

Survey finds veterans generally satisfied with mental health care

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A survey of U.S. veterans receiving mental health services from the Veterans Health Administration finds general satisfaction, but also significant room for improvement among all areas studied.

The RAND Corporation study, conducted in 2008 and 2009, found that patients with a substance use disorder were less satisfied than other veterans who received [mental health](#) services. Those with substance abuse problems also were less likely than others to report that staff listened to them or respected their decisions.

The findings, published in the journal *Psychiatric Services*, are from a survey of more than 5,000 veterans who had received services from the Veterans Health Administration for a mental health or substance use problems.

Because the survey is several years old, researchers say the results may provide a useful baseline to judge future patient satisfaction and highlight areas needing improvement as federal policymakers overhaul the veterans' health system because of recent concerns about quality and access.

"We found that veterans who received services from the VA for mental health or substance use problems reported satisfaction with their care that was similar to or slightly lower than people who receive similar care in other public or private health care systems," said Kimberly Hepner, the study's lead author and a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, a

nonprofit research organization. "There certainly was room for improvement in all the areas we studied."

Researchers used VA records to survey patients who had been treated over the prior year for bipolar disorder, major depression, [posttraumatic stress disorder](#), schizophrenia or substance use disorder. Participants were asked about their need for housing and employment services, timeliness and recovery orientation of their care, satisfaction with care and perceptions of symptom improvement.

Half of the patients reported always receiving routine appointments as soon as requested and 42 percent of those surveyed said they were highly satisfied with the [mental health care](#) provided by the Veterans Health Administration.

About 74 percent of patients reported being helped by the treatment, yet just 32 percent said that their symptoms had improved. Patients who had been treated for [substance use disorder](#) were less likely to report being helped by the care they received.

Researchers say that while the information presented in the study is several years old, the results are the latest and most-complete assessment of veterans' satisfaction with mental health and substance use care received through the Veterans Health Administration.

Provided by RAND Corporation

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