadership positions.
- Building healthy feedback loops with minority- and woman-identified veterans in your community to identify needs and wants, and plan to meet them.
- Recognizing that lack of childcare is a barrier to accessing services and achieving employment; while many women veterans serve as primary caregivers for their children, advances on the childcare front positively impact parents of all genders, children, and the community.

PART II: Service Era and Geography

February 20, 2020 | By Rhiannon Guzelian, NVI

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The largest service-era cohort will also be the group with the longest continuous wartime service.

In 2030, the majority of veterans—52.8%—will have served during the Gulf War era, including Post-9/11 veterans who will make up 23.8% of the veteran population. It is possible that by 2030, the entire military experience of the majority of America's veterans will be served during times of war.

Communities can continue to improve how they serve these veterans and their families by:

- Continuing to support the caregivers who play a significant role in recovery and well-being for ill and injured veterans.
- Considering that surveys show that many veterans who participated in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are unsure that they made a difference or believe they did not; for veterans experiencing this dissatisfaction, cynicism, or ennui, traditional gratitudes and honors may not resonate or otherwise be well-received.
- Remaining abreast of research and best practices—both for clinical practitioners and anyone serving veterans—on connecting with and caring for veterans with the “trademark injuries” of these wars: PTSD, TBI, and moral injury. People living with each (or some, or all) of these injuries may experience cognitive changes that inherently make it difficult to both recognize when there is a problem and ask for help to solve it.
- Tightening public-private connections with active duty military installations and guard and reserve units to identify ways to bring veterans into the fold sooner.

Veterans will continue to settle in the south and the west.

Geographic Distribution of the Veteran Population by State

2020		2030	
Texas	1,551,192	Texas	1,427,866
California	1,529,814	California	1,152,308
Florida	1,423,968	Florida	1,147,635
Pennsylvania	743,574	North Carolina	676,516
North Carolina	721,979	Virginia	647,184

Ohio	712,829	Georgia	635,544
Virginia	708,689	Pennsylvania	540,918
New York	691,848	Ohio	536,808
Georgia	686,921	New York	484,998
Illinois	574,646	Washington	459,652

Source: [VA VetPop data](#)

The VetPop projections suggest that the geographic layout of the veterans space is evolving—however slightly. By 2030, Virginia and Georgia will bump Pennsylvania and Ohio down the rankings of the states with most veterans, and Illinois will disappear from the top 10, replaced by Washington.

When serving the veterans in their states—or working to attract veterans to become residents—collaboratives may want to consider:

- The impacts of state-level legislation that can improve veterans’ access to services, tax situation, and quality of life for their families.
- Researching the ways in which state-level benefits that are *not* exclusive to veterans actually affect veteran well-being.
- How you can leverage veteran strengths in your state’s workforce.
 - Are eligible certificate- and degree-awarding programs aligned ready to accept veterans’ education benefits?
 - Does your state occupational licensing entity recognize military training and experience when adjudicating licensure?

We can’t see the future. But these statistics are our best-informed guess at what the veteran population of the future may be like. If we use this information to inform sustainable, wise systems changes now, we’ll be helping today’s veterans, and tomorrows.