

VETERAN PERCEPTIONS SURVEY RESULTS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

September 2025





...diers course, trainees who could not pass the armed forces' physical or aptitude tests go through three months of remedial training, or boot camp. Photographs by Rebecca Kiger for The New Yorker

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE U.S. MILITARY'S RECRUITING CRISIS

“In 2022 and 2023, the **Army missed its recruitment goal by nearly twenty-five per cent**—about fifteen thousand troops a year. It hit the mark last year, but **only by reducing the target** by more than ten thousand. The **Navy** has also fared badly: it **failed to reach its goals in 2023, then met them in 2024 by filling out the ranks with recruits of a lower standard**; nearly half measured below average on an aptitude exam. The **Army Reserve hasn't met its benchmark since 2016**, and the ranks are so depleted that active-duty officers have been put in charge of reserve units.”

Rationale

- At a time of historically bad recruiting results, when the traditional explanations—strong economy, poor physical fitness, drug use, Samurai culture, etc.—do not sufficiently explain the problem
- Our goal was to test this hypothesis:
 - Have the legacies of 20 years of war, as seen through public sentiment about our veterans, negatively impacted recruiting in an unprecedented way?
- As we'll show you today, the short answer is yes, the hypothesis is valid.

Methodology

This study was conducted between September 26 – October 9, 2024, by Ipsos using the probability-based, KnowledgePanel®. This poll is based on a nationally representative probability sample of the following groups:

- 1,011 general population adults age 18 or older
- 524 parents of children aged 14-17
- 291 teens aged 14-17, obtained through their parents who took the survey
- 205 school personnel (defined as teachers, counselors, or coaches for grades 9-12)

The margin of sampling error for this study is plus or minus 3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for results based on the general population sample of adults; plus or minus 4.7 percentage points for parents; plus or minus 6.8 percentage points for teens; and plus or minus 8.2 percentage points for school personnel.

PROBLEM #1: A HISTORICALLY LOW WILLINGNESS TO SERVE

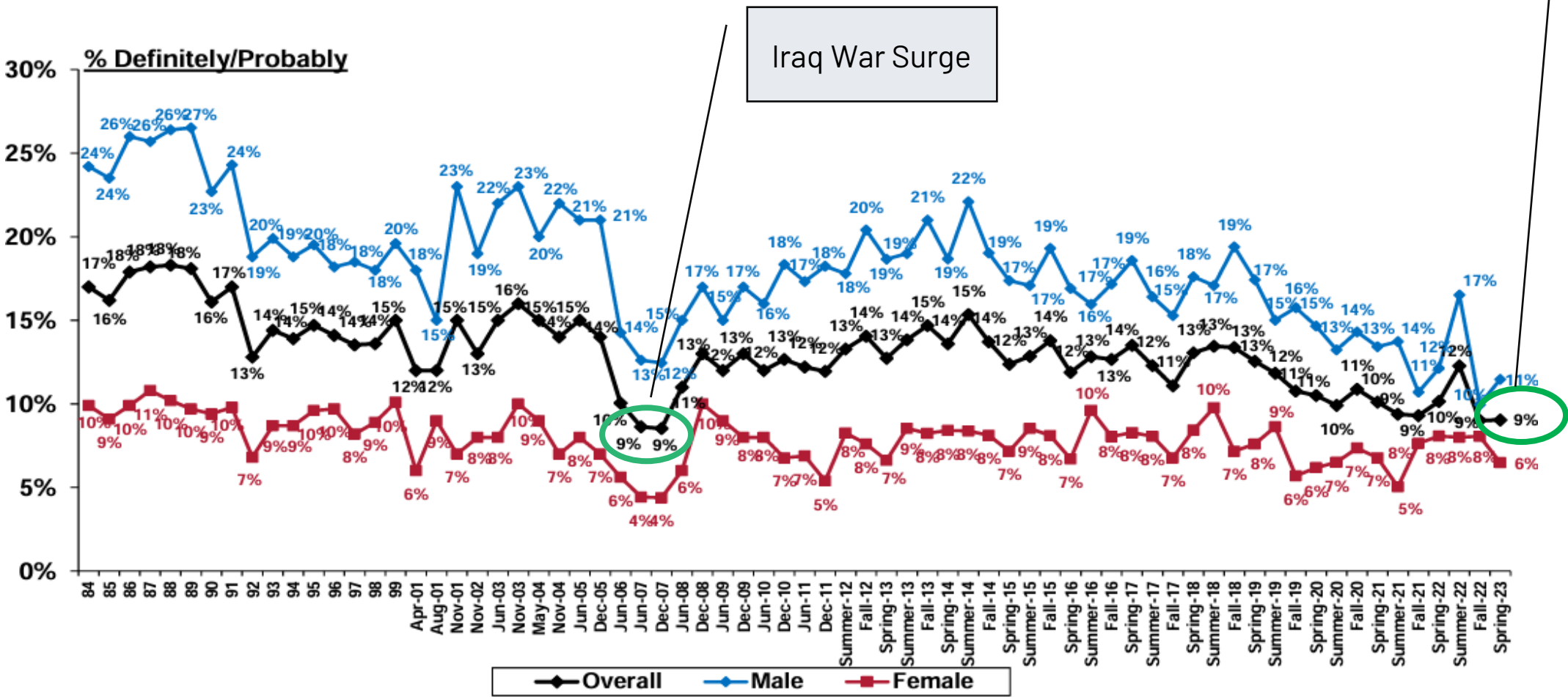
Historical General Military Propensity

By Gender

FPP9: In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military?

Response options: Definitely, Probably, Probably Not, Definitely Not

Tie for recruiting low point. Why?



Note: Youth ages 16–21. Estimates are charted to precise values. Labels are rounded to the nearest whole percent.

Source: DoD Youth Attitude Tracking Survey (YATS) and Youth Poll

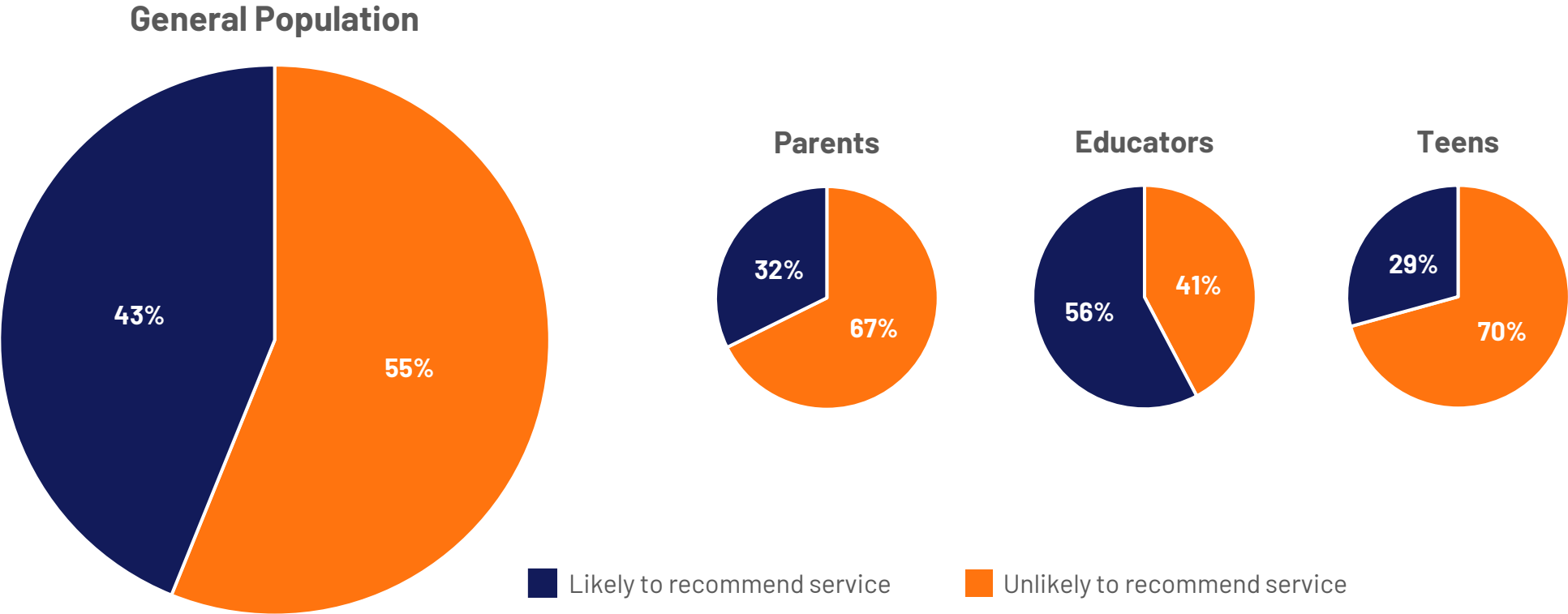


Questions: YATS (Q503)–Jun-10 (FPP9): “Now, I’d like to ask you how likely it is that you will be serving in the Military in the next few years?”

Dec-10–Onwards (FPP9): “In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military?”

Enormous hesitancy in recommending military service to young people

How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service?

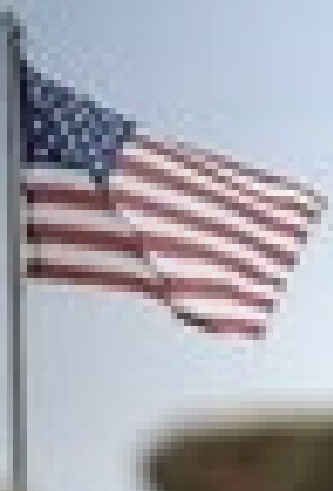


Q (Adults) - We would like your opinion about the choices that your child has/young people have. Suppose your child/a young person asked for your advice about various post-high school options. How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service such as the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, or the National Guard?
Q (Teens) - How likely is it that you would recommend joining the military to someone your age (e.g., friend, family member, classmate)?
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (n=524); Teens (n=291); School Personnel (n=205)



70%

of teens are **unlikely or very unlikely to recommend** joining the military to someone their age





Only **25%**
of teens **ever thought**
about serving in the
military.

66%

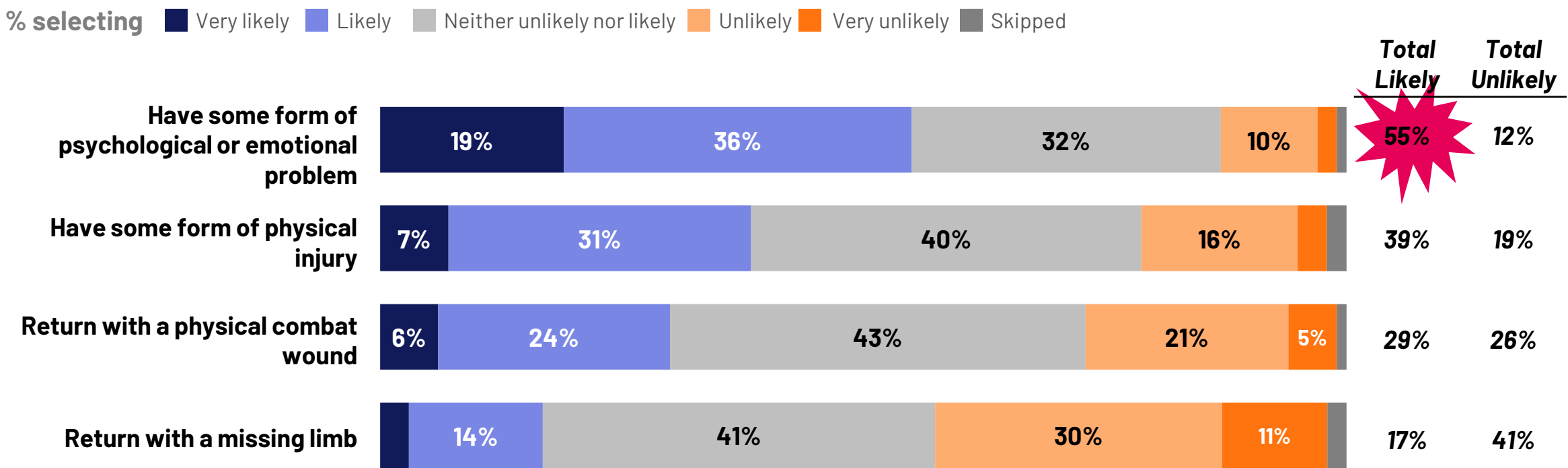
of teens, if they were an employer, would **rather hire someone with a 4-year college degree** than with 4 years of military service.



PROBLEM #2: POOR PERCEPTIONS OF VETERAN OUTCOMES

More than half of Americans say someone getting out of the military will likely have some form of psychological or emotional problem.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...

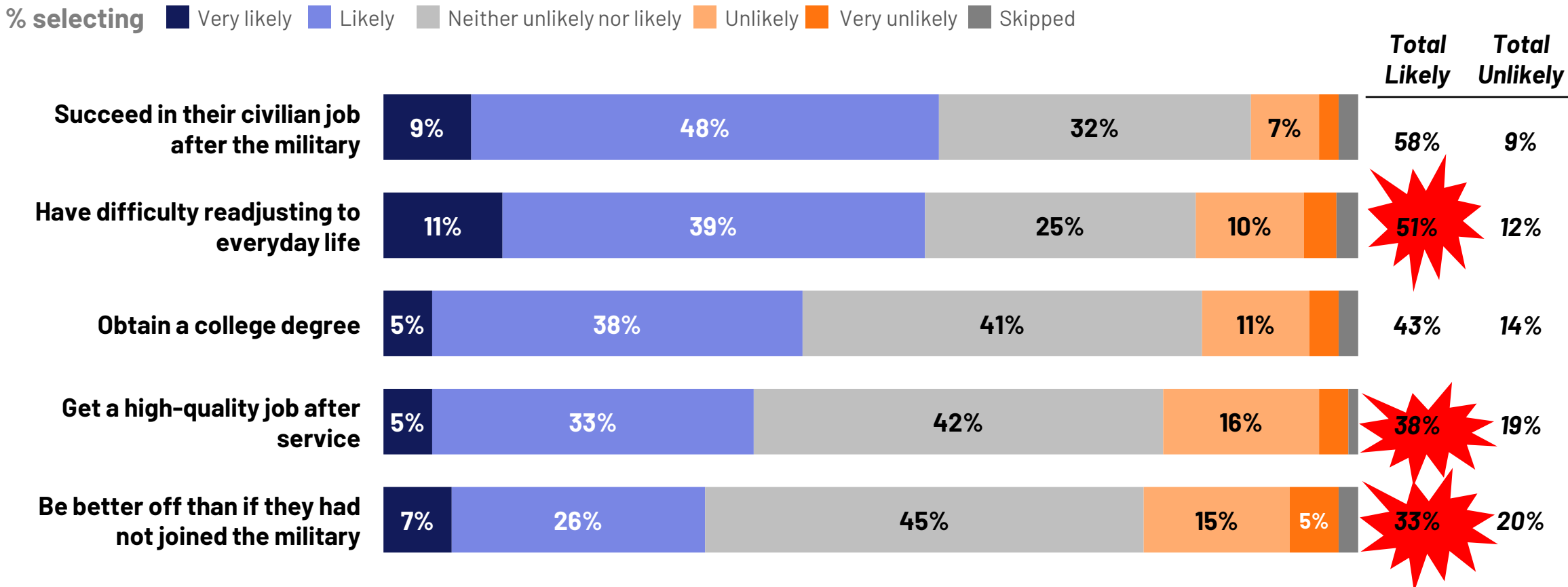


Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011)



More than a half of Americans say Veterans have difficulty reintegrating, and more than a third think they are unlikely to get a high-quality job.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...



Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011)



Teens are more likely than parents and educators to say someone getting out of the military will likely return with a physical wound or missing limb.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...*

% selecting likely (net)

	Total	Parents (A)	Teens (B)	School Personnel (C)
Have some form of psychological or emotional problem	55%	60%	64%	58%
Have some form of physical injury	39%	43%	49%	42%
Return with a physical combat wound	29%	37%	49% AC	32%
Return with a missing limb	17%	20%	27% A	20%

Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...

Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (N=524), Teens (N=291), School personnel (N=205)

*Note: Letters and shading indicate a statistically significant difference between groups

PROBLEM #3: POOR PERFORMING FEDERAL VETERAN PROGRAMS



63%

of Americans feel
**Veterans are
supported poorly** by
the federal
government

Severely Underperforming Federal Programs

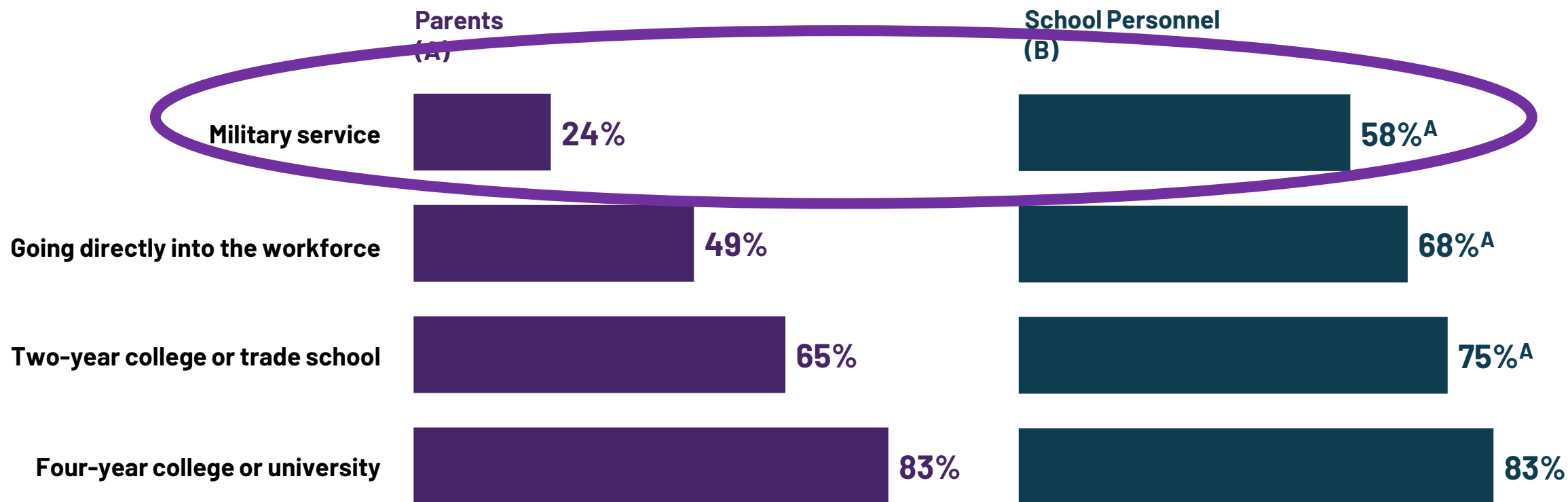
Program Area	Federal Solution	Exemplar NPO Solution
Employment	DOL's \$152M in Programs under VETS	Call of Duty Endowment grantees place more veterans into jobs and do so at 1/15th the cost of Department of Labor Programs while achieving higher quality outcomes .
Traumatic Brain Injury	VA's ~\$146M+ mTBI Program	The Avalon Action Alliance's treatment model achieves better clinical outcomes compared to VA (more than 72% of patients experienced reduction in Neurobehavioral Symptom Inventory and more than 95% have a positive Patient Global Impression of Change).
Mental Health	VA's \$16.5B traditional mental health programs	Avalon trains over 1,000 veterans annually in the science of Post-traumatic Growth through the Warrior PATHH program experiencing four times better outcomes than VA's efforts.
Suicide Prevention	VA's \$571M conventional suicide prevention programs	Through an initial \$9M investment, the Face the Fight Coalition's sophisticated dynamic modeling estimates it will save 3,500+ lives by 2032 . Their efforts have already reached over 180,000 veterans with evidence-based suicide prevention interventions.

THE ROAD TO BETTER

School personnel are much more likely to discuss military service with teens compared to parents of teens, which may highlight their potential as valuable resources for recruitment outreach.

How often do you discuss the following with teens?*

% selecting often/sometimes



Q. How often do you discuss the following with your teen/teens?

Base: Parents (N=405), School Personnel (N=205)

Educators are much more likely than other adults & teens to believe Veterans will obtain a college degree, have job success, and be better off.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...*

% selecting likely (net)

	Total	Parents (A)	Teens (B)	School Personnel (C)
Succeed in their civilian job after the military	58%	56%	59%	65% A
Have difficulty readjusting to everyday life	51%	53%	53%	47%
Obtain a college degree	43%	50%	46%	55% B
Get a high-quality job after service	38%	43%	46%	53% A
Be better off than if they had not joined the military	33%	36%	31%	45% AB

Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...

Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (N=524), Teens (N=291), School personnel (N=205)

*Note: Letters and shading indicate a statistically significant difference between groups



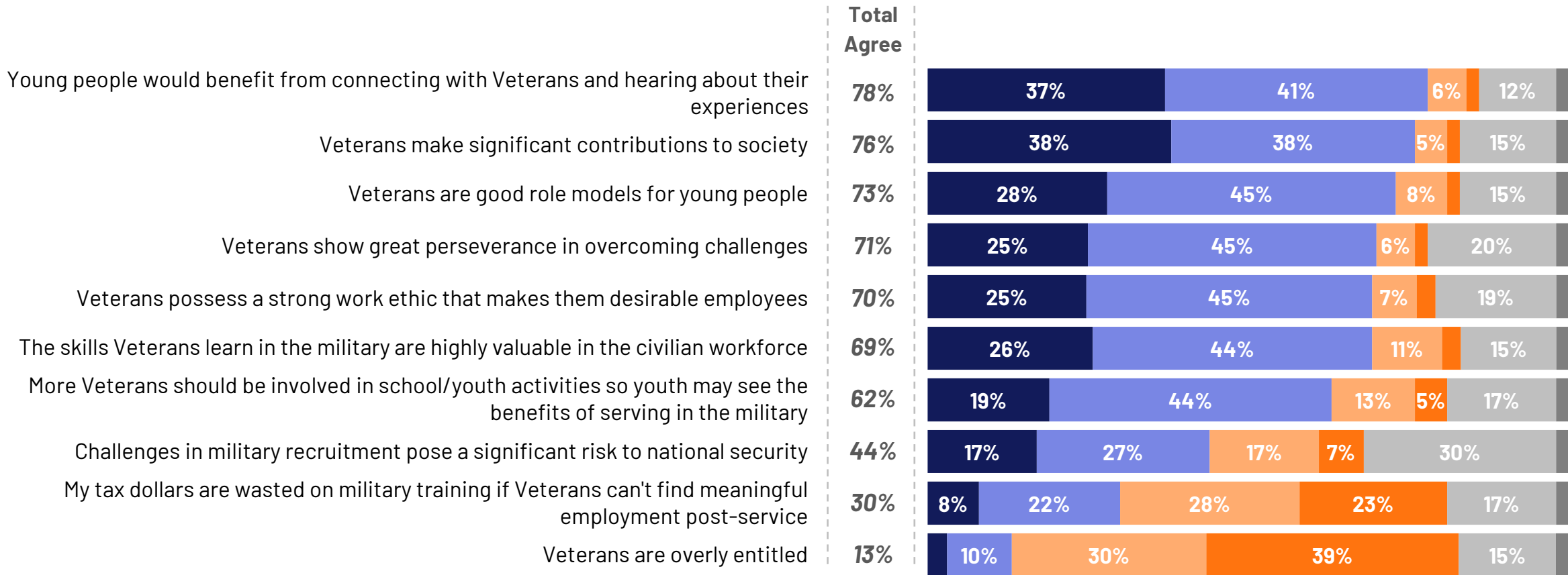
73%

of parents say
**Veterans are good
role models** for young
people

Most Americans feel youth would benefit from connecting with Veterans and hearing about their experiences.

How much do you agree with the following statements?*

% selecting Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don't know Skipped



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: General population (n=1,011)

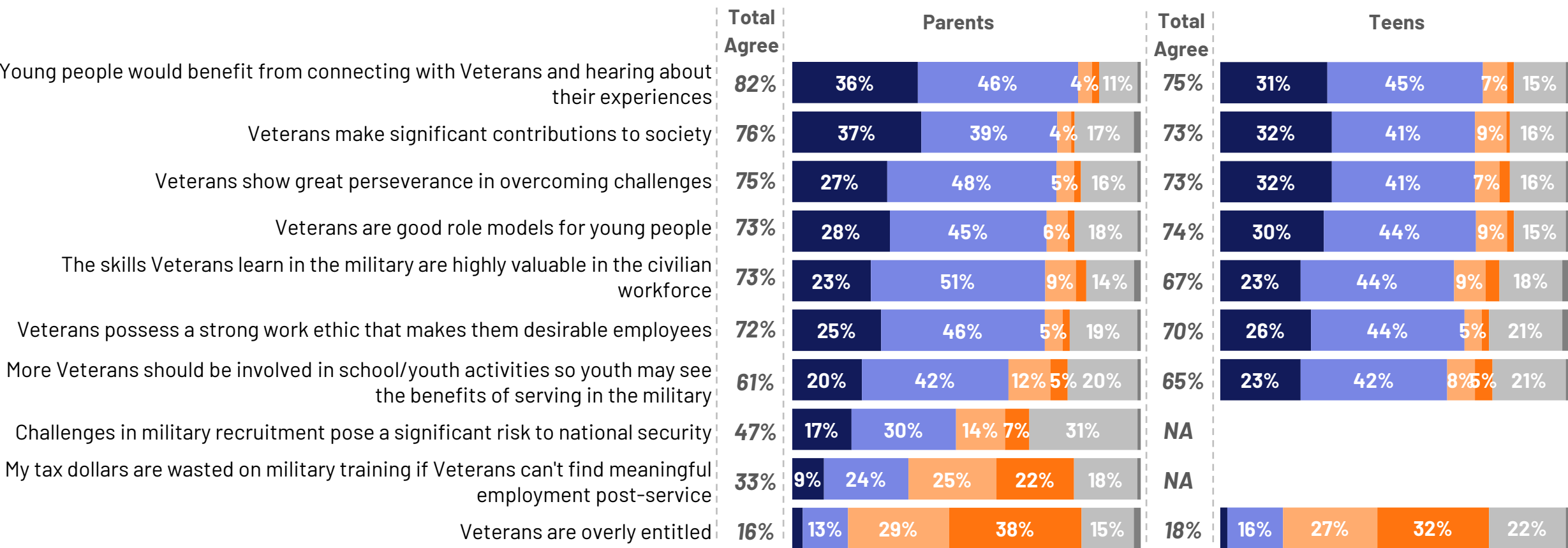
* Note: Values less than or equal to 3% are not shown



Most parents and teens themselves feel teens would benefit from connecting with Veterans and hearing about their experiences.

How much do you agree with the following statements?*

% selecting Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don't know Skipped



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: Parents (N=524); Teens (N=291)

* Note: Values less than or equal to 3% are not shown



Americans who correctly answer questions about Veterans' experiences are more likely to recommend military service.

How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service?

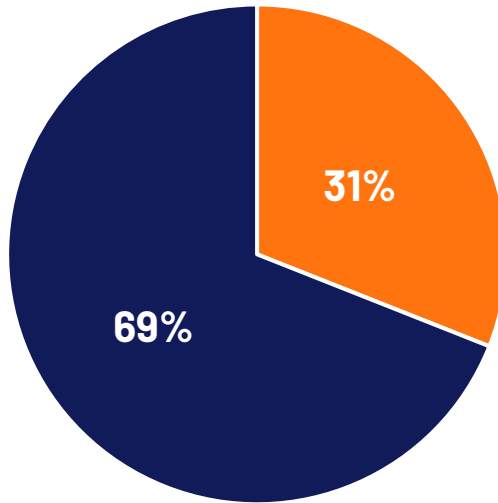
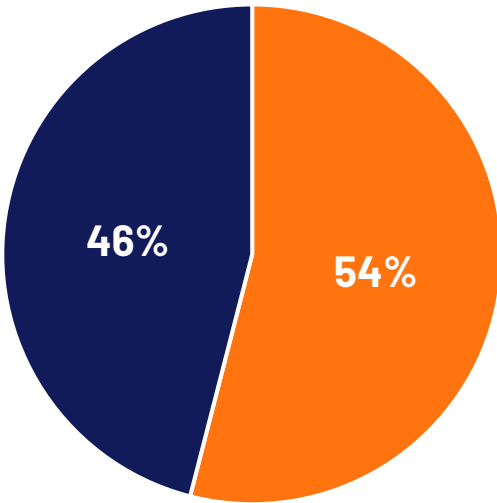
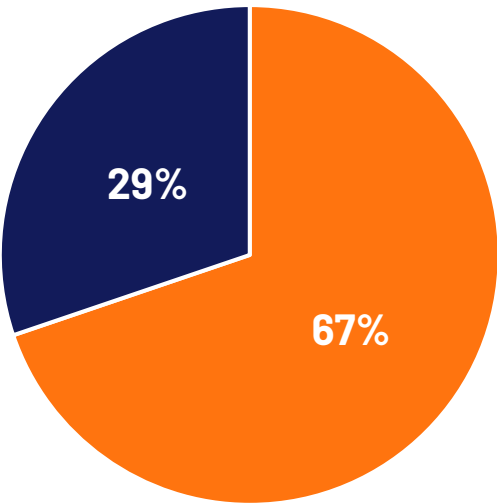
Responses represent non-veteran adults

of knowledge questions
answered correctly (out of 9):

0-2 correct

3-5 correct

6+ correct*



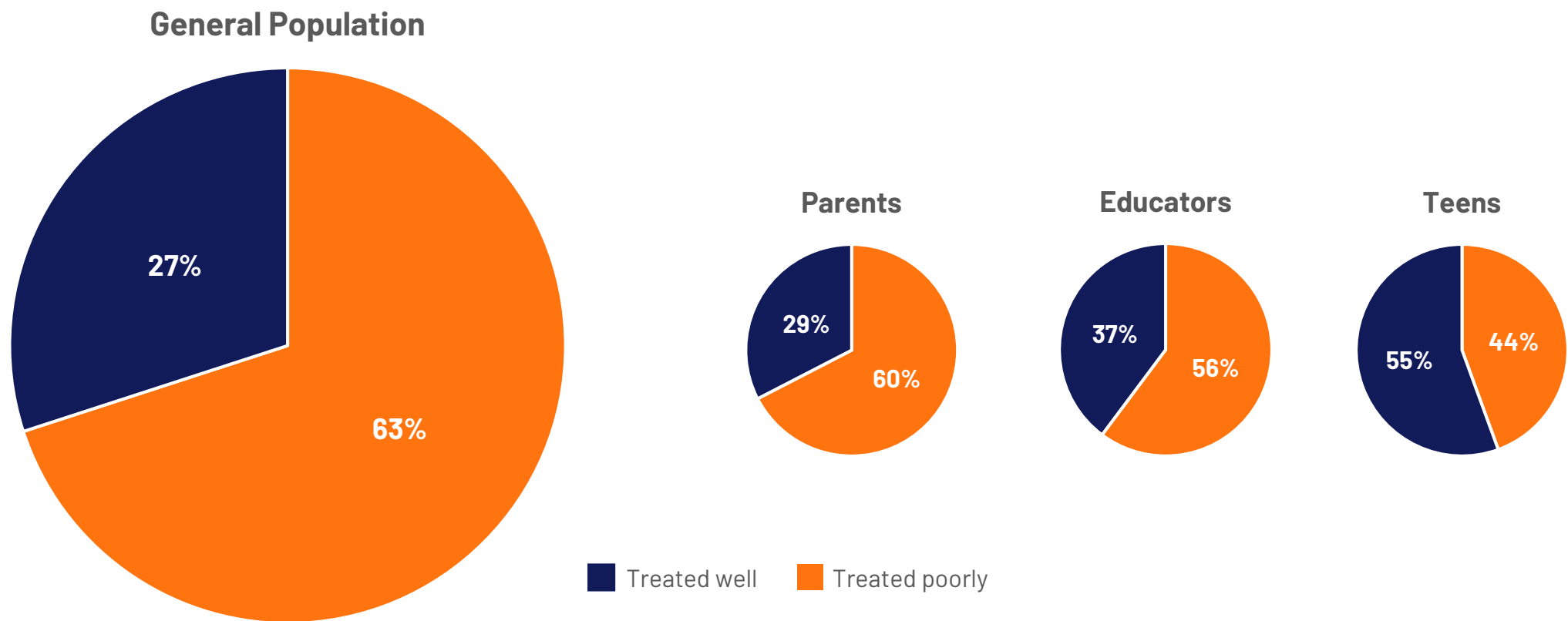
■ Likely to recommend service ■ Unlikely to recommend service

Q - We would like your opinion about the choices that your child has/young people have. Suppose your child/a young person asked for your advice about various post-high school options. How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service such as the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, or the National Guard?
Base: Non-Veterans (N=877): 0-2 correct (N=423), 3-5 correct (N=359), 6+ correct (N=95*)



Most Americans think the federal government needs to do more to take care of Veterans after service.

How well do you think Veterans are supported by federal government programs?



Q - How well, if at all, do you believe Veterans are supported by federal government programs after their service?
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (n=524); Teens (n=291); School Personnel (n=205)



More than **90%**
of Americans say they
support **increasing
funding for Veteran
mental health &
employment services**



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Four Key Recommendations

1. Create and annually publish a veteran wellbeing accountability dashboard
2. Redirect government funds to best-in-class, proven nonprofits that consistently drive measurably superior outcomes
3. Launch a national Veteran awareness campaign
4. Educate high school staff on veteran outcome facts

Recommendation #1: Create and annually publish a veteran wellbeing accountability dashboard

Rationale

- If something gets measured, it's more likely to get attention.
- There is no system to comprehensively track and ensure veteran wellbeing.
- Instead, there are uncoordinated, expensive, and largely unaccountable federal programs that may or may not actually help veterans.

Action

- Create a comprehensive, publicly accessible dashboard showcasing the objectives, budget, and outcomes of the six major veteran wellbeing areas: Employment, Mental Wellbeing, Brain Health, Physical Health, Housing, and Education.
- This initiative requires greater disclosure from existing government programs, demonstrating their inter-relationships, and driving accountability for clear, measurable outcomes from the \$330 Billion federal veteran budget.

Expected Outcome

- Good results will actively counter pervasive misinformation; bad results will show where changes must be made. Such an effort could be incubated within government and eventually handed over to the Office of Management and Budget, using best-in-class commercial sector data management techniques.

Recommendation #2: Redirect government funds to best-in-class, proven nonprofits that consistently drive measurably superior outcomes

Rationale

- With almost two thirds of Americans thinking vets are supported poorly or very poorly by the federal government, it's time for a change.

Action

- Redirecting existing funds - that require no additional funding - not only ensures our veterans get better support from qualified organizations, it also could eventually save the government valuable resources.
- Similarly, this effort could be incubated within government, where a formal efficiency and effectiveness review of government vs. comparable non-profit programs could be conducted.
- The recommendations should then be provided to Congress and incorporated into the next set of appropriation bills.

Expected Outcome

- Improved economic, mental and physical health for our Veterans and, over time, a growing awareness among Americans that military service leads to positive life outcomes.

Recommendation #3: Launch a national Veteran awareness campaign

Rationale

- This study clearly shows there are major knowledge gaps between the American public and the military/veteran community that are harming our ability to recruit the future All-Volunteer Force.

Action

- Implement a sustained, multi-faceted campaign to highlight veterans' positive contributions to society and dispel negative stereotypes about military service.
- This campaign should focus on real-life success stories, emphasizing the skills, education, and career opportunities available to veterans.
- Partner with respected organizations, influencers, and media outlets to maximize reach and impact.
- A Presidential Commission should be created to guide these efforts, including oversight of spend and resulting outcomes.

Expected Outcome

- Increased willingness among Americans to recommend military service

Recommendation #4: Educate high school staff on Veteran outcome facts

Rationale

- There is potential to make significant gains among educators, one of the most key influencers in a youth's decision to join the military, in their willingness to recommend military service. At the same time there is tremendous receptivity to learning more about service from the veteran community.

Action

- Veterans, the military's "alumni," when well taken care of are its best recruiters.
- DoD should partner with veteran organizations to develop and implement targeted educational programs focusing on high school counselors, teachers, and administrators.
- This effort should provide accurate information about military service, highlight the positive outcomes achieved by veterans, and address common misconceptions.
- Campaigns should showcase veterans' success in civilian life to highlight the benefits of a military career path for youth among their most key influencers.
- DoD should be required to report on the impact of this effort quarterly.

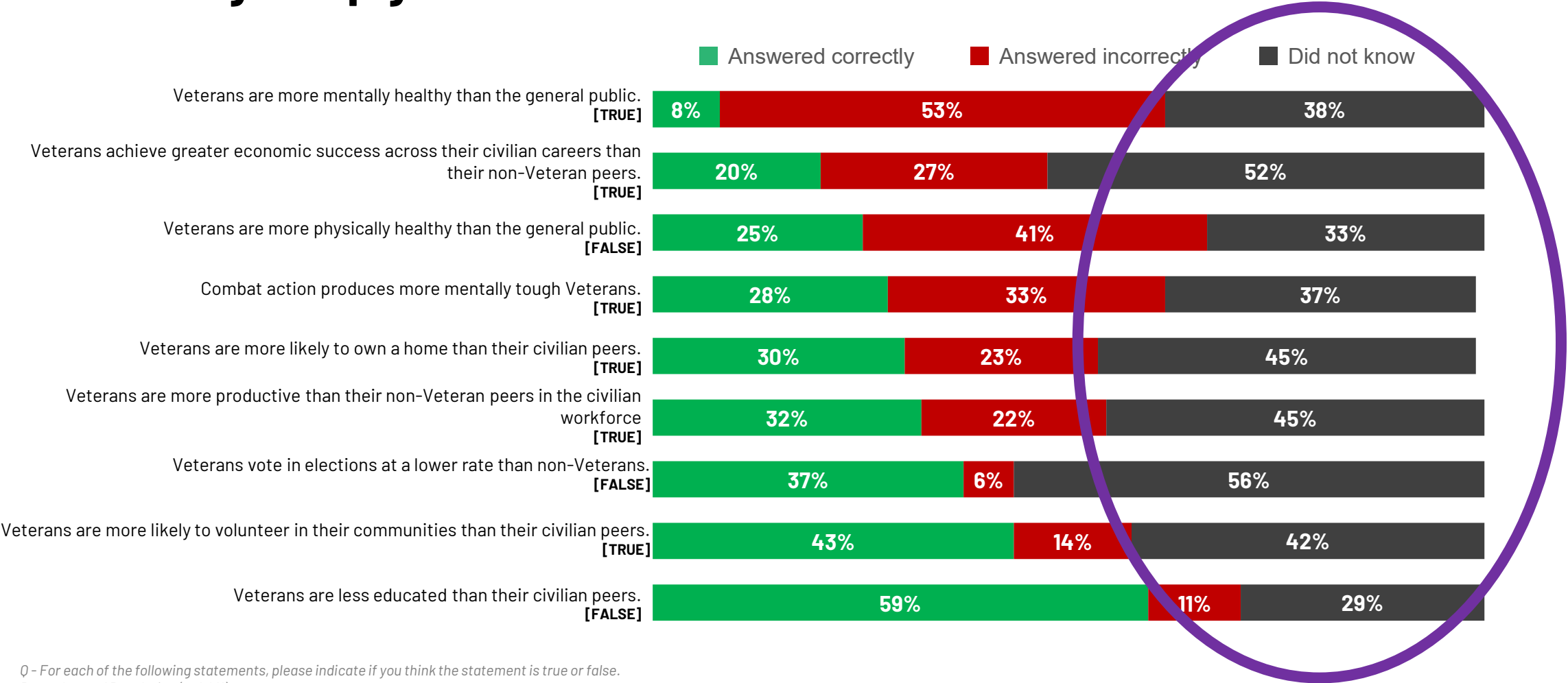
Expected Outcome

- Increased willingness to consider service among youth and greater understanding of the benefits of military service amongst Americans

APPENDIX

There is a significant lack of awareness around Veterans' experiences.

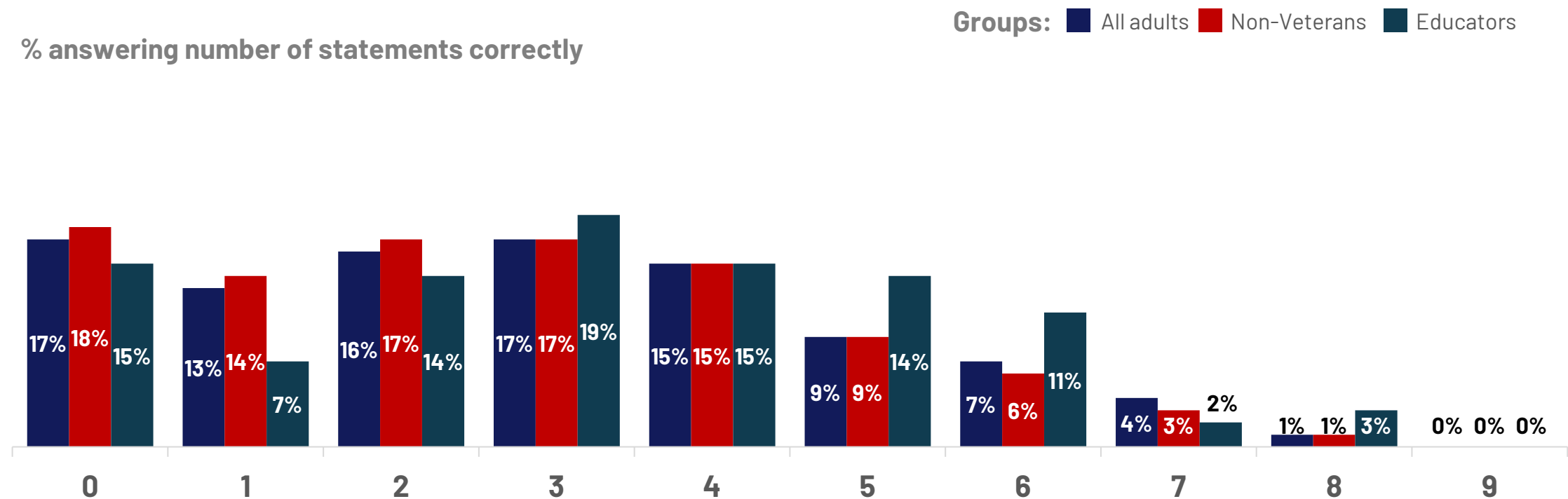
When asked factual statements about Veterans, many Americans admit they simply don't know.



Q - For each of the following statements, please indicate if you think the statement is true or false.
Base: General Population (n=1,011)
*Note - respondents were asked a series of True/False questions about Veterans. The correct answer is noted in **bold** next to each statement.



Nearly half of all Americans answer two or fewer (of nine) statements about Veterans correctly.



Q - For each of the following statements, please indicate if you think the statement is true or false.
Base: General Population (n=1,011); Non-Veterans (N=877); Educators (N=205)
*Note - Respondents were asked a series of True/False questions about Veterans.





CALL OF DUTY
ENDOWMENT

MISSION

THE CALL OF DUTY ENDOWMENT IDENTIFIES AND FUNDS THE MOST EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS THAT GET UNEMPLOYED VETERANS BACK TO WORK.

IMPACT MODEL

The Endowment uses a performance-driven approach, the Seal of Distinction, to fund organizations delivering the highest standards of quality and cost efficient veteran job placement services.

IMPACT METRICS

AT 1/15 THE COST OF DEPARTMENT OF LABOR EFFORTS

\$628 COST PER VETERAN PLACEMENT VS. DOL'S \$9,479

149,000+
CUMULATIVE PLACEMENTS



A group 84% the size of the active duty U.S. Marine Corps

\$9.3 BILLION
CUMULATIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$75K
AVERAGE STARTING SALARY

89%
6-MONTH RETENTION RATE

93%
PLACEMENT IN FULL-TIME WORK

SINCE 2022
PLACING MORE VETS THAN THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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CALLOFDUTYENDOWMENT.ORG

Winning the Battle Within

Together, we connect our nation's veterans and first responders with life-changing care.

We focus directly on the invisible wounds caused by

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Post-traumatic Stress (PTS)

Substance Abuse (SA)

Our Alliance Partners are committed to an *integrative approach* to brain wellness.

- Single point of access
- National Alliance of leading TBI, PTS, and SA programs
- Our programs are built by and for the military and first responders
- Designed with the individual in mind
- No out-of-pocket expenses



Avalon Action Alliance is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

avalonactionalliance.org
avalon@avalonactionalliance.org



@avalonactionalliance

Why we exist

2.6M

Veterans and First Responders struggle with traumatic brain injury



4.5M

Veterans and First Responders suffer from substance abuse and psychological health conditions



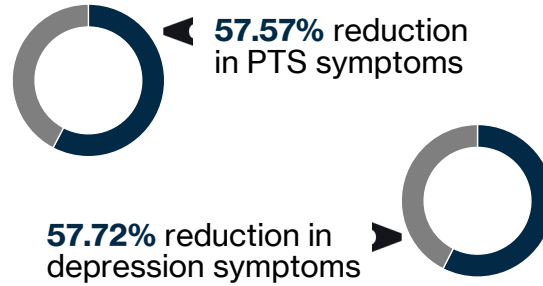
34,133

Total Veterans, First Responders, and Family Members Served Nationwide

Avalon has alliances with **11** Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) teams, **7** Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) centers, and **2** Substance Abuse (SA) treatment centers.

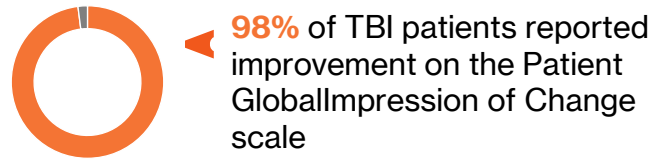
PTS/PTG

153 Warrior PATHH programs delivered
1,120 Warrior PATHH students served
21,446 Struggle Well participants



TBI

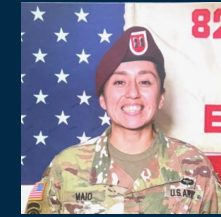
759 client evaluations
363 intensive outpatient clients
540 family members participated in care



SA

72 Warriors Heart participants

Our Alliance Partners

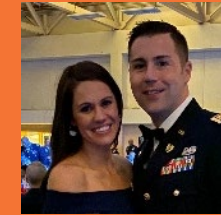


Maria

US Army Veteran/
Wyoming National
Guard

Avalon PTS/PTG
Graduate

“Warrior PATHH is a transformative program that restored my hope, elevated my faith, and guided me out of years of pain, anxiety, and depression. The Guides and my Warrior sisters empowered me to allow myself to live again and helped me release 35 years of suppressed emotions. WP was the foundation for the peace and healing I had been seeking for so long, making me feel truly seen and understood. I sincerely believe that WP’s intentional, thoughtful training saved my life and helped me love and appreciate my own story. I am forever grateful.”



Adam

US Army Veteran
Avalon TBI Client

“I was given an amazing opportunity to participate in the UNC THRIVE Program. I have never met a group of more professional, intelligent, and genuine humans. I encourage all my military friends to look into this program. In the short time I was there, they identified issues that I couldn’t articulate and provided me insight into things I’ve never spoken about. I truly cannot thank them enough. My ability to be open with them was terrifying but their genuine concern for me made it easier than it has ever been.”

Josh Warriors Heart Participant

“Avalon supported me while fighting this ugly disease called addiction. I’ve battled with addiction and PTSD for years as a law enforcement officer in Virginia. I cannot thank you enough for the support and I will not let you down.”

Transforming Deep Struggle into Profound Strength and Lifelong Growth



Warrior PATHH is the first training program ever designed to enable our nation's combat veterans and first responders to transform deep struggle into profound strength and lifelong Posttraumatic Growth (PTG). Warrior PATHH is a 90-day, non-pharmacological, peer-delivered training program that begins with a 7-day intensive and immersive initiation at one of nine locations across the United States.

Program Essentials

- **Duration:** 7-day intensive + 12 weeks of structured support, learning, and accountability
- **Cost:** No charge for participants
- **Format:** Peer-led, non-pharmacological training
- **Location:** Nine facilities across the United States including Boulder Crest Arizona (Sonoita), Boulder Crest Texas (Italy), and Boulder Crest Virginia (Bluemont)
- **Ongoing Support and Lifelong Learning:** Video conferences, daily content, mobile app access

Built on the Five Phases of PTG

1. **Education:** Understanding trauma's impact and growth opportunities
2. **Regulation:** Developing mind, body, and spiritual wellness practices
3. **Disclosure:** Devising ways to self-disclose personal experiences with struggle that are effective in strengthening interpersonal relationships
4. **Story:** Creating your positive, forward-looking narrative
5. **Service:** Finding new purpose through family and community impact

Transformative Results

- **58%** Reduction in PTSD symptoms
- **58%** Reduction in Depression
- **53%** Reduction in Anxiety
- **58%** Increase in Posttraumatic Growth
- **76%** Growth in Deeper Relationships
- **65%** increase in New Possibilities

Warrior PATHH was developed by the Boulder Crest Foundation, a national nonprofit organization working to ensure that service members, veterans, first responders, and their families can live great lives in the aftermath of stress, struggle, and trauma. Warrior PATHH was developed in collaboration with Dr. Richard Tedeschi, the co-founder of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), and Dr. Bret Moore, a twice-deployed Army psychologist.

Who Should Apply

- Combat veterans (Active, Reserve, Guard, honorable discharge) and First responders
- Those ready to transform struggle into strength
- Individuals committed to personal growth
- Must be free from active addictions

Where Do We Run Warrior PATHH?

Warrior PATHH is delivered at Boulder Crest's PTG Academies in Arizona (Sonoita, AZ), Texas (Italy, TX), and Virginia (Bluemont, VA), by our Mobile Training Teams at various locations across the country, and with our Avalon Action Alliance partners in Arkansas (Sheep Dog Impact Assistance), Florida (GratitudeAmerica), Georgia (Camp Southern Ground), Maine (Travis Mills Foundation), South Carolina (Big Red Barn Retreat), and Washington State (Permission to Start Dreaming Foundation).

What Graduates Say

// “I've gone from feeling defeated and damaged to recognizing that I am wiser and stronger because of my past.”

“I found myself again, and got my life back.” //



BOULDER CREST
FOUNDATION

Begin Your Journey

Apply at www.warriorpathh.org today

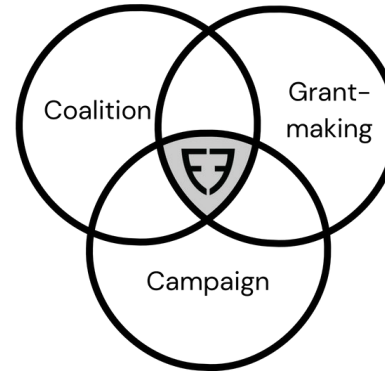


PURPOSE & APPROACH

Face the Fight is a collaborative effort of corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and government liaisons charged with raising awareness and support for veteran suicide prevention. Our *aspirational goal* is to reduce the veteran suicide rate in half by 2030.

Key Components:

- **Public Awareness Campaign** : Reduce stigma and promote resources
- **Grantmaking** : Scale evidence-informed interventions and quickly respond to newly identified needs
- **Coalition**: Lead through meaningful actions, commitments, and cross-sector collaboration



FOUNDING PARTNERS



STRATEGIC ALLIANCES



Join the #Fight at www.wefacethefight.org

