

# Decennial Veterans' Long-term Care Needs Study

House Bill 264

September 2024



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES**

# Overview and House Bill 264 Directive



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# The Directive: House Bill 264

## Charge

Passed in the 2023 Montana legislative session, House Bill (HB) 264 mandates the decennial Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs Study, focusing on the living conditions and support systems essential for the well-being of Montana's veteran community.

## Objectives

1. Determine the demographics of the Montana veteran population.
2. Conduct a personal survey of the Montana veteran population, including online and paper options.
3. Evaluate existing veterans' home services and their configuration concerning the identified needs.
4. Analyze the need for additional state veterans' cemeteries, including their placement within the state.

## Study Goal

**The study aimed to identify key challenges and issues related to long-term care for Montana veterans, inform future initiatives, and provide guidance for improving long-term care services for veterans in Montana.**



# Assessment Approach



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# 2024 Montana Veterans' Assessment Methodology

## 01 Demographic Analysis

A comprehensive examination of Montana's veteran population demographics quantified the veteran population, analyzed age distribution across counties, and identified specific long-term care needs, including disability assistance, rehabilitation services, and mental health support.

## 03 Interviews

SLTC interviewed staff of the Veterans Navigation Network, an entirely grant- and donation-funded Montana-based organization, serving more than 500 veterans annually.

01 02

## 2024 Montana Veterans' Assessment Methodology

## 02 Focus Groups

Senior and Long-Term Care (SLTC) staff held one Zoom focus group session, inviting caregivers, providers, and spouses. Three caregivers of veterans participated from Silver Bow and Jefferson counties.

## 04 The Veteran Survey

SLTC, in collaboration with a contractor, developed a survey tool to assess the long-term care needs and desires of veterans across Montana, including assessment of cemetery needs.

03 04

# 2024 Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs Survey

SLTC created a non-scientific survey for veterans titled, "Your Future Long-Term Independence: Let's Plan on It!"

Additional efforts were made to reach out to rural and remote areas. The project team aimed for survey respondent distribution to mirror the distribution of veterans living in each Montana county.

The 2024 veterans' survey was available online and in hard copy from January 5, 2024 to July 15, 2024.

3,579 Montana veterans participated in the survey in total, with 3,341 veterans completing the survey online and 238 submitting paper responses.

### Montana Veterans Long-Term Care Needs Survey Question Sections:

- Tell Us About You
- Your Service Matters
- Your Living Situation
- Getting Around
- Your Work and Community Involvement
- Your Learning Experience
- Your Overall Well-Being
- Your Long-Term Care Needs
- What's Important for Your Long-Term Health Care Needs
- Your Community Network
- When Staying at Home Isn't Possible
- Family Support
- State Funding for Veterans and Long-Term Planning
- Background Questions
- Accessing Information Preference Questions
- Planning for Veteran Cemetery Space



# Demographic Analysis

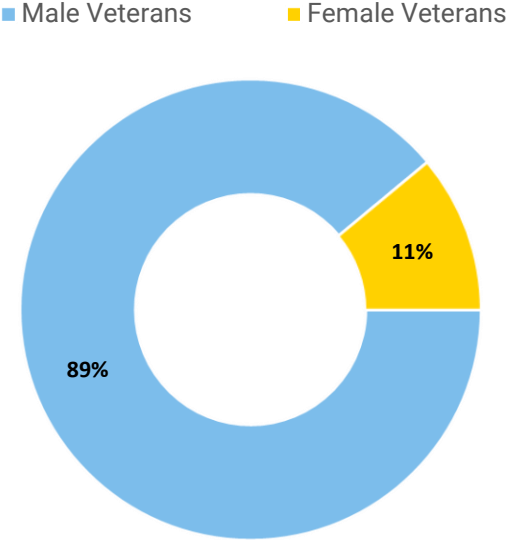


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# Montana Veteran Demographics

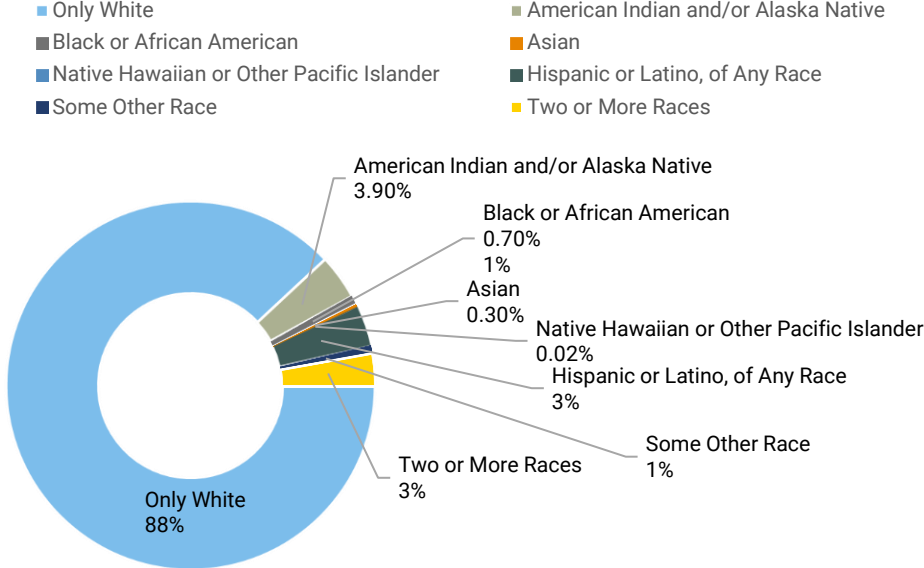
Montana is home to 85,247 veterans, representing 8% of the state's population.

### Gender Breakdown of Montana Veterans



While most Montana veterans are male, female veterans represent the fastest growing veteran group.

### Racial and Ethnic Breakdown of Montana Veterans



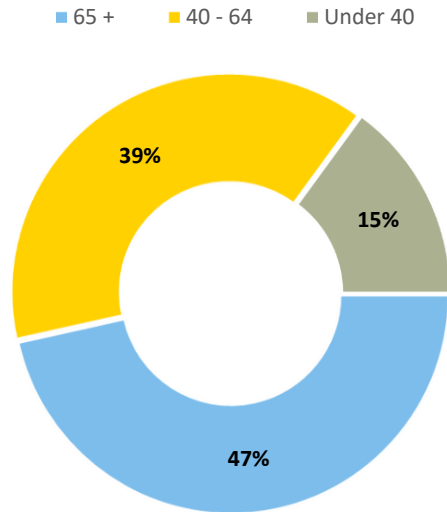
With eight tribal territories/reservations in Montana, acknowledging diversity is essential to ensuring equity in long-term care services for veterans.



# Montana Veteran Population Trend

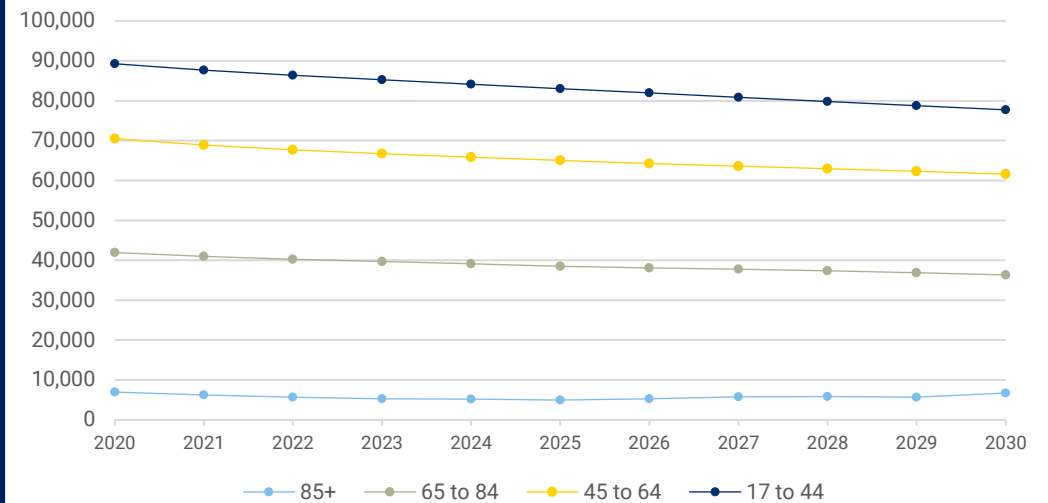
Montana has the second-highest percentage of veterans in the United States. However, while Montana's overall population is growing, the veteran population is declining.

Age Breakdown of Montana Veterans



The average age of veterans served by Montana Veterans Affairs is 64, slightly older than the national average of 62.

Montana's Veteran Population Trend by Age

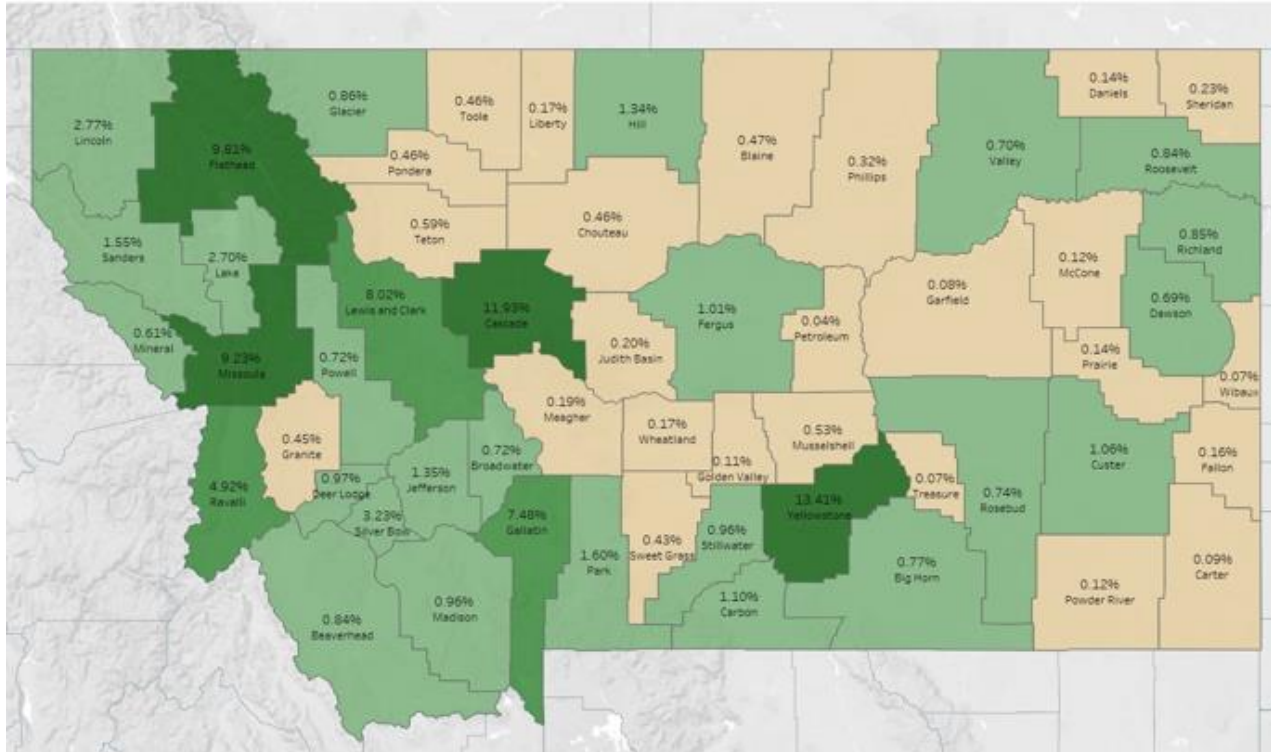


The overall veteran population is declining. However, there is a notable, projected uptick in the expected veteran population age 85+ from 2026 onwards.

# Distribution of Montana Veterans

Montana veterans represent 8% of the state's population.

Percentage of Montana's Veterans by County, 2020



- In 2020, 65% of Montana's veteran population was concentrated in seven counties: Yellowstone, Cascade, Flathead, Missoula, Lewis and Clark, Gallatin, and Ravalli.
- The remaining 35% of Montana's veterans were spread across 49 of the state's 56 counties.
- The concentration of veterans in certain areas and the relative sparsity in others paints a clear picture of where veteran services might be most needed.

# Impact of the Social Determinants of Health on Veterans

Each service member's experiences influence their longevity, support needs, and overall health.

## Social Determinants of Health



- **Education Access and Quality:** Aligned with national statistics, 29.6% of Montana veterans have graduated college and 40.3% have some college education.
- **Health Care Access and Quality:** 94.19% of Montana veterans manage multiple chronic conditions and 44.9% are living with at least one disability.
- **Neighborhood and Built Environment:** Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries in older adults. In Montana, unintentional falls are the third most common cause of injury-related deaths.
- **Social and Community Context:** 6.9% of veterans met the criteria for past-year serious psychological distress. Montana's efforts to address veteran suicides have shown progress, with a 20% decrease in suicides from 2020 to 2021.
- **Economic Stability:** 42.3% of Montana veterans reported they were retired, and 4% reported they are unable to work. 15.9% of Montana veterans live at or below the 138% poverty line.

# Current Services and Resources



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# Current Veterans' Services and Resources in Montana

Montana veterans are supported by several resources put forth by Federal and State agencies.

## State Veterans' Homes



Montana Veterans' Home  
Columbia Falls



Eastern Montana  
Veteran's Home  
Glendive



Southwestern Montana  
Veterans' Home  
Butte

Montana's State Veterans' Homes are intermediate/skilled nursing facilities for honorably discharged veterans who have served in the United States armed forces. These three homes have a total of 257 beds.

## Additional Veterans' Services



### The Montana VA Healthcare System maintains:

- VA Clinics
- A 34-bed Acute Care Medical-Surgical Facility
- A 14-bed Community Living Center
- Telehealth Services
- Home and Community-Based Services
- Additional Specialty Services



### Additional services available to veterans include:

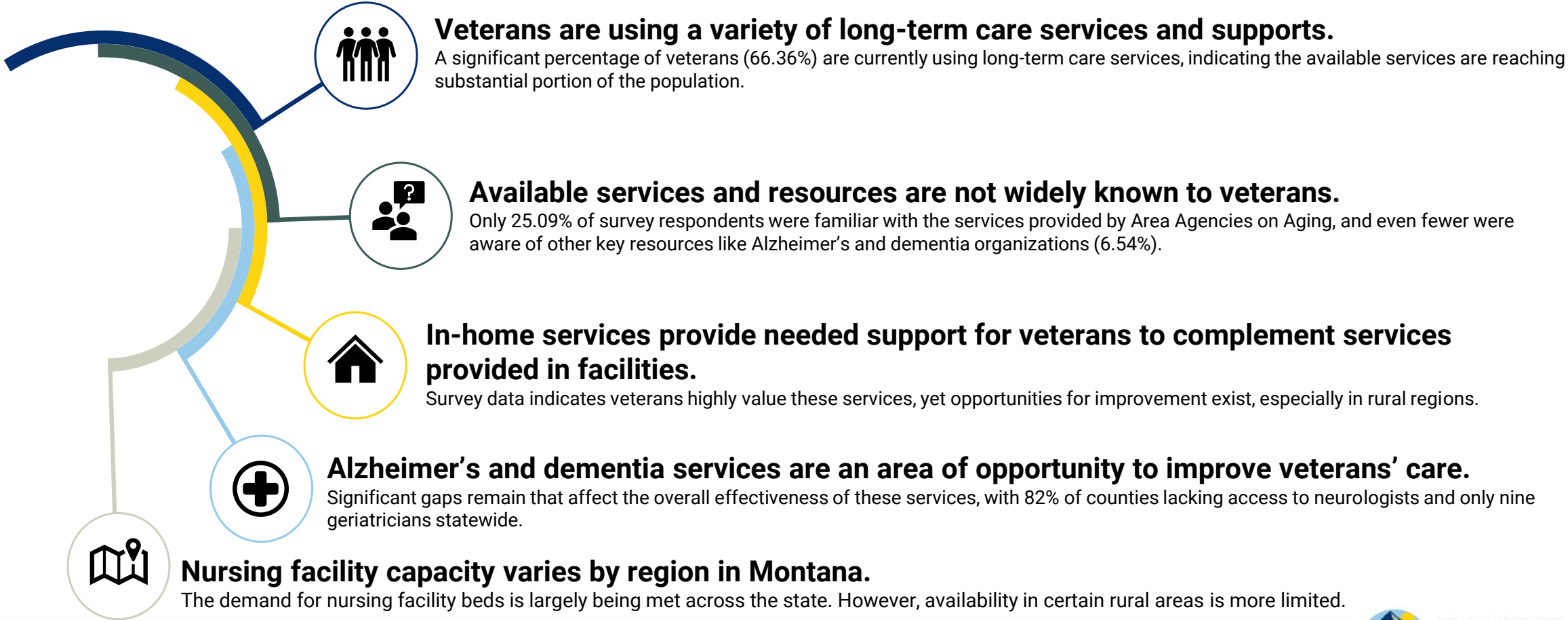
- Adult Protective Services
- Aging and Disability Resource Centers
- Legal Services
- Food and Nutrition Programs



# Assessment Observations



# Summary of Assessment Observations



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## **Veterans in Montana have a significant demand for long-term care services, which will need to be addressed as veterans age.**

Survey data indicate that 19.31% of respondents anticipate needing long-term care services in the near future, with many expecting to require such services within the next 1 to 10 years.

## **Appropriate care settings for veterans vary based on region and preference.**

There is a strong preference among veterans for state veterans' facilities and VA health care facilities for long-term care, with 33.94% and 36.08% of respondents, respectively, indicating they would most likely turn to these options if unable to care for themselves at home.

## **The need for Alzheimer's/dementia facilities is apparent and will grow as veterans age.**

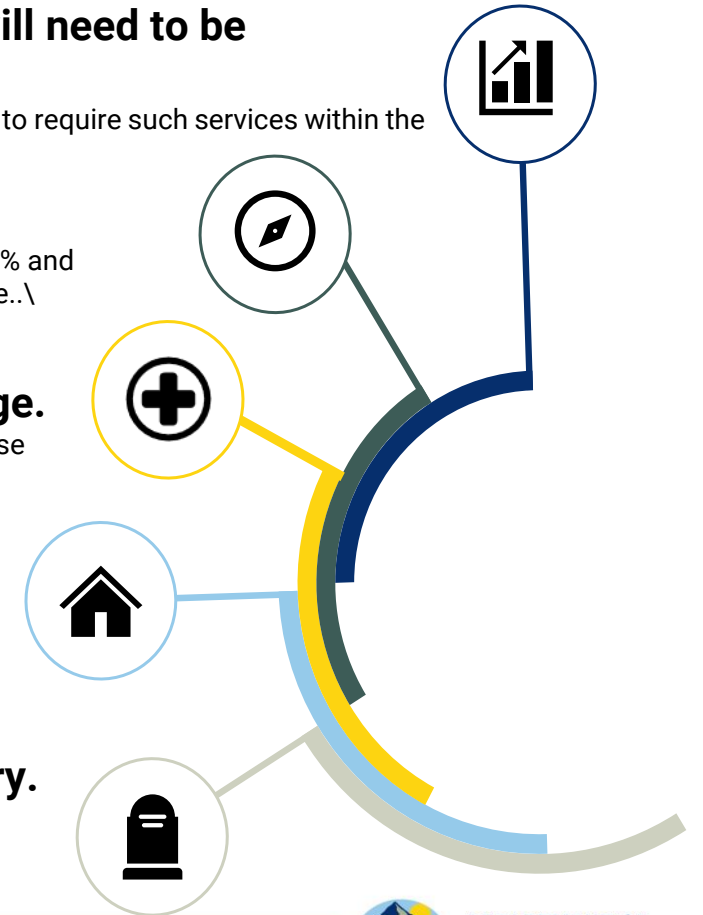
The survey indicates 16.07% of respondents currently need care for Alzheimer's or other dementias, and this need is likely to increase as the population ages.

## **Future service growth for veterans in Montana should include in-home care.**

Only 25.09% of survey respondents were familiar with the services provided by Area Agencies on Aging and even fewer aware of other key resources like Alzheimer's and dementia organizations (6.54%).

## **Montana has three state cemeteries, two national cemeteries, and one tribal cemetery.**

Montana veterans responding to the survey indicated various preferences for how they wish to be laid to rest. Many thought they would be buried in a VA national or state-run cemetery, understanding the criteria for being buried in these cemeteries.





# Montana Veteran's Affairs Division



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# Questions

