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Veterans' health care: A much bigger problem than you think!

During the past few weeks, we have been hearing about the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and its systemic challenges in providing appropriate access to care, secret patient waiting lists, and excessive wait times for appointments. As this story continues to unfold, we are seeing the problems grow exponentially. The nation is finally starting to realize what veterans and their families have known for a long time. The entirety of the American health care system is not properly equipped to care for veterans. It is important to note that there are veterans who do receive good care from veteran clinics and veteran hospitals; however, the majority do not. The majority are not seen and not getting the type of quality and timely care that they deserve. Amidst all of the speculation and commentary from the pundits, here are the facts. As an aggregate, only 27% of veterans are registered with the VA for health care benefits. Thus, over 70% of veterans are currently being seen by private medical practitioners and private hospitals in their local communities. There are approximately 23 million veterans in the United States. Over 90% of veterans and their families have health insurance (private via employer, self insured, and government). Although over 70% of Veterans and their families are being seen by private medical practitioners and private hospitals throughout the nation's communities, the majority of providers are not asking patients about their current or past military affiliation (personal or immediate family members). The systemic lack of gaining a complete and well informed social history on patients, is putting members of the veteran and military communities at significant risk, because providers are not aware of the military experiences and environmental exposures that impact health outcomes. The health risk associated with military service has forged health and health care disparities as a growing area of national concern. Since veterans and their immediate families represent nearly 75 million Americans (25% of the population), the quality and optimization of service delivery to this population is critically important to the nation's overall health care ecosystem.

With the preceding facts as a backdrop, the nation now has 2 significant challenges it must address. First the private healthcare and supportive service systems, must be trained and educated on the unique needs of veterans and their families. Their unique needs and the causality for wounds, injuries, illnesses, and communication are different from the non-veteran population. Secondly, trust is now a major concern for veterans and their families as they engage the health care and supportive services sectors. Private medical practices and private hospitals must be trained and educated on [Warrior-Centric Healthcare](#) best practices that are evidenced based if they are expected to successfully optimize engagement, assessment, treatment, management and adherence with veterans and their families.

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