

ND HOPES Data Brief

Introduction

With support from North Dakota Health and Human Services (ND HHS), ND HOPES created the following data brief about Veteran suicide in North Dakota. ND HOPES is a 5-year initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) working to reduce suicide attempts and deaths in the state. ND HOPES delivers suicide prevention programs, resources, and supports, with tailored initiatives for populations disproportionately affected by suicide, including Veterans.

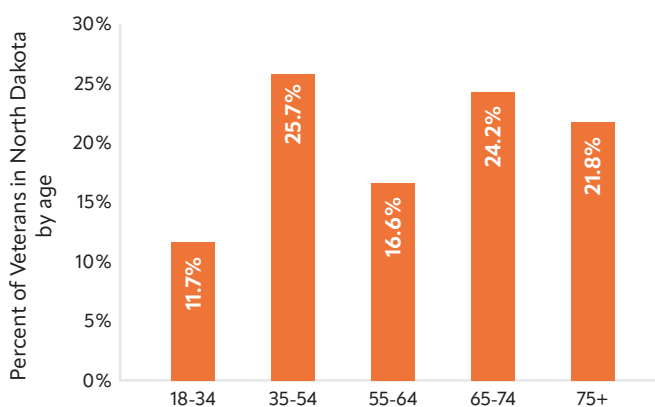
Suicide data presented in this brief were derived from the North Dakota Violent Death Reporting System (NDVDRS). The NDVDRS is a state-based surveillance program that collects data on all violent deaths that occur within North Dakota,¹ including suicides. NDVDRS collects data on suicide deaths from a variety of sources including death certificates, coroner/medical examiner reports, law enforcement reports, crime laboratory reports, and toxicology results.

We recognize that each Veteran who has died by suicide is a life lost and that there are significant and lasting impacts on families, friends, and communities. The purpose of this data brief is to increase awareness of Veteran suicide risk in the state and provide Veteran-serving organizations, public health professionals, and other organizations with key information to tailor programming, policies, and suicide prevention efforts for Veterans in North Dakota.

Overview of Veterans in North Dakota

According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, in 2023, North Dakota had a population of 49,788 Veterans. As of 2021, most Veterans in North Dakota are men (91.6%) and over the age of 65 (46%). See Figure 1.

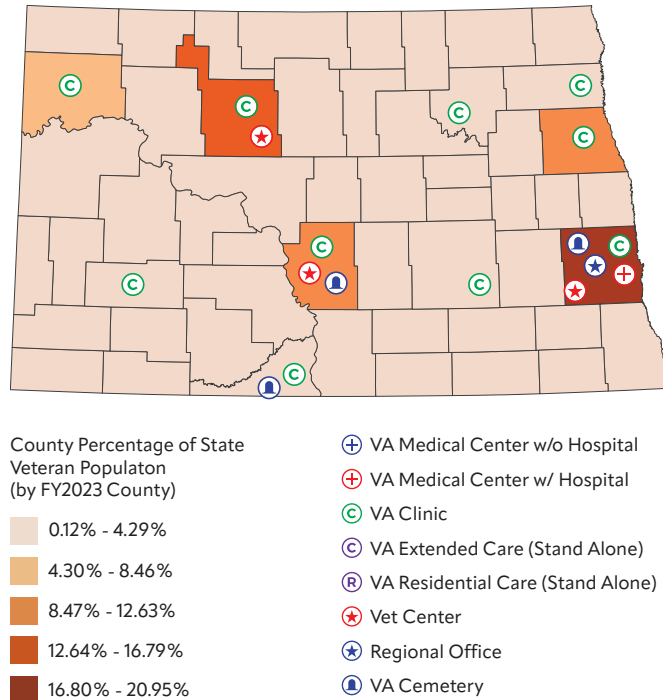
Figure 1: Age distribution of Veterans in the state of North Dakota, 2021



Within the state, there are 15 facilities providing medical, financial, or additional support services for Veterans. See Figure 2. Unfortunately, only 39% of Veterans in North Dakota utilize Veterans Affairs (VA) services. This suggests a need to increase engagement with existing services and develop new services that meet the evolving needs of North Dakota Veterans.

¹Numbers represent both ND residents and Out-of-State residents where the initial injury that led to death occurred in ND.

Figure 2: Map of facilities providing Veteran services in North Dakota, 2023²



Demographics of Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

According to the NDVDRS,³ there were 134 deaths by suicide among Veterans in North Dakota between 2019 and 2024.⁴ Of these, 94.8% were male, 90.3% were White, and 29.8% were between the ages of 35 and 54. Veterans ages 18 to 34 were overrepresented among these deaths, accounting for 26.1% of the deaths while comprising only 11.7% of the Veteran population. On the other hand, Veterans 65 and older were underrepresented, comprising 46% of the Veteran population yet accounting for 26.1% of the deaths. Figure 3 displays the demographics of Veterans who died by suicide.

Figure 3: Demographics of Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2024*

Age	
18-34	26.1%
35-54	29.8%
55-64	17.9%
65+	26.1%
Sex	
Male	94.8%
Female	5.2%
Race	
White	90.3%
Hispanic or Latino	8.2%
American Indian / Alaskan Native	5.2%
Other	4.4%
Marital Status	
Married, Civil Union, Domestic Partnership	33.6%
Never Married	29.8%
Divorced	26.1%
Widowed	6.7%
Married but separated	3.7%

Suicide means among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide, and Veterans are more likely to own and be experienced users of firearms.⁵ In North Dakota, firearms were used in 74.6% of Veteran suicide deaths between 2019 and 2024.* Most of these deaths were by handgun (81.3%), followed by rifles (12.5%), shotguns (4.7%), and unspecified firearms (1.6%) (according to available data, 2019-2022). Hanging, strangulation, and

²Map of VA Facilities in North Dakota designed by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

³The NDVDRS captures information on Veterans and active military personnel with one question asking, "Has the person ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces?"

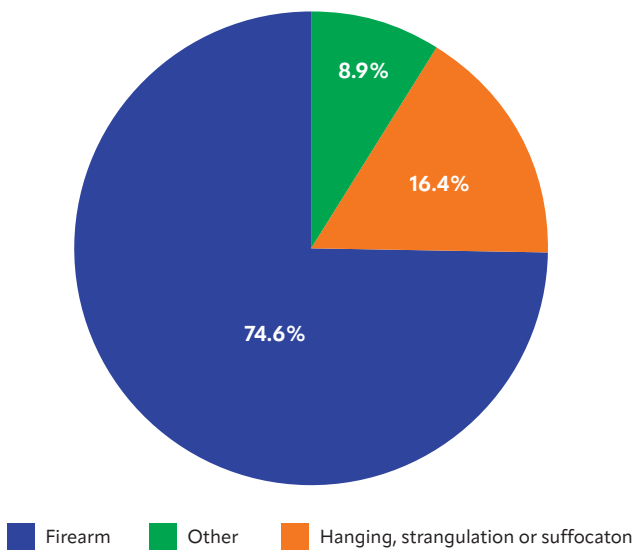
⁴2023 and 2024 data are considered provisional and subject to change as final reports are collected. 2024 data is included up to December 10th, 2024.*

⁵[Ways Veterans Differ from the General Population](#), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

ND HOPES Data Brief

suffocation were the second most frequent causes of death (16.4%), followed by poisoning (3.7%). Other causes of death included motor vehicle crashes, intentional falls, drowning or submersion, injury with sharp instruments, and more than one method. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Suicide means among Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2024*



Substance use among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

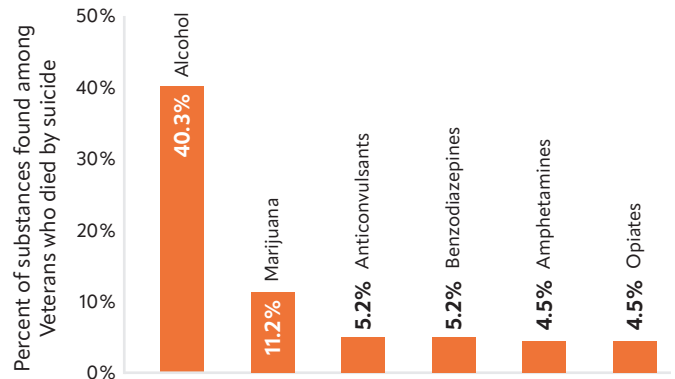
Veterans have higher rates of substance use than the general population, which can be attributed to the trauma they face during service and the challenge of transitioning to civilian life following discharge.⁵ According to available toxicology results, the most common substance present in Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota was alcohol (40.3%), followed by marijuana (11.2%).⁶ See Figure 5 for available and reported toxicology results (Note: Toxicology reports are not present in all cases for a host of reasons).

⁵[Ways Veterans Differ from the General Population](#), U.S Department of Veterans Affairs

⁶Medical marijuana was legalized in ND in 2016, and this count does not distinguish between medical and recreational use.

⁷Circumstance Data was available for 2019-2022 cases, which included 88 Veteran Suicides. The following percentages represent the suicide deaths where the endorsed circumstances were reported by any of the NDVDRS data sources.

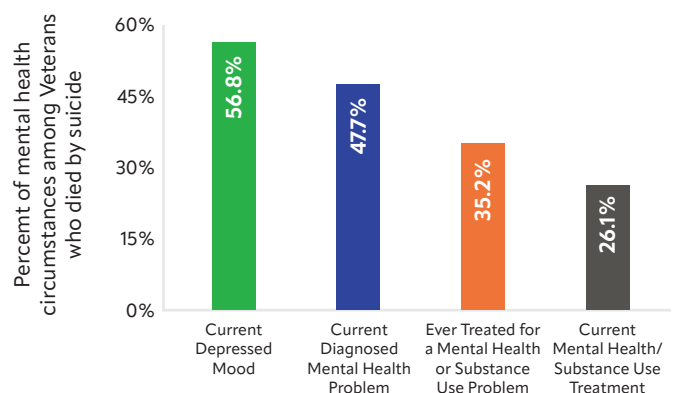
Figure 5: Substances present among Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2024



Mental health circumstances among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

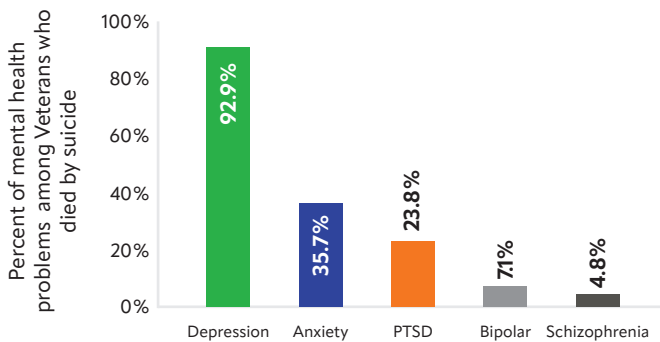
Veterans who are struggling with their mental health are at a greater risk for suicide.⁵ As reported in circumstance data,⁷ among North Dakota Veterans who died by suicide between 2019 and 2022, 56.8% had reported a depressed mood, 34.1% had reported an alcohol problem, 19.3% had reported a problem related to a substance other than alcohol, and 47.7% had a diagnosed mental health problem at the time of their death. Among Veterans with a diagnosed mental health problem, 73.9% were not receiving mental health or substance use treatment at the time of their death, and only 35.2% ever received treatment.⁷ See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Mental health circumstances among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota, 2019-2022



The mental health problems present among Veterans varied and often co-occurred; while the vast majority had reported depression (92.9%), there were additional reports of anxiety (35.7%), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (23.8%), bipolar disorder (7.1%), and schizophrenia (4.8%). See Figure 7.

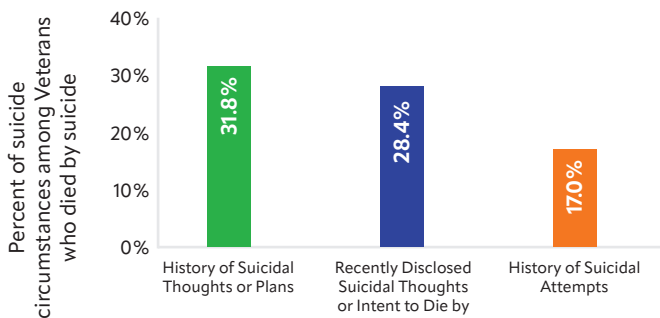
Figure 7: Mental health problems among Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2022



History of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

Past history of suicide attempts is a risk factor for future suicidal behavior.⁸ Among North Dakota Veterans who died by suicide between 2019 and 2022, 31.8% had a reported history of suicidal thoughts or plans, with 28.4% having recent suicidal thoughts or intent and 17.0% having a history of suicide attempts.⁷ See Figure 8.

Figure 8: Suicide circumstances among Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2022

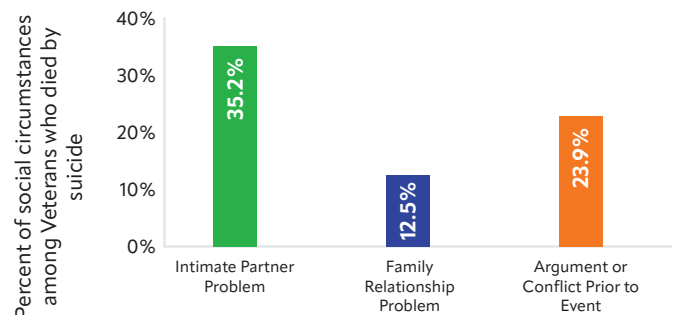


There was a recent disclosure of suicidal thoughts or intent to die by suicide in 28.4% of Veteran suicides between 2019 and 2022. Veterans primarily disclosed suicidal thoughts, plans, or intent to a previous or current intimate partner (68.0%), followed by friends and colleagues (28.0%), family (16.0%), other people (12.0%), and healthcare workers (8.0%). There was a suicide note left in 30.7% of Veteran suicide deaths.

Social circumstances among Veterans who died by suicide in North Dakota

Stressful life events, including relationship problems, legal problems, and financial problems, can increase risk for suicide.⁸ Evidence shows that intimate partner problems are frequently identified as a circumstance in suicide deaths among service members and Veterans. In fact, one study found that 49% of Veterans who died by suicide experienced intimate partner problems.⁹ Among North Dakota Veterans who died by suicide between 2019 and 2022, 35.2% experienced a relationship problem with a current or previous intimate partner and 12.5% experienced a familial relationship problem. Additionally, there was an argument or conflict reported in 23.9% of Veteran suicide deaths.⁷ See Figure 9.

Figure 9: Social circumstances among Veterans who died by suicide in ND, 2019-2022



In addition to relationship problems, 19.3% of Veterans who died by suicide had employment problems, 11.4% had criminal or civil legal problems, and 7.9% had financial concerns prior to their death.

⁷Circumstance Data was available for 2019-2022 cases, which included 88 Veteran Suicides. The following percentages represent the suicide deaths where the endorsed circumstances were reported by any of the NDVDRS data sources.

⁸[CDC Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide](#)

⁹[Suicide Among Military Personnel and Veterans Aged 18-35 Years by County—16 States](#)



ND HOPES Data Brief

Key Takeaways

Between 2019 and 2024, 134 Veterans died by suicide in North Dakota.

- Most of these deaths were among Veterans who were White, male, and 34-55 years old.
- Firearms were the most frequently used suicide method, accounting for almost three-quarters of Veteran suicide deaths.
- Almost half of the Veterans who died by suicide reported a mental health problem, including depression or substance use problems, but only 26.1% of those Veterans were connected to treatment at their time of death.
- Approximately 29% of Veterans who lost their lives to suicide had previous disclosures of suicidal thoughts, plans, or intent to a person in their life.

Overall, the NDVDRS data presented in this brief illustrate the disproportionate impact of substance use, mental health, and suicide among North Dakota Veterans. To effectively work with Veterans and address this disproportionate impact, it is important to use a strengths-based approach that leverages their resilience. Findings in this data brief highlight opportunities to better support Veterans, including the need for more comprehensive mental health promotion and suicide prevention efforts specifically targeted to reach Veterans in North Dakota.

We are grateful for our many community partners who are delivering programs, services, and supports for Veterans in North Dakota. Service members, healthcare providers, Veterans, and their families all play a vital role in creating supportive environments where Veterans can thrive. We encourage you to explore the resources below so that, together, we can create a supportive environment for the Veterans in our state.

Additional Resources

- [ND HOPES Veterans Resources Handout](#) - Learn more about mental health promotion and suicide prevention among Veterans in North Dakota
- [North Dakota Veterans Affairs](#) - Connect with state Veterans programs and healthcare practitioners in North Dakota
- [ND Cares and The Governor's Challenge](#) - Locate state resources for suicide prevention for Service Members, Veterans, Families, and Survivors
- [The Governor's Challenge Resource Guide](#) - Locate community partners in North Dakota
- [The Governor's Challenge Dashboard](#) - Follow project affiliated Veterans data

If you or someone you know needs help, there are resources available for Veterans.

- Call or text 988, or [chat](#) online at [988lifeline.org](#) to connect with a trained crisis counselor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **Veterans may press '1' for the Veterans Crisis Line where they will be connected with someone qualified and knowledgeable about supporting Veterans.** This resource is available for all Veterans; it is not necessary to be enrolled in VA services to connect.

Conclusion

ND HOPES produces quarterly data briefs. You can find prior data briefs [on our website](#). If you would like to explore the results of the North Dakota Violent Death Reporting System or the Veterans Affairs state summary data in greater detail, you can visit [ND HHS](#) or the [VA State Summary](#) page.

Please visit our website and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram (@nd_hopes), and Twitter/X (@NDHOPES). If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us at info@ndhopes.com.



info@ndhopes.com



ndhopes.com

