



Suicide Deaths Among Veterans In California, 2017-2018

In accordance with Assembly Bill 242 (Chapter 222, Statutes of 2017), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has created this annual injury data brief on California Veterans (those who have served in the United States Armed Forces) who died by suicide in 2017 and 2018. It provides information on statewide counts by age, sex, race/ethnicity, county, and method of suicide. Data are compiled from limited information on death certificates in the California Comprehensive Death Files produced by CDPH's Center for Health Statistics and Informatics.¹

In 2018, there were 690 suicide deaths among California residents aged 18 years and older who had served in the United States Armed Forces (Table 1).

- ⇒ Suicide deaths among Veterans made up 16% of all suicides in 2018.
- ⇒ Among Veterans, suicides made up 1% of total deaths in 2018.
- ⇒ The number of Veteran suicide deaths represented an 8% increase from 2017.

Table 1: Suicide Deaths and Total Deaths in California Residents aged 18 Years and Older by Veteran Status, 2017-2018

Veteran Status	2017		2018	
	Suicides	Total Deaths	Suicides	Total Deaths
Yes	636	52,210	690	50,920
No	3,461	208,855	3,611	210,718
Unknown	75	3,518	70	3,714
Total	4,172	264,583	4,371	265,352

Data Limitations

- Veteran status is identified based on the answer to a single item on the death certificate that asks whether the decedent was “ever in the United States Armed Forces.” This does not distinguish between current and former service members, nor does it identify those seeing active duty. This definition may not align with those used in other reports, which frequently include only those who have been activated for federal military service and are not serving at the time of their death. For this reason, the numbers presented here may be higher than those found in other reports.
- Rates were not calculated because CDPH does not have good estimates on the underlying population of Californians that have served in the US Armed Forces.
- The Veteran status information on death certificates may be inaccurate if those completing the form (e.g., Coroners, Funeral Homes) did not have sufficient information on the decedent's history.
- Data for 2017 have been updated from last year's data brief to exclude four Veteran and ten non-Veteran suicide deaths because these decedents were found not to be residents of California.

**Prepared by the California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS) Project,
Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities.**

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- ⇒ In 2018, 41% of Veteran suicides were in the 65-84 year old age group and 25% occurred in the 45-64 age group (Table 2).
- ⇒ The majority of suicides among Veterans were males (97%) and White (81%) or Hispanic (11%).

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics among Suicide Deaths in California Residents aged 18 years and older by Veteran Status, 2017-2018

	2017		2018	
	Veteran	Non-Veteran	Veteran	Non-Veteran
Sex				
Male	615	2583	669	2670
Female	21	878	21	941
Age				
18-24	21	412	28	393
25-44	120	1188	111	1263
45-64	153	1308	176	1384
65-84	254	487	282	506
85+	88	66	93	65
Race/Ethnicity				
White	504	2137	560	2160
Black	32	139	29	161
Hispanic	66	781	77	857
American Indian	6	26	2	26
Asian/PI	26	369	21	392
Other/Unknown	2	9	1	15
Total	636	3461	690	3611

- ⇒ In 2018, firearms were used in the majority of suicides among California Veterans (65%), followed by hanging/suffocation (20%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Mechanism of Suicide among California Residents aged 18 years and older by Veteran Status, 2017-2018

Mechanism	2017		2018	
	Veteran	Non-Veteran	Veteran	Non-Veteran
Firearm	419	1134	448	1126
Hanging/Suffocation	109	1236	139	1412
Poisoning	61	572	57	578
Cut/Pierce	17	97	19	93
Jump	10	156	11	162
Other	20	266	16	240
Total	636	3461	690	3611

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- ⇒ In 2018, 55% of male Veteran suicides occurred in those aged 65 or older. Among females, this age group consisted of 24% of Veteran suicides (Table 4).
- ⇒ Among both sexes, the majority of suicides among Veterans were White (82% of males and 67% of females in 2018).

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics among Suicide Deaths in California Resident Veterans aged 18 years and older by Sex, 2017-2018

	2017		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age				
18-24	19	(<65 years)	23	(<65 years)
25-44	111		107	
45-64	143	21	169	16
65-84	254	(≥65 years)	278	(≥65 years)
85+	88		92	
Race/Ethnicity				
White	491	13	546	14
Black	28	*	27	*
Hispanic	65	*	73	*
American Indian	*	*	*	*
Asian/PI	24	*	20	*
Other/Unknown	*	*	*	*
Total	615	21	669	21

- ⇒ Firearms were used in the majority of suicides among male Veterans (66% in 2018), whereas poisoning was most common among females (57%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Mechanism of Suicide among California Resident Veterans aged 18 years and older by Sex, 2017-2018

	2017		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age				
Firearm	417	2	442	6
Hanging/Suffocation	104	5	137	2
Poisoning	52	9	45	12
Cut/Pierce	17	0	19	0
Jump	9	1	11	0
Other	16	4	15	1
Total	615	21	669	21

Technical Notes:

Suicides are identified on the death certificate as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes X60-X84, U03.0, or U03.9. Mechanism of suicide is categorized by the following ICD-10 code groupings:

Cut/Pierce: X78; Firearm: X72-X74; Hanging/Suffocation: X70; Jump: X80-X81; Poisoning: X60-X69; and Other: U03.0, U03.9, X71, X75-X77, X79, X82-X84.

*Numbers are masked due to potential identification as required by the California Department of Health Care Services, Data De-Identification Guidelines (DDG), Version 2.0, November 22, 2016.

¹Copies of the California Certificate of Death and the CDPH, Vital Records, Death/Fetal Death Registration Handbook are available upon request from CDPH, Center for Health Statistics and Informatics.

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⇒ Los Angeles and San Diego, the two most populous counties, have the largest number of suicide deaths among Veterans in California, accounting for 30% in 2018 (Table 6).

Table 6: Suicide among California Veterans aged 18 years and older by County of Residence, 2017-2018

County of Residence	2017	2018	County of Residence	2017	2018
Alameda	16	17	Orange	30	42
Alpine	0	0	Placer	7	9
Amador	*	*	Plumas	0	*
Butte	9	17	Riverside	43	52
Calaveras	*	*	Sacramento	31	32
Colusa	0	0	San Benito	0	1
Contra Costa	16	19	San Bernardino	31	37
Del Norte	0	*	San Diego	110	98
El Dorado	7	7	San Francisco	9	9
Fresno	20	14	San Joaquin	14	9
Glenn	*	*	San Luis Obispo	17	12
Humboldt	3	6	San Mateo	8	7
Imperial	1	1	Santa Barbara	13	5
Inyo	*	*	Santa Clara	22	14
Kern	15	16	Santa Cruz	6	2
Kings	5	3	Shasta	14	10
Lake	4	2	Sierra	0	0
Lassen	*	*	Siskiyou	*	0
Los Angeles	93	108	Solano	10	22
Madera	2	5	Sonoma	7	13
Marin	6	4	Stanislaus	9	11
Mariposa	*	*	Sutter	0	2
Mendocino	6	2	Tehama	2	5
Merced	1	3	Trinity	0	0
Modoc	0	0	Tulare	5	5
Mono	0	0	Tuolumne	3	5
Monterey	4	6	Ventura	13	25
Napa	2	3	Yolo	1	4
Nevada	4	0	Yuba	5	4
			Total	636	690

*Numbers are masked due to potential identification as required by the California Department of Health Care Services, Data De-Identification Guidelines (DDG), Version 2.0, November 22, 2016. In the case of county breakdowns, cells are masked when the number of deaths and the resident population are small.