

North Carolina has one of the largest military member populations in the country — and yet, tens of thousands of North Carolina veterans are unable to access safe and affordable health care. While families struggle to find help, reports show that many of these individuals and their loved ones would gain access to health care if Medicaid were expanded — and risks to their health access would increase if the Affordable Care Act were repealed.

## BACKGROUND: SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS IN NC

| COUNTY            | PERCENT VETERAN POPULATION | PERCENT OF VETERANS WITH A MAJOR SERVICE DISABILITY |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Onslow County     | 22.4%                      | 25.6%   |
| Cumberland County | 19.8%                      | 18.6%   |
| Camden County     | 17.6%                      | 13.7%   |
| Hoke County       | 16.4%                      | 25.3%   |
| Craven County     | 15.8%                      | 13.1%   |

Source: Rural Health Information Hub

Over **82,000** people in North Carolina are currently employed by the U.S. Armed Services. Further, **667,000** veterans live in North Carolina.

North Carolina has one of the **largest** active duty service member populations in the country.

Contrary to popular belief, the **majority of the nation's veterans** do not get their health care coverage through the Department of Veterans Affairs, but instead depend on supplemental insurance. This includes Medicaid, which currently covers nearly **1.8 million American veterans**.

- Only **half of the estimated 18 million veterans** in our country are enrolled in VA services and only two-thirds of those receive VA health care.
- Roughly **30,000** veterans and 23,000 veteran family members in North Carolina are uninsured.
- Over **370,000** veterans in North Carolina are below the age of 65 and do not qualify for Medicare.
- Nearly **1 out of 3** veterans in North Carolina is living with a disability.

# MEDICAID EXPANSION

It is estimated that [12,000](#) veterans in North Carolina currently fall in the Medicaid coverage gap and could gain access to health care if Medicaid were expanded.

- Nationwide, roughly [the same number](#) of veterans access health care through Medicaid as the Veterans Affairs system.

Unsurprisingly, states that expanded Medicaid under the ACA saw their portion of veterans who lacked health insurance [shrink the most](#) compared to non-expansion states.

- Medicaid expansion within the ACA resulted in [large groups](#) of veterans who did not live close enough to a Department of Veterans Affairs facility to access care enrolling in Medicaid, which provided an alternative option for health insurance.

Nearly [1 in 10](#) non-elderly veterans have Medicaid coverage and, of those, 40 percent get their coverage only through Medicaid.

# AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

In 2013, prior to the ACA, almost [one in ten](#) nonelderly veterans was uninsured completely. Within two years of the ACA's implementation, the percentage was down to [5.8%](#).

If the Affordable Care Act were repealed, [more veterans](#) would lose their health insurance than there are active duty members of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps combined.

- At least [690,000](#) military veterans nationwide would become completely uninsured by 2026 if the Affordable Care Act were repealed.

After the Affordable Care Act was implemented, veterans who did not yet qualify for Medicare were [36 percent](#) less likely to be uninsured than before.

- These large gains in coverage rates are a [result of both](#) increased insurance through the ACA marketplace and through [Medicaid expansion](#).

Repealing the Affordable Care Act would put a [massive burden](#) on the already struggling Department of Veterans Affairs health system as veterans seek alternative sources of health care.

- Additionally, [many veterans](#) utilize both insurance through the ACA marketplace and the Department of Veterans Affairs system. These veterans would be shifting a larger portion of their care to the VA system if they lost other forms of health care coverage.

If North Carolina's two senators, Thom Tillis and Richard Burr, had succeeded in their efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act in July 2017, [27,100](#) military veterans in North Carolina alone would have lost their health insurance.

# IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS

An [email](#) obtained by the [Center for Investigative Reporting](#) from the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system in April 2020 revealed that nurses at a VA facility in Durham were instructed to wear a single surgical mask per week due to an appalling lack of supplies.

- In April 2020, [eight members](#) of the U.S. House wrote a letter to Vice President Pence seeking answers to questions regarding conditions inside the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system during the coronavirus pandemic.
- The letter was prompted by a [lack of details](#) from the Trump administration about the status of masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment within VA facilities.

Facilities within the Department of Veterans Affairs system in North Carolina are relying on [virtual telehealth](#) to provide mental health services to veterans during the coronavirus pandemic, highlighting the need for consistent access to care.

- Officials at the Fayetteville Veterans Affairs N.C. Coastal Health Care System said that they are using telehealth to [continue engagement](#) with patients living with post traumatic stress disorder.

Like communities of color across the country, Black and Hispanic veterans are at a [higher risk](#) of contracting coronavirus and experiencing serious complications from the virus.