CDPH
California Department of Public Health

Office of Suicide Prevention

Suicide Death Among Veterans in California, 2023

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 reside in California and have served in the United States Armed Forces) who died by suicide in 2023. It provides information on numbers of suicide deaths statewide broken down 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 2023, there were 501 suicide deaths among California residents aged 18 years and older who served in the United States Armed Forces (identified here as Veterans; Table 1).

- In 2023, the total number of deaths statewide for those 18 and older decreased by 6%. The number of deaths by suicide decreased by about 3% statewide for those 18 and older and decreased by 12% among California Veterans.
- Suicide deaths among Veterans made up over 12% of all suicides for those 18 and over in 2023.
- Among both Veterans and non-Veterans, suicides made up 1% of total deaths in 2023, showing no substantial increase from 2022.

Table 1: *Suicide death and total death counts in California residents aged 18 years and older by decedent's Veteran status, 2023.*

Veteran Status	Suicides	Total Deaths (18 and older)
Veteran	501	44,900
Non-Veteran	3,486	242,580
Unknown	63	4,035
Total	4,050	291,515

Most Veteran suicide deaths were males (96%; see Data Limitations section on page 3). Forty-one percent of Veteran suicides were in the 65- to 84-year-old age group, and 24% occurred in the 25- to 44-year-old age group. Thirteen percent of Veterans who died by suicide were 85 years and older. Most Veteran suicides were among individuals who identify as White (75%) and Hispanic (13%; Figure 1).

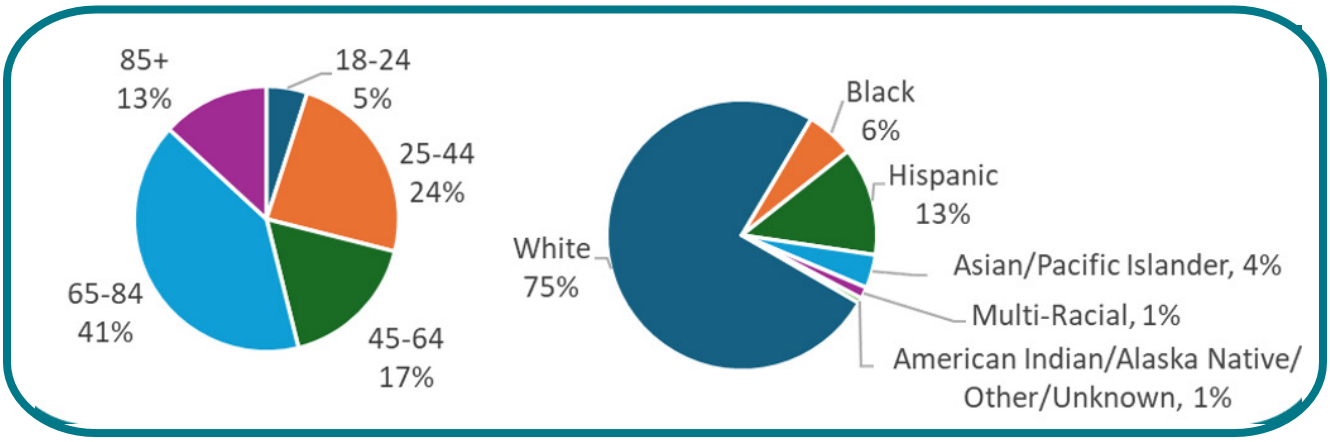

Figure 1: *Age and Race/Ethnicity proportions among Veteran suicide deaths, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2023 (n=501). AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Islander.*

Firearms were used in more than two-thirds of suicides among California Veterans (68%), the second most common method being hanging/suffocation (17%; Figure 2).

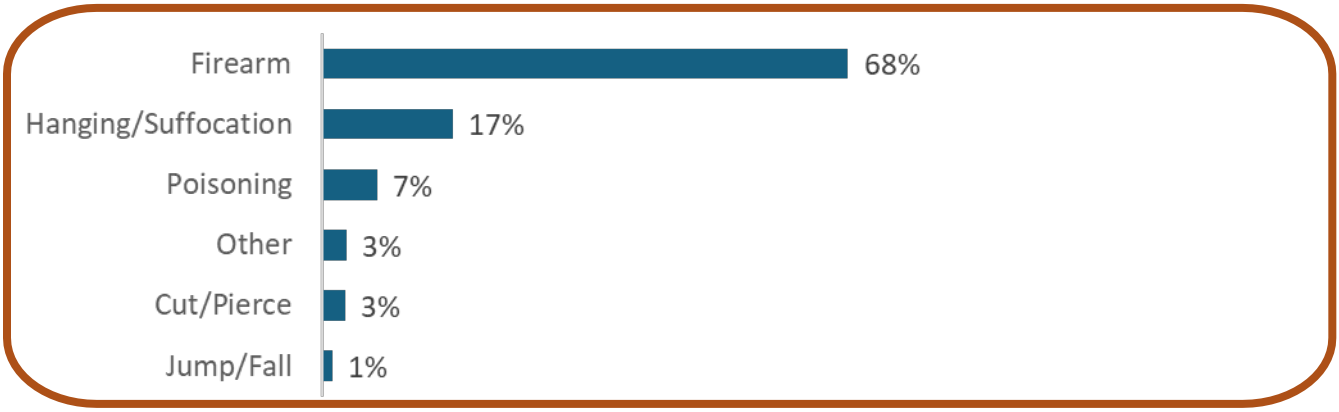

Figure 2: *Method of suicide proportions among Veteran suicide deaths, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2023 (n=501). "Other" includes any suicide death not covered by the specified methods; see technical notes for more information.*

Females made up 4% of Veteran suicide deaths. In 2023, 69% of male Veteran suicides were among those aged 50 or older, whereas this age group comprised 50% suicide death among female Veterans (Table 2). Among both sexes, most suicides were among Veterans who identified as White (76% of males and 56% of females).

Table 2: *Counts and percentages of demographic characteristics among Veteran suicide deaths by sex, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2023.*

Age (years)	**Male (N)**	**Male (%)**	**Female (N)**	**Female (%)**
18 – 24	25	5%	0	0%
25 – 49	128	27%	9	50%
50 – 84	264	55%	9	50%
85+	66	14%	0	0%

Race/Ethnicity	**Male (N)**	**Male (%)**	**Female (N)**	**Female (%)**
American Indian/Alaska Native	*		*	
Asian/Pacific Islander	20	4%	0	0%
Black	25	5%	4	22%
Hispanic	62	13%	3	17%
Multi-Race	*		*	
White	367	76%	10	56%
Other/Unknown	1	<1%	0	0%
Total	483		18	

**Some 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.*

Firearms were used in most suicides among male Veterans (69%), followed by hanging/suffocation in 17% (Table 3). Firearms were also used in most suicides among female Veterans (44%), followed by poisoning was used in one-third of female Veteran suicides (33%).

Table 3: *Counts and percentages of method of suicide among Veteran suicide deaths by sex, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2023.*

Method of Suicide	Male (N)	(%)	Female (N)	(%)
Firearm	334	69%	8	44%
Hanging/Suffocation	82	17%	3	17%
Poisoning	30	6%	6	33%
All Other Methods	37	8%	1	6%
Total	483		18	

San Diego and Los Angeles, the two most populous counties in California, had the largest number of suicide deaths among Veterans in California, accounting for 31% in 2023 (Table 4).

Overall suicide deaths in California decreased from 2022 to 2023, and the same was observed for California Veterans. It is worth noting that suicide deaths increased by 28% for Veterans aged 25- to 44-years old, a group which had declined in suicide deaths 31% from 2021 to 2022. All other age groups described saw decreases in suicide deaths, with Veterans aged 85 and above having the largest decrease (31%) from 2022 numbers (Table 5). Differences among race/ethnicity were observed, with decreases in suicides from 2022 numbers among White Veterans (13%), Asian/Pacific Islander Veterans (35%), and Multi-Racial Veterans (53%); while Hispanic Veterans and Black Veteran suicide deaths remained relatively stable. The number of American-Indian/Alaska Native Veteran suicides were fewer than the reporting threshold utilized to allay concerns with potential identification of individuals, while in 2022 there were no American-Indian/Alaska Native Veteran suicides reported.

DATA LIMITATIONS

- In this report, Veteran status is identified based on a death certificate field 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 considered active duty. This definition of Veteran may not align with others that include only those who have been activated for federal military service and are not serving at the time of their death.
- Rates are not presented because CDPH does not have estimates on the underlying population of Californians who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Caution is advised when interpreting percentages that are calculated from small denominator values due to concerns with statistical reliability.
- The Veteran status information on death certificates may be inaccurate if those completing the form (e.g., Coroners, Funeral Home personnel) did not have sufficient information on the decedent's history.
- Sex is defined based on the sex that was provided on the death certificate. Data available on death certificates may not yet include information on preferred gender identity, and if an individual has transitioned from the gender assigned at birth, this transition is not documented on their death certificate. There is currently no data available on sexual orientation.

Table 4: *Veteran suicide death counts by county of residence, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2020-2023.*

County	2020	2021	2022	2023
Alameda	18	14	13	5
Alpine	0	0	0	0
Amador	*	*	*	*
Butte	6	5	5	3
Calaveras	*	*	*	*
Colusa	0	*	0	0
Contra Costa	16	13	10	15
Del Norte	*	*	*	*
El Dorado	5	9	5	3
Fresno	9	12	16	13
Glenn	*	*	0	*
Humboldt	4	*	5	7
Imperial	*	0	0	4
Inyo	0	0	*	*
Kern	19	12	19	13
Kings	5	0	*	*
Lake	*	3	3	6

County	2020	2021	2022	2023
Lassen	0	*	*	*
Los Angeles	81	81	75	74
Madera	3	*	*	*
Marin	5	5	4	5
Mariposa	0	*	*	*
Mendocino	8	3	*	3
Merced	3	*	5	5
Modoc	0	0	*	0
Mono	0	0	0	0
Monterey	8	6	13	3
Napa	*	*	*	*
Nevada	6	4	0	5
Orange	34	44	29	29
Placer	16	13	9	5
Plumas	*	*	*	*
Riverside	41	42	55	34
Sacramento	23	36	28	22
San Benito	0	*	*	0

County	2020	2021	2022	2023
San Bernardino	46	37	43	36
San Diego	85	61	69	81
San Francisco	6	5	3	*
San Joaquin	17	12	16	11
San Luis Obispo	7	10	10	9
San Mateo	8	6	9	4
Santa Barbara	6	5	7	8
Santa Clara	17	18	6	7
Santa Cruz	3	4	7	6
Shasta	7	14	12	6

County	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sierra	0	0	0	0
Siskiyou	*	*	*	*
Solano	7	11	12	12
Sonoma	4	5	14	11
Stanislaus	3	10	7	5
Sutter	*	3	*	*
Tehama	3	3	6	4
Trinity	*	*	0	0
Tulare	*	3	5	7
Tuolumne	*	*	*	3
Ventura	13	11	16	13
Yolo	4	4	5	0

**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.*

Prepared by the Office of Suicide Prevention
Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities
California Department of Public Health

Data source: CDPH, California Comprehensive Master Death File (CCMDF), 2022.

FOR VETERANS IN NEED:

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call 988 and then **press 1** to be connected to the Veterans Crisis Line for 24/7 confidential crisis support for veterans and their loved ones. Chat also available at veterancrisisline.net or text 838255.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1]Copies 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 (CHSI).

Suicides are identified on the death certificate as an underlying cause of death with ICD-10 codes X60-X84, U03.0 or U03.9. Method of suicide is categorized by the following ICD-10 code groupings: Cut/Pierce: X78; Firearm: X72-X74; Hanging/suffocation: X70; Fall: X80; Poisoning: X60-X69; and Other: U03.0, U03.9, X71, X75-X77, X79, X81-X84.

As required by the California Department of Health Care Services, Data De-Identification Guidelines (DDG), Version 2.0 (November 22, 2016), small numbers may be masked in tables to prevent potential identification. In the case of county breakdowns, cells are masked when the number of deaths and the resident population are small.

SUPPLEMENTAL TABLE

The following table contains the number of suicide deaths to both Veteran and Non-Veterans by demographic characteristics and method of suicide for the four reporting years, 2020 through 2023.

Table 5: *Suicide counts by demographic characteristics and method of suicide among Veterans and Non-Veterans, California residents aged 18 years and older, 2019-2022.*

Sex	2020 Veteran	2020 Non-Vet	2021 Veteran	2021 Non-Vet	2022 Veteran	2022 Non-Vet	2023 Veteran	2023 Non-Vet
Male	567	2,509	537	2,592	548	2,667	483	2,643
Female	16	848	22	791	22	852	18	838

Age (years)	2020 Veteran	2020 Non-Vet	2021 Veteran	2021 Non-Vet	2022 Veteran	2022 Non-Vet	2023 Veteran	2023 Non-Vet
18 – 24	39	350	30	383	28	344	25	353
25 – 44	109	1,276	136	1,321	94	1,301	120	1,295
45 – 64	120	1,147	106	1,084	113	1,213	86	1,161
65 – 84	231	518	207	531	240	576	204	604
85+	84	66	80	65	95	90	66	73

Race (Ethnicity)	2020 Veteran	2020 Non-Vet	2021 Veteran	2021 Non-Vet	2022 Veteran	2022 Non-Vet	2023 Veteran	2023 Non-Vet
American Indian/Alaska Native	*	11	5	23	0	14	*	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	20	368	33	354	31	380	20	374
Black	26	156	27	165	29	165	29	141
Hispanic	60	809	59	897	62	887	65	934
Multiracial	5	75	9	71	15	89	7	77
Other/Unknown	*	11	0	12	2	10	*	14
White	468	1,927	426	1,862	431	1,979	377	1,936

Method of Suicide	2020 Veteran	2020 Non-Vet	2021 Veteran	2021 Non-Vet	2022 Veteran	2022 Non-Vet	2023 Veteran	2023 Non-Vet
Firearm	356	1,141	362	1,161	368	1,262	342	1,229
Hanging/Suffocation	113	1,252	105	1,199	94	1,204	85	1,189
Poisoning/Overdose	60	451	47	482	60	526	36	548
Cut/Pierce	12	117	12	129	19	95	15	136
Fall/Jump	15	165	12	188	13	190	7	171

Method of Suicide	2020 Veteran	2020 Non-Vet	2021 Veteran	2021 Non-Vet	2022 Veteran	2022 Non-Vet	2023 Veteran	2023 Non-Vet
Other Methods	27	231	21	225	16	247	16	213
Total	583	3,357	559	3,384	570	3,524	501	3,486

**Count masked due to potential identification due to low count, as required by the California Department of Health Care Services, Data De-Identification Guidelines (DDG), Version 2.0, November 22, 2016. Some demographic characteristics may not sum to the total due to unknown status of the decedent or membership in an unlisted category.*

Table 6. *Veteran Suicide counts by major groups within Asian/Pacific Islander demographic groups, 2020-2023.*

Demographic Group	2020	2021	2022	2023	2020-2023
Asian Specified	0	*	*	*	*
Chinese	0	*	*	*	*
Japanese	*	*	*	*	12
Korean	*	*	*	*	11
Vietnamese	*	*	*	*	*
Cambodian	*	0	*	*	*
Thai	0	0	0	*	*
Laotian	0	0	*	0	*
Hmong	0	*	*	0	*
Asian-Indian	*	0	*	*	*
Filipino	11	15	*	*	39
Hawaiian	*	*	0	0	*
Guamanian	0	0	*	*	*
Samoan	*	0	0	0	*
Eskimo	0	0	0	0	0
Aleut	0	0	0	0	0

Demographic Group	2020	2021	2022	2023	2020-2023
Pacific Islander	0	*	*	*	*
Indonesian	-	-	-	0	0
Malaysian	-	-	-	0	0
Taiwanese	-	-	-	0	0
Bangladeshi	-	-	-	0	0
Pakistani	-	-	-	0	0
Sri Lankan	-	-	-	0	0
Fijian	-	-	-	0	0
Tongan	-	-	-	0	0
Two or more API ancestries	0	*	*	0	*
Total	20	33	31	20	104

Cells denoted with a "-" represent demographic values that may not have been available at the time a death certificate was created. Individuals that were a member of these groups and died by suicide in these years may have been attributed "Asian Specified", "Pacific Islander", or another designation. Caution is warranted in interpreting the counts prior to 2023.

**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.*