

Disabled Veterans and employers: moving from surviving to thriving

Employers have been eager to hire America's Veterans in recognition of the unique expertise they can bring to an organization, as well as a show of support and patriotism. But with over one-third of Veterans nationwide reporting a disability, Voya Cares and Easterseals commissioned original research to better understand what it means to support Veterans with disabilities and their caregivers in the workplace.

The Veterans community today looks quite different than it did two decades ago. And service members from the post-9/11 generation returning to civilian life, often following multiple deployments, are returning to a different economy that demands new and constantly evolving skill sets.

On the surface, employers' efforts to hire Veterans appear to have been successful: As of March 2024, the unemployment rate for all Veterans is 3.0%, and it is 5.3% for Veterans with a disability, lower than both groups' non-Veteran counterparts.¹

However, these numbers do not show the full picture. For millions of American Veterans — particularly the over 4.7 million who have service-connected disabilities² — the transition from service to civilian life and work can present complexities and difficulties. It is not always apparent how skills developed in the military translate into the civilian workforce, even those that are highly valued by employers. Disabled Veterans may be employed, but many are underemployed, meaning they have a job, but it is part-time, and/or it does not allow them to use their skills and talents to their full potential. Mental and emotional health and wellbeing also are concerns for disabled Veterans, further complicating efforts to find and maintain employment that is appropriate to their level of skills and expertise.

Experiences like this have left many feeling uncertain about their long-term financial security and retirement. Add to that a lack of understanding of the financial resources available to them through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and their employers, and disabled Veteran employees are left unsure of how to maximize and integrate them all effectively.

Often overlooked in the conversation on important Veterans issues is the role of their families and caregivers. According to the VA, there are more than 6.5 million unpaid caregivers of Veterans.³ These individuals perform the necessary and often unseen care tasks — including managing medication, health care, personal care, and transportation — that can impact not only the Veterans whom they support but also many areas of caregivers' own lives. Caregivers often experience some of the same career challenges and financial insecurity that Veterans face but to a more extensive degree.

Today, many employers want to support their disabled Veteran employees and their Veteran caregiver employees. However, there is a gap between what support employees need, the benefits and services offered and those that are used.

With this in mind, Voya Cares and Easterseals commissioned original research to look beyond efforts to hire Veterans to better understand what it means to support Veterans with disabilities and their caregivers. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, the research explores key areas, such as:

- What challenges do Veterans with disabilities encounter when transitioning from service to civilian life and employment?
- What are disabled Veterans' financial and career goals?
- Are they confident in their readiness for retirement?
- What benefits and supports are they seeking from employers?
- How are family caregivers being supported in the workplace?
- What role can employers play in providing Veterans with disabilities and their caregivers the support and services they need to thrive?

Key findings

Disabled Veterans report challenges transitioning from service to civilian life and work. In particular, they face unique barriers to finding appropriate employment and advancing in their careers.

Both Veterans with disabilities and employers face challenges connecting these Veterans with promising job opportunities. Many disabled Veterans report being underemployed. Additionally, disabled Veterans are more likely than nondisabled Veterans to feel they lack support for education and professional development opportunities. And employers have challenges around hiring disabled Veterans, including their tendency not to voluntarily disclose that they have a disability.

There is a significant gap between employers' perception of how they support disabled Veterans at work and how disabled Veterans and their caregivers feel their needs are being met in the workplace.

Many employers see Veteran outreach as an essential part of their recruitment, but they are less focused on specific outreach efforts to Veterans with disabilities. Furthermore, employers are less certain about how to support disabled Veterans, once hired. While most employers are interested in offering benefits to support disabled Veterans and their caregivers — such as Stay-at-Work programs, managed accounts, and student debt management — the programs that disabled Veterans prioritize often differ from what employers expect.

Many Veterans with disabilities have low confidence about their long-term financial future and retirement.

Even though many disabled Veterans access VA resources, they are not confident they are maximizing the benefits and resources available to them and integrating them effectively with their employee benefits. This is especially evident for retirement planning services, an area in which employers traditionally may not offer many benefits.

Concerns about mental health benefits and support are top-of-mind.

Disabled Veterans recognize mental health as a top barrier to employment and indicate that mental health support and services are critical to their success at work. Yet even when employers make these supports available, disabled Veterans often are hesitant to access them, partly because they may not want to disclose mental health challenges.

Caregivers of disabled Veterans are struggling and frequently overlooked for support.

Caregivers often perform a balancing act between work, caregiving and their own needs and would benefit from programs and resources that help them balance these demands.

Visit VoyaCares.com/DisabledVets for more information.

1. March 8, 2024, Veteran Unemployment Rates, U.S. Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>
2. U.S. Census Bureau data tables 2022, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2022.B21100?t=Disability:Veterans>
3. "Caregivers of Veterans Spend \$11,500 on Average Each Year on Expenses, New Data Shows." Military.com, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/11/14/caregivers-of-veterans-spend-11500-average-each-year-expenses-new-data-shows.html#:~:text=More%20than%206.5%20million%20veterans,offers%20extensive%20services%20for%20caregivers> and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Research, Caregivers and Family Support, https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/research_topics/caregiving.cfm

This material has been provided for educational purposes only. This material was created to provide accurate and reliable information on the subjects covered. It is not intended to provide specific legal, tax or other professional advice. • Easterseals and the Voya® family of companies are not affiliated and are not responsible for each other's policies and services. • Voya Cares® and other Voya products and services are offered through the Voya family of companies.

© 2024 Voya Services Company. All rights reserved. CN3504075_0426

