



# How Medicaid Strengthens Mental Health Services for Veterans

**Veterans have a higher likelihood of mental and behavioral illness related to their military experience and are among those who benefit from Medicaid coverage of mental health treatment. In fact, more than 1 in 10 veterans have been diagnosed with substance use disorder (SUD),<sup>1</sup> and more than 3 out of every 10 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan report having a mental health or cognitive condition.<sup>2</sup> Medicaid coverage provides support for veterans who suffer from these and other mental health conditions.**

1. Nearly 2 million veterans rely on their Medicaid coverage for routine checkups and mental health services, especially if they live far from a Veteran's Administration (VA) facility.<sup>3</sup>
2. Veterans with Medicaid coverage have complex health needs. For example:<sup>4</sup>
  - 54% have a disability
  - 11% have a severe mental illness
  - 12% have a substance use disorder
  - 35% describe their health as fair or poor
3. Among veterans covered by Medicaid, nearly 40% have Medicaid as their only source of health care coverage. For the remaining 60%, Medicaid supplements other coverage, helping to improve both their health and financial security.<sup>5</sup>
4. Many state Medicaid programs cover services that aim to address mental illness and substance use like peer support services – where individuals use their own lived experience recovering from SUD to support others in recovery – and other programs that promote productivity for adults.<sup>6</sup>
5. Veterans make up 12% of people experiencing homelessness in the United States. Medicaid has been found to improve access to care and overall health for veterans experiencing homelessness, who often lack access to other sources of coverage and have high rates of chronic health conditions, disabilities, mental health issues, and alcohol or substance use disorder.<sup>7</sup>
6. State Medicaid programs often cover behavioral health benefits for enrollees experiencing mental illness or SUD – including many veterans – such as psychiatrist services, inpatient psychiatric care, and inpatient SUD treatment. Some states' Medicaid programs also cover supported employment services like personal care, transportation, and job coaching, that help people with mental illness obtain and maintain employment.<sup>8</sup>

1 <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/substance-use-military-life>

2 [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9336.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9336.html)

3 <https://familiesusa.org/resources/cutting-medicaid-would-hurt-veterans/>

4 <https://www.cbpp.org/veterans-with-medicaid-have-complex-health-needs>

5 <https://www.kff.org/infographic/medicaids-role-in-covering-veterans/>

6 <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/708685.pdf>

7 <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-role-of-medicaid-and-impact-of-the-medicaid-expansion-for-veterans-experiencing-homelessness/>

8 <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/medicaids-role-in-financing-behavioral-health-services-for-low-income-individuals/>

