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Illinoisans See VA Access as Veterans' Greatest Challenge

Of all the problems faced by Illinois veterans, almost half of the state's voters—46.2 percent—say getting access to VA health care, or the care itself, are the greatest challenges they face, according to a recent poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Challenges with employment, including unemployment, underemployment, and job placement, were voiced as the greatest issue by 24.9 percent of respondents. Homelessness and housing assistance were seen as the greatest issue by only 3.4 percent, followed by only 0.2 percent concerned with education and training. Almost one in five (19.6 percent) had no opinion.

The statewide poll of 1,000 registered voters was conducted February 28 through March 10. The survey has a margin for error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. The live-interview survey's sample included 30 percent cell-phone respondents.

"These results are concerning because either the health care needs of men and women who have served are not being met, or a better job needs to be done illustrating that these needs are being taken care of," said Delio Calzolari, a Navy veteran and associate director of the Institute.

The poll asked an open-ended question: "What is the greatest challenge Illinois veterans face?"

Over one quarter (26.6 percent) of respondents mentioned Veterans' Administration (VA) access or VA wait times. An additional 15.8 percent answered veterans' mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder (or syndrome) (PTSD), drug and alcohol abuse or suicide. Another 3.8 percent specified physical health issues.

Calzolari said "We asked an open-ended question to get a bead on perceptions of challenges facing veterans. From the countless ways people could answer, nearly half of the responses named veterans' healthcare issues" as their greatest challenge.

Voters in urban areas place more emphasis on employment needs than those Downstate.

- VA access issues are reported the most Downstate (the areas outside Chicago and the Chicago suburbs, which include suburban Cook County and the collar counties) where 30 percent of respondents reported VA access as veterans' greatest challenge. Combining

VA access and health issues raises that percentage to 47.7 percent. Another 20.7 percent perceived employment issues as the greatest challenge.

- In Chicago, employment issues overtake VA access issues as the top challenge to veterans. Nearly three in ten Chicagoans (28.5 percent) perceive employment issues as veterans' greatest challenge and 24.0 percent responded VA access. Again, however, when VA access and other healthcare issues are combined, that category retakes the top spot with 44.0 percent of responses.
- Results in suburban Cook and the collar counties have the same pattern as the city. Three in ten (30.2 percent) responded that they perceived employment issues as veterans' greatest challenge and 25.6 percent responded VA access.

However, when VA access and other healthcare issues are combined (42 percent) suburban voters, like those in Chicago and downstate, rank health care as the biggest problem.

“These results reinforce the idea that rural and urban veterans face different problems or at least prioritize them differently,” said Calzolari.

“Rural veterans do not have the density of services and non-profit organizations that urban areas do. Lack of public transportation, services, healthcare professionals, or even attorneys for VA claims appeals in rural areas are obstacles rural vets face that are a smaller challenge to urban vets.”

“If a veteran cannot square away his or her health, the vet is less likely to be able to solve employment or other problems. If a vet solves the health issue, then the vet is better positioned to work on employment issues and more likely to view the employment issue as the greatest challenge because the health issues are resolved,” Calzolari said.

The poll also indicates differences in opinion among people with military experience, their nonmilitary immediate family members, and people in nonmilitary households. Despite these differences, VA access and healthcare remains the greatest challenge reported by each group.

- Over half of veterans or people on active duty, 51 percent, stated VA access and health issues are veterans' greatest challenge. Similarly, 49.3 percent of immediate family members of veterans or active duty service people answered VA access and health issues are veterans' greatest challenge.
- However, only two in five, 40.0 percent, of people in nonmilitary households name VA access or healthcare as veterans' greatest challenge.
- People in nonmilitary households frequently identify employment issues as veterans' greatest challenge, at 30.3 percent. Significantly fewer veterans or active duty military (20.6 percent) and their immediate family members (22.7 percent) named employment issues.

The Simon Institute Poll interviewed 1,000 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3 points from the results obtained here.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Fieldwork was conducted from February 28 – March 10. No auto-dial or “robo polling” is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s poll web page at www.simonpoll.org.

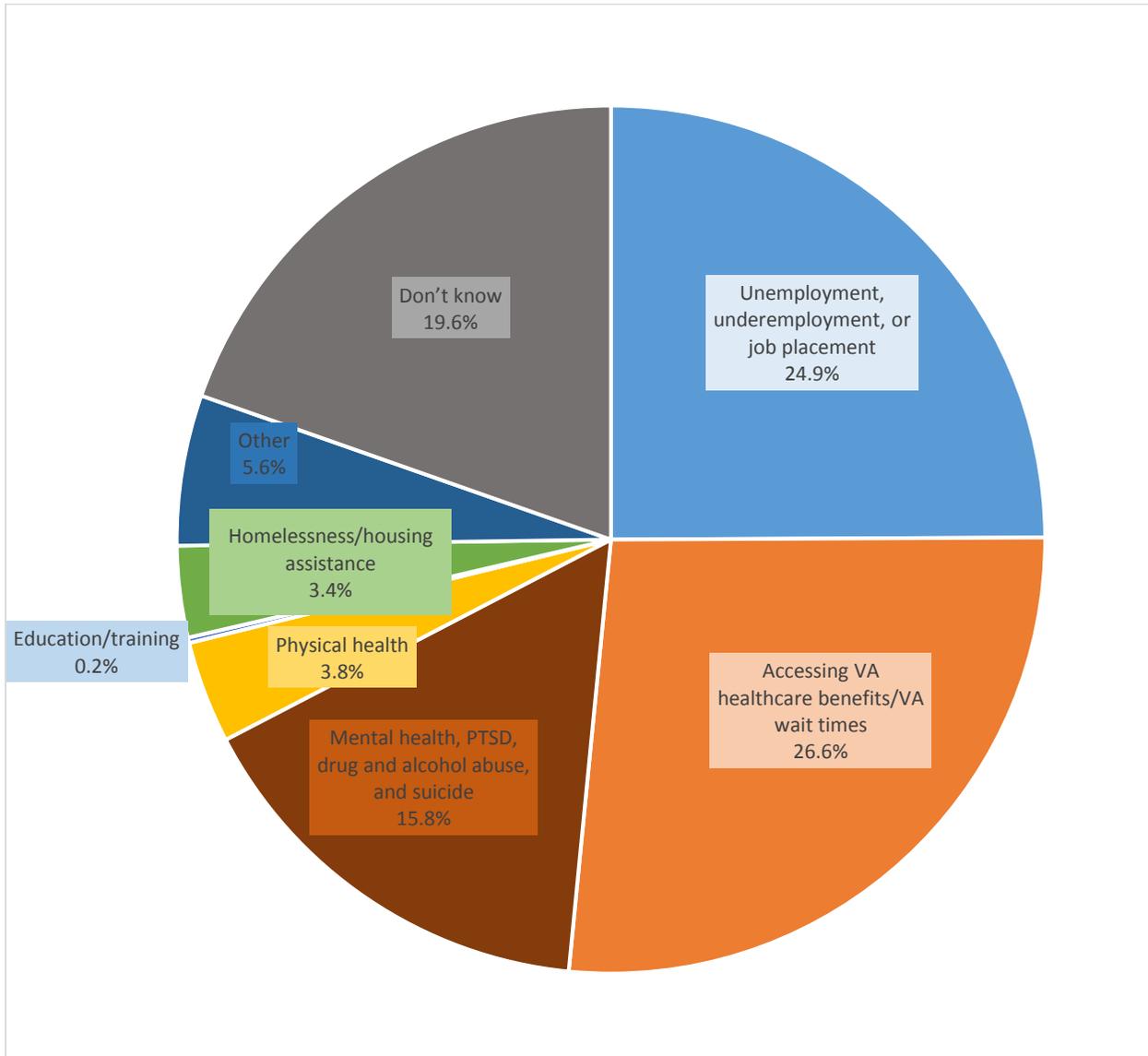
Simon Institute polling data are also archived by three academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The three open source data repositories are: the University of Michigan’s Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (OpenICPSR; <http://openicpsr.org/repoEntity/list>), the University of North Carolina’s The Howard W. Odum Institute for Research in Social Science Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

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Greatest Challenge Veterans Face

Thinking about veterans' issues, what is the greatest challenge that Illinois Veterans face?

Response	Percent
1. Accessing VA healthcare benefits/VA wait times	26.6%
2. Unemployment, underemployment, or job placement	24.9%
3. Don't know	19.6%
4. Mental health, PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide	15.8%
5. Other	5.6%
6. Physical health	3.8%
7. Homelessness/housing assistance	3.4%
8. Education/training	0.2%

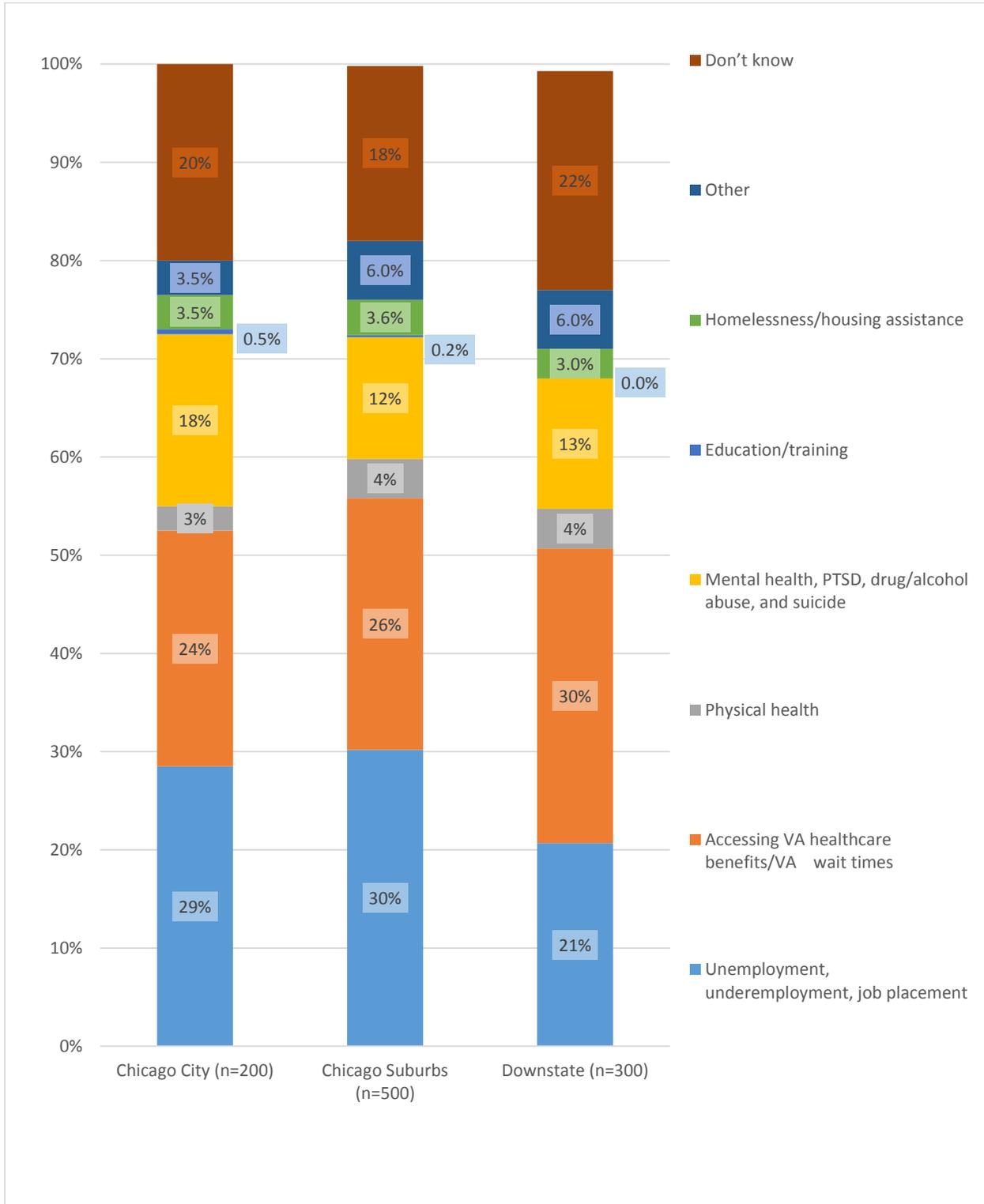


Response	Count	Percent
Unemployment, underemployment, or job placement	249	24.9%
Health or issues with the VA	462	46.2%
Accessing VA healthcare benefits/VA wait times	266	26.6%
Mental or physical health	196	19.6%
- Mental health, PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide	158	15.8%
- Physical health	38	3.8%
Education/training	2	0.2%
Homelessness/housing assistance	34	3.4%
Other	56	5.6%
Don't know	196	19.6%

Note: In this table (and those that follow) we display both collapsed counts and un-collapsed counts. For example, we show the number of respondents that stated mental or physical health as the greatest issue as well as the count for mental health and the count for physical health.

Greatest Challenge Veterans Face by Geographic Region

Thinking about veterans' issues, what is the greatest challenge that Illinois Veterans face?



<i>Response</i>	Chicago City (n=200)		Chicago Suburbs (n=500)		Downstate (n=300)	
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Unemployment, underemployment, job placement	57	28.5%	151	30.2%	62	20.7%
Health or issues with the VA	88	44.0%	210	42.0%	143	47.7%
Accessing VA healthcare benefits/VA wait times	48	24.0%	128	25.6%	90	30.0%
Mental or physical health	40	20.0%	82	16%	53	18%
- Physical health	5	2.5%	20	4%	13	4%
- Mental health, PTSD, drug/alcohol abuse, and suicide	35	17.5%	62	12.4%	40	13.3%
Education/training	1	0.5%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Homelessness/housing assistance	7	3.5%	18	3.6%	9	3.0%
Other	7	3.5%	30	6%	19	6%
Don't know	40	20%	89	17.8%	67	22.3%

Greatest Challenge Veterans Face by Veteran Status

Thinking about veterans' issues, what is the greatest challenge that Illinois Veterans face?

<i>Response</i>	Veteran or On Active Duty (n=155)		Immediate Family of Vet (n=489)		Other (n=350)	
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Unemployment, underemployment, job placement	32	20.6%	111	22.7%	106	30.3%
Health or issues with the VA	79	51.0%	241	49.3%	140	40%
Accessing VA healthcare benefits/VA wait times	52	33.5%	133	27.2%	80	22.9%
Mental or physical health	27	17.4%	108	22.1%	60	17.1%
- Physical health	8	5.2%	24	4.9%	6	1.7%
- Mental health, PTSD, drug/alcohol abuse, and suicide	19	12.3%	84	17.2%	54	15.4%
Education/training	0	0%	2	0.4%	0	0%
Homelessness/housing assistance	4	2.6%	19	3.9%	11	3.1%
Other	14	9%	24	4.9%	18	5.1%
Don't know	26	16.8%	92	18.8%	75	21.4%