

Opioid Use Disorder

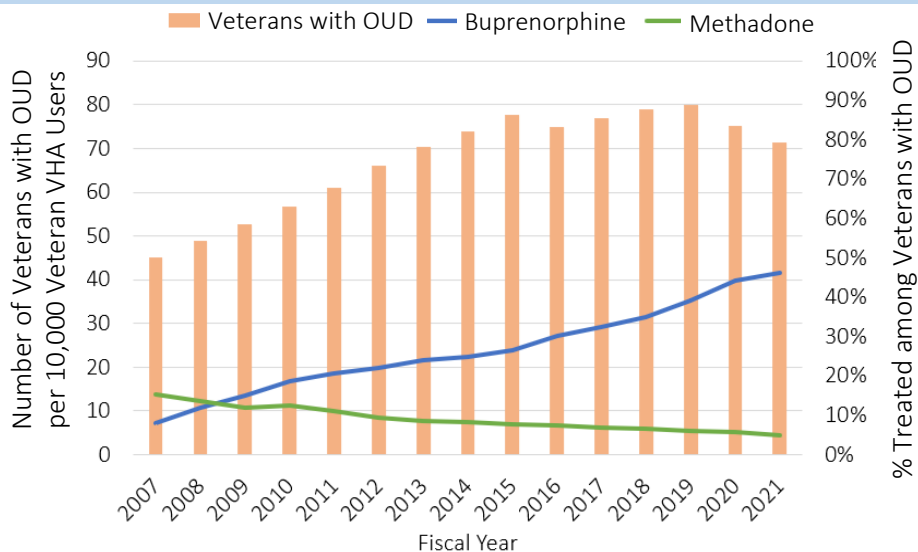
April 2022

Fact Sheet: Data on Veterans Using VA Health Care

CSPEAR provides timely epidemiologic information on VA health care users. This fact sheet presents summary data to inform a broad community of VA leaders, investigators, and clinicians as they consider how best to address the needs of Veterans.

Introduction: Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) is a brain disease that can develop after repeated opioid use¹. Opioid overdose has become a national epidemic in the United States². Veterans are at a higher risk of OUD due to increased prevalence of acute and chronic pain conditions, mental health conditions, and social stressors³. The number of patients with OUD receiving care through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has more than doubled from 2003 to 2017⁴. The use and misuse of prescription/illicit opioids have led to an increased rate of Veterans' death caused by opioid overdose⁵. Medication treatment for OUD including methadone, buprenorphine, and injectable naltrexone is strongly recommended for OUD and is a covered pharmacy benefit for Veterans⁶. VA implemented programs such as the Opioid Safety Initiative in 2013⁷ and the Opioid Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution program in 2014⁸.

Number of Veterans Diagnosed with OUD and Percent Treated with Buprenorphine or Methadone by Fiscal Year, 2007–2021



Fast Facts

- In Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, an estimated 0.71% (47,241/6,610,305) of Veteran VHA users met criteria for OUD diagnosis.
- Methadone was the first available drug for OUD treatment. Its use has been declining.
- Intramuscular naltrexone is relatively new in terms of OUD treatment. However, it is rarely used for treating Veterans with OUD.
- Buprenorphine has become the most widely used medication for treating OUD.

Methods: Data were extracted from the VA Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW)⁹. The population under consideration consisted of Veteran users of the VHA and OUD diagnoses (OUD treatments are also considered). While protecting privacy, we first identified the number of Veteran users of the VHA in each fiscal year 2007 through 2021, and then identified those with an OUD diagnosis. **Definitions:** A). *OUD diagnosis:* at least 1 inpatient OR 2 outpatient ICD codes (visit the [Centralized Interactive Phenomics Resource \(CIPHER\)](#) for more information on the [OUD phenotype](#)). B). *OUD Treatment:* Treatments with methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone were pulled from the following CDW domains: inpatient Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA), outpatient pharmacy domain, and fee basis. In addition to searching drug names and synonyms, drug classifications, administration methods and dosage information are taken into account. For example, the drug classification is used to limit OUD drugs to the “OPIOID ANALGESICS” class. We only considered methadone medications that were taken orally in liquid/solution form; buprenorphine medications that were taken sublingually in tablet form; and intramuscular naltrexone. However, 99.5% of naltrexone treatments were in the form of oral tablets, making it difficult to discern between naltrexone’s use for OUD and alcohol use disorder. Therefore, naltrexone data are excluded from the analysis due to its rarity. C). *OUD Proportion:* The proportion of Veteran VHA users who meet criteria for OUD diagnosis in a given fiscal year. **Acknowledgements:** This material is the result of work supported with resources and the use of facilities at the VA Cooperative Studies Program Epidemiology Center in West Haven, CT. The contents do not represent the views of VA or the US Government.

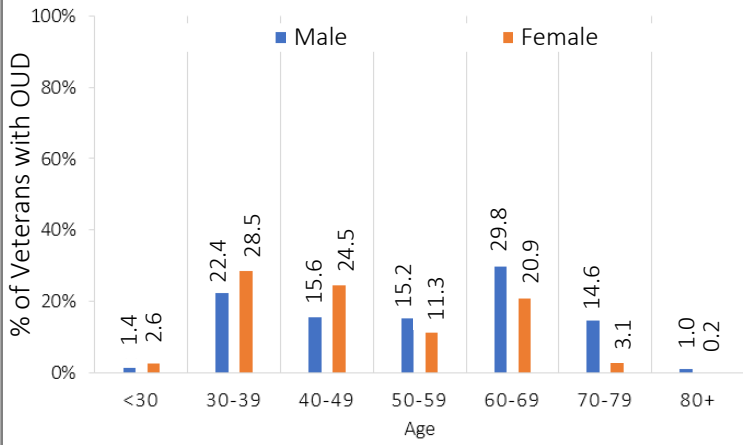
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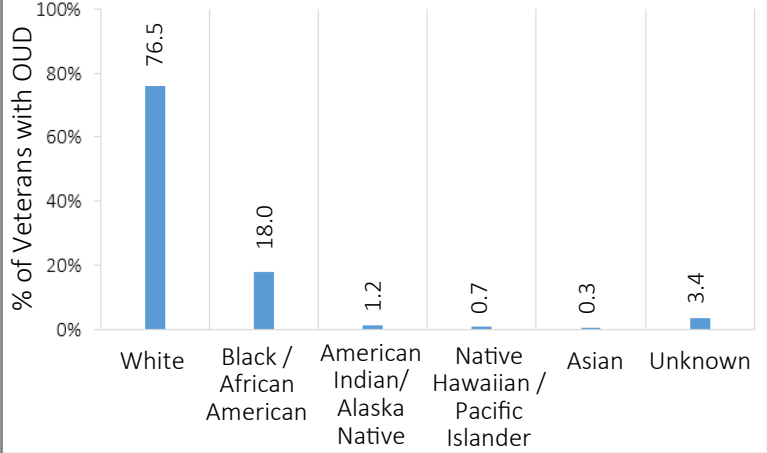


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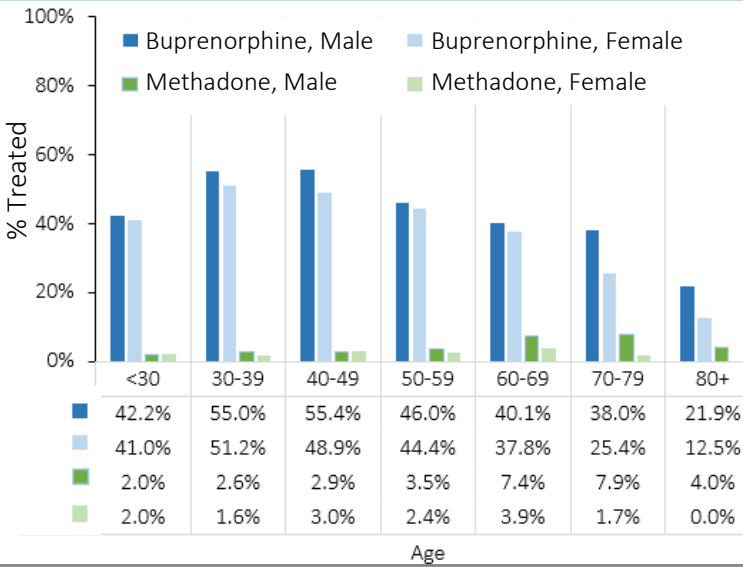
Age and Sex Distribution of Veterans Diagnosed with OUD, FY 2021



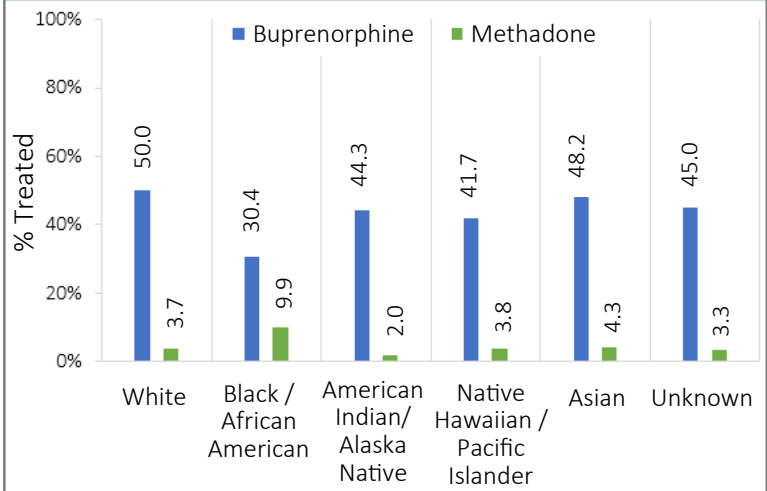
Racial Distribution of Veterans Diagnosed with OUD, FY 2021



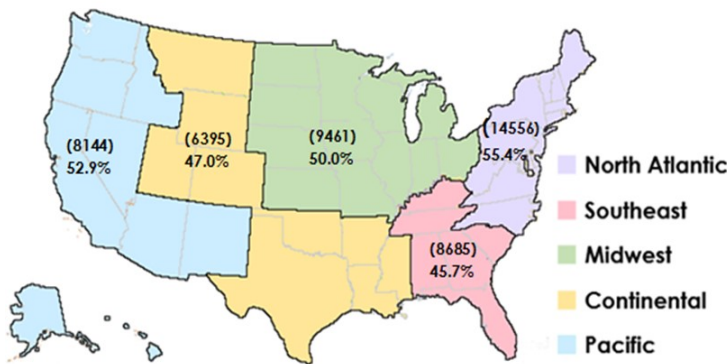
Percent of Veterans with OUD Treated with Buprenorphine or Methadone by Age and Sex, FY 2021



Percent of Veterans with OUD Treated with Buprenorphine or Methadone by Race, FY 2021



Geographic Distribution of OUD Treatments in FY2021



The map shows the numbers of patients with OUD (in parentheses) and the proportions of these patients (%) treated with methadone or buprenorphine across different geographic regions.

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References and Resources

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- [9] [Corporate Data Warehouse \(CDW\)](#). Accessed Dec 2021.