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Program Evaluation and Research Unit

# Transition Assistance Programs' (TAP) Relationship with Post- Military Separation Life Outcomes

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# Background

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# Upstream Approach to Suicide Prevention

- The highest suicide rates are within one year of transition from active duty.
- According to Veterans of Foreign Wars survey respondents, only about 60% of transitioning service members (TSMs) report participating in a Transition Assistance Program (TAP).



## **Reviewing President Biden's Strategy to Reduce Veteran Suicide by Addressing Economic Risk Factors**

Jun 15, 2022



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# Policy to Support Veterans During Their Transition from Military Service to Civilian Life

- Executive Order (EO) 13822 (Jan. 2018)- requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide suicide prevention resources for TSMs
- Evaluation of EO 13822 by the Inspector General (Nov 2021) found:
  - The DoD did not establish and implement oversight of Mental Health Assessment (MHA) and suicide risk screening processes for TSMs
  - The DoD did not implement a warm handoff approach during the transition from the Military Health System (MHS) to the VHA



# ***Study: Post-Separation Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Assessment (PSTAP)***

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*2019 Cross-Sectional Report*

*U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*



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# Study Goals

1. Identify what is most important to Veterans in determining their satisfaction with TAP

The version in place during the study: Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS)

2. Determine what to do to improve the experience; and
3. Guide training and activities aimed at enhancing the quality of benefits and services for Veterans



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# Study Cohort

- Cohort 1: Servicemembers who separated 5-6 months (Dec. 2018/Jan. 2019) prior to completing the 2019 survey
- Cohort 2: Servicemembers who separated 11-12 months (June/July 2018) prior to completing the 2019 survey
- Cohort 3: Servicemembers who separated 35-36 months (June/July 2016) prior to completing the 2019 survey
- Note: not all Veterans were TAP eligible- about 54% were eligible



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# Study Findings– Veterans who took TAP:

- Felt that the VA briefings were the most useful courses (about 85% useful)
- Use their VA benefits at a higher rate than the general study population
- Encounter a wide array of challenges when transitioning from military to civilian life
- Are likely to work in full-time, permanent positions







## Study Findings– Veterans who took TAP (Continued):

- Have a higher likelihood of using VA benefits and show more positive outcomes than the general study population
- Have high levels of satisfaction (about 60%) with most aspects of their lives, including their future security



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# Veterans' Experiences with TAP

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Table 9. When considering the course information for each TAP module, how useful was the content during your transition? (Question 4 - Asked of Veterans who Participated in the Listed Course Based on Question 1)

Course	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Transition GPS 5-day course	79.0%	76.6%	73.0%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(509)</i>	<i>(954)</i>	<i>(919)</i>
VA Benefits I/II (VA)	87.4%	87.2%	81.0%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(444)</i>	<i>(777)</i>	<i>(614)</i>
Career Technical Training Track (DOL)	75.3%	64.9%	66.0%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(212)</i>	<i>(152)</i>	<i>(106)</i>
Transition Overview (DoD)	63.1%	68.4%	63.8%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(268)</i>	<i>(475)</i>	<i>(349)</i>
Personal Financial Planning for Transition (DoD)	70.5%	70.9%	67.5%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(334)</i>	<i>(604)</i>	<i>(438)</i>
Military Occupational Classification "MOC" Crosswalk (DoD)	61.7 %	63.4%	62.4%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(313)</i>	<i>(526)</i>	<i>(377)</i>
Employment Workshop (DOL)	75.6%	79.2%	76.5%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(359)</i>	<i>(636)</i>	<i>(480)</i>
Accessing Higher Education Track (DoD)	77.8%	77.0%	73.8%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(171)</i>	<i>(312)</i>	<i>(233)</i>
Entrepreneurship Track (Small Business Administration)	61.3%	66.5%	64.3%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(126)</i>	<i>(223)</i>	<i>(185)</i>
OPM's Federal Employment Training (OPM)	50.3%	56.0%	47.9%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(458)</i>	<i>(842)</i>	<i>(865)</i>

Source: 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data merged with VA Administrative Data and DoD Data to identify cohort groups.

- Veterans who took TAP felt that VA Briefings were the most useful course across all cohorts
- VA benefits are important to nearly all Veterans because they help Veterans' capacity to overcome obstacles related to any type of employment



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# Veterans' Benefits Usage

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Table 12. 2019 VA Benefits Usage for TAP Participants and Study Veteran Population

Category	Percent	Participated in TAP			Study Population		
		Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Mortgage Insurance	Applied	0.8%	0.9%	2.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.9%
Disability	Applied	77.6%	72.8%	74.4%	50.2%	51.5%	53.2%
Education	Applied for Ch. 33	61.0%	65.0%	70.9%	47.1%	50.4%	56.1%
	Applied for Ch. 30	11.8%	11.7%	13.3%	11.1%	11.2%	12.2%
	Applied for Ch. 1606	3.0%	2.6%	3.0%	11.5%	9.4%	8.8%
	Applied for Ch. 1607	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%	2.7%	2.2%	2.4%
Home Loan	Applied for Home Loan	53.2%	60.0%	65.5%	43.0%	45.5%	49.2%
	Receiving Home Loan	36.8%	40.6%	47.1%	30.5%	32.9%	35.5%
Life Insurance	Applied	8.8%	11.6%	11.5%	4.0%	6.8%	6.2%
VA Health Care (VHA)	Enrolled in VHA	38.8%	49.3%	58.4%	23.5%	32.4%	45.2%
VR&E	Applied to VR&E Ch. 31	18.3%	15.8%	20.7%	10.3%	11.8%	16.0%
	Entitled to VR&E Ch. 31 (of those that applied)	26.2%	27.6%	26.3%	19.6%	19.9%	24.8%
	Applied to VR&E Ch. 36	9.8%	5.7%	10.1%	4.0%	4.9%	6.1%
	Completed Counseling Ch. 36 (of those that applied)	71.9%	64.3%	53.0%	45.1%	44.0%	47.5%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>		<i>(617)</i>	<i>(1,123)</i>	<i>(1,053)</i>	<i>(41,797)</i>	<i>(58,360)</i>	<i>(65,079)</i>

Source: VA Administrative Data on benefits usage merged with 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data.

Note: Percentages are weighted for Veterans who participated in TAP.

- Veterans who took TAP use their VA benefits at a higher rate than the general study population.
- The rates of usage are higher for Veterans in Cohort 3, as they have spent more years in civilian life compared to other cohorts.



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# Challenges Facing Veterans During Transition

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Table 13. Thinking about your transition to the civilian world, please rate the extent to which you found the following items challenging during the transition process. (Question 12 - Asked of TAP Veterans Only) (continued)

Item	Challenge Level	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Learning to have a better work-life balance after the transition.	Challenging	46.5%	48.7%	49.9%
	A little challenging	18.7%	20.4%	20.7%
	Not at all challenging	34.4%	29.7%	28.6%
	Prefer not to answer	0.5%	1.1%	0.8%
	<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(572)</i>	<i>(1,054)</i>	<i>(997)</i>
Missing the camaraderie and teamwork that was part of the military culture.	Challenging	67.0%	68.9%	72.3%
	A little challenging	13.1%	15.5%	13.9%
	Not at all challenging	19.5%	14.9%	13.2%
	Prefer not to answer	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%
	<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(591)</i>	<i>(1,080)</i>	<i>(1,008)</i>
Working at a slower pace than when in the military.	Challenging	53.5%	57.4%	54.8%
	A little challenging	13.0%	14.4%	14.1%
	Not at all challenging	32.6%	27.1%	29.7%
	Prefer not to answer	0.9%	1.0%	1.3%
	<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(526)</i>	<i>(962)</i>	<i>(933)</i>
Working at a faster pace than when in the military.	Challenging	16.6%	21.0%	18.6%
	A little challenging	17.0%	14.5%	11.0%
	Not at all challenging	65.0%	63.3%	68.7%
	Prefer not to answer	1.3%	1.2%	1.7%
	<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(405)</i>	<i>(745)</i>	<i>(726)</i>

Source: 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data merged with VA Administrative Data and DoD Data to identify cohort groups.

- Veterans who took TAP encounter a wide array of challenges when transitioning from military to civilian life
- Higher percentages of Cohort 3 Veterans still face challenges



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# Employment Outcomes

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Table 16. Percentage of Veterans working in permanent positions or engaged in any entrepreneurial activities (Questions 15 and 16 - Asked of Employed Veterans Only)

Employment Type	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
<b>Work in permanent positions</b>	87.0%	84.4%	83.1%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(391)</i>	<i>(723)</i>	<i>(752)</i>
<b>Engaged in Entrepreneurial Activities</b>			
Own their own company	4.2%	3.3%	5.3%
Have a side-business/hobby to supplement income	6.1%	8.8%	9.2%
Have taken tangible steps to start a business in the last 12 months	6.2%	5.2%	5.3%
<i>Total Respondents Who Are Employed (N)</i>	<i>(396)</i>	<i>(735)</i>	<i>(762)</i>

Source: 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data merged with VA Administrative Data and DoD Data to identify cohort groups.

Table 17. Describe your current employment (Question 17 - Asked of Employed Veterans Only)

Current Employment Status	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
I work full-time	76.7%	73.7%	68.1%
I work full-time & have an additional job	7.1%	8.0%	15.0%
I work part-time by choice	10.6%	11.6%	10.7%
I work part-time at one job	4.2%	4.7%	4.9%
I work part-time at more than one job	1.5%	2.0%	1.3%
<i>Total Respondents Who Are Employed (N)</i>	<i>(390)</i>	<i>(722)</i>	<i>(748)</i>

Source: 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data merged with VA Administrative Data and DoD Data to identify cohort groups.

- Veterans who took TAP are likely to work in full-time, permanent positions
- Cohort 3 had the lowest percentage of permanently employed Veterans and full-time employment status but had the highest percentage of engagement in entrepreneurial activities



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# Veterans' Satisfaction with Life

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Table 37. Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your:  
(Question 50 - Asked of TAP Veterans Only)

Life Domain	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Life as a whole	57.6%	63.5%	62.2%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(610)</i>	<i>(1,112)</i>	<i>(1,037)</i>
Standard of living	69.2%	68.1%	67.7%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(611)</i>	<i>(1,114)</i>	<i>(1,040)</i>
Health	51.5%	53.9%	53.9%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(611)</i>	<i>(1,112)</i>	<i>(1,040)</i>
Life achievement	57.6%	61.6%	60.9%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(611)</i>	<i>(1,112)</i>	<i>(1,040)</i>
Personal relationships	62.1%	64.4%	59.2%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(610)</i>	<i>(1,112)</i>	<i>(1,042)</i>
Safety	79.9%	79.8%	79.7%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(610)</i>	<i>(1,113)</i>	<i>(1,042)</i>
Being a part of the community	43.1%	46.6%	50.2%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(608)</i>	<i>(1,112)</i>	<i>(1,040)</i>
Future security	60.8%	63.1%	60.5%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(609)</i>	<i>(1,109)</i>	<i>(1,039)</i>
Spirituality/Religion	52.8%	57.6%	55.4%
<i>Total Respondents (N)</i>	<i>(609)</i>	<i>(1,111)</i>	<i>(1,038)</i>

Source: 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey Data merged with VA Administrative Data and DoD Data to identify cohort groups.

- Veterans who took TAP have high levels of satisfaction with most aspects of their lives, including their future security
- Being part of the community ranked lowest for each cohort
- For most life domains, cohort 2 had higher percentages of satisfaction compared to cohorts 1 and 3.



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# Next Steps

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# Areas of Focus for VA

1. Develop better messaging to ensure Veterans are aware of one-on-one counseling services provided by the VA
2. Provide additional mental and emotional health services to transitioning servicemembers and also to Veterans immediately after transition
3. Improve Veterans' understanding of available family benefits



# Areas to Improve TAP

1. Improve TAP curriculum regarding the most significant challenges Veterans face during their transition
2. Focus additional resources on TSMs in lower pay grades
3. Improve the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) curriculum by focusing on courses that received a low usefulness score
4. Identify TAP courses that can be optional for officers and Veterans in higher pay grades



# Response and Recommendations

- Improving mental health resource awareness
  - Education calls to service members within 90 days of separation date
  - Expanded discussion of resources in TAP briefing
  - Launch of a broad communication campaign
- Greater focus on strengthening protective factors
- New VHA SP Initiatives: REACH VET (predictive modeling system)
  - Application in service members transitioning to civilian life/Veteran populations is not yet known (Peterson et al., 2018)





# Discussion

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# Questions

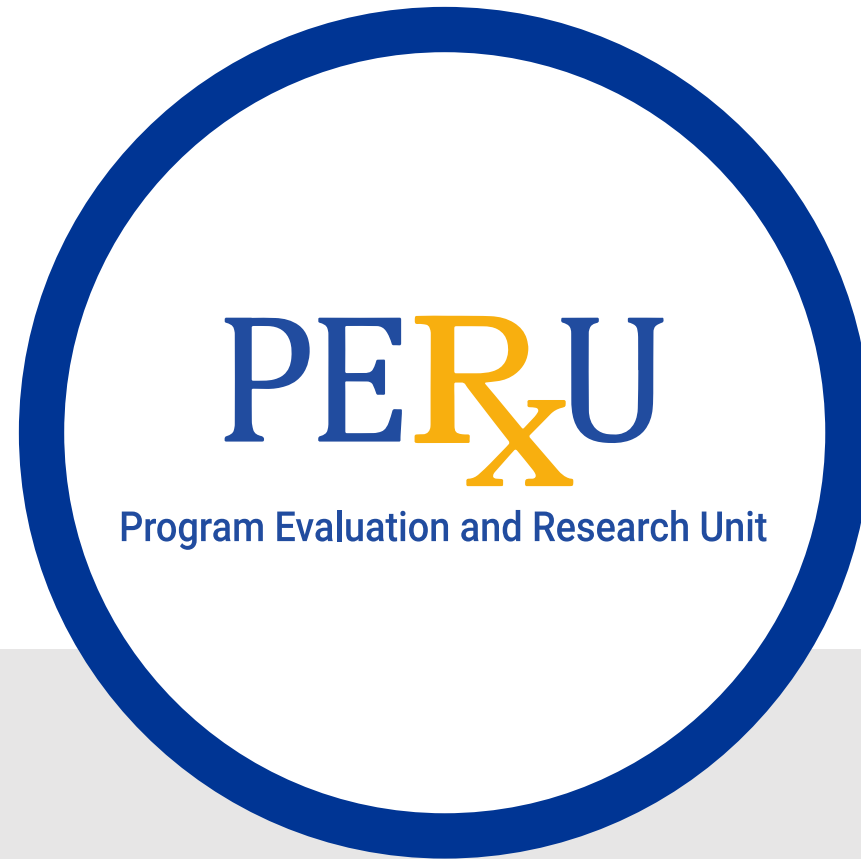
1. Does TAP reduce Veteran suicide/suicide risk?
2. Does TAP improve Veterans' access to economic opportunities?  
Does TAP protect against Veteran suicide?
3. What recommendations do you have to improve TAP based on your experience with the program?
4. How can these findings inform Veteran suicide prevention efforts?



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