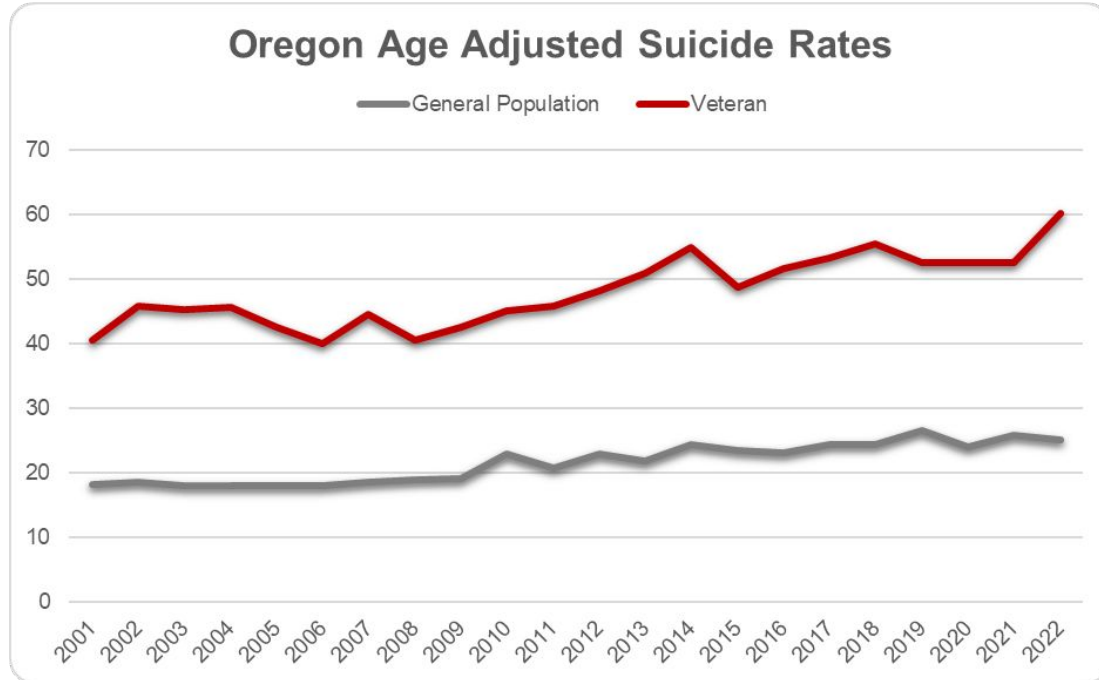


# Improving Oregon Veteran and Service Member Outcomes: Increasing Access and Use of Healthcare

**HB 2537**

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# Oregon's Veteran and Service Member Suicide Rate is 40% higher than national average and has been for two decades.



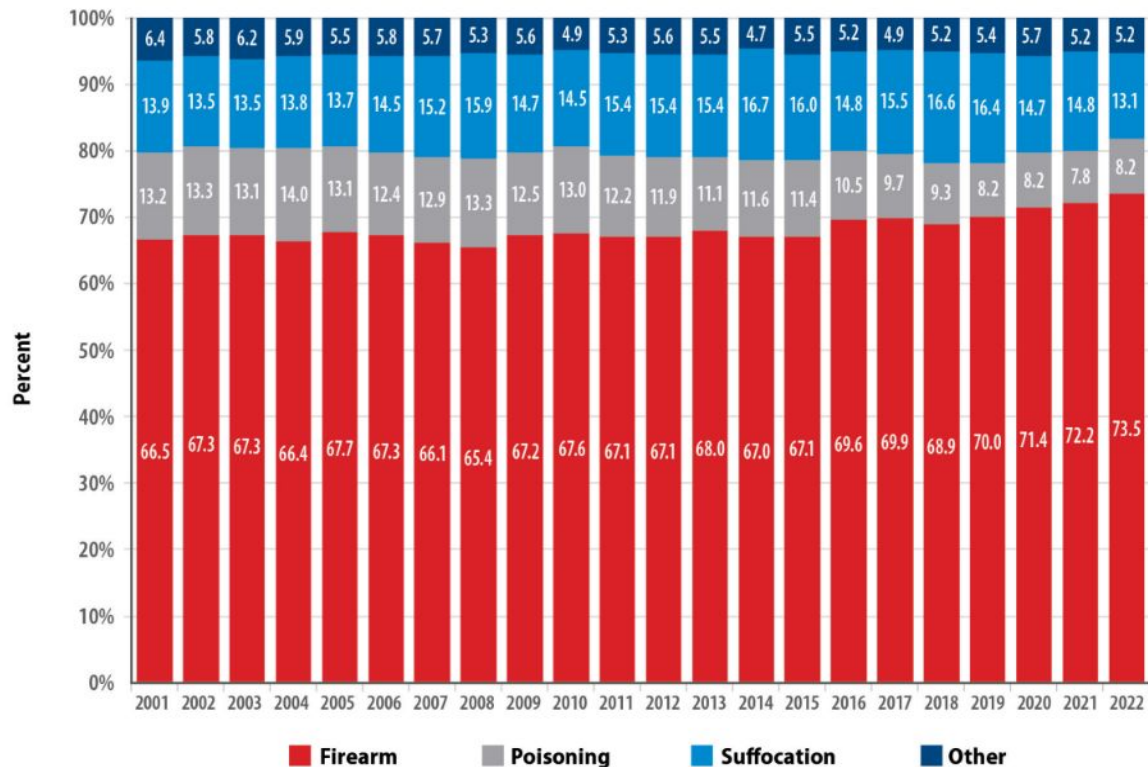
**2,063 Oregon Veterans died by suicide between 2010 and 2022. This means one Oregon Veteran dies every 3 days.**

**Nationally, four times as many post 9/11 Veterans have died from suicide than from combat.**

# Veteran Suicide Means

Figure 15 presents the distribution of methods involved in Veteran suicide deaths, from 2001–2022.

**Figure 15: Methods Involved, Percentage, Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001–2022**



**In 2023, our organization commissioned an analysis to understand why Oregon's Veteran suicide rates have, despite significant efforts, not improved over 20 years.**

**Our research found a lack of access and use of health care is one of the most significant factors in Oregon's high Veteran Suicide rate.**

# Veterans Health Administration (VHA) care cannot meet the needs of all Veterans

## Of Veterans Under 65:

- Half of all Oregon Veterans don't access (VHA) care today.
- 49.6% of Veterans who died from suicide in 2022 did not received VHA or VBA care in 2021 or 2022 (VHA, 2024)
- The VA reports, even of those Veterans enrolled in care, approximately 38% do not access care in any given year, a number significantly higher than the civilian population (19%) who do not access care in any given year.

VHA has created some innovative options (such as the PACT act) to increase access to mental health care. Yet, evidence shows the vast majority of Veterans who die by suicide are being seen in primary care, not mental health care.

# Why don't Veterans access care?

## Of Veterans Under 65:

**1. Military association can trigger trauma:** Evidence shows that a significant portion of Veterans are less likely to access healthcare if the care is associated with the military due to military related trauma.

- For female Veterans, the suicide rate was 75.0% higher for those with positive screens for military sexual trauma

**2. Research consistently shows Veterans face multiple barriers to accessing VHA care (VHA Survey of Veteran Enrollees, 2022).**

- 36.5% said they required immediate attention and could not get an appointment
- 30% report barriers to accessing care in their communities, in particular those in rural areas who must travel to receive VA services.

## The Solution: HB 2537

### Oregon Veterans Waiver Program in the Oregon Health Authority

Create a new Healthcare Access Program that allows Oregon Veterans (under 65) to receive services through the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) to ensure all Oregon Veterans can access needed health care.

VHA care is an excellent option for some but not all Veterans.

Efforts should be made to simultaneously increase enrollment in VHA services, while providing innovative options like HB2537 to increase Veterans access to and use of healthcare. Some Veterans may then also transfer to VHA care once VHA care can be established.



Access to healthcare is associated with a 26% lower risk of suicide ([CDC, 2024](#)) and access to healthcare insurance with mental health care parity (such as OHP) is associated with a 5% reduction in suicide rates ([Rand, 2025](#)).

## Financial Impact

**If approved under a Medicaid waiver program, 90% of costs would be covered by Federal reimbursements.**

- Minimal impact on the state's budget.
- The Direct funding could come from the Veterans' Service fund to develop, administer and fund the OHP Veteran Access program.
- The program could begin as a pilot in areas with highest Veteran suicide rates while the state applies for the 2027 Medicaid waiver.

# **We are failing those who have served our country and state.**

**It is time for Oregon to pilot, test, evaluate and scale innovative solutions to reduce our Veteran suicide rates and support our Veterans to thrive.**