



# Called to Serve:

Supporting Your  
Veteran Employees



As HR teams compete for talent in one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving employment landscapes our nation has seen, veterans remain a powerful, yet largely untapped, talent pool. While the challenges veterans face finding employment are well known, the strategies for retaining these valuable employees have been largely overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

**Now is the time to pay attention.**

With the explosion of remote work opportunities, veterans and spouses of active-duty military personnel have **more employment options than ever before**. This has caused forward-thinking HR teams to reconsider how to best meet veterans' unique needs and evolving expectations.

Among all the HR disciplines, **benefits professionals are uniquely positioned** to help veterans transition to the private sector and navigate the complexities of the health care system. More importantly, they are key advocates for veterans in their discussions with supervisors, well-being champions, executive leadership, carriers, and other stakeholders.



<sup>1</sup> *Veterans have faced a new type of challenge this year — high rates of unemployment.* The Hill. Nov. 11, 2020.



# Sometimes unemployed, never unemployable

First, the good news: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for veterans was 3.6% in September 2021.<sup>2</sup> This was **considerably better than the national average** of 5.2%.<sup>3</sup>

But it hasn't always been this way.

The unemployment rate of veterans ages 18-24 reached as high as 29% in 2011. According to the Rand Corporation, the most likely reason for this high rate is that veterans' separation from the military is often followed by a long search for new employment.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the reason for traditionally high veteran unemployment rates, one thing is certain: being without a job can be one of the most discouraging times in a person's life. And for veterans who gravitate toward **serving a purpose greater than themselves**, extended periods of unemployment can result in a profound loss in sense of self.



2 *Veterans unemployment held steady in September as national outlook improved.* Military Times. Oct. 8, 2021.

3 *Veterans unemployment well-below national levels, matches pre-pandemic levels.* Military Times. Sept. 3, 2021.

4 *Why Is Veteran Unemployment So High?* Rand Corporation. 2014.



# Underemployed, but not for long

Veterans also disproportionately face underemployment; that is, they have higher qualifications than their role requires.<sup>5</sup> According to a study by ZipRecruiter and the Call of Duty Endowment, **nearly one-third of veterans experience underemployment**—a rate 15.6% higher than non-veterans.<sup>6</sup>

The report also found that veterans tend to leave their first jobs after military service much faster than non-veterans—hardly surprising considering how overqualified many are. However, when that first job is exactly what they're looking for, veterans stay 8.3% longer than non-veterans.

The takeaway for HR teams is this: **Help veterans find the right fit, and they'll stay.**



Vets who feel valued by their organization stay in their initial jobs

# 8.3%

longer than non-veterans.

– ZipRecruiter



<sup>5</sup> *Underemployment Remains an Issue for America's Veterans*. Recruit Military. Accessed on Oct. 28, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *ZipRecruiter and the Call of Duty Endowment Release National Report on State of Veteran Employment Activity*. Businesswire. Nov. 9, 2017.



# Experienced, industrious, and loyal

Considering the massive amount of job applications that come in within minutes of posting a new position, recruiters must apply certain criteria to help narrow their search. Chief among them is education level.

Depending on the role, this filtering puts veterans without a degree at an immediate disadvantage, even though, they have, on average, **three times more work experience than non-veteran job applicants.**<sup>7</sup>

Once they're hired, there's almost no stopping them. According to LinkedIn's [Veteran Opportunity Report](#), vets are **39% more likely to move into a leadership role** than their civilian counterparts within three years of being hired.<sup>8</sup>

Retention rates among veterans are also high. In fact, **57% of vets stay in their role for at least 30 months**, compared to 42.5% of non-veterans. And as they advance in their career, veterans are 160% more likely to obtain a graduate degree or higher, bringing even more skills to the table.<sup>6</sup>



Vets are

# 39%

more likely to move into a leadership position within 3 years.

- LinkedIn



"Vets are smart, highly trained people. Just because some don't have a degree, don't underestimate their experience with problem solving and the value they can bring—not only to your team, but to your leaders as well."

- Lamisha Wood, Air Force 2004 - 2010

<sup>6</sup> ZipRecruiter and the Call of Duty Endowment Release National Report on State of Veteran Employment Activity. Businesswire. Nov. 9, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Veterans entering the civilian jobs market can face hurdles. Human Resource Executive. Nov. 11, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Veteran Opportunity Report. LinkedIn. Accessed on Oct. 28, 2021.



# Five recommendations for benefits professionals

Veterans will be the first to tell you, **they're generally a quiet bunch**. And their service-before-self worldview makes them less likely to ask for personal attention.

Unfortunately, this can create **blind spots** for HR teams. This is especially true among benefits professionals whose day-to-day duties revolve around ensuring individual employees get the attention they and their covered dependents need.

Here are five recommendations to ensure veteran **employees make the most of the benefits available to them**.





# 1. Support civilian health benefits literacy

In the private sector, benefits bewilder the best of us. Data collected in 2020 shows that **fewer than one in five employees feel truly confident** about their benefits knowledge, while **83%** have basic benefits understanding or are downright confused.<sup>9</sup>

Among veterans, benefits literacy is even lower.

**During their military career, most veterans received the majority of their health care on base.** There were no networks, no copays, and no deductibles. And if they missed an appointment, their commanding officer heard about it.

Technology can help with the transition to employer-based benefits, especially when it comes to annual enrollment—a concept that wasn’t even introduced into military benefits programs until recently.<sup>10</sup>

**This is where decision support tools really pay off.** Especially for those veterans who are used to linear, step-by-step processes, a benefits recommendation engine can make the selection process much less confusing.

After answering some basic questions about health status, risk tolerance, and personal savings, employees are presented with a benefits package that **most closely aligns with their needs and budget** while giving them peace of mind about their decision.

Some recommendation engines even leverage historical utilization data to help employees estimate their costs for the coming year. This information can be mission critical for veterans still transitioning to civilian benefits—with the accompanying civilian price tag.

## On average, 86% of employees are confused about their benefits. Does this describe you?



31%

Yep, that’s me



52%

I know where my ID card is



17%

I’m a pro

— *Businessolver*



“When you’re on active duty, nearly everything is taken care of for you on base. Then when you transition to civilian benefits, you could be 40 years old and have never filed a health care claim. A claim? What’s a claim?”

– *Sara Vidoni, military spouse since 2012*

9 2021 MyChoice® Recommendation Engine Benefits Insights Report. April 13, 2021.

10 Don’t Forget: Tricare Open Enrollment for 2022 Runs Nov. 8 to Dec. 13. Military.com. Sept. 27, 2021.



## 2. Create awareness about voluntary and employer-sponsored benefits

In the case of veterans with injuries sustained during service or those with active-duty or retired military spouses, most will have health coverage through a program like [Tricare](#). It's important to remember, however, that **this coverage is generally limited to health care**; most will not automatically have dental coverage, and even fewer will have vision benefits through this type of governmental program.

Voluntary benefits are an entirely different world.

Especially for veterans who are just joining the private sector, **many have never been exposed to the voluntary benefits** widely available to today's employees. Because of the complete health care coverage they received during their military career, most had no need for benefits like:

- ▶ Accident insurance
- ▶ Critical illness coverage
- ▶ Hospital indemnity insurance
- ▶ Prescription drug programs

It's also important to ensure veteran employees are aware of benefits specifically designed to enhance and protect the quality of life for **their most important support network—their family**. Few veterans will know about the advantages of electing benefits for:

- ▶ Dependent care
- ▶ Health care advocacy
- ▶ Relocation services
- ▶ Legal resources
- ▶ Maternity services

Then there is the wide variety of non-electable and employer-sponsored benefits—the **programs, policies, and perks** available to all employees. While they were in the military, most veterans were not exposed to the structure of civilian benefits like:

- ▶ Employee assistance programs (EAP)
- ▶ Flexible spending accounts
- ▶ Life insurance
- ▶ 401(k) matching
- ▶ Well-being programs/incentives

By ensuring they know about these programs, employers not only give veteran employees peace of mind, they also demonstrate a **genuine interest in their holistic well-being**.



Ensure veterans know about benefits designed to enhance and protect the quality of life for their most important support network—their family.



## 3. Help veterans take full advantage of their benefits

Navigating the private health care system can be stressful for anyone; however, veterans are at **increased risk for financial and psychological fallout** due to a lack of exposure to the ins and outs of networks, payment structures, claims filing, and other complexities.

A trip to the emergency room, for example, can be shockingly expensive, resulting in weeks or months of financial anxiety. But employers who help their employees know when to use urgent care instead of the ER, or help them file a claim with their accident insurance carrier can significantly **reduce the burdens associated with the private health care system**.

Organizations with just a few dozen employees—and a compassionate head of HR—can provide veterans with some personal attention in cases like these. But what about organizations with thousands of employees, several hundred of whom may be veterans?

Fortunately, the same **technology that powers the hyper-personalized consumer experiences** pioneered by companies like Amazon and Netflix is now being applied to benefits platforms.

Examples include **integrated services** that help employees:

- ▶ Find high-value in-network providers
- ▶ Resolve claims issues
- ▶ Stay on track with health screenings and chronic disease management
- ▶ Navigate the health care system
- ▶ Access telemedicine services

When employers invest in a personalized benefits experience, they see a dramatic return on cost savings and better health outcomes for their employees. And among veterans, being connected to the **right care, in the right place, at the right time, and for the right value** can lead to higher employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and better retention rates.



“With Tricare, you have to physically go to the base or to a preferred provider’s office to get care. So, having a telemedicine benefit through an employer is very valuable.”

– Ruth Santos, Army 2008 – 2016



## 4. Ensure veterans are aware of mental health resources

Mental health benefits deserve **special attention** when it comes to veterans. While 41% of Americans over age 18 struggle with mental health or substance abuse, veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Fortunately, employers have started to pay **closer attention to mental health**, especially in the wake of the pandemic. The 2021 Businessolver State of Workplace Empathy Study found that:

- ▶ Employees who believe their organization **openly discusses** the importance of mental health increased from 58% in 2020 to 65% in 2021.
- ▶ 76% of employees say all levels of their organization are **empathetic to employees' mental health**—a 7-point improvement over last year.<sup>13</sup>

While these statistics are encouraging, the workplace empathy study also found that 64% of employees say asking for help could **jeopardize their job security**.

**Among veterans, the data suggests an even more dire need for support.** According to the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, fewer than 50% of returning veterans who need mental health treatment actually receive it.<sup>14</sup>



# 64%

of employees believe asking for help with mental health issues could jeopardize their job security.

– *Businessolver*



11 *Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Aug. 14, 2020.

12 *Veterans' Growing Demand for Mental Health Services*. Government Accountability Office. May 17, 2021.

13 *Declining Mental Health Requires Employer Empathy*. Businessolver. April 2021.

14 *Veterans*. National Council for Mental Wellbeing. Accessed on Oct. 29, 2021.

## What can benefits professionals do?

First and foremost, **don't treat veterans differently.** They'll be the first to say that they aren't any more fragile—or any stronger—than other employees.

Rather, focus on mental health **awareness and support for all employees throughout the year**, not just during Mental Health Awareness Month or leading up to Veterans Day:



**Start by listening.** Publicly acknowledge that employees need help and have support available at work.



**Bridge gaps and communicate.** Increase supervisors' comfort level by providing training and resources.



**Make it a top-down organizational priority.** Identify a senior leader who is willing to share their personal experiences.



**Normalize it.** Assert equity between physical and mental illness when communicating with employees about resources to support them.



**Model self-care and help seeking.** Lead by example within your HR team and among employees.



**Ensure privacy.** Make sure vets know they can confidentially access mental health services without negative consequences.

It's also important for employers to understand the **administrative burden veterans face** when seeking mental health services from governmental entities like the Department of Veterans Affairs. Employers that offer mental health benefits through telemedicine-based carriers—those that are available with just a few taps from a mobile device—should make sure veterans know about this option.



"Flexibility is huge, like letting a vet recover after the Fourth of July. There are a lot of vets who experience an emotional and psychological impact just with fireworks going off."

—Maria Gore, Coast Guard 2007 – 2013



## 5. Recognize and share corporate values

While “[service before self](#)” is one of the three core values of the U.S. Air Force, you’d be hard pressed to find a veteran in any service branch who would disagree. Compared to their civilian counterparts, **veterans are values driven**.

For many, it’s why they joined the military.

When they transition to civilian life, veterans often seek out employers who promote a set of clear and actionable values. Interestingly enough, **values-based benefits are considered a demonstration of employer empathy** by both veteran and non-veteran employees alike. According to the [Businessolver 2020 State of Workplace Empathy Study](#):

- ▶ Employees believe, by an 18-point margin over CEOs, that **benefits aligned with values** lead to more motivated and productive employees.
- ▶ 78% of employees say that **benefits around volunteerism matter**. This includes being allowed company time to volunteer for a social cause chosen by the employee or employer.<sup>15</sup>

To help employers ensure veterans and like-minded employees know about how their organization is making a difference:

- ▶ Remind employees about the availability of benefits that **address their well-being**.
- ▶ Ensure existing values-based benefits messaging is wrapped into **annual enrollment planning** and delivery.
- ▶ Seek out **benchmark data** to understand how benefits offerings compare to peers and competitors.
- ▶ Conduct **listening exercises** to understand which values-based benefits employees want and need.
- ▶ Create a **five-year plan** that focuses on benefits to add or strengthen.

To retain veterans and other values-driven employees, **employers can gain a competitive advantage** by conveying to their employees and the world how their mission impacts customers, their industry, and their communities.



Employees overwhelmingly agree that benefits aligned with values lead to more motivated and productive employees.

– *Businessolver*

<sup>15</sup> *How Values-Based Benefits Make an Impact*. Businessolver. Aug. 25, 2020.



# Conclusion

Due to the pandemic and the recent social justice movement, **HR's role has evolved rapidly in recent years.** Their renewed focus on ensuring opportunity, increasing the diversity of their workforce, and demonstrating workplace empathy have created more inviting workspaces for all employees, including veterans.

At the same time, employers are locked in a **war for talent.** Recruiters face new challenges—and new opportunities—as work is redefined by factors such as location and shifting demographics.

Fortunately, today's technology can help elevate a **heightened awareness and stronger appreciation of employee benefits**—a factor **73%** of employees say increase loyalty to their employer.<sup>16</sup>

Especially among the highly experienced and hard-working veterans in your workforce, being connected to the **right care, in the right place, at the right time, and for the right value** can lead to higher employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and better retention rates.

More importantly, it's the **right thing to do**, especially for those who gave so much to our nation and who contribute so much to your organization.



# 73%

of employees say benefits increase loyalty to their employer.

– MetLife



## Learn More

For more information and tips for helping all employees make the most of their benefits, read [The Case for a Personalized Employee Benefits Experience.](#)



<sup>16</sup> MetLife Employee Benefit Trends. MetLife. Accessed on Oct. 29, 2021.



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