SOCIAL WELLBEING AGENCY | TOI HAU TĀNGATA

Overview

The Social Wellbeing Agency (SWA) has worked with Veterans' Affairs to build the evidence base about veterans in Aotearoa New Zealand. To date, government agencies have been unable to source comprehensive data about the veteran population as there is no complete record of those who have served in the defence forces and no way to identify them in administrative data.

Using the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)[1] , we identified the veteran population, described their demographic characteristics, and their experiences of disability and employment outcomes. The resulting report supports commitments by SWA under Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau (Te Arataki), The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Action Plan.

Methods

Identifying the population

In this work we used the definition from Te Arataki which defines veterans as: " All those who have completed a period of military service, but who no longer serve."

Using the IDI, we constructed an indicator of veteran status, drawing together data from a range of datasets to identify a group of people who are likely to be veterans.

This data contained information indicative of service in the defence force, including:

- Receipt of pensions and entitlements
- Employment by New Zealand Defence Force
- Stated occupation in surveys or recorded at the time of key life events
- Stated industry of employment in surveys e.g. the Census

The resulting dataset included all the veterans we could identify, who were alive and in New Zealand at any point in 2021, the most recent year for which there was complete data. The veteran dataset does not include veterans who left the country after their service or those who have died.

Our method was highly accurate at identifying veterans within the available administrative data. When validated against a list of known veterans of the Vietnam War, our method was successful in identifying 85 percent of them. Although the method used in this work may underestimate the total veteran population, the identified population represents a material group of those alive in 2021.

Investigating disability

To investigate disability among veterans, we used an indicator developed by SWA in collaboration with experts in Disabled People's Organisations and government. Applying the indicator to the veteran population dataset allowed us to investigate the proportion with difficulty walking or climbing stairs, hearing, seeing, remembering or concentrating, difficulty with self-care activities such as washing or dressing, and communication (understanding and being understood).
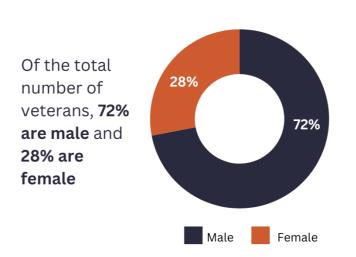
Investigating employment outcomes

To investigate employment among veterans, we used Employer Monthly Schedule (EMS) data in the IDI. This data links employees to employers for every month that they receive employment income and provides a basis for understanding patterns of employment. We used this data to count the number of months working age persons were employed over a two-year period, from January 2018 to December 2019.
We investigated industry of employment using the main source of employment income. Data for this analysis was limited to working age veterans, aged 20-64 years.
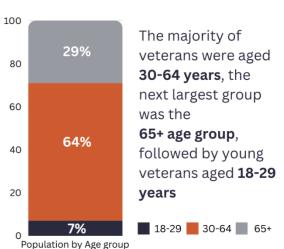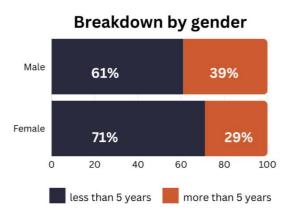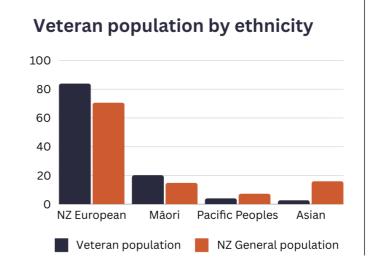
Demographics

We identified approximately
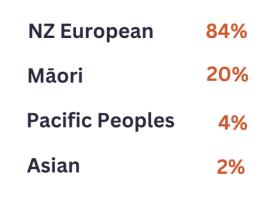
44,000

veterans living in New Zealand in 2021

Of the total number of veterans, **72% are male** and **28% are female**

Male 72% / Female 28%

The majority of veterans were aged **30-64 years**, the next largest group was the **65+ age group**, followed by young veterans aged **18-29 years**

Population by Age group: 18-29 = 7%, 30-64 = 64%, 65+ = 29%

Nearly two-thirds (**64%**) of veterans had short service (less than five years)

Breakdown by gender

Male: less than 5 years 61%, more than 5 years 39%
Female: less than 5 years 71%, more than 5 years 29%

Veteran population by ethnicity

Veteran population / NZ General population — NZ European, Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian

NZ European	**84%**
Māori	**20%**
Pacific Peoples	**4%**
Asian	**2%**

*respondents can belong to more than one ethnic group so the percentages will total more than 100
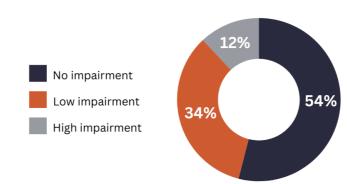
Disability

We were able to obtain disability information for a subset of approximately

34,000

veterans, or 77% of the total identified veteran population in 2021

Of this population, **54%** did not experience any impairments. **34%** had low impairment, and **12%** had high impairment

No impairment 54%, Low impairment 34%, High impairment 12%

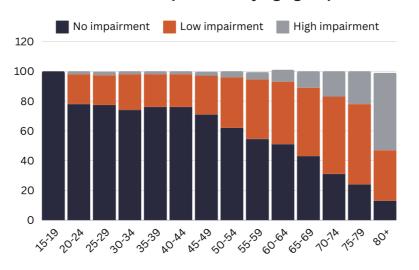# Building an evidence base for understanding veteran outcomes

Disability

Compared to the general population, veterans experienced fewer impairments before age 30, but more severe impairments from age 65.

After age 65 most (75%) veterans were living with some impairment.

Proportion of veterans with no, low and high functional impairment by age group

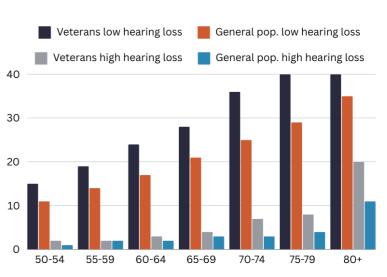Legend: No impairment, Low impairment, High impairment

*percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number so the percentages may total more or less than 100

Difficulty with hearing was the most common impairment experienced by veterans

From age 50 years, a **higher proportion of veterans experienced significant hearing loss** compared to the general population
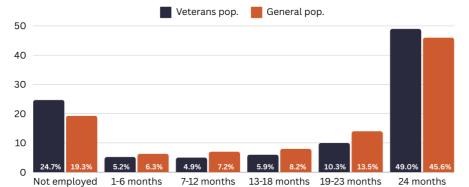
Proportion of veterans and the general population who experienced hearing loss

Legend: Veterans low hearing loss, General pop. low hearing loss, Veterans high hearing loss, General pop. high hearing loss

Employment

Many veterans were in stable employment. Almost half (49%) of working-aged veterans were employed continuously for the 24-month period over 2018 and 2019. However, one quarter of veterans had no employment income over the study period, 1.7 times higher than the rate for the general population.

Number of months in employment for veterans and the general population aged 20-64 years who worked for at least one month over the period (2018-2019).

Legend: Veterans pop., General pop.

	Not employed	1-6 months	7-12 months	13-18 months	19-23 months	24 months
Veterans	24.7%	5.2%	4.9%	5.9%	10.3%	49.0%
General	19.3%	6.3%	7.2%	8.2%	13.5%	45.6%

Compared to the general population, a considerably larger proportion of veterans worked in public order, safety and regulatory services, public administration, logistics and transport, manufacturing and air and space transport industries.

Public order, safety and regulatory services (including police, fire and other emergency services) was the top industry of employment in 2019.

Professional, scientific and technical services, public administration, and construction services were other top industries along with preschool and school education.

Top 5 industries of employment for veterans

1. Public Order, Safety and Regulatory Services
   10.4%

2. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
   6.5%

3. Public Administration
   5.4%

4. Construction Services
   5.3%

5. Preschool and School Education
   3.9%

Conclusion

This work was the first to produce robust demographic information about the New Zealand veteran population, their experience of disability and their employment outcomes.
A key outcome of this work has been the creation of a population dataset within the IDI that can be reused by veteran serving agencies and researchers to explore areas of further interest. In addition to the wellbeing outcomes covered in this report, there is the opportunity within the IDI to explore a broad range of mental health and wellbeing outcomes including suicide and unmet need for mental health and addiction services.
The method developed to identify the veteran population also has applications for other workforce analyses and may have particular value for health and social sector workforce analysis and planning.