



WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT®

WOUNDED WARRIOR
TINA WAGGENER

WARRIOR SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND





WOUNDED WARRIOR
XANDER HERNANDEZ
WITH HIS WIFE



ABOUT WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is a leading veterans service organization focused on transforming the way the post-9/11 generation and future generations of veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in our communities.

Our mission to honor and empower wounded warriors is fulfilled by our direct service programs, advocacy efforts, and collaboration among best-in-practice veteran and military organizations — helping warriors thrive.



ABOUT THE WARRIOR SURVEY

Wave 3 of the WWP Warrior Survey was fielded to WWP warriors from May 25 to August 1, 2023. The survey has grown to represent over 185,000 post-9/11 veterans across the continental U.S. and its territories. The Warrior Survey data provides a 360-degree view of the warriors WWP serves, including their quality of life and most pressing needs. It guides WWP's efforts to support warriors and enhance their quality of life.

To view and download the comprehensive report, including details of the methodology, measures, and references, visit warriorsurvey.com.

WWP WARRIORS: A 360-DEGREE VIEW

This 360-degree view lays out the fundamental traits that paint a picture of those whom this survey represents — WWP warriors.

AVERAGE AGE

41



SEX



81.8%
Male



18.2%
Female

MARITAL STATUS



Married — 65.6%

Divorced or separated — 20.9%

Never married, single — 12.8%

Widowed — 0.7%

NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD



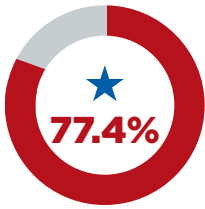
One or more
61.0%



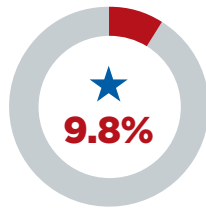
None
39.0%



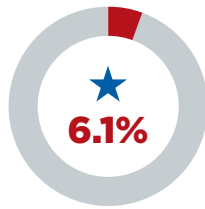
ETHNICITY



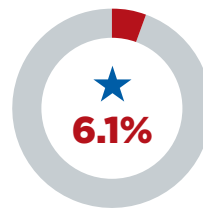
Not of Hispanic,
Latino/a, or
Spanish Origin



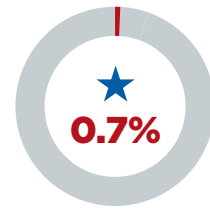
Mexican,
Mexican American,
Chicano/a



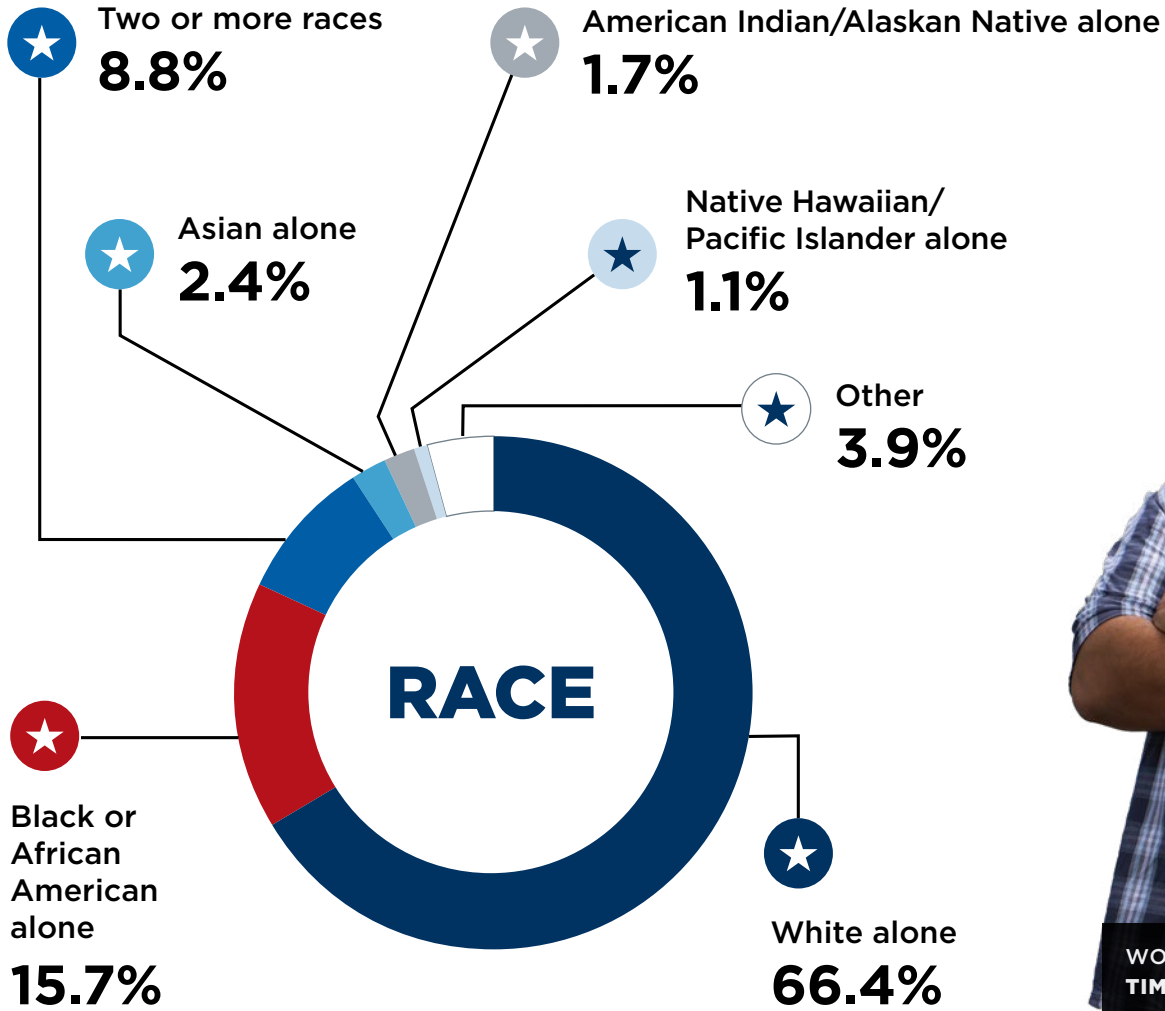
Other Hispanic,
Latino/a, or
Spanish Origin



Puerto
Rican



Cuban



WOUNDED WARRIOR
TIM APONTE



TOP 5

Self-reported
CONDITIONS



82.5%
Sleep problems



80.3%
Anxiety



76.7%
Depression



76.5%
Post-traumatic stress
disorder (PTSD)

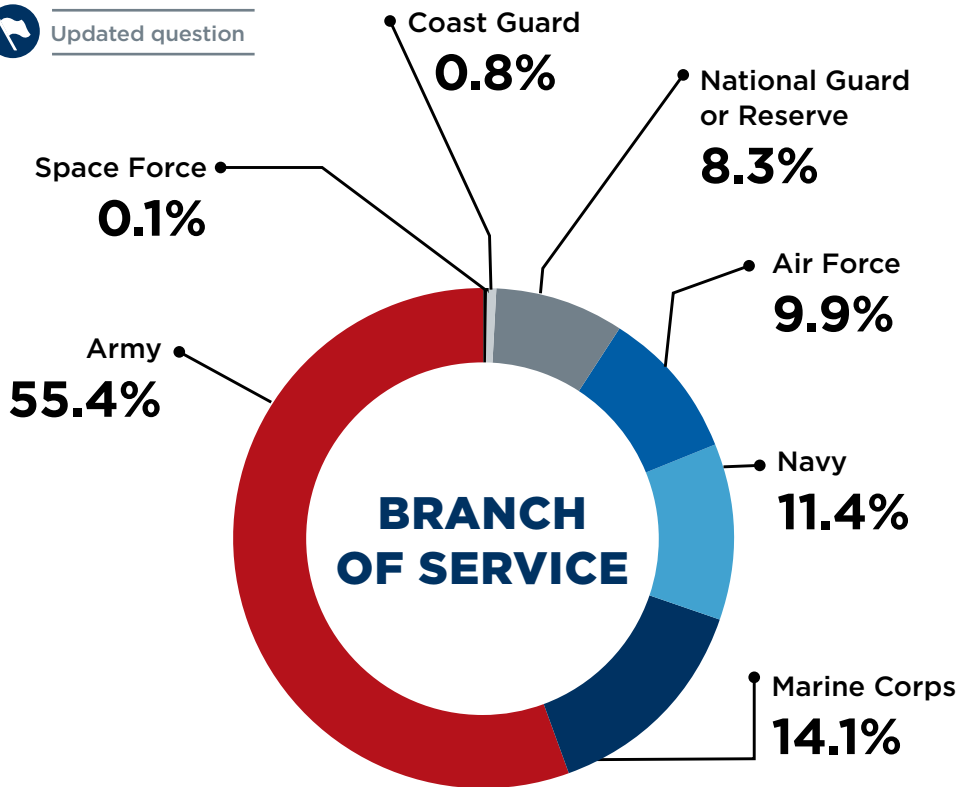


55.5%
Migraines or
chronic headaches

WWP WARRIORS: A 360° VIEW (CONTINUED)



Updated question



CURRENT MILITARY STATUS:



3.6%
ACTIVE DUTY

PAY GRADES/RANKS:

42.7%	E5-E6 (Midgrade Enlisted)
34.2%	E1-E4 (Junior Enlisted)
15.1%	E7-E9 (Senior Enlisted)
3.7%	O4-O10 (Senior Officers)
3.0%	O1-O3 (Junior Officers)
1.2%	W1-W5 (Warrant Officers)

DISABILITY RATING:

78.8%

Disability rating of 70% or higher

8.4%

None/pending or on appeal



TOP 5

Self-reported
INJURIES

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION:



12.4%
unemployment rate.

42.0%
have obtained a
bachelor's degree
or higher.

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY:



7.7%
experienced
homelessness
in the past
12 months.

4.1%
think they may
experience
homelessness in
the next 12 months.

FOOD INSECURITY:



37.3%
met the threshold for
being food insecure.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES:



4.9%
report that a lack
of transportation
impacts their access
to health care.

*Head Injury and TBI: The Warrior Survey asks warriors to report the injuries they experienced as a result of their military service. Head injury and TBI are both provided as options. A head injury is any bump, blow, jolt, or penetrating injury to the head that may affect the brain or surrounding structures, without necessarily causing lasting impairment. TBI is a specific type of head injury that disrupts normal brain function, often resulting in cognitive, physical, or emotional impairments. While all TBIs are head injuries, not all head injuries result in TBIs.⁴



WOUNDED WARRIOR
MELISSA MCMAHON



67.4%

Hearing loss
or tinnitus



58.6%

Bone, joint, or muscle
injury (i.e., fracture, break,
or injury to extremities, back,
shoulder, or neck)



37.4%

Head injury*
(i.e., bump, blow, jolt,
or penetrating injury
to the head)



35.2%

Traumatic brain
injury (TBI)*



15.0%

Spinal cord injury



QUALITY OF LIFE



Quality of life is a key element of WWP’s vision to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation’s history. To better understand what impacts warriors’ quality of life, we look across five main components: mental, physical, financial, social, and spiritual.

In the Wave 2 (2022 Warrior Survey) findings, we found factors within each component that had the greatest impact on quality of life. For example, within the mental health component, we found that PTSD and depression had the strongest association with quality of life.

The Wave 3 report builds on the factors identified in Wave 2. Wave 3 explores risk and protective characteristics. The findings inform WWP’s direct service programs, additional research, and policy recommendations that improve warriors’ quality of life.



HOW WWP DEFINES QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life:

A warrior's ability to fully participate in and enjoy life.

Quality of life is made up of five components:

Physical, mental, financial, social, and spiritual.

Quality of life is measured by:

Veterans RAND 12-Item Health Survey (VR-12), a widely used tool for measuring quality of life. The VR-12 produces two scores: a mental component score and a physical component score.



QUALITY OF LIFE FINDINGS

The Wave 3 report builds on the Wave 2 report. In Wave 2, the factors listed below showed the greatest impact on quality of life. In Wave 3, we explore the risk and protective characteristics associated with these factors:

- ★ **Mental component:** PTSD and depression
- ★ **Physical component:** Sleep and body mass index
- ★ **Financial component:** Employment
- ★ **Social connection component:** Loneliness
- ★ **Spiritual component:** Post-traumatic growth

RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS:



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

These are the primary **risk characteristics** we found in Wave 3 — linked to **poorer** quality of life outcomes:

- ★ Loneliness
- ★ Symptoms of one or more mental health conditions



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

These are the primary **protective characteristics** we found in Wave 3 — linked to **more positive** quality of life outcomes.

- ★ Good sleep quality
- ★ Post-traumatic growth
- ★ Resilience

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

Mental health challenges remain a critical concern for warriors and a key focus when it comes to improving their quality of life. Most WWP warriors live with anxiety, depression, and PTSD, which deeply affect their daily lives. These challenges must be addressed, and warriors must have access to the care and support they need to build resilience and truly thrive.



TOP MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Top three self-reported mental health issues among WWP warriors:



80%
Anxiety



77%
Depression



77%
PTSD

WWP warriors presenting with moderate to severe symptoms at the time of the survey:



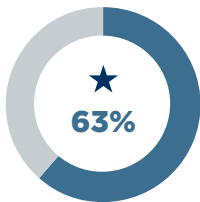
52%
PTSD



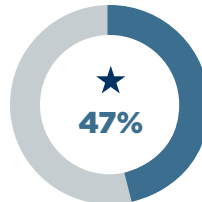
50%
Anxiety



35%
Depression



More than six in 10 (63%) WWP warriors reported symptoms of **one or more** mental health conditions.



Nearly half (47%) of WWP warriors screened **positive** for potential hazardous drinking or active alcohol use disorders.



**I'M A DIFFERENT PERSON
TODAY. A BETTER FATHER.
A BETTER HUSBAND.
WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT CHANGED
MY LIFE.**

**— WOUNDED WARRIOR
ARNULFO DAUTO**



SELF-DIRECTED VIOLENCE

28%

of WWP warriors reported having suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months.

RESOURCES USED FOR SUICIDALITY

When WWP warriors were asked who they talk to about suicidal thoughts or attempts, the three most common responses were:



Counselor or therapist



Family member



Friends



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND CARE

TOP 5 COPING MECHANISMS

The top five tools and resources used by WWP warriors in the past year to help with feelings of stress or emotional or mental health concerns were:



67%
Talking with another veteran



64%
Prescription medication



60%
Self-medication
(alcohol, non-prescription marijuana, or narcotics)



60%
Support groups
(e.g., PTSD groups, peer-to-peer counseling, Alcoholics Anonymous, cognitive behavioral therapy groups)



58%
Services at VA medical centers

MENTAL HEALTH RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS



WOUNDED WARRIOR
RICHARD DORR WITH HIS FAMILY

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Experiencing mild or no symptoms of mental health conditions can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **more likely** for WWP warriors to present with symptoms for one or more mental health conditions:

- ★ Loneliness
- ★ Military sexual trauma
- ★ Financial strain
- ★ Obesity



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to present with symptoms for one or more mental health conditions:

- ★ Good sleep quality
- ★ Employment
- ★ Higher post-traumatic growth

PHYSICAL WELLNESS



WOUNDED WARRIOR
YOLANDA POUILLARD

WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

At WWP, we take a holistic approach to wellness — supporting both the mind and body. We know that physical wellness is about so much more than being physically fit. For many warriors, it's about managing pain, gaining and retaining mobility, and sleeping better. Understanding these challenges is key to improving warriors' quality of life and helping them feel more comfortable and confident.



CHRONIC PAIN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Most WWP warriors (95%) self-reported experiencing some pain in the past three months.

76%

of WWP warriors reported that pain interfered moderately or severely with their enjoyment of life.

The most common methods WWP warriors reported using for managing pain:



76%

Over-the-counter pain medication



64%

Exercise



50%

Prescription pain medication

43%

of WWP warriors reported using physical activity to help overcome feelings of stress or emotional or mental health challenges.



SLEEP

The Wave 2 findings show that sleep was the strongest indicator of good quality of life among WWP warriors.

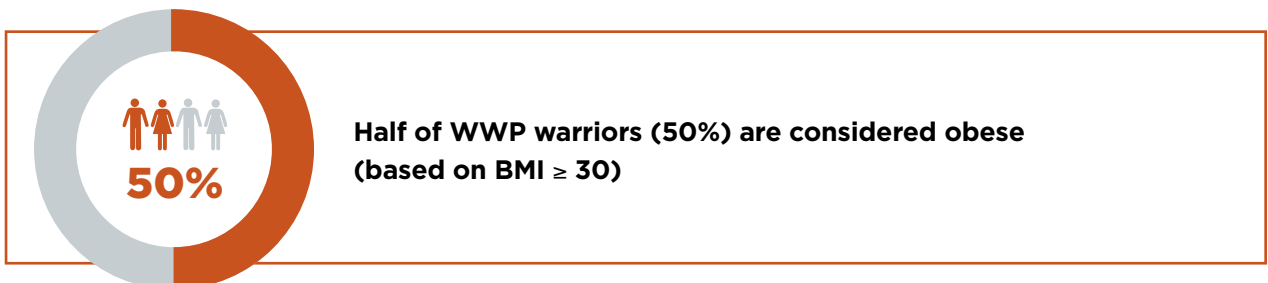
83%

of WWP warriors reported sleep problems, putting it at No. 1 on the list of self-reported conditions and injuries.



BMI

Obesity among the WWP warrior population continues to be a concern because of the negative associations between obesity and quality of life.





I NEED THE PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF ADAPTIVE SPORTS TO BOOST MY MENTAL HEALTH. THERE ARE DAYS I DON'T FEEL LIKE TRAINING, BUT WHEN I'M DONE, IT'S A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.

**— WOUNDED WARRIOR
KELLY ELMLINGER**



PHYSICAL HEALTH RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

SLEEP

Good sleep quality can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **more likely** for WWP warriors to report poor sleep quality:

- ★ Presenting with symptoms for one or more mental health conditions



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to report poor sleep quality:

- ★ No pain or effectively managing pain
- ★ Physical activity (some intentional exercise)
- ★ Higher post-traumatic growth

OBESITY

A BMI below 30 can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

No characteristics were found to make it **more likely** for WWP warriors to have a BMI of 30 or above.



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to have a BMI of 30 or above.

- ★ Physical activity (some intentional exercise)

FINANCIAL WELLNESS



WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

Financial wellness plays a vital role in the quality of life for warriors. When they feel confident and in control of their finances, warriors thrive in other areas of their lives. Consistently, unemployment and financial strain remain top concerns among the warrior population. Understanding the financial challenges warriors face is key to providing the support they need.



EMPLOYMENT

60% of WWP warriors report that they are currently employed.



44%
Work full time



5%
Work part time



10%
Are retired from
the military and
still working

Some veterans experience barriers to job growth opportunities and underemployment when transitioning to civilian employment. Among currently employed warriors, 37% report not making enough money at their current job, given their skill level.

Underemployment Work Situation (among WWP warriors currently unemployed)	★ WWP WARRIORS
I am not making enough money at my current job, given my skill level	37%
I am overqualified for my current job	28%
I must work more than one job to make ends meet	10%
I can't find a job that aligns with my skill set	8%
I can't get as many hours as I need/want at my job	6%
I can't find a job in my geographic area	4%
I am underqualified for my current job	2%
None of the above	42%

NOTE: The sum of the percentages is greater than 100%, as WWP warriors were asked to select all that apply.



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The WWP warrior unemployment rate is higher than the U.S. veteran population, the U.S. general population, and the U.S. general population with a disability.

Unemployment Rates Among WWP Warriors and Comparative Populations	Population	Unemployment Rate
	WWP Warriors	12.4%
	U.S. General Population with a Disability	7.4%
	Post-9/11 Veterans	4.3%
	U.S. General Population	3.8%
	All U.S. Veterans	3.6%

NOTE: Comparative data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics at the time of Wave 3 (August 2023).



FINANCIAL STRAIN

67%

of WWP warriors reported that they did not have enough money to make ends meet at some point in the past 12 months.

The top-reported source of financial strain among WWP warriors was the increased cost of goods (55%).

Top Reasons for Financial Strain or Struggles	★ WWP WARRIORS
Increased cost of goods (for example, food, gas, rent)	55%
Other unexpected financial hardship (natural disaster, car, home repairs, etc.)	21%
Working, but not making enough money	20%
Family obligations (care for a parent or child, taking on dependents, funeral costs, etc.)	20%
Out of work	14%

NOTE: WWP warriors were asked to report the top two reasons for financial strain or struggle in the past 12 months.



DEBT

Top three current types of debts reported by WWP warriors:



Credit card



Auto loan



Mortgage on primary home

75%

of WWP warriors reported that their debts (excluding the mortgage on their residence) were either “somewhat unmanageable” or “very unmanageable.”

FINANCIAL WELLNESS RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS



WOUNDED WARRIOR
YOMARI CRUZ

EMPLOYMENT

Employment can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to be employed:

- ★ Presenting with symptoms for one or more mental health conditions



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

No characteristics were found to make it **more likely** for WWP warriors to be employed.

SOCIAL CONNECTION

WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

The loss of camaraderie, connection, and community that warriors experience in the military can make civilian life challenging. Many warriors find themselves feeling isolated and experiencing loneliness. Feeling understood and finding social connection again is important to improving warriors' quality of life.



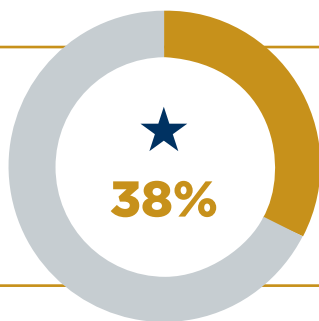
LONELINESS

The majority of WWP warriors (68%) are lonely. WWP warriors reported that they sometimes or often:

79% Feel isolated

75% Feel left out

72% Feel they lack companionship



Over a third (38%) of WWP warriors reported that, during the past four weeks, their physical health or emotional problems interfered with their social activities either “most of the time” or “all of the time.”

SOCIAL CONNECTION RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS



WOUNDED WARRIORS
CHRIS GORDON (LEFT) AND
MANNY COLON (RIGHT)

CONNECTEDNESS

A sense of connectedness can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **more likely** for WWP warriors to be lonely:

- ★ Presenting with symptoms for one or more mental health conditions



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to be lonely:

- ★ High resilience
- ★ Good sleep quality
- ★ Higher post-traumatic growth

SPIRITUAL

WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

Spiritual well-being is related to one's unique purpose, identity, values, beliefs, and life vision. This can include a person's approach to life after trauma and finding purpose beyond difficult experiences.

Warriors certainly face their fair share of unique challenges, particularly during and after their transition from military service. Spiritual well-being can help warriors face situations in a positive manner, overcome difficulties, and, in turn, improve their quality of life.



POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth is a measure of positive coping after experiencing trauma. Considering the high prevalence of trauma, it is important to understand how WWP warriors have coped and the purpose they've found after the trauma they've experienced.

38%

Agreed "I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life"

33%

Agreed "I changed my priorities about what is important in life"

27%

Agreed "I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was"



RESILIENCE

WWP warriors reported that often or nearly all the time:

49%

I am able to adapt when changes occur

46%

I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships

SPIRITUAL RISK AND PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS



POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth can have a positive impact on WWP warriors' quality of life.



RISK CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **less likely** for WWP warriors to have post-traumatic growth:

- ★ Loneliness



PROTECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics that made it **more likely** for WWP warriors to have post-traumatic growth:

- ★ Good sleep quality
- ★ High resilience
- ★ Participation in a support group for stress, emotional, or mental health concerns
- ★ Previous deployment to a combat area

SUPPORT AND CARE

WAVE 3 KEY FINDINGS

Given the high rate of service-related injuries and challenges, warriors need and deserve strong support systems that are reliable and easy to access, especially when it comes to health care for physical and mental health needs. Understanding the support they need and the barriers they face is key to improving their well-being and overall quality of life.



HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

WWP warriors most frequently cited VA health care (59%) or TRICARE (22%) as their primary health insurance or health coverage plans.

Over two-thirds (70%) of WWP warriors reported having multiple insurers.

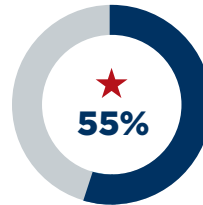
Factors WWP Warriors Consider Important When Selecting a Health Care Provider	★ WWP WARRIORS
Time to get an appointment	70%
Ease of scheduling an appointment	67%
Provider's qualifications (for example, education, experience, and credentials)	62%
Office location	57%
Experience with veterans	52%

NOTE: WWP warriors were asked to report up to five factors.



BARRIERS TO CARE

For WWP warriors living with service-related injuries and health problems, access to reliable health care is critical to their overall quality of life.



Just over half of WWP warriors (55%) experienced some degree of difficulty accessing health care through the VA.

TOP 5 BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE

The top five barriers that WWP warriors reported most impacted accessing health care are:



Wait time to get an appointment



Poor experiences with provider



Difficulty scheduling appointments



Limited options in my geographic area



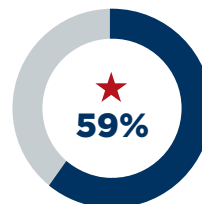
Personal schedule (work, school, family responsibilities)

NOTE: WWP warriors were asked to report up to five barriers.



TELEHEALTH

Telehealth can help address some of the barriers to care because it provides cost-effective care for various medical needs and is more accessible.



Most WWP warriors (59%) reported utilizing telehealth in the past 12 months.

Among the WWP warriors who did **not** utilize telehealth services:

15%

Reported that it was not offered to them

26%

Preferred in-person services



**NOW THAT I
FINALLY FEEL LIKE
I'M UNDERSTOOD,
I'M CONFIDENT I CAN
HELP OTHERS FEEL
UNDERSTOOD
AS WELL.**

**— WOUNDED WARRIOR
ANTOINETTE WALLACE**



AID AND ASSISTANCE

About one in four (26%) WWP warriors reported needing aid and/or assistance from another person due to service-connected injuries or health problems.

Fourteen percent of WWP warriors reported needing assistance but say they are not getting the aid and/or assistance they need.

WWP warriors who require aid and assistance most often reported needing help with:

- ★ Mental health or emotional regulation
- ★ Mobility (e.g., walking, going upstairs, transferring from bed to chair)
- ★ Dressing or undressing oneself

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE



This research highlights how important it is to take a holistic approach to understand and address veterans' needs. Considering all factors — mental health, physical health, financial wellness, social connection, and spiritual well-being — will provide better insights into the complex needs of veterans, helping create solutions that enhance their overall quality of life. While the findings are specific to WWP warriors, the insights serve as a call to action for all public and private organizations supporting post-9/11 veterans and their families. Based on this research, WWP offers the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Advance policies to improve access to mental health resources and reduce barriers to care.

- ★ Enhance and promote accessible mental health care.
- ★ Address the shortage of mental health professionals.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Enhance care and treatment for co-occurring conditions.

- ★ Develop and implement whole-health initiatives that include awareness, education, and non-pharmacological treatments for co-occurring conditions, including substance use and mental health conditions, sleep disorders, and chronic pain.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Enhance and expand suicide prevention training for both the veteran community and the public sector.

- ★ Develop and implement comprehensive suicide prevention training programs.
- ★ Implement veteran suicide prevention programs at state and federal levels.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Expand opportunities for veterans to connect within the veteran community and with the broader public.

- ★ Encourage volunteerism and civic engagement.
- ★ Research and invest in peer support groups.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Enhance financial wellness and employment opportunities for veterans.

- ★ Implement financial management training earlier in the transition process.
- ★ Enhance veteran employment resources and employer engagement.

**Never forget the service and
sacrifice of those who served**

To view or download the comprehensive report of findings and
recommendations, scan the code or visit warriorsurvey.com





**WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT**

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