



# 2016 Nebraska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Data

*Selected Variables on Veterans and  
Family Members of Veterans*

## Summary Report

Prepared for:  
**Nebraska Association of  
Local Health Directors**

### **Acknowledgement**

Special thanks to Jeff Armitage (Epidemiology Surveillance Coordinator for the Division of Public Health, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services) for running the analysis the BRFSS data used in this report, as well as providing valuable insights.

Special thanks to Schmeckle Research Inc. of Lincoln, Nebraska for their work in evaluating and compiling the data for this report.



## Introduction and Methodology

### ***BRFSS Background***

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) has been conducting surveys among Nebraska adults annually since 1986 for the purpose of collecting data on health-related risk behaviors and events, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services. Information gathered during these surveys is used to identify emerging health problems, establish and track health objectives, and develop, implement, and evaluate a broad array of disease prevention activities in the state.

The BRFSS is a cross-sectional telephone survey of adults 18 and older conducted in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories with technical and methodological assistance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Survey questions are standardized to ensure comparability of data with other states and to monitor trends over time.

### ***Veterans, Family Members of Veterans and the Work of NALHD's VetSET project***

In 2016, respondents to the BRFSS in Nebraska were asked to identify if they were veterans of the U.S. military (i.e., if they have ever served in the U.S. military). In the second half of 2016, respondents were asked to identify if they have a parent/guardian, brother or sister, spouse or significant other, or child who served in the U.S. military.

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this report is to compare veterans and family members of veterans to the general population on a set of 22 BRFSS indicators. These 22 indicators were selected for their close or proximal alignment with the work of the VetSET project. Data from this report can be used to illustrate areas of need for veterans and their family members in Nebraska.

## Demographics

Table 1 outlines the survey respondents as a percentage of all respondents. Table 2 displays demographics of veteran survey respondents compared to no-veterans.

Table 1	Survey respondents	
		Percent of total
	Served active duty in U.S. military (veterans)	12.1%
	Parent/guardian served in U.S. military	40.0%
	Brother or sister served in U.S. military	26.1%
	Been married to or in serious relationship with someone who served in U.S. military	17.6%
	Had a child serve in the U.S. military	8.1%
	Had a child serve in the U.S. military among those with children 18 year of age or older	16.5%
	Had a parent/guardian, sibling, spouse or significant other, or child serve in U.S. military	60.4%

Table 2	Demographics of Veteran and Non-Veteran Survey Respondents		
		Veterans	Non-veterans
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	91.6%	44.0%
	<i>Female</i>	8.4%	56.0%
<b>Urban/Rural</b>	<i>Urban – Large</i>	60.6%	58.4%
	<i>Urban - Small</i>	19.4%	21.3%
	<i>Rural</i>	20.0%	20.3%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<i>White (non-Hispanic)</i>	89.4%	82.1%
	<i>Minority</i>	10.6%	17.9%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<i>Less than high school</i>	4.6%	10.7%
	<i>High school diploma/GED</i>	32.0%	26.7%
	<i>Some college or tech. school</i>	38.1%	35.6%
	<i>Graduated college</i>	25.3%	27.0%
<b>Household Income</b>	<i>Less than \$25,000</i>	18.2%	24.5%
	<i>\$25,000 to \$49,999</i>	29.8%	26.3%
	<i>\$50,000 to \$74,999</i>	20.9%	17.0%
	<i>\$75,000 or more</i>	31.1%	32.3%

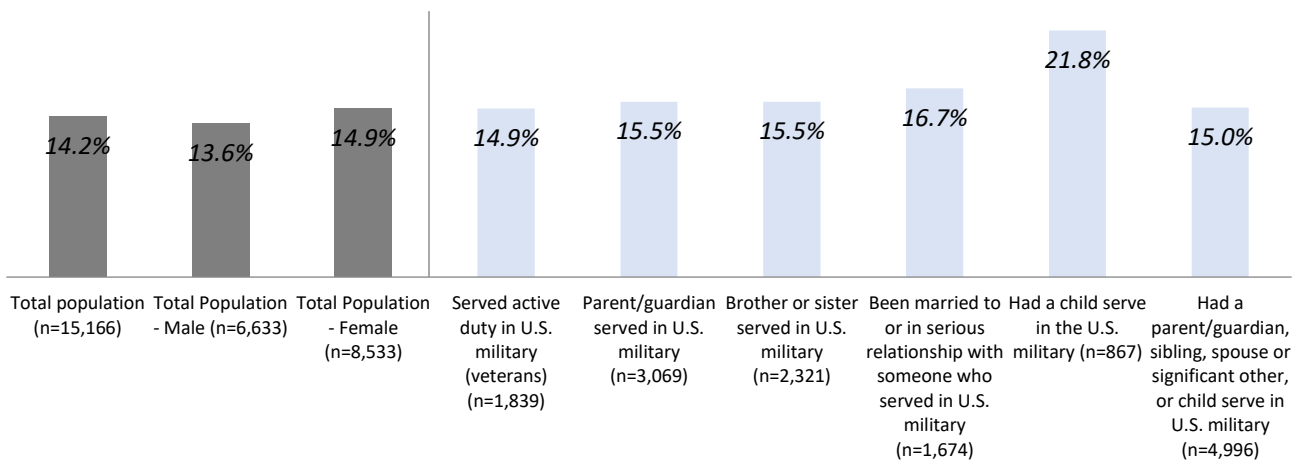
# Selected BRFSS Results

## Indicator 1. General health fair or poor

*Indicator Definition: Percentage of adults 18 and older who report that their general health is fair or poor.*

There were no statistically significant differences between veterans/family members of veterans and the total population on the indicator “general health fair or poor”. However, those who have had a child serve in the U.S. military reported their general health as fair or poor at a rate of 21.8%, compared to 14.2% for the total population (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. General health fair or poor**

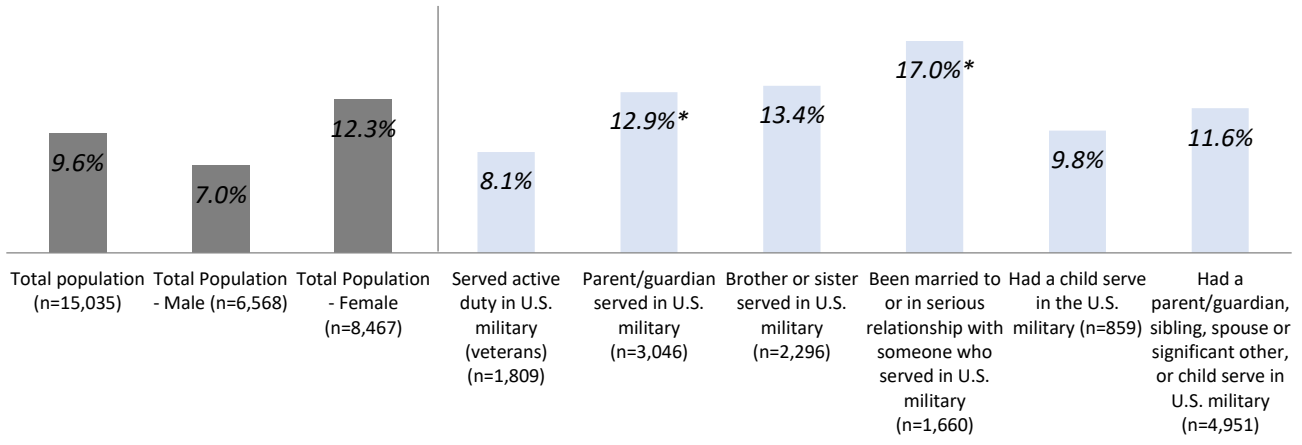


## Indicator 3. Mental health was not good on 14 or more of the past 30 days (i.e., frequent mental distress).

*Indicator Definition: Percentage of adults 18 and older who report that their mental health (including stress, depression, and problems with emotions) was not good on 14 or more of the previous 30 days.*

Family members of veterans appear to be more affected by mental health issues, most notably those who have been married to or in a serious relationship with someone who served in the U.S. military. Among this spouse/significant other group, 17.0% reported that their mental health was not good on 14 or more of the past 30 days, compared to 9.6% for the total population, a statistically significant difference (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Mental health was not good on 14 or more of the past 30 days (i.e., frequent mental distress)**



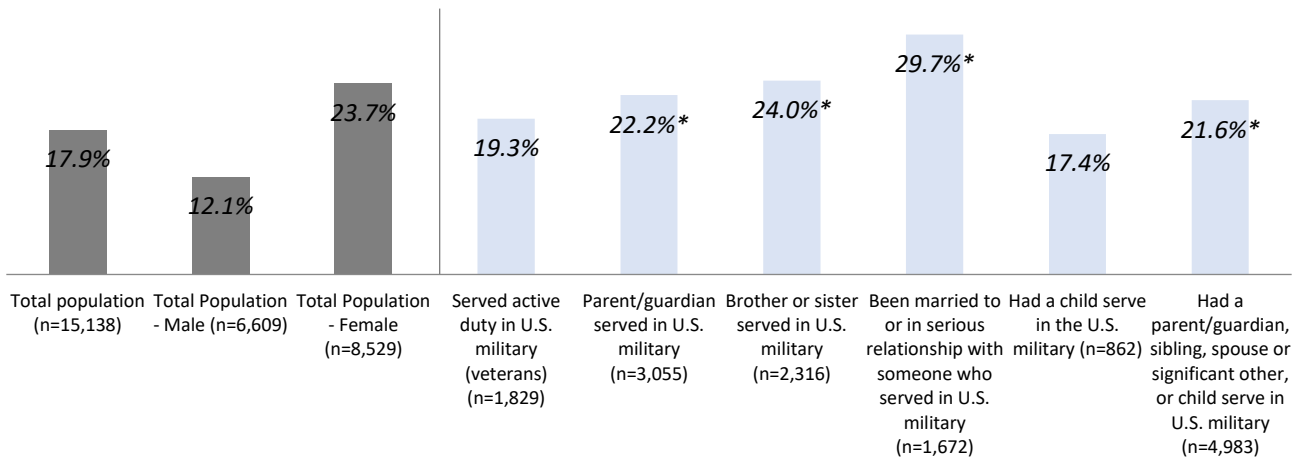
\*Statistically significant difference between the indicated group and the total population (based on 95% confidence interval non-overlap).

**Indicator 17. Ever told they have depression**

*Indicator Definition: Percentage of adults 18 and older who report that they have ever been told by a doctor, nurse, or other health professional that they have a depressive disorder (depression, major depression, dysthymia, or minor depression).*

Family members of veterans reported being told that they have depression by a health professional at significantly higher rates compared to the total population. Most notably, 29.7% spouses/significant others of those who have served in the U.S. military reported that they have been told they have depression, compared to 17.9% for the total population (Figure 17).

**Figure 17. Ever told they have depression**



\*Statistically significant difference between the indicated group and the total population (based on 95% confidence interval non-overlap).

## Conclusion

While there are many noteworthy areas in which veterans and their family members may have differed from the general population on the 22 BRFSS indicators included in the full report, it appears that mental health is the most prominent area indicating a need for services for veterans and their families.

On the indicator (#3) “Mental health was not good on 14 or more of the past 30 days (i.e., frequent mental distress)” there was a striking difference between family members of veterans and the general population. More than one-in-six (17.0%) spouses/significant others of veterans reported that their mental health was not good on 14 or more of the past 30 days, which is nearly double the rate of 9.6% for all of Nebraska. Spouses/significant others of military veterans are mostly females, and females report higher rates of mental distress in general. Nevertheless, the 17.0% rate of frequent mental distress reported by spouses/significant others is notably higher than the 12.3% reported by females across the state. In addition, parents/guardians and brothers/sisters of military veterans report notably high rates of frequent mental distress (12.9% for parents/guardians and 13.4% for brothers/sisters).

Perhaps even more telling is Indicator 17: “Every told they have depression.” Nearly one-in-five (17.9%) out of the total population has ever been told by a health professional that they have depression. Among veterans, this rate is slightly higher at 19.3%, but notably higher than the rate of 12.1% among all males in Nebraska, and veterans were 92% male in this survey sample. Females tend to report rates of depression that are approximately double that for males. Among all females, the reported rate of ever having depression was 23.7%. Among spouses/significant others, the reported rate of ever having depression was notably higher than this rate for all females at 29.7%. In addition, parents/guardians and brothers/sisters reported rates of ever having depression that are notably higher than the rate for the overall population (22.2% for parents/guardians and 24.0% for brothers/sisters).

Clearly, these two indicators point to a relatively high need for mental health services primarily for family members of veterans, but also for veterans themselves.

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