Native American In the Military: From Service to Civilian Life

Throughout American history, Native veterans have answered the call to serve in the Armed Services. Highly regarded within their tribal community for their dedication and commitment to serve in the Armed Services, Native American veterans represent 574 federally recognized tribes. We take this opportunity to honor all Native Americans and acknowledge their ongoing contributions to the success and growth of our nation. This infographic provides key highlights for American Indian and Alaska Native service members and veterans. The information and statistics in this document are from various data collection efforts centered on military life, transition, employment, entrepreneurship, and higher education.

# American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans in the military

# Population

## Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve

Currently over 20,000+ American Indian or Alaska Native Active Duty and Selected Reserve Members

*Total Military Force*

* Over 14,000 active duty service members
* Over 6,000 selected reserve members

## Veterans

Currently over 140,000 American Indian and Alaska Native veterans in the U.S.

* 11% of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans are female
* 39% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans served during Vietnam era
* 18% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans served during Gulf War Era II (Post 9/11)
* 22% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans served during Gulf War Era I

## Highlights

* 25% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans live outside of metropolitan areas
* 63% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans live in the West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific Regions
* 134,718 VA home loans in 2020 for American Indian or Alaska Native veterans
* 18% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans live below poverty threshold
* 40% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans are enrolled for VA health care

# Views on MILITARY SERVICE

## TOP MOTIVATIONS FOR MILITARY SERVICE

* 57% A desire to serve your country
* 50% Education benefits
* 50% New experiences/adventure/travel
* 36% Defend your country
* 36% A history of service in your family

## TOP SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES STRENGTHENED BY MILITARY SERVICE

* 88% Leadership and management skills
* 85% Work ethic/discipline
* 83% Teamwork
* 83% Adaptation to different challenges
* 79% Mental toughness
* 77% Professionalism
* 76% Ability to get things done
* 76% Training & teaching others
* 76% Coping with adversity
* 75% Perseverance

## WAS MILITARY SERVICE WORTH IT?

* 84% reported that joining the military was a GOOD decision
* 83% served outside of the continental United States operating across different cultures, nations, and regions

## STEM

46% reported that their military specialization was STEM RELATED

# TRANISITON

## Top Reasons for Leaving Armed Service

* 43% Lost faith or trust in military or political leadership
* 30% Completion of military service obligation (less than 20 years)
* 30% Family reasons
* 29% Medical reasons
* 29% Career change/alternative job opportunities
* 28% Pursue education and training opportunities
* 26% Concerns & grievances about service experiences
* 21% Military retirement (20 years or more)

## Military Influence on Post Service Aspirations

* 68% reported that military service prepared them for their civilian career
* 51% indicated the desire to pursue a career DIFFERENT from their military specialty (MOS, AFSC, etc.)
* 37% indicated the desire to pursue a career SIMILAR to their military specialty
* 13% indicated they are UNSURE if they will pursue a career similar to their military specialty

## Top Transitional Challenges

* 62% Navigating VA administration or benefits
* 55% Getting a job
* 45% Getting socialized to civilian culture
* 45% Depression
* 44% Disability
* 43% Financial struggles
* 40% Skills translation
* 34% Using and accessing GI Bill benefits
* 33% Anger management
* 33% Contradictory information from different sources
* 33% Understanding GI Bill benefits
* 33% Information about education opportunities
* 33% Stigma of being a service member

## Disabilities

* 29% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans have a service-connected disability

Of those

* + 92% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans indicated their service-connected disability creates obstacles
    - 33% in my personal life
    - 20% in getting a job
    - 19% in holding a job
    - 14% in completing their education

## AmericaServes

Less than 1% of military members/veterans seeking services in AmericaServes networks identified as American Indian or Alaska Native.

The top service categories for American Indian or Alaska Native clients were:

1. 27% Housing & Shelter

2. 12% Benefits Navigation

3. 9% Employment

## Positive Impacts of Service

* 95% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents felt pride from their accomplishments during service
* 93% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents indicated they matured as a result of their service
* 94% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents reported their service had a positive impact on their life \*
* 70% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents reported they would be happy if their child(ren) were to join the military \*

## Transition Difficulty

* 64% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents characterized their financial transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 48% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents.
* 65% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents characterized their employment transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 49% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents
* 62% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents characterized their overall transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 43% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents
* 59% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents characterized their healthcare transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 40% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents
* 63% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents characterized their benefits transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 43% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents

## Time to Employment

44% of American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents reported it took less than three months to find employment after their transition, compared with 51% of White/Non-Hispanic veteran respondents

Is there anything you wish you could change about your transition?

*“The lack of realistic training ends up leaving veterans to face an uncomfortable lack of structure, miss the adrenaline of life-challenging situations, become annoyed at civilians with their less detail-orientation, and all compounded by worrying about finances. This all leaves the veteran’s and their families feelings isolated and alone as if no one understands the clear disconnect between veterans' expectations for post-military life and the reality they meet”* – *Air Force Post 9/11 Veteran*

# Employment

## Unemployment

IN 2019, American Indian or Alaska Native veteran unemployment was at 8.04% {this was HIGHER compared to other veteran counterparts but LOWER compared to American Indian or Alaska Native nonveteran counterparts}[[1]](#footnote-1)

* + The unemployment rate for male American Indian or Alaska Native veteran was 7.79%
  + The unemployment rate for female American Indian or Alaska Native veteran was 9.60%

## Earnings

In 2019, $50,000 median earnings for American Indian or Alaska Native veterans {HIGHER compared to American Indian or Alaska Native nonveteran counterparts who earn about $31,000; LOWER compared to non-minority veteran counterparts who earn about $61,000}

In 2019, 55% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans were in private sector and 35% were in public sector

## TOP FIVE OCCUPATIONS

1. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
2. Management Occupations
3. Production Occupations
4. Protective Service Occupations
5. Construction and Extraction Occupations

## TOP FIVE INDUSTRIES

1. Educational, Health and Social Services
2. Public Administration
3. Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative, and waste management Services
4. Manufacturing
5. Construction

# STEM WORKFORCE

* Of those veterans in the STEM workforce, less than 1% are American Indian or Alaska Native
* $ 82,025 average earnings for American Indian or Alaska Native veterans in STEM
  + $ 96,491 average earnings for American Indian or Alaska Native veterans in STEM with a college degree or higher
  + $ 69,707 average earnings for American Indian or Alaska Native veterans in STEM with less than a college degree

What are your career aspirations?

*“Open law firm catering to native americans and start a law program for them in AK” – Army Gulf War Era I Veteran*

# Entrepreneurship

* In 2019, 10% of American Indian or Alaska Native veterans were self-employed
* 60% of American Indian or Alaska Native veteran entrepreneurs indicated that navigating the resources in their local community was not easy in 2020

## motivations for pursing entrepreneurship

* 45% Opportunity to be financially independent/increase personal income
* 38% Maintain personal freedom
* 36% Improving quality of life
* 32% Chance to implement own ideas/creating something
* 28% Helping society/supporting community
* 26% Secure future for family
* 23% Having more free time/flexible hours
* 17% Make own decisions
* 17% Personal security

## Current Barriers

* 55% Lack of access to capital
* 45% Lack of financing
* 24% Federal regulations and policies
* 24% Personal health issues (disability, etc.)
* 21% Current economic situation
* 18% Irregular income
* 18% Taxes and legal fees
* 15% Lack of organizations to assist entrepreneurs
* 15% Problems finding good employees/contracted personnel
* 15% Lack of available assistance in assessing business viability

## RESOURCES American Indian or Alaska Native ENTREPRENEURS FIND MOST HELPFUL

* 32% SCORE Business Mentors
* 32% Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)
* 24% SBA Regional Offices
* 24% Veteran's Business Outreach Centers (VBOC)
* 24% Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)
* 20% SBA District Offices
* 20% Local chamber(s) of commerce

# hIGHER Education

93% of American Indian or Alaska Native veteran indicated that higher education should play a role in post-service transition

82% of American Indian or Alaska Native veteran indicated that they could not afford school without the GI Bill

## EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

American Indian or Alaska Native post 9/11 veteran have achieved:

* 24% bachelor’s degree or higher
* 46% some college or associate degree
* 26% high school degree
* 4% less than high school degree

## Motivations for PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

* 85% Career/job opportunities
* 72% Potential for making money/Improve economic status
* 71% Self-improvement and personal growth
* 57% Support family
* 51% Make use of benefits
* 51% Professional advancement
* 48% Enjoy education and learning
* 41% Want to help people/society
* 41% Role model to children
* 30% Increase technical skills

## BARRIERS THAT HINDERED PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

* 64% Lack of financial resources/ Financial burden
* 33% Health/disability issues
* 26% Bureaucracy associated with VA paperwork and processing
* 26% GI Bill benefits expire before I complete my degree
* 23% Personal/family obligations
* 22% Conflict between job and school

## CHALLENGES WHILE PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

* 38% Lack of financial resources
* 36% Age differences
* 32% Few veterans resources on campus
* 28% Administering veterans benefits
* 28% Family responsibilities
* 28% Working full time job
* 25% Transferring academic credits
* 25% Lack of understanding from faculty about military
* 20% Lack of support for disabilities
* 20% Difficulty in selecting courses

## HELPFUL RESOURCES ON CAMPUS FOR VETERAN SUCCESS

* 74% Military/veteran friendly campus
* 73% Academic advising/counseling
* 68% Flexible class schedules
* 62% Dedicated veterans office & administrators on campus
* 60% Preferred classroom settings and instruction
* 59% Veterans supportive faculty
* 55% Academic preparation courses & remediation
* 54% "Hands-on" learning
* 53% Career services and counseling
* 52% Study groups

How Can Higher Education Help?

*“Have a support staff that works with not only mainstream veterans but diverse veterans such as Native American veterans” – Army Post 9/11 Veteran*

# References

*Population*

Military population was analyzed from U.S. Department of Defense (2020). 2019 Demographics DoD Profile of the Military Community. Military Community and Family Policy

Veteran population and metro area were analyzed from Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimate]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

<https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0>

*Views of Military Service*

Motivations, top skills, and STEM were analyzed from unpublished data using Zoli, C., Maury, R., & Fay, D. (2015, November). Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers’ Transition from Service to Civilian Life data-driven research to enact the promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. Only American Indian/ Alaska Native service members/veteran were used in analysis (n=163)

*Transition*

Reasons for leaving, top transition challenges, disability barriers, post service aspirations were analyzed from unpublished data using Zoli, C., Maury, R., & Fay, D. (2015, November). Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers’ Transition from Service to Civilian Life data-driven research to enact the promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. Only American Indian/Alaska Native service members/ veteran were used in analysis (n=163)

Disability, poverty, and access to VA healthcare were analyzed from Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimate]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0>

Positive impacts of service, transition difficulty, and time to employment were analyzed from unpublished data collected for the 2018-2016 Blue Star Families’ annual Military Family Lifestyle Surveys (\* is 2017 and 2018 only). Please note these findings are limited due to small sample size (n< 150) for American Indian/Alaska Native veteran respondents. This effort is from Blue Star Families in collaboration with the IVMF. For more information, see Blue Star Families, 2018-2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. Retrieved from <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

Data from AmericaServes is from the beginning of the AmericaServes to June 2021

*Employment/Entrepreneurship*

Earnings, industry, occupation, and self-employment is data analyzed using Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey 1-year estimate]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0>

STEM is from Maury, R.; Stone, B.; Armstrong, N. (2018, December). Enhancing Veterans’ Access to STEM Education and Careers: A Labor Market Analysis of Veterans in the STEM Workforce. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University

Self-employment is data using Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimate]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0>

Motivations, Barriers, and resources in entrepreneurship is data of American Indian or Alaska Native veteran (n=50) who responded to IVMF’s 2021 National Survey of Military-Affiliated Entrepreneurs. Sample is from cross sectional study only. More information can be found at <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/nsmae-series/>

*Higher Education*

Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V7.0>

Barriers and helpful resources were analyzed from unpublished data using Zoli, C., Maury, R., & Fay, D. (2015, November). Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers’ Transition from Service to Civilian Life data-driven research to enact the promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. Only American Indian/ Alaska Native service members/veteran were used in analysis (n=163).

*Quotes*

Quotes are from unpublished data using Zoli, C., Maury, R., & Fay, D. (2015, November). Missing Perspectives: Servicemembers’ Transition from Service to Civilian Life data-driven research to enact the promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. Only American Indian/ Alaska Native service members/veteran were used in analysis (n=163)

1. Using ACS 2019 the unemployment rates for veteran by race were: White, non-Hispanic = 4.37%; Black or African-American = 7.43%; Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin= 5.6%; Asian = 4.95%; American Indian or Alaska Native = 8.04%; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander = 5.9%. The unemployment for American Indian or Alaska Native nonveteran = 11.49% [↑](#footnote-ref-1)