

Pathways for Military Veterans to Enter Healthcare Careers

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BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Over the next five years, approximately 1.5 million military service members will separate from the military. Healthcare holds promise as a target industry with jobs for transitioning military veterans given healthcare's high number of job openings, especially for entry-level jobs requiring less than a Bachelor's degree, and the projected future growth of the healthcare industry. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many veterans, including those with healthcare experience, have difficulties entering civilian healthcare occupations. This study investigates veterans' barriers to smooth career transitions into healthcare careers, with a focus on allied health occupations. In addition, this study examines the types of programs and policies designed to assist veterans to overcome barriers in their pursuit of healthcare careers.

METHODS

This descriptive study draws from a review of published and grey literature using PubMed, Internet search engines, state legislation, documentation of federal and foundation grants, organization websites, and the Grey Literature Report. The National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) used its legislation tracking system to scan all 50 states for enacted laws relating to the intersection of licensed health professions and veterans, as well as the intersection between education and veterans, between 2007 and 2015.

KEY FINDINGS

Four thematic areas emerged from the literature on the barriers that veterans frequently face when pursuing healthcare careers: 1) navigating complex benefits, 2) translating military education and training to meet civilian academic requirements, 3) meeting credentialing requirements, and 4) overcoming limited communication and knowledge about healthcare career opportunities.

- About half of states' legislative efforts to assist veterans with employment transitions directly identified healthcare careers, primarily emergency medical service and nursing occupations. Most state efforts were aimed at helping veterans meet credentialing requirements, including applying military education and experience to meet licensing requirements, as well as helping veterans translate military education and training into civilian occupations, including providing in-state tuition and college credit for military education and training.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The following considerations may help reduce the barriers for veterans interested in pursuing a healthcare career:

1. Build on recent efforts to increase transparency of military training curricula to improve translation of military education and experience into civilian healthcare education and experience.
2. Encourage states to adopt reciprocity of state credentials for healthcare occupations to increase job placement of veterans.
3. Streamline educational benefits for veterans to reduce confusion about access to healthcare careers.
4. Expand awareness of healthcare career opportunities across all educational institutions.
5. Clarify career ladder opportunities in healthcare for veterans.
6. Assess the scope of practice and experience attained by veterans in key military healthcare occupations to improve the translation of military job experiences into comparable civilian roles.
7. Help employers understand best practices and identify innovations in recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans.

- Several individual institutions, organizations, and government entities have introduced or changed existing policies and/or provided funding to support veterans’ education and employment programs to assist veterans’ transitions to civilian employment. Most of these programs address the barrier of translating military education and training to meet civilian academic requirements.
- Few efforts were found that were aimed at increasing awareness about healthcare career opportunities, and among those that did exist, most were in the developmental or early stages.

State and federal policymakers, educational institutions, and veteran support organizations have been developing ways to help veterans transition into healthcare jobs. As programs and efforts mature, high-quality, sustained evaluation and assessment are needed to understand how well the efforts are meeting their goals and the needs of veterans, as well as to identify areas for improvement, additional support, and replication in other settings.

Table 1. Types of Enacted State Legislation to Support Veterans Entering Civilian Healthcare Occupations (2007-2015)

Barrier	Approach	States*
Navigating Complex Benefits	Provide outreach regarding benefits and eligibility to military personnel	(IN, NV, RI, UT)
Translating Military Education and Training to Meet Civilian Academic Requirements	Translate college credit for military service or education	(AL, AK, CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MO, NH, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY)
	Provide in-state tuition for military veterans	(AK, AL, AZ, CO, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, IA, LA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MS, MO, NE, NV, NM, ND, OH, OR, RI, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WY)
	Provide campus supports for military veterans	(AZ, NJ, OR, TX)
Meeting Credentialing Requirements	Apply military education and experience to meet licensing requirements	CT, FL, GA, IL, KS, KY, LA, MD, MA, OR, TN, UT, VT, VA, WA (AK, DE, HI, ME, MT, MH, NJ, RI, SD, TX, WV, WY)
	Issue license or certificate to military personnel	AZ, AK, CT, FL, IN, MI, MS, NJ, NC
	Implement state reciprocity of license for military personnel and family	CO, KY, LA, TX
	Waive licensing fees for military personnel and family	IL, MI
Limited Communication & Knowledge about Healthcare Opportunities	--	None identified

*States in parenthesis () indicate non-healthcare specific efforts

Note: Legislation is included in this table if the intent of the law would impact health professions, even if the laws do not specifically identify healthcare careers or pathways. States that have non-specific health profession related legislation are indicated in parentheses. Sources include: NCSL 2015 report entitled “State Help for Returning Veterans” and a 50-state scan provided by NCSL to CHWS for this report.

More information about efforts to help veterans transition into healthcare careers is available in the report:

Snyder CR, Wick KH, Skillman SM, Frogner BK. Pathways for Military Veterans to Enter Healthcare Careers. Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, May 2016.