

Universal health coverage for US military veterans within reach, but many still lack coverage

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Over a million US military veterans lacked healthcare coverage in 2012, according to new estimates published in *The Lancet*. While many people believe that all veterans are covered by the Veterans Affairs health care system, less than half (8.9 million) of the 22 million veterans in the US are covered by VA health benefits, and most veterans are covered by private health insurance. Uninsured veterans are more likely to be young, single, African American, and veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the authors of this viewpoint estimate that [universal health coverage](#) for veterans is within reach, thanks to the Affordable Care Act and its Medicaid expansion and subsidies for private health care. According to the authors, 87% of currently uninsured veterans could be eligible for health coverage through the Medicaid expansion, via the subsidized [private health insurance](#) market, or by enrolling in VA health benefits. Uninsured veterans are more likely to be clustered in states that have rejected the ACA's Medicaid expansion. Of the top five states with the highest number of uninsured veterans, four [1] are states that have rejected the expansion (the fifth, California, has accepted the expansion, but is also the most populous state in the union).

"Largely on account of the Affordable Care Act, the goal of universal health coverage for veterans is closer than ever,"* explains author Dave A Chokshi. "There remain political hurdles to achieving this goal, both in the false impression that the VA already provides universal coverage, and the decision by several states to reject the ACA's Medicaid expansion. While eligibility for insurance is not tantamount to access to care, universal coverage is an important first step towards high-quality healthcare."*

More information: *The Lancet*, www.thelancet.com/journals/lan... (14)61254-X/abstract

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