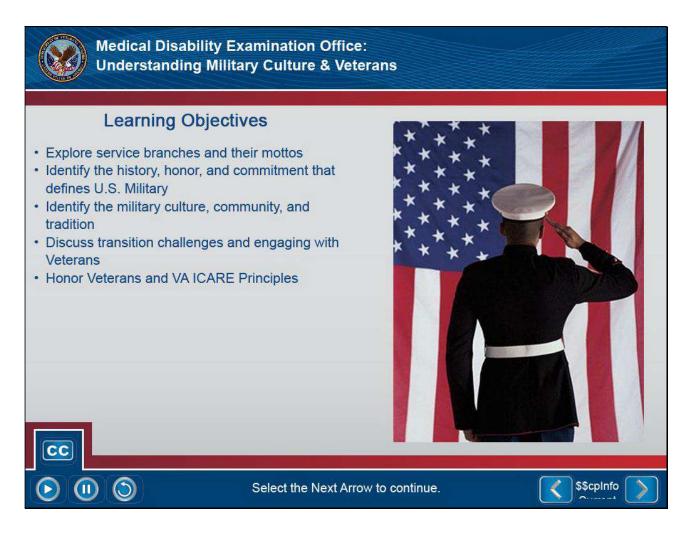


Welcome to Understanding Military Culture and Veterans.



Understanding military culture and how it impacts disability examinations involves multiple topics.

This lesson will increase your understanding of military branches and servicemembers, as well as their history, honor and commitment to serve our nation.

We'll explore the military culture and community, and Veterans' commitment to military tradition.

We will also discuss challenges Veterans experience when transitioning from active duty to civilian life. Finally, we will learn about honoring our Veterans and how VA ICARE principles lead to Veterans' care.

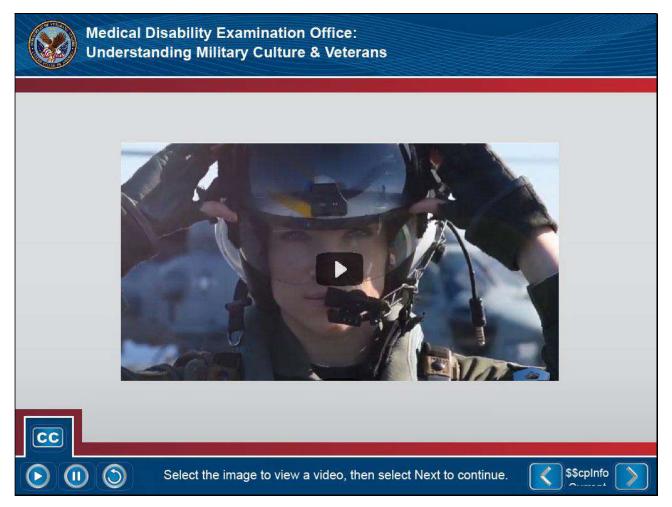


The Department of Defense is America's largest employer and spans around the world in more than 160 countries.

The Department of Defense's enduring mission is to provide combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our nation.

The men and women serving in our armed forces have helped forge a sense of identity and unity among Americans, particularly during times of strife.

The ten unified combatant commands provide effective command and control of U.S. forces around the world, in peace and war.

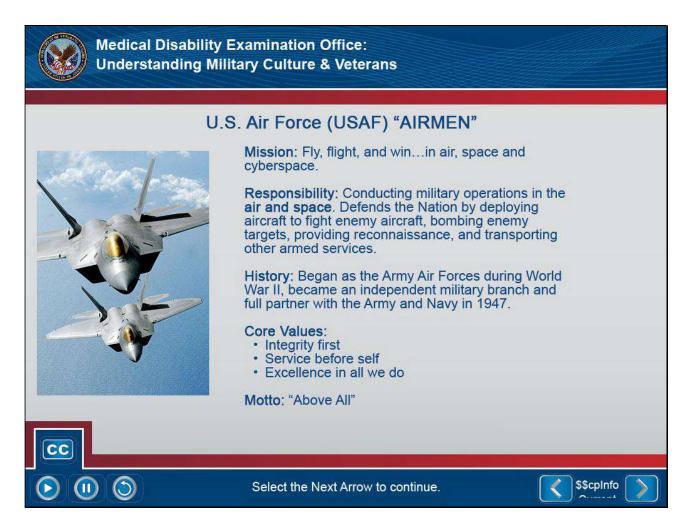


Select the image on the screen to view a short video or got to <a href="https://www.defense.gov/Our-Story/">https://www.defense.gov/Our-Story/</a>. The video will open in a new browser tab, where you will need to select the video image to play. When finished, please return to this screen to continue through the course.



There are five branches in the Department of Defense military forces.

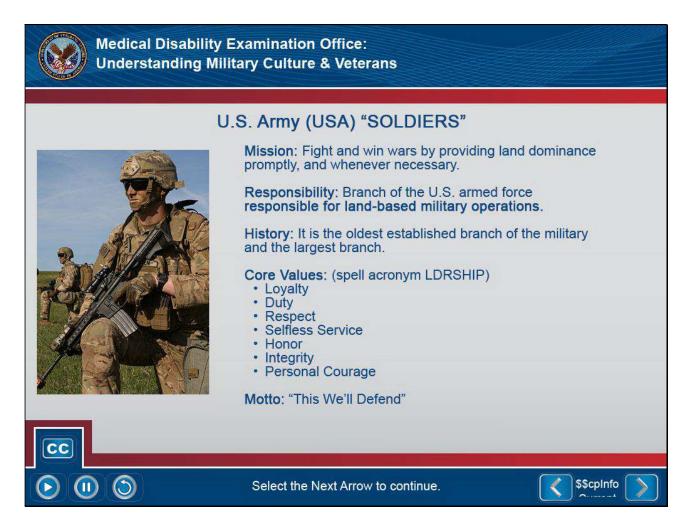
This course will explain a little about each of them and how military culture affects Servicemembers as they transition into being Veterans.



The Air Force began during WWII and partnered with the Army and Navy in 1947. They defend our Nation in air and space.

The Air Force provides a rapid, flexible, and lethal air and space capability that can deliver forces anywhere in the world within hours.

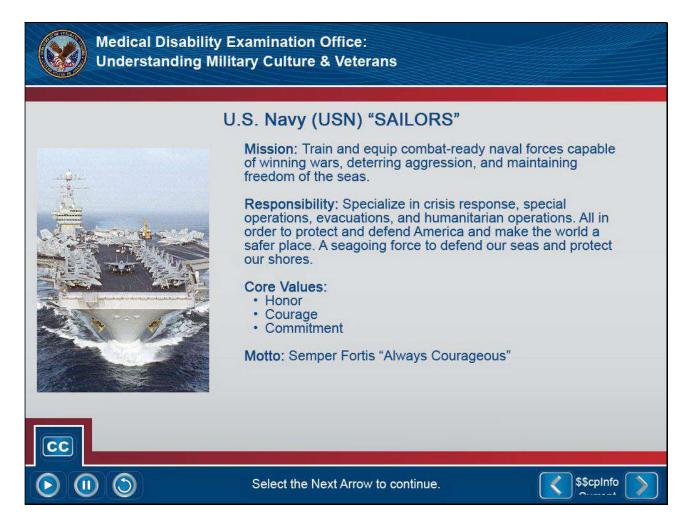
Their core values include Integrity, Service, and Excellence. Their motto is "Above All."



The Army is the oldest and largest military branch.

They provide land dominance with many core values that make up an acronym of leadership; including loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

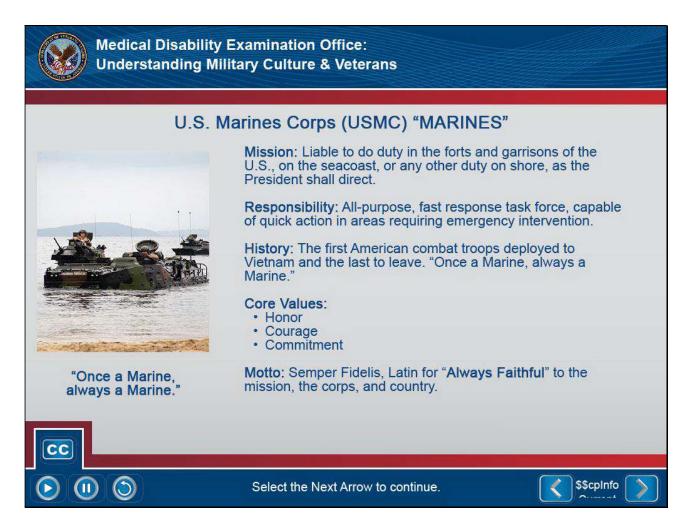
Their motto is: "This We'll Defend."



Above, below, and on the water, the Navy is America's forward-deployed force and is a major deterrent to aggression around the world.

Navy sailors are trained to be combat-ready to provide crisis response, special operations, evacuations, and humanitarian operations. They strive to make our world a safer place.

Their core values are honor, courage, and commitment; and their motto is Semper Fortis, meaning Always Courageous.



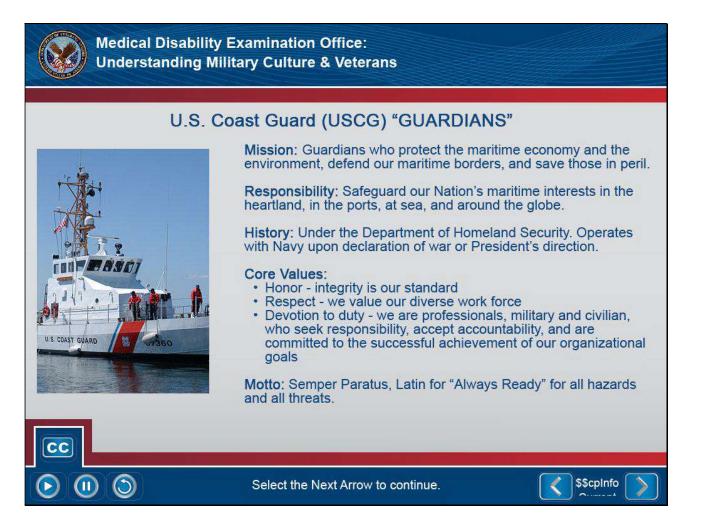
A component of the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps maintains amphibious and ground units for contingency and combat operations.

The Marines believe that there is no such thing as a former Marine; rather they say: "Once a Marine, always a Marine."

They are an all-purpose fast response task force anywhere, anytime. As America's expeditionary force in readiness since 1775, the U.S. Marines are forward deployed to win our Nation's battles swiftly and aggressively in times of crisis.

They fight on land, sea, and air, as well as provide forces and detachments to naval ships and ground operations.

Their core values are honor, courage, and commitment. You will often hear a Marine proudly exclaim "Semper Fi," Latin for "Always Faithful," to the mission, the corps, and country.



The Coast Guard provides law and maritime safety enforcement, marine and environmental protection, and military naval support.

Part of the Department of Homeland Security during peacetime, the Coast Guard operates under the Navy during times of war.

Basically, our Coast Guard are our Guardians at sea. They safeguard our seas and ports around the world.

Their core values are honor, respect, and devotion. Their motto, "Semper Paratus," is Latin meaning, "Always Ready."



In order to meet their strategic responsibilities, each branch has developed unique and diverse subcomponents that work in environments that would not be apparent to the casual observer. For instance, the Air Force has ground forces that support the overall mission, such as air controllers and security personnel.

The Army is able to bolster its immense logistical requirements with a fleet of water vessels that includes several ocean-going ships maintained and operated by soldiers. Coast Guard members not only ensure safe waters, but they also have other specific missions, such as drug interdiction.

Marine Corps fighter aircraft squadrons and security elements are regularly assigned to Navy ships. Navy medical personnel, called Navy Corpsman, are always assigned to Marine Corps combat elements. Navy Mobile Construction Battalions, known as Seabees, work as a ground force to perform a very specific mission.

These are just a few examples of how sub-components of a branch can be unique and focused on a specific mission. Therefore, it is very important that assumptions not be made regarding what environment the Veteran may have served in, or their personal experiences based solely on their branch of service.



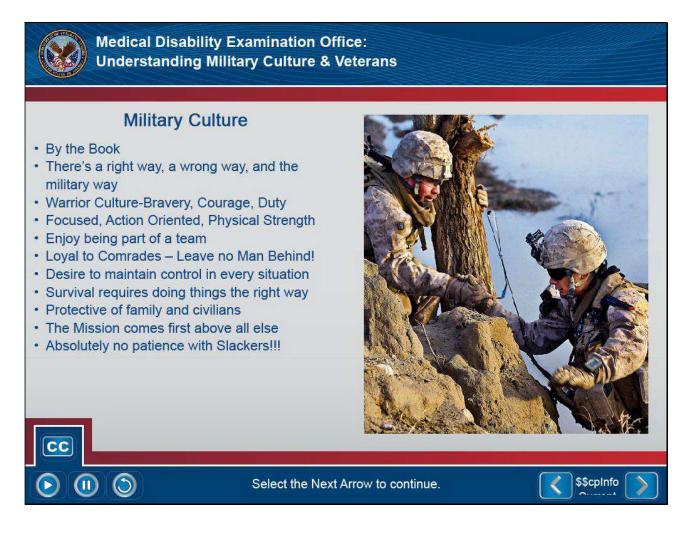
Reservists and Guards-people are critical for national defense. The National Guard is a versatile force, supporting combat missions, domestic emergencies, humanitarian efforts, homeland security operations and more.

Reservists and National Guard members who were called to active duty by a Federal Executive Order may qualify for VA health care benefits.

Returning Servicemembers, including Reservists and National Guard members, who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations have special eligibility for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for several years following discharge from active duty.

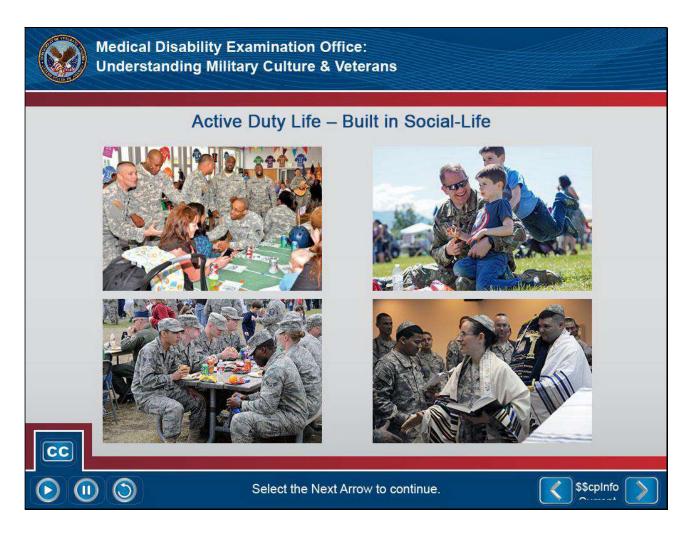
When a Reservist is activated in times of war, he or she would then be considered an Active Duty Servicemember. Reserves and National Guard units normally conduct training one weekend per month, and one two-week period each year.

Guard units are combat-trained and are usually deployed to their own state; however, they can be deployed to other states or overseas during states of emergency or during times of war. Guardsmen and women are sometimes called the "Citizen Soldier."



The military isn't just a job or a career, it's an entire culture and way of life. Military members are trained to live by the book, always stand proud, and ready to serve.

They learn early that slacking or not doing things the right way gets people killed. Their loyalty to comrades and the team keeps them focused. They are very protective.



Army installations are regarded as forts (sometimes referred to as being on-post or off-post). Navy installations are regarded as bases or stations. The Air Force installations are bases, and Marine Corps bases are referred to as camps, although the Army also has a few camps.

The military culture intertwines in every aspect of Servicepersons' lives. Bases, Forts, Camps, and Posts are like small cities. They have schools, day-cares, colleges, gyms, chapels, grocery stores, shopping centers, gas stations, and even horse stables and clubs. You will often see a Burger King or other fast food restaurant on base, or even a bowling alley and movie theater.

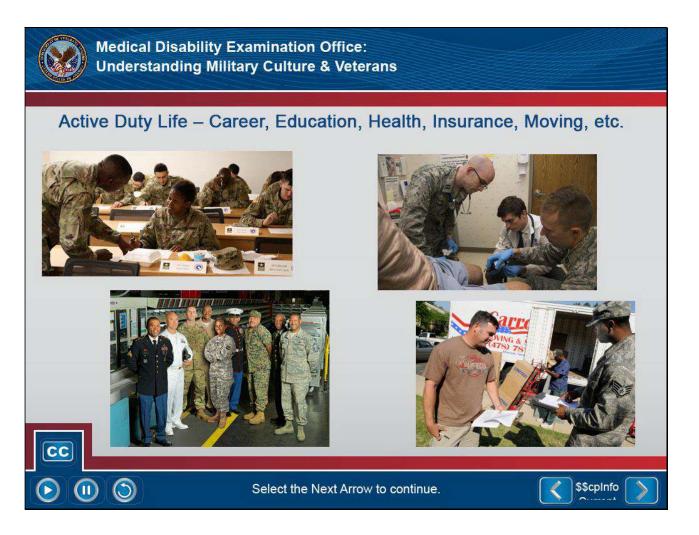
The installation offers planned social activities for adults, children's activities, and even child care. Military members and their families live, shop, attend school, workout at the gym, swim, attend social functions, funerals, and receive family support on the installation.

Medical hospitals and clinics providing healthcare are found overseas and on many U.S. installations. Each installation is a community in every aspect.



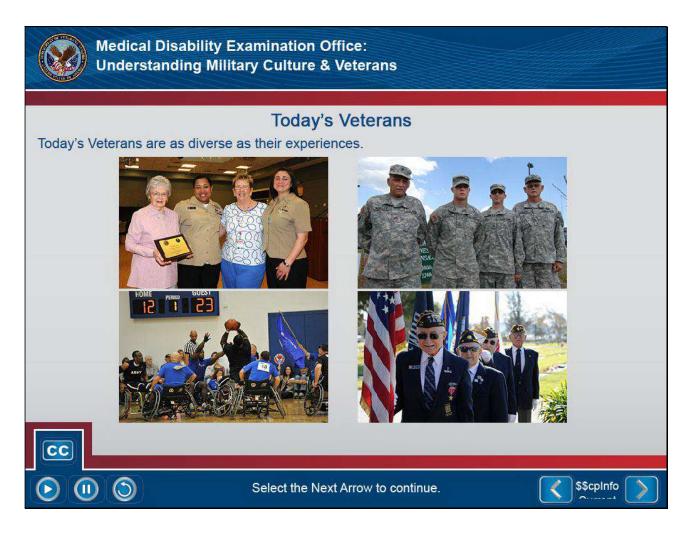
Their community is enriched with rituals and ceremonies. They are proud and dedicated to their communities.

Together they celebrate life events or provide support through life's difficult times.



Active duty life provides defined structures for career, health care, choice of insurance, home, and even moving.

Leaving the military community and structure requires Veterans and their families to learn how to adapt to civilian lifestyle, with many new choices and decisions, and with little help or support. It can quickly become overwhelming.

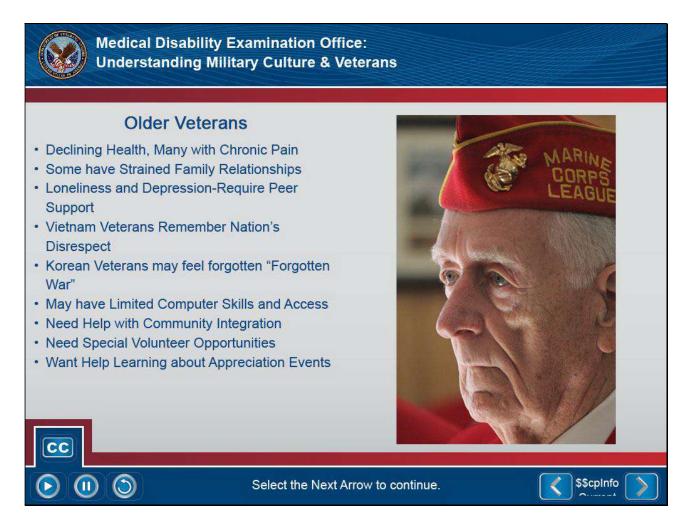


Today's Veterans are as diverse as their experiences. Veterans may be eligible for additional benefits related to their service-connected condition, but Veterans' health care is not just for service-connected injuries or medical conditions.

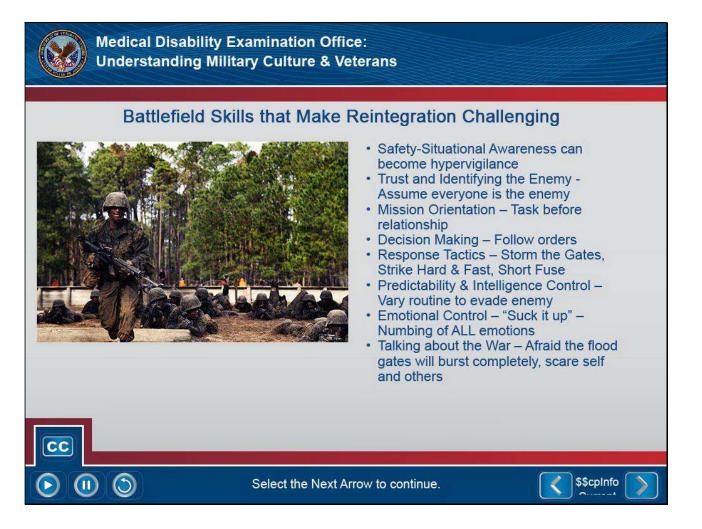
And, health care eligibility is not just for those who served in combat. It is also for all who served on active duty, irrespective of the location of service.

It is important to note that the Veteran population is changing. There are large numbers of younger Veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, over 11% of Servicemembers in the current conflicts are women.

As these young men and women return home, VA is evolving to meet the needs of this changing population.

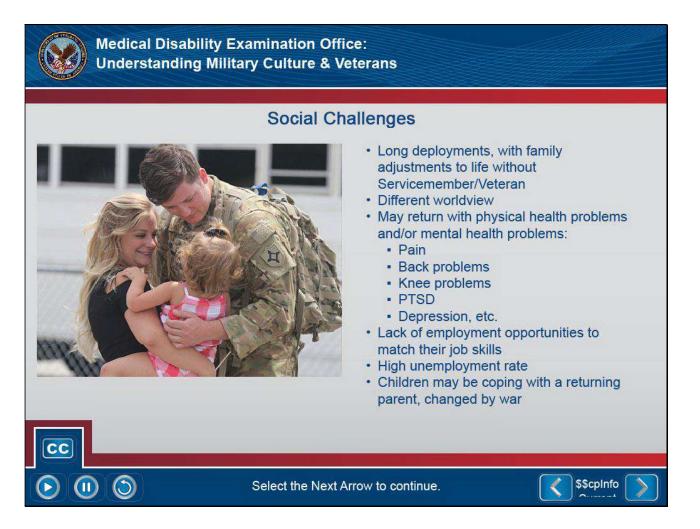


Older Veterans find it challenging as well. Though they may have integrated into the civilian community long ago, they often lack skills to find needed resources and they remember the disrespect they experienced when returning from war. They need additional patience and support.



Reintegrating into civilian life is met with many challenges for Veterans. Combat readiness and experiences that once saved their lives, now make living challenging.

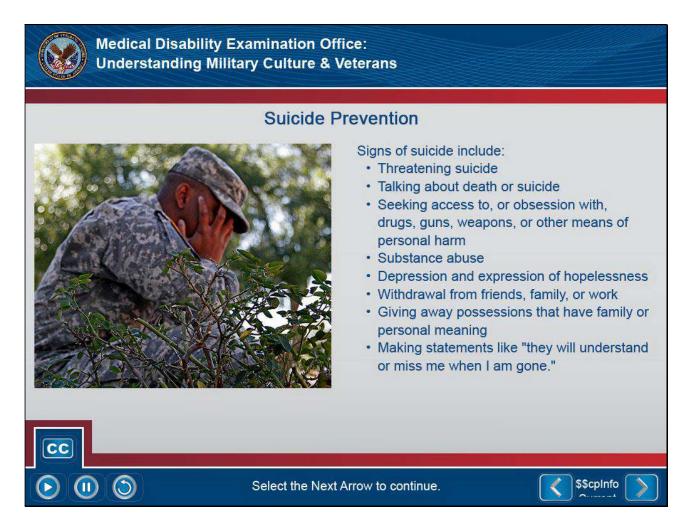
The structure they once followed doesn't always exist in civilian life and leaves them frustrated. They've been through a lot and are often unsure about how to return to a life that seemingly no longer exists for them.



Because of their unique experiences, many of which were traumatic, they suffer social challenges and can often feel lost or out of place. They may no longer feel needed or necessary as they try to relearn how to work and relate with civilians.

Their spouses and children also have unique experiences, some also traumatic, that make this transition challenging. The entire family may be experiencing difficulties transitioning to civilian life. This puts a lot of stress on the Veteran.

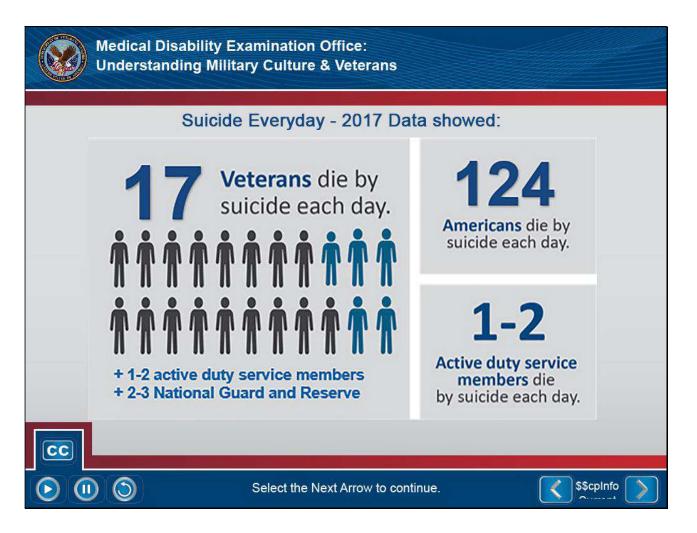
More than 37,000 will be homeless tonight and nearly 300,000 are unemployed. And, unfortunately, as many as 180,000 are incarcerated.



Suicide in the Veteran population is a significant and growing problem and is often related to military experiences and other social problems. As an examiner in the VA system, you may encounter someone who is considering suicide or who demonstrates several warning signs of potential suicide. Suicide is preventable; therefore, it is important to be able to recognize the warning signs of suicide and know what action to take if you encounter someone who has suicidal tendencies or is making threats of suicide.

If you encounter someone demonstrating any of these warning signs, do not be judgmental or confrontational. Try to find out if the Veteran is suicidal. For example: Are you feeling hopeless about the present or future? If yes, ask: Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?

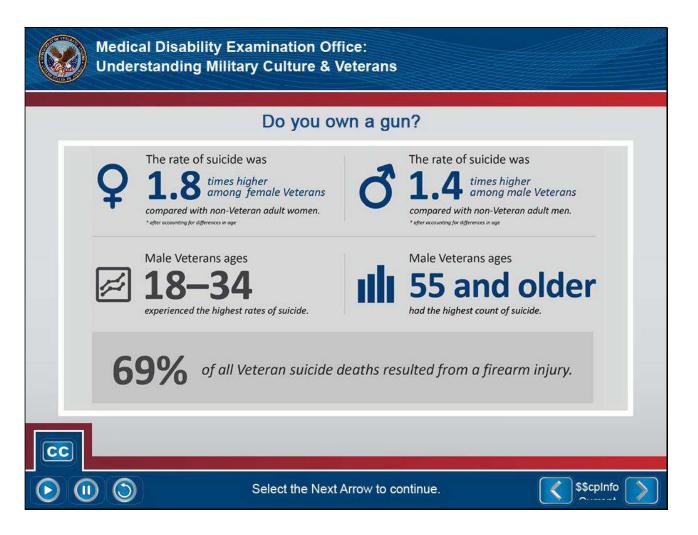
Most VA medical facilities have a Suicide Prevention Coordinator who may be contacted to intervene, determine the level of threat, and begin the referral process for treatment. Be aware of the warning signs of potential suicide; as a person with direct patient contact, you may be the first link in the recognition and prevention process. If a Veteran answers yes to suicidal questions, work to ensure the Veteran's immediate safety.



According to the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report by the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention showing data collected for 2017, an average of 17 Veterans die by suicide each day.

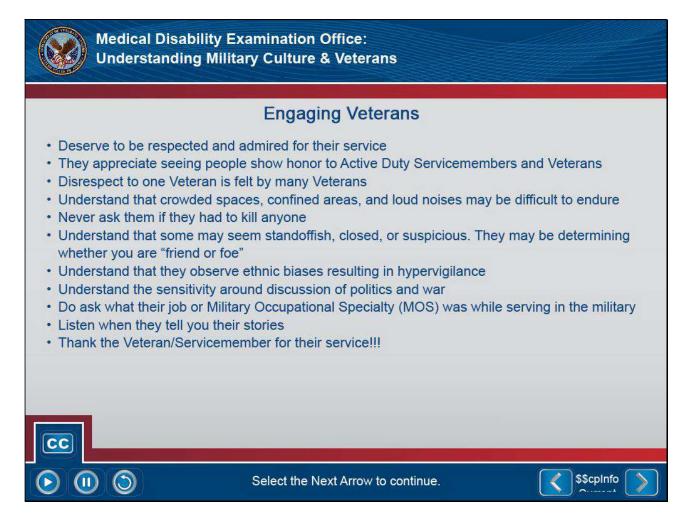
Another 1 to 2 active military members will also die each day, and yet another 2 to 3 National Guard and Reserve members, who have never been activated, will also die by suicide each day.

Suicide prevention is a national priority and VA is dedicated to this mission. While the data extends only through 2017, since that time VA has continued to work actively to address the issue of Veteran suicide.



Both female and male Veterans are more likely to end their lives than their non-Veteran counterparts. The majority of Veterans taking their life, will do so with a firearm.

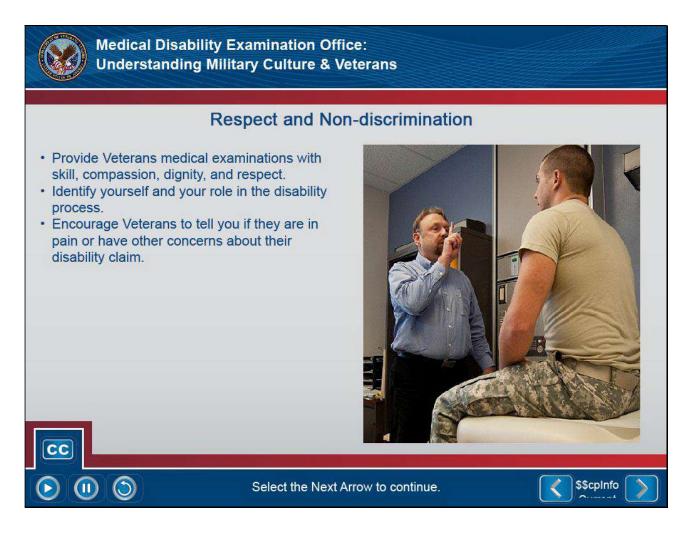
As disability examiners, you may be VA's first interaction with Veteran's who need help.



Now that you better understand their culture and challenges, you are better able to engage with Veterans and understand their unique situations.

It's important to show them honor, understand their challenges and how to engage them with appropriate questions, and most importantly, thank them for their service.

Take a moment to review some reasons you should show consideration to Veterans when engaging with them, and how you can do so.

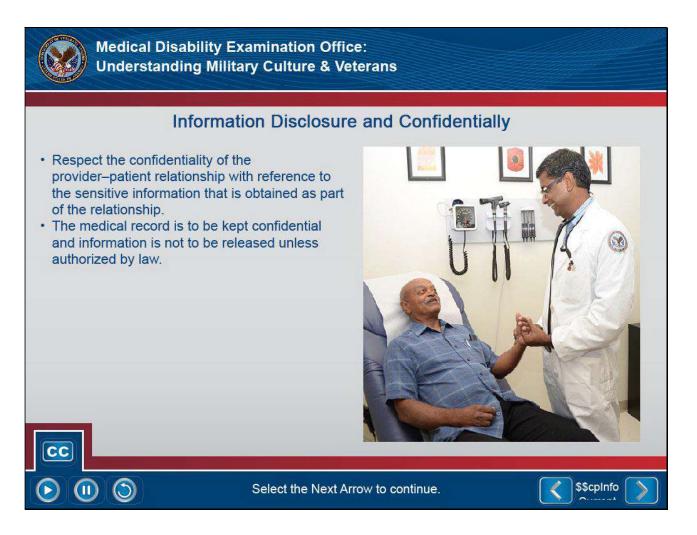


Filing a claim for compensation and medical care is a Veteran's right, and a VA priority. About one-half of the persons who seek medical help do so because of the primary complaint of pain. Pain includes not only the perception of an uncomfortable stimulus, but also the response to that perception.

With your increased understanding that Veterans are proud, you know how important it is to encourage Veterans to talk about their physical and emotional challenges.

While in the military, complaints of pain or emotional distress may have been viewed as a sign of weakness or an inability to maintain a military career. As Veterans, they are now free to share their challenges without fear of losing their career; however, the perception of weakness may still inhibit them from readily sharing their experiences. They need your support to build a relationship of trust that enables them to share their challenges accurately.

Also know that some Veterans may have been injured or ill, while serving in locations with limited access to care or treatment, and in some cases, no treatment or documentation. Some Veterans may have been exposed to harsh environments without documentation. Thus, engaging the Veteran to share information is important to the examination process.

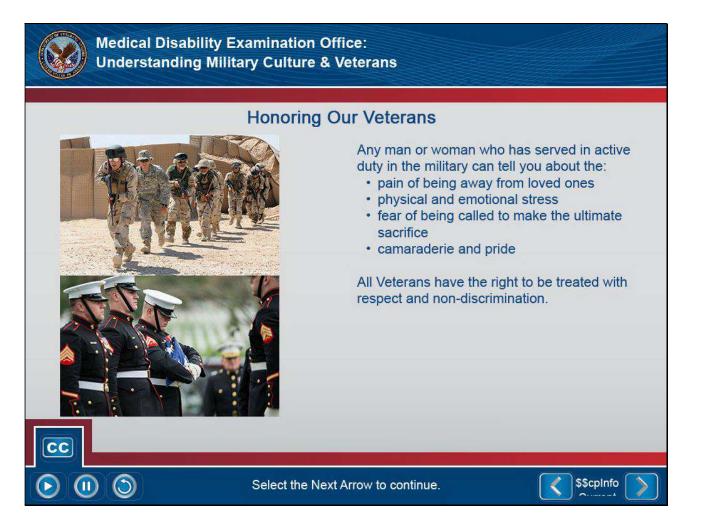


Remember military pride and understand how Veterans may be reluctant to disclose information that in military culture may be seen as weak and complaining.

They need your help in feeling able to disclose information they may have never before said out loud.

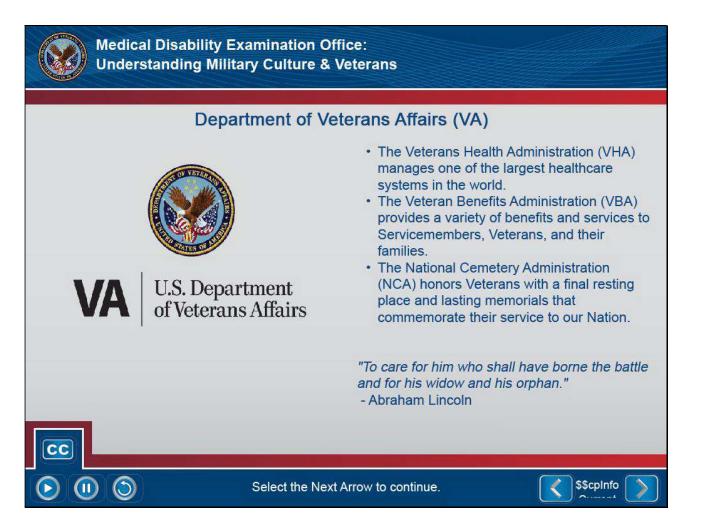
Veterans span time-ranges from pre-Vietnam to the present Gulf War Veterans. Each generation has its own perception of VA and may hold a distrust for the examination process.

Your genuine interest in their experiences and challenges can help bridge that trust.



Please remember: Military service is distinct among all vocations. It deserves our respect and gratitude, whether or not a Veteran saw combat action, was called to foreign soil, or was injured in battle.

Each Veteran swore to support and defend our Nation in wartime and peacetime. All Veterans can tell you the sacrifices they have made to serve duty for our country. Our duty is to care.



The Veterans Administration mission is to care for our Veterans and help them transition and survive as a civilian. The VA was established in 1930 and later became the cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989. Today's modern VA is a dynamic partnership with a shared mission divided among three administrative branches.

Today's VHA, the largest of the three, continues to meet Veterans' changing medical, surgical, and quality-of-life needs. New programs provide treatment for traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, suicide prevention, women Veterans and more.

VA has opened outpatient clinics, and established telemedicine and other services to accommodate a diverse Veteran population and continues to cultivate ongoing medical research and innovation to improve the lives of America's patriots.

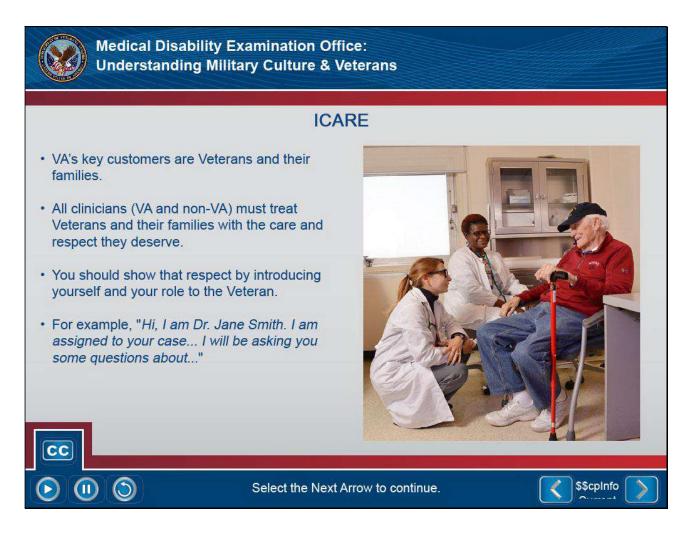
VBA benefits include disability compensation, pension and fiduciary services, insurance, education and training, vocational rehabilitation and employment services, guaranteed home loans and more to advance the economic empowerment and independence of Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

There are more than 130 national cemeteries, and more cemeteries are in development. More than 3.5 million people, including Veterans of every war and conflict, from the Revolutionary War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, are honored by burial in VA's national cemeteries.

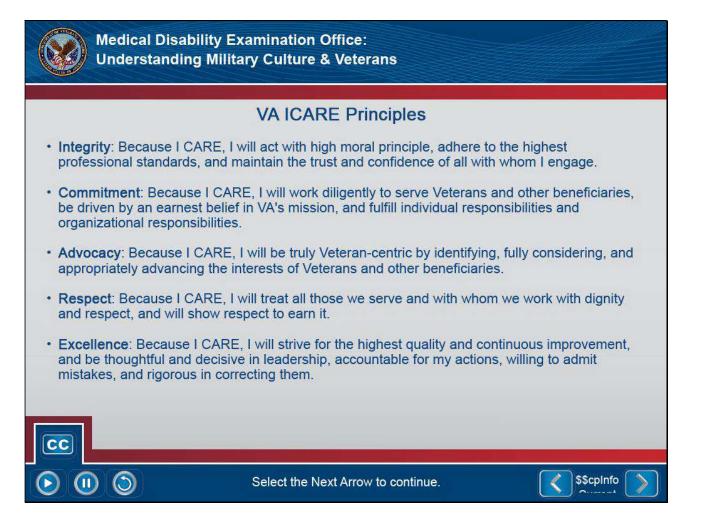
Today there are more than 22 million living Veterans who have earned the honor of burial in a national cemetery, including the more than 350 Medal of Honor recipients buried in VA's national cemeteries.

Working as one VA, these administrations proudly provide responsive, timely, and compassionate service to those who served our Nation.

Abraham Lincoln made that pledge to America's Civil War Veterans during his Second Inaugural Address, in 1865. Nearly a century and a half later, the VA is still making good on President Lincoln's promise, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

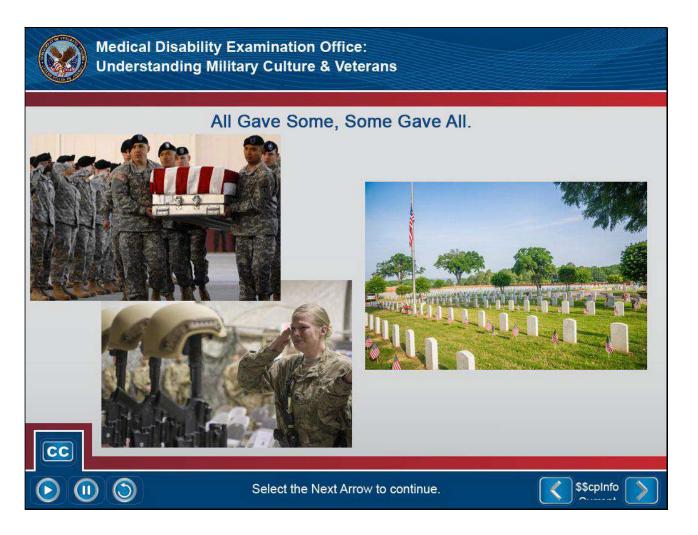


Veterans, and their families, are our customers. We strive to show them we care. Introduce yourself in a way which tells Veterans they are not just another face or number. Be sure to thank them for their service.

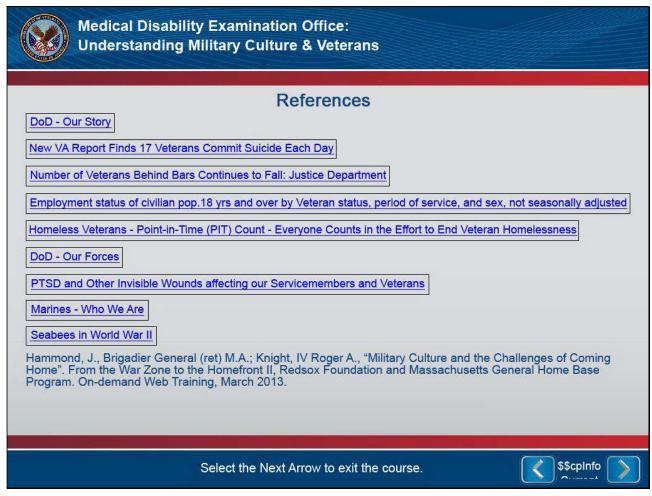


The VA's core values and service standards can be used to guide behavior. Most of these concepts follow common sense and courtesy and reflect the way most people would like to be treated.

We encourage you to share these with your team as a reminder to care for those who served.



It is important for you to remember that all Veterans gave a piece of themselves in their service for our country. Some gave all. Thank you for your service in supporting and caring for our Nation's Veterans.



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