

RAND announces stunning update to size of military caregiver population as financial insecurity, mental health, family strain reach concerning levels

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 24, 2024 /PRNewswire/ -- RAND researchers presented the findings of a nationwide study on military and veteran caregivers today at the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's 9th Annual National Convening on Military Caregiving at Amazon HQ2 in Arlington, Virginia. The report, commissioned by the Foundation, estimates that the number of Americans providing care to a wounded, ill, or injured service member or veteran now stands at 14.3 million—representing 5.5 percent of all U.S. adults. Researchers found that these caregivers provide at least \$119 billion worth of care to their loved ones every year, while 35 percent of their households live below 130 percent of the federal poverty line.

The estimated population of 14.3 million military and veteran caregivers, up from the 2014 estimate of 5.5 million.

"America has largely left the care of its service members and veterans in the hands of their family members and friends, without ensuring that they are prepared or adequately supported," said Steve Schwab, CEO, Elizabeth Dole Foundation. "RAND's findings are a wake-up call for the nation and force us to confront the consequences of continuing to thrust these tremendous responsibilities upon millions of selfless caregivers and their families."

The study, *America's Military & Veteran Caregivers: Hidden Heroes Emerging from the Shadows* was made possible with the support of Wounded Warrior Project[®] (WWP), the Lilly Endowment, AARP, and Lockheed Martin. It serves as a 10-year follow-up to the Foundation's first landmark report, released in 2014 from the White House.

At the Convening, Dr. Rajeev Ramchand, lead author and co-director of RAND's Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute, shared the results of the survey, including the following:

- The estimated population of 14.3 million military and veteran caregivers marks a dramatic update to the 2014 estimate of 5.5 million.
- About 40 percent are "sandwich caregivers," who also care for a child under 18, and many of these children are struggling.
- Almost a quarter of military and veteran caregiver kids needed mental health treatment in the past year but did not receive it—nearly double the rate of civilian caregiver kids and three times the rate of non-caregiver children.
- Caregivers lose more than \$13,000 in annual out-of-pocket costs due to caregiving and lost household income.
- Food insecurity is more common among caregivers, particularly those caring for a veteran or service member aged 60 or younger, 40 percent of whom are food insecure.
- Depression and suicidal thoughts occur more frequently among caregivers than non-caregivers. Among those caring for a veteran or service member aged 60 or younger, one in five contemplated suicide in the last year.
- 63 percent of uninsured military caregivers live in Southern states; 59 percent are non-White; and 47 percent live below the 100 percent poverty line. Among those caring for a service member or veteran aged 60 or younger, 39 percent lack healthcare coverage, which is 15 percentage points higher than civilian caregivers in the same age demographic.
- More than 70 percent of military and veteran caregivers felt that they were not listened to or that their input was not sought by their loved ones' healthcare provider.

"Every day caregivers sacrifice to ensure veterans and service members have the care they need and deserve. The RAND report highlights just how significantly this can affect their mental and financial health and impact their children," said WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt. "As more warriors face the lasting impacts of our nation's longest war, the need for dedicated, selfless caregivers increases. That's why Wounded Warrior Project is committed to providing the crucial care and long-term support these warriors and their caregivers will need as they age."

The Foundation announced plans to mobilize its extensive network, including the over 100 organization members of the Hidden Helpers Coalition and the more than 200 communities across the nation that have joined its Hidden Heroes Cities and Counties network, to implement the report's recommendations and effectively address its most urgent findings. Recommendations include expanded mental health and substance use treatment options for caregivers and their children, increased financial support, more caregiver-friendly work environments, and greater progress on including caregivers in their loved ones' healthcare teams.


Military and veteran caregivers looking for support, and those who wish to offer their help to this community, can visit the Foundation's website at Elizabethdolefoundation.org.

About the Elizabeth Dole Foundation

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation is the preeminent organization empowering, supporting, and honoring our nation's 14.3 million military and veteran caregivers – the spouses, parents, family members, and friends — who care for America's wounded, ill, or injured service members and veterans at home. Founded by Senator Elizabeth Dole in 2012, the Foundation adopts a comprehensive approach in its support and advocacy, working with leaders in the public, private, nonprofit, and faith communities to recognize military caregivers' service and support their well-being. The Foundation's Hidden Heroes Campaign brings vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and provides a network for military caregivers to connect with their peers and access carefully vetted resources. Visit elizabethdolefoundation.org for more information.

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn more about Wounded Warrior Project.](#)

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