

# Suicides Among Veterans In California, 2017



In accordance with Assembly Bill 242 (Chapter 222, Statutes of 2017), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has created this injury data brief on California Veterans who died by suicide in 2017, the most recent complete year of data available. It provides information on statewide counts by age, sex, race/ethnicity, and method of suicide. Data are compiled from the California Comprehensive Death Files produced by CDPH's Center for Health Statistics and Informatics.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, there were 640 suicide deaths among California residents aged 18 years and older who had served in the United States Armed Forces (Table 1).

- ⇒ Suicides among Veterans made up 15.3% of all suicides.
- ⇒ Among Veterans, suicides made up 1.2% of total deaths.
- ⇒ Veteran status was unknown in 1.3% of total deaths and 1.8% of suicides.

Veteran Status	Suicides	Total Deaths
Yes	640	52,263
No	3,471	209,110
Unknown	75	3,565
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,186</b>	<b>264,938</b>

#### 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” which does not distinguish between current and former service members.
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Rates were not calculated because CDPH does not have good estimates on the Veteran population in California. CDPH is working with the Veterans Health Administration to align Veteran definitions and population numbers.
- ⇒ As shown in Table 2, 43% percent of Veteran suicides were in the 25-64 year old age group and 40% percent occurred in the 65-84 age group (Table 2).
- ⇒ The majority of suicides among Veterans were males (96.7%) and White (79%).

## Suicides Among Veterans in California, 2017



Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Suicide Decedents by Veteran Status, California Residents Aged 18 Years and Older, 2017		
	Veteran	Non-Veteran
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	619	2588
Female	21	883
<b>Age</b>		
18-19	3	96
20-24	18	319
25-44	121	1194
45-64	154	1308
65-84	256	488
85+	88	66
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	506	2144
Black	33	138
Hispanic	66	784
American Indian	6	26
Asian/PI	27	370
Other/Unknown	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>3471</b>

- ⇒ Firearms were used in the majority of suicides among California Veterans, accounting for 65.6% of suicides in this group (Table 3).
- ⇒ Hanging/Suffocation was the second most common mechanism of suicide accounting for an additional 17% of Veteran suicides.

Table 3: Mechanism of Suicide among California Residents Aged 18 Years and Older by Veteran Status, 2017		
Mechanism of Suicide	Veteran	Non-Veteran
Firearm	420	1137
Hanging/Suffocation	109	1239
Poisoning	61	574
Suicide/Other	21	265
Cut/Pierce	17	96
Jump	12	160
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>3471</b>

**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; Suicide-Other: U03.0, U03.9, X71, X75-X77, X79, X82-X84.

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.

Prepared by the California Violent Death Reporting System (Cal-VDRS) Project, Safe and Active Communities Branch.

