

2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Veteran Adults

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

July 2022



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About This Presentation

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- Some slides present the same analysis across multiple years. The underlying populations from which these estimates are derived change across years since the number of people in the United States changes across years. Thus, a change in proportions does not equal a constant change in the weighted count.

National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

- NSDUH is a comprehensive household interview survey of substance use, substance use disorders, mental health, and the receipt of treatment services for these disorders in the United States.
- NSDUH covers the civilian, noninstitutionalized population, aged 12 or older:
 - Includes: Households, college dorms, homeless in shelters, civilians on military bases
- Sample includes all 50 states and DC

Who is Not Covered by NSDUH?

- Children under age 12
- Populations with potential serious mental health/substance use issues:
 - Institutionalized populations:
 - » Incarcerated
 - » Hospitalized
 - » Nursing homes
 - Homeless populations not in homeless shelters

How Do We Use NSDUH?

- Provides a window into the state of substance use and mental health issues in the United States
- Provides insights that can be studied in the context of data from other agencies to help in decision-making about what types of resources are needed and where resources should be directed
- Helps to guide policy in addressing:
 - Problematic substance use
 - Prevalence of mental illness
 - The intersection of substance use and mental health issues
 - State-level treatment and prevention needs by providing data at the state level

Changes to NSDUH in 2020

- Data typically collected from January to December; **collected in Q1 and Q4 only during 2020**
- Changed to multi-mode collection in Q4 of 2020: **web survey added**
- Change from DSM-IV to **DSM-5** impacted SUD estimates
- **New and expanded item content:** nicotine vaping, receipt of telehealth services, adolescent suicide, COVID-19 impacts
- Approximately 67,500 persons are interviewed annually; the final 2020 sample consisted of **36,284 completed interviews**

Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders in America in the Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

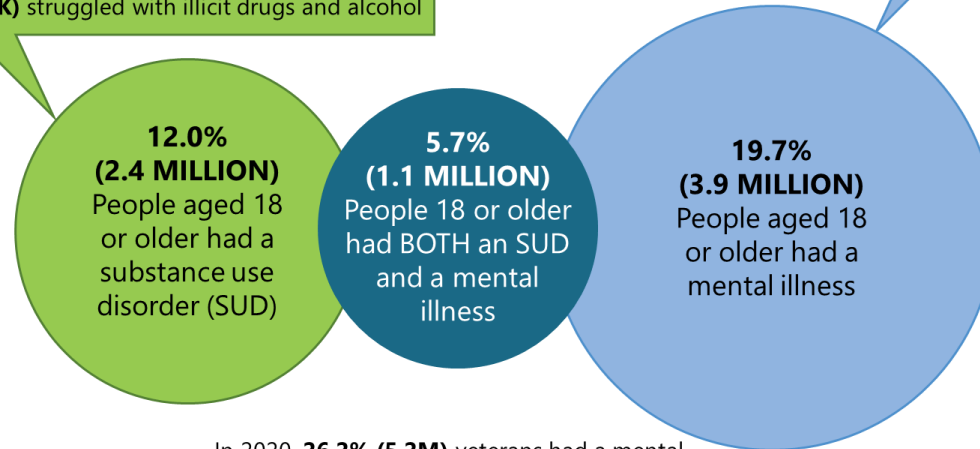
PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+

Among veterans with a substance use disorder:

4 IN 10 (41.9% or 1.0M) struggled with illicit drugs
7 IN 10 (70.1% or 1.7M) struggled with alcohol use
1 IN 8 (12.0% or 290K) struggled with illicit drugs and alcohol

Among veterans with a mental illness:

1 IN 3 (34.0% or 1.3M) had a serious mental illness



In 2020, **26.2% (5.2M)** veterans had a mental illness and/or substance use disorder.

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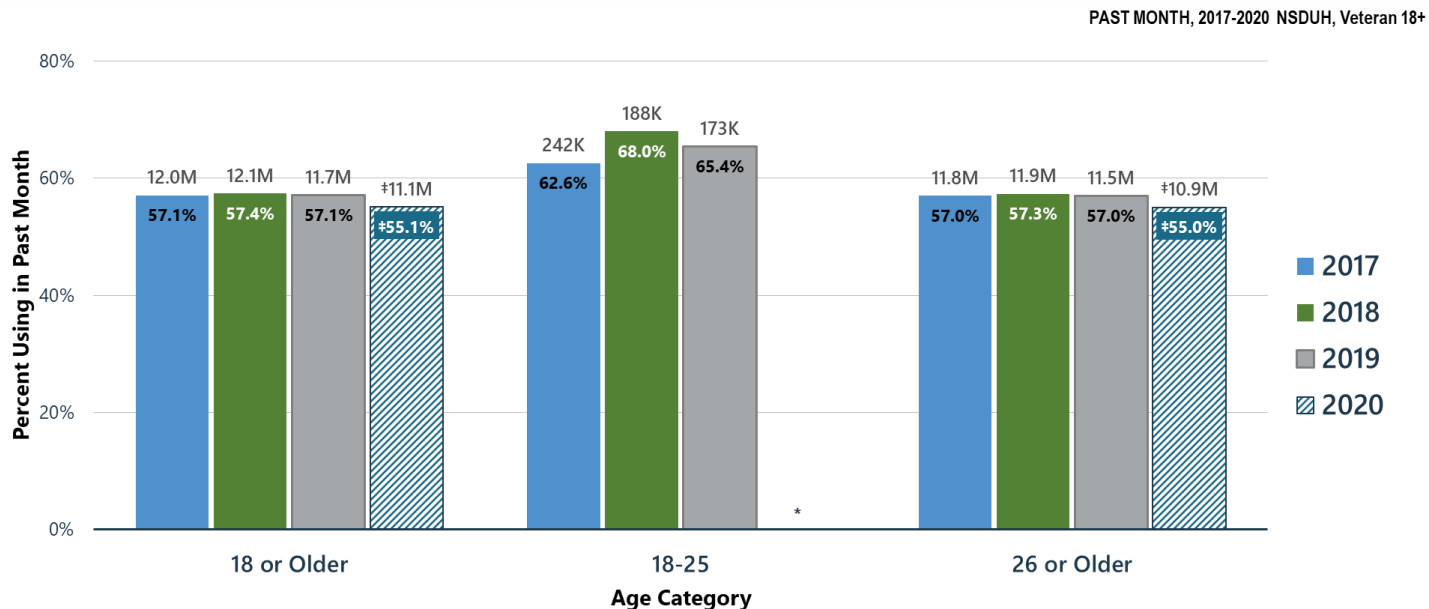
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TALKING POINTS:

- Millions of veterans struggle with substance use disorder and mental illness.
- Almost three quarters of veterans with SUD struggled with alcohol use.
- One in three veterans with mental illness experienced serious mental illness.
- 1.1 million veterans had both an SUD and mental illness.

Alcohol Use in Past Month: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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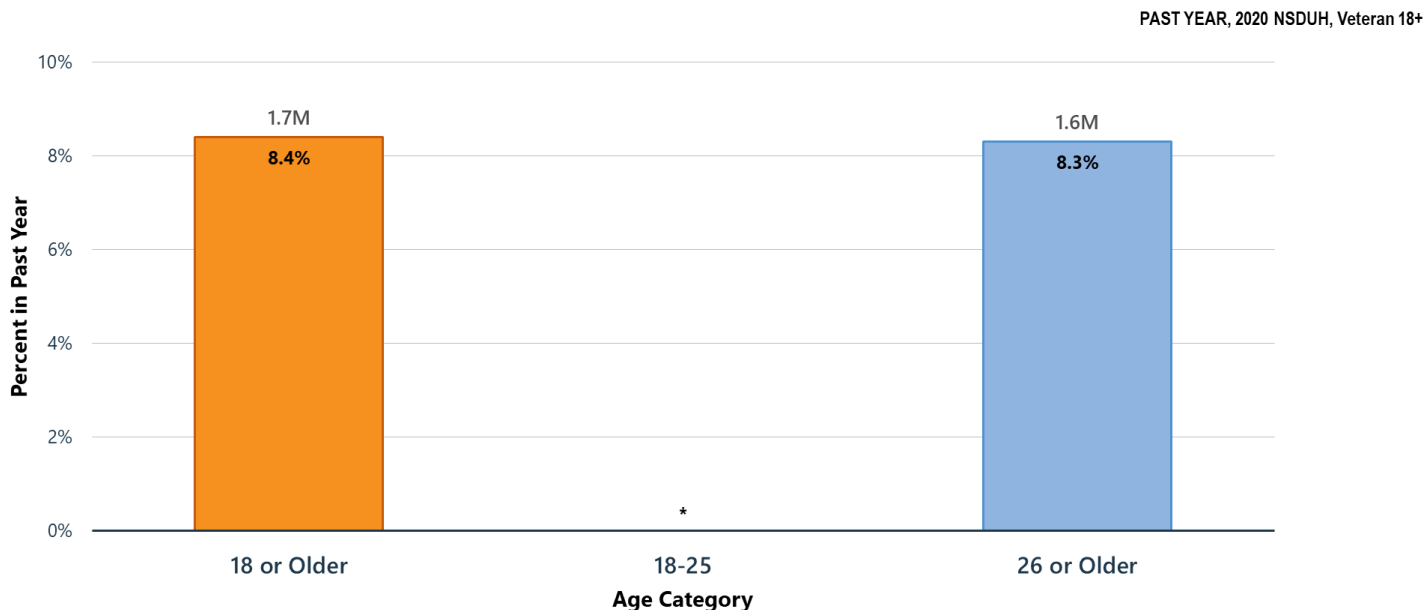
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TALKING POINTS:

- In 2020, over half of veterans aged 18 or older used alcohol during the past month.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- 2020 estimates were not directly compared to estimates from prior years due to methodological changes in 2020.

Alcohol Use Disorder in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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TALKING POINTS:

- In NSDUH, alcohol use disorder is measured using questions based on the diagnostic criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, also known as DSM. Starting in 2020, NSDUH used the criteria specified in DSM-5, which was published in 2013.

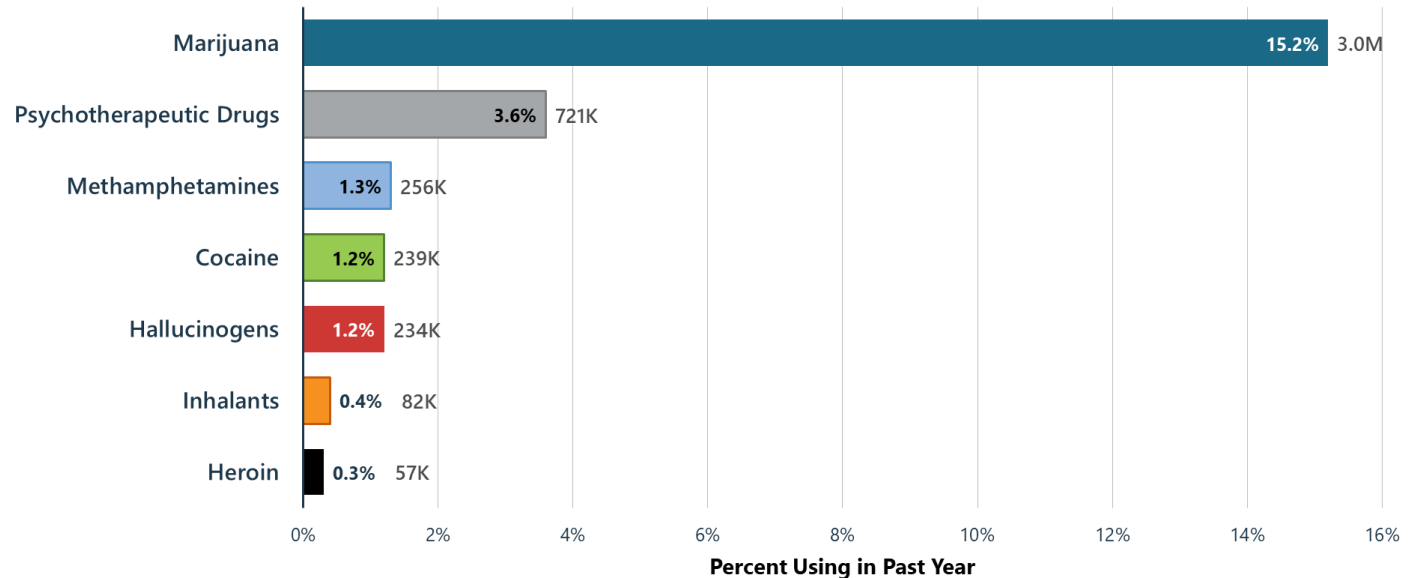
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Summary: Alcohol Use in 2020

- **Among veterans aged 26 or older in 2020:**
 - 55.0 percent (or 10.9 million people) used alcohol in the past month
 - 8.3 percent (or 1.6 million people) had an alcohol use disorder

Illicit Drug Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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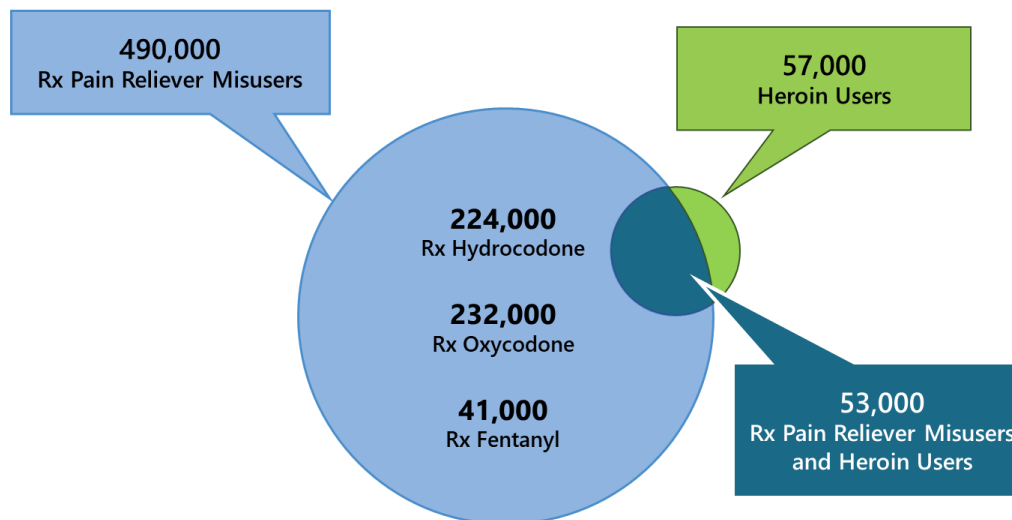
TALKING POINTS:

- The 2020 NSDUH defines illicit drug use as the use of marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, and methamphetamine, as well as the **misuse** of prescription stimulants, tranquilizers, sedatives, and pain relievers.
- In NSDUH, **misuse of prescription drugs** was defined as use in any way not directed by a doctor, including use without a prescription of one's own; use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug; or use in any other way not directed by a doctor.
- The most commonly used illicit drug in the past year was marijuana followed by the misuse of psychotherapeutic drugs (prescription stimulants, tranquilizers, sedatives, and pain relievers).

Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse and Heroin Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+

494,000 VETERANS WITH OPIOID MISUSE (2.5% OF TOTAL POPULATION)



Rx = prescription.

Opioid misuse is defined as heroin use or prescription pain reliever misuse.

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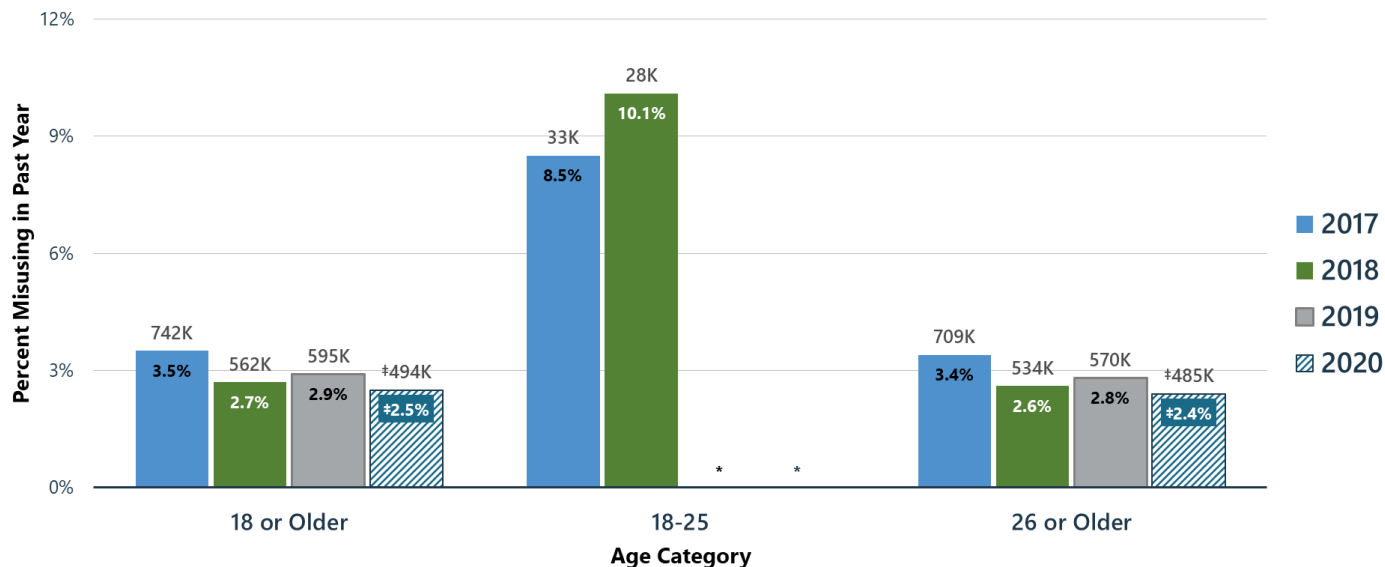
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TALKING POINTS:

- Of those who misused opioids, the vast majority were misusers of prescription pain relievers.
- Of those who used heroin, only about 1 in 10 used heroin alone.
- Opioids are a group of chemically similar drugs that include heroin and prescription opioids, such as hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin®), oxycodone (e.g., OxyContin®), and morphine.
- Prescription pain reliever misuse and heroin use fall under the umbrella of opioid misuse.

Opioid Misuse in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

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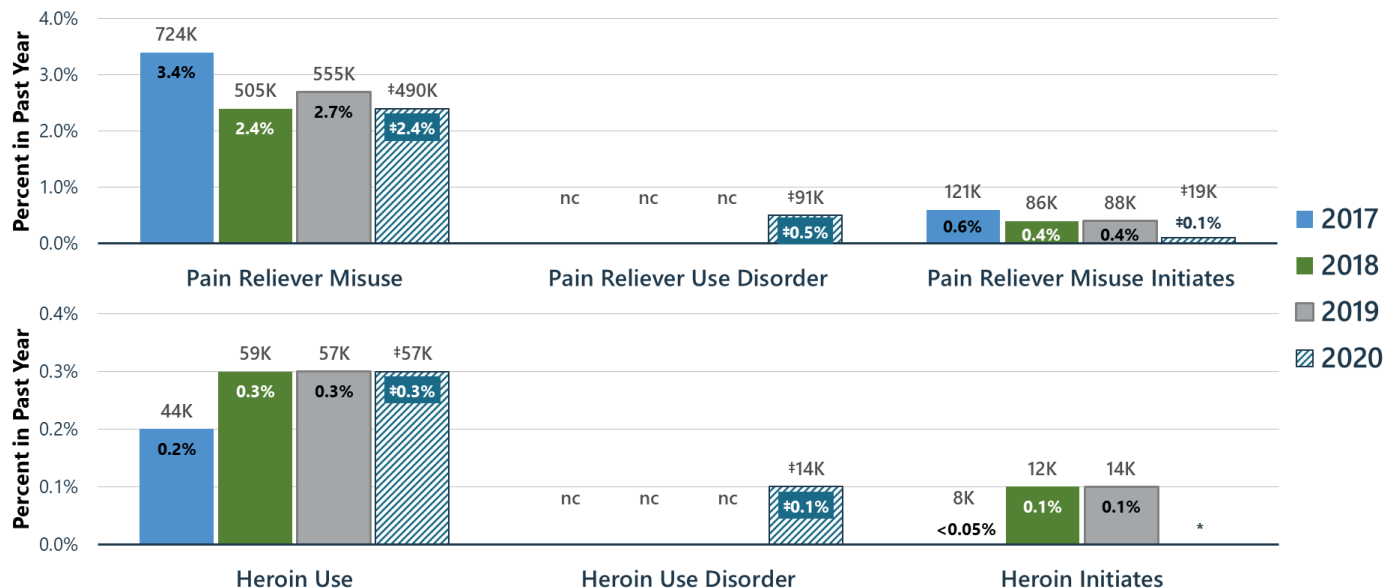
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TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse and Heroin Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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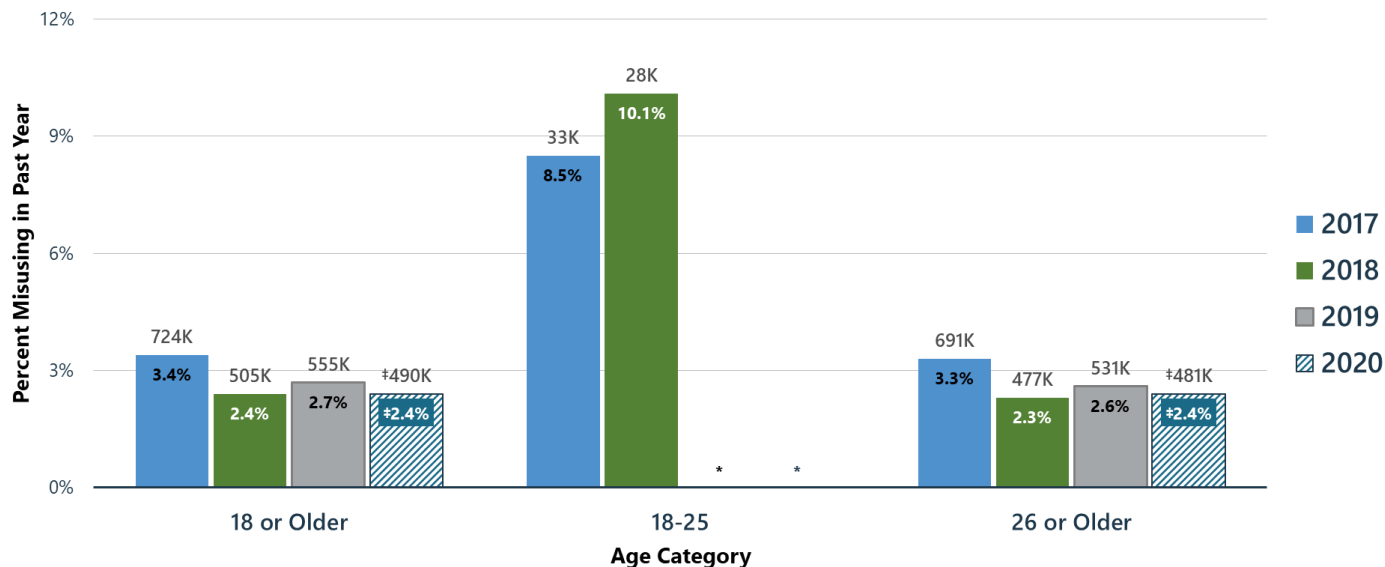
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TALKING POINTS:

- Misuse of prescription pain relievers is much more common than heroin use.
- Likewise, pain reliever use disorder is more common than heroin use disorder.

Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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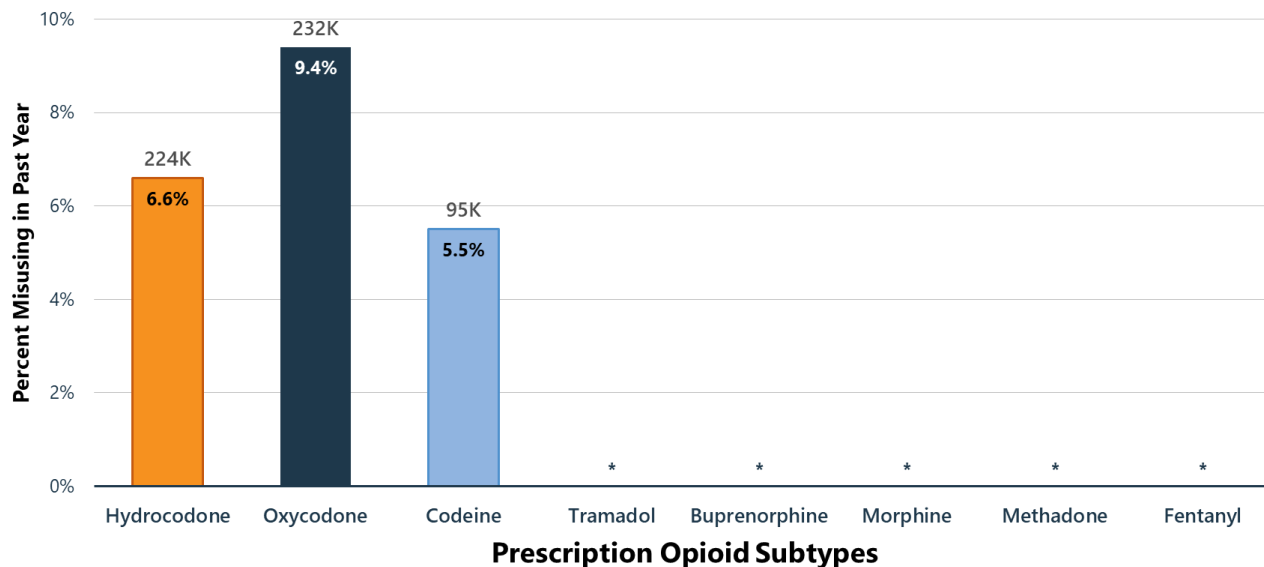
TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Data not shown – low precision

Misuse of Prescription Opioid Subtypes in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+ Who Had Any Use of the Prescription Opioid

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+ SUBTYPE USERS



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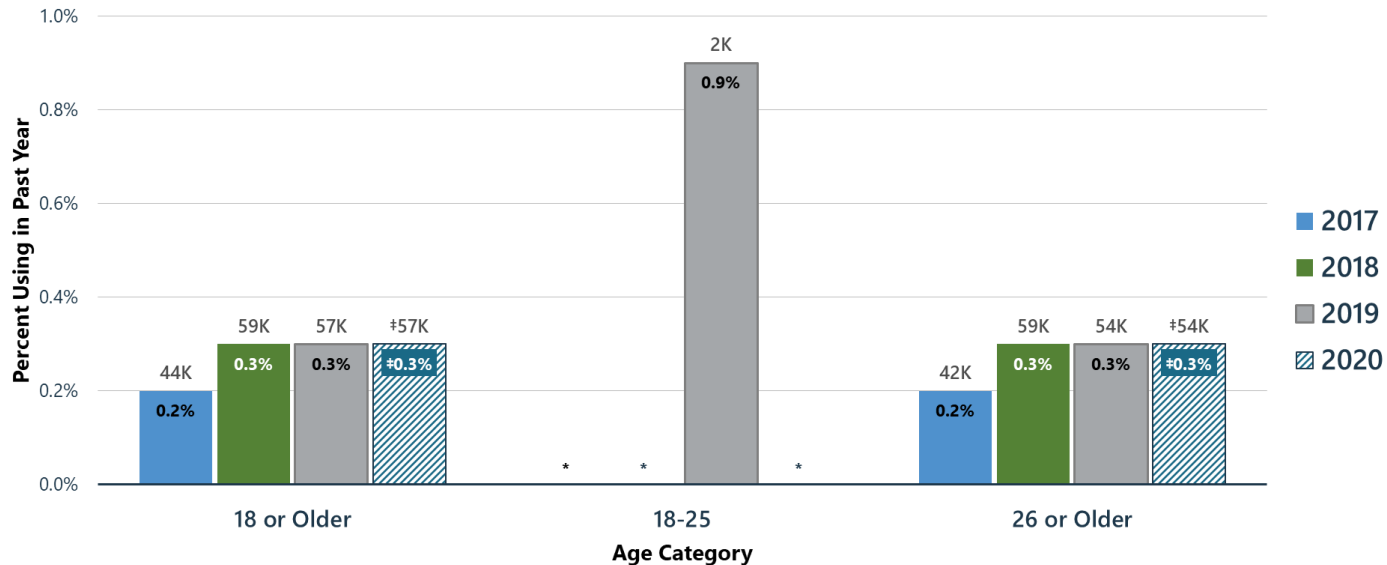
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TALKING POINTS:

- The percentage of veterans aged 18 or older who misused prescription opioids was similar across opioid subtypes.

Heroin Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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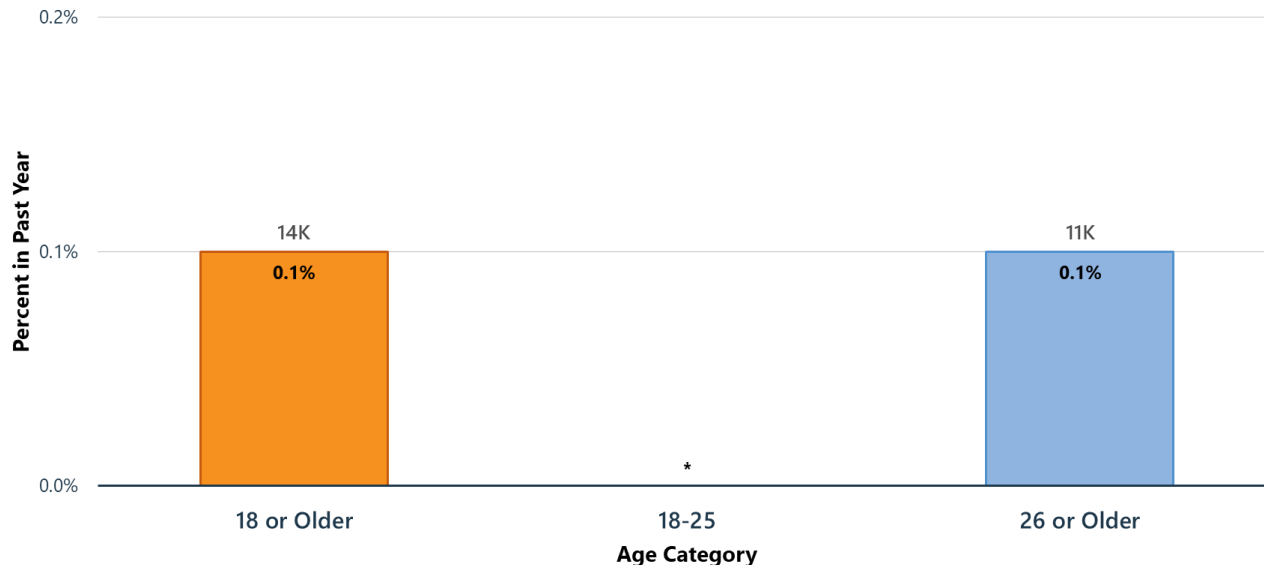
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TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Heroin Use Disorder in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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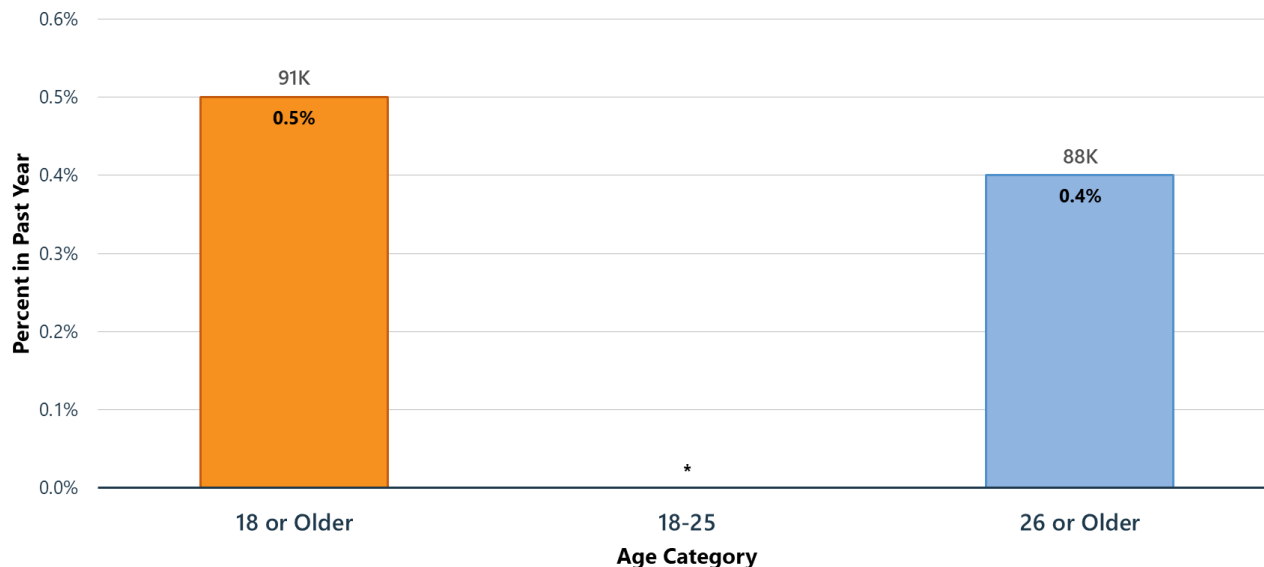
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TALKING POINTS:

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Opioid Use Disorder in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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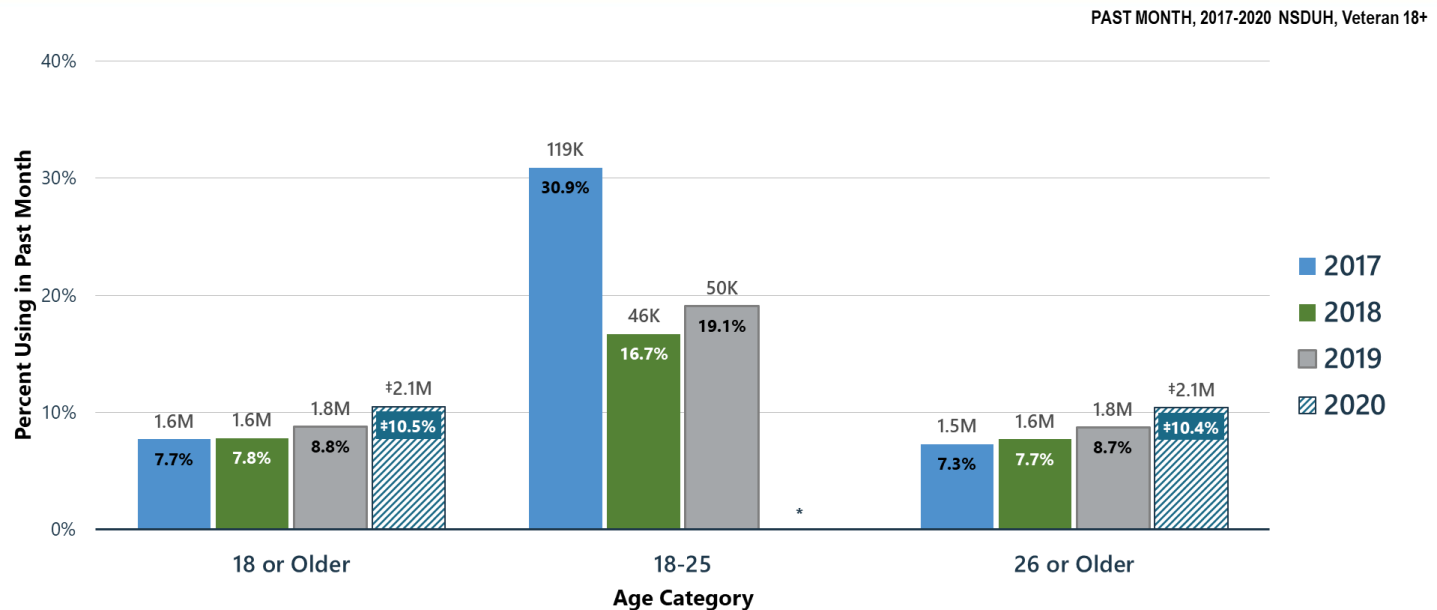
- Respondents were classified as having an opioid use disorder if they met DSM-5 criteria for heroin use disorder or prescription pain reliever use disorder, or both.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Summary: Opioid Misuse in 2020

- Opioid misuse is primarily driven by prescription pain reliever misuse.
- **Among veterans aged 26 or older in 2020:**
 - 2.4 percent (or 485,000 people) misused opioids in the past year
 - 0.4 percent (or 88,000 people) had an opioid use disorder

Other Illicit Substances

Marijuana Use in Past Month: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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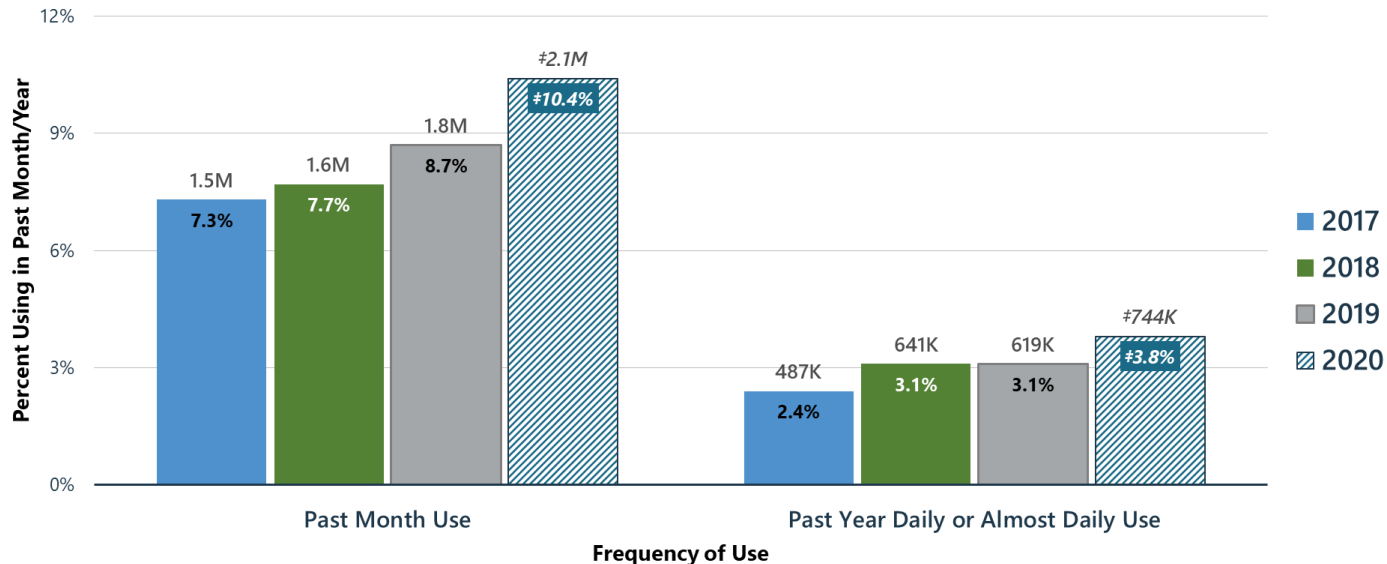
- In 2020, marijuana was the most commonly used illicit drug.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Data not applicable

Data not shown – low precision

Frequency of Marijuana Use: Among Veterans Aged 26+

PAST MONTH/YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 26+



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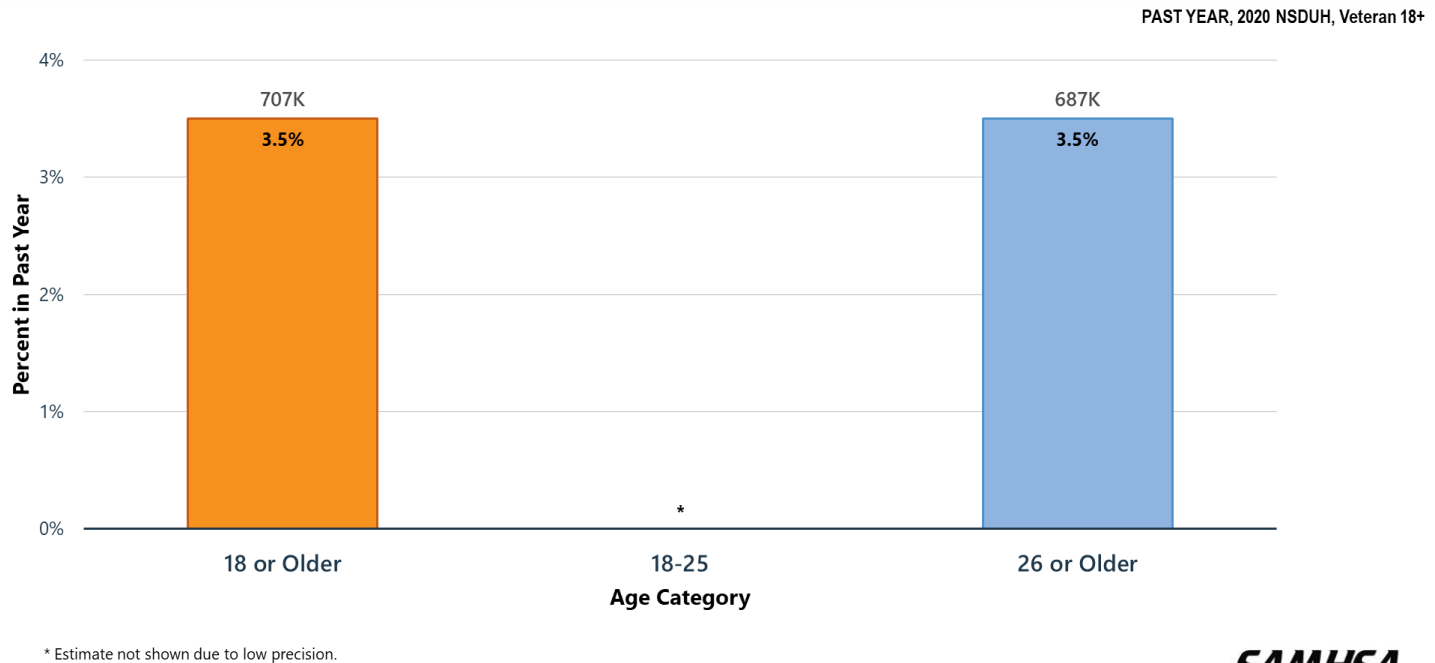
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TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Marijuana Use Disorder in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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TALKING POINTS:

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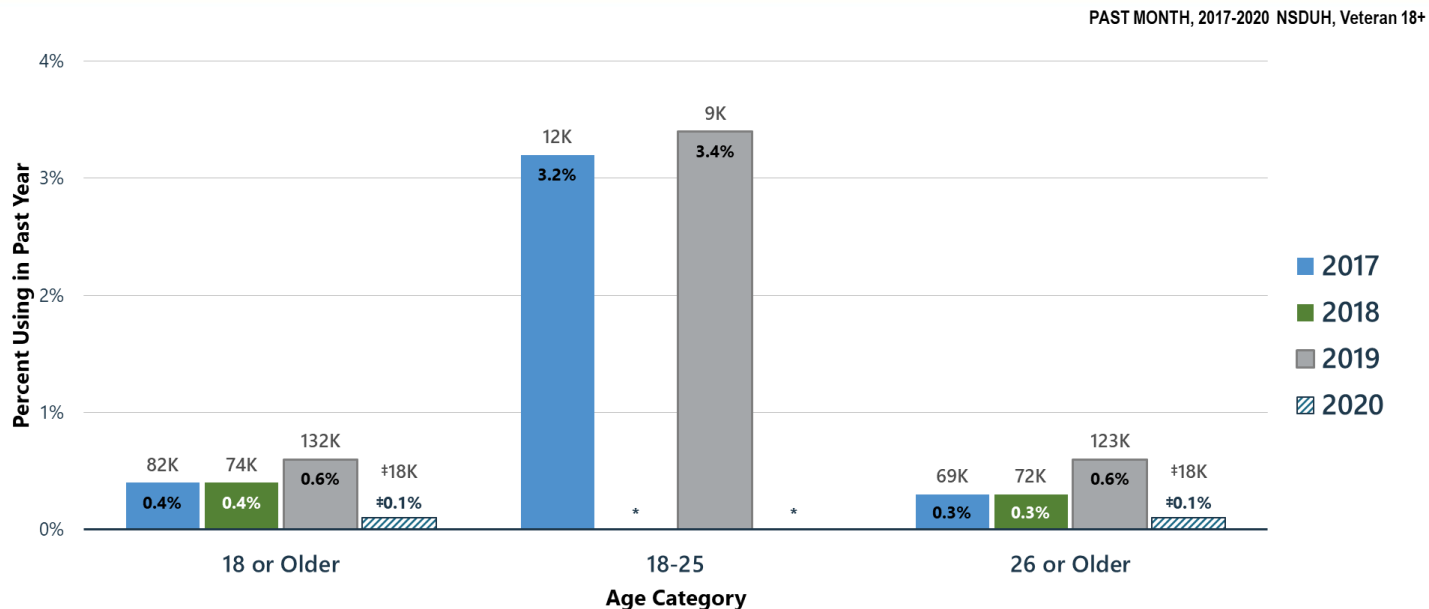
Data not shown – low precision

Data not shown – low precision

Summary: Marijuana Use in 2020

- **Among veterans aged 26 or older in 2020:**
 - 10.4 percent (or 2.1 million people) used marijuana in the past month
 - 3.5 percent (or 687,000 people) had a marijuana use disorder

Cocaine Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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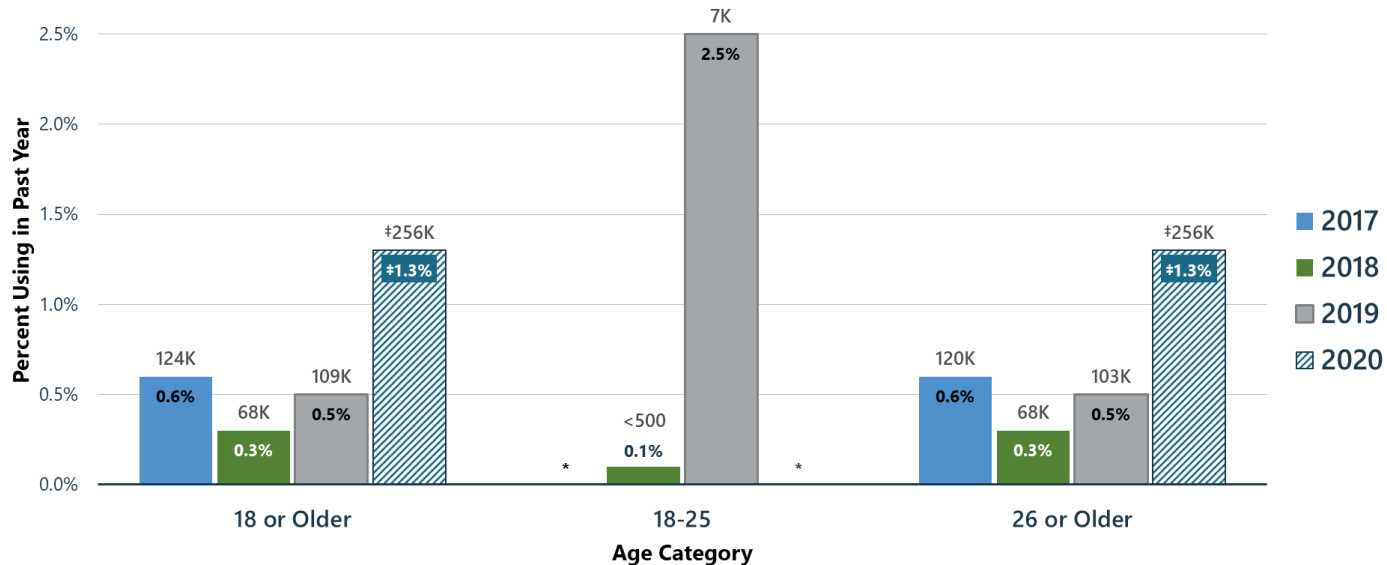
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TALKING POINTS:

- Cocaine use includes the use of crack cocaine.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Methamphetamine Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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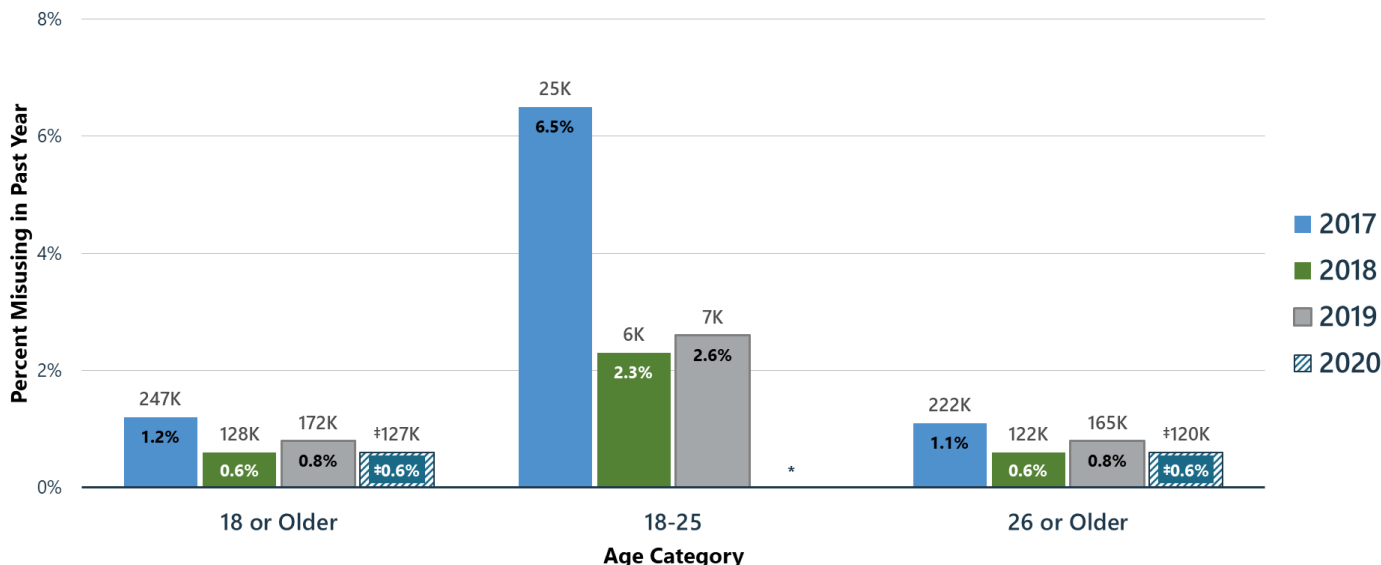
TALKING POINTS:

- Although methamphetamine is legally available by prescription (Desoxyn®), most methamphetamine used in the United States is produced and distributed illicitly rather than through the pharmaceutical industry. The misuse of prescription stimulants is covered on the next slide.

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Misuse of Prescription Stimulants in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



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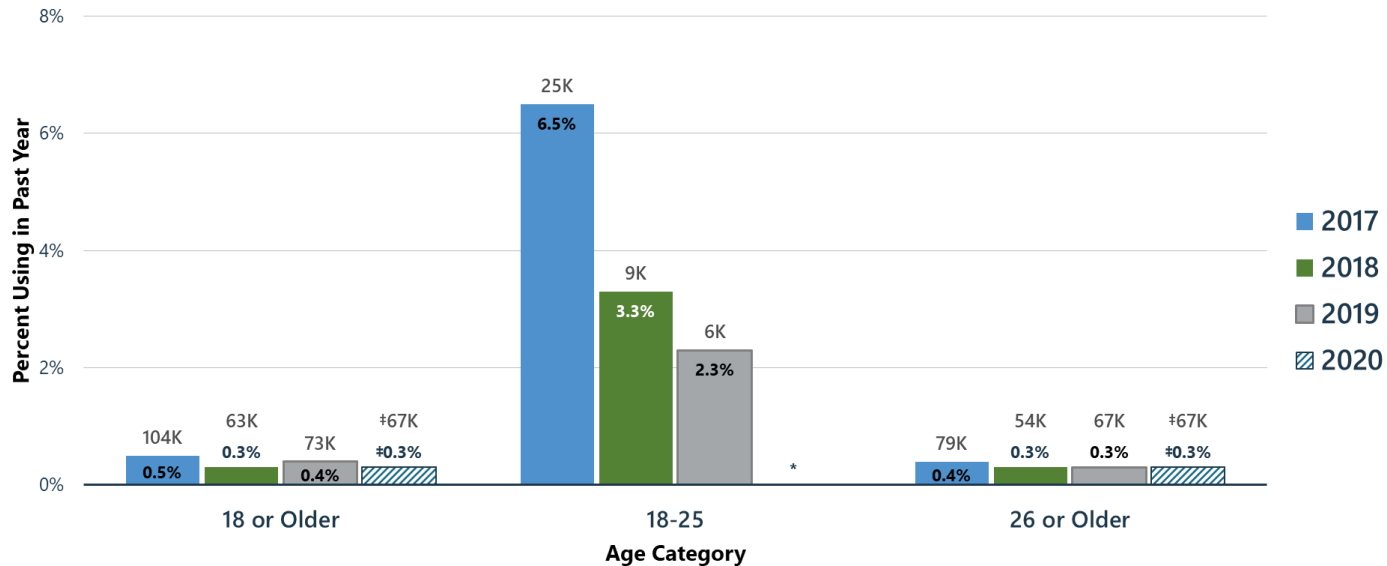
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TALKING POINTS:

- Methamphetamine has not been included as a prescription stimulant, unless respondents specified the prescription form of methamphetamine (Desoxyn®) as some other stimulant they had misused in the past year.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

LSD Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



Estimates represent past year use of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), a type of hallucinogen.

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TALKING POINTS:

- Several drugs are grouped under the category of hallucinogens, including LSD.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

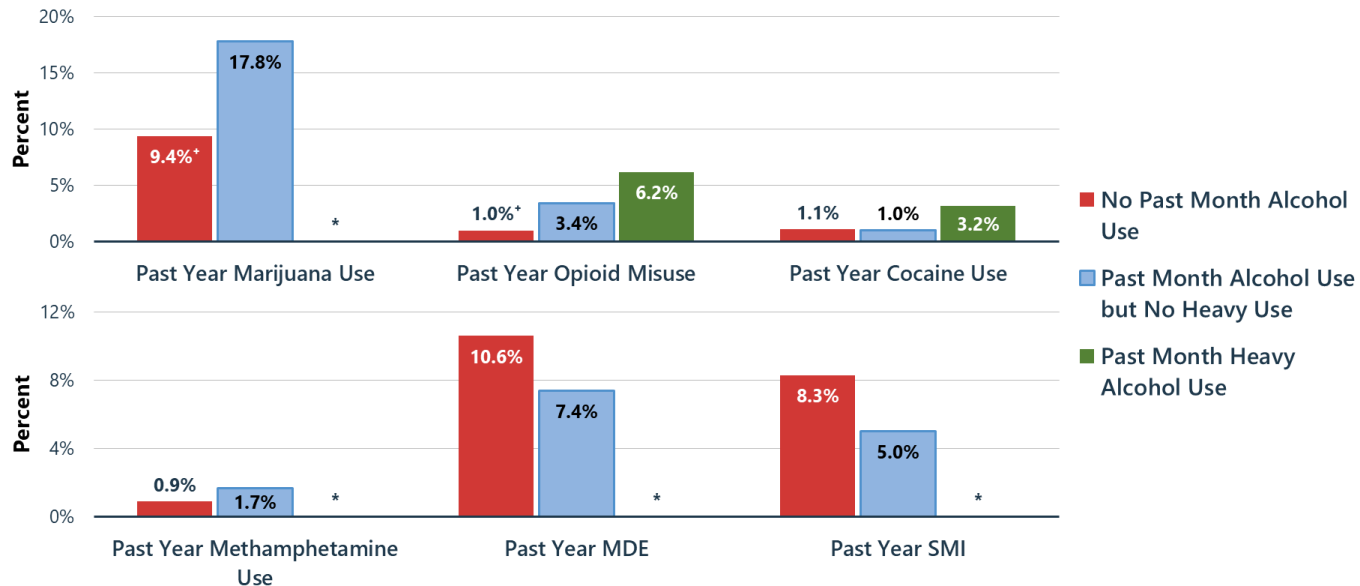
Summary: Other Substance Use in 2020

- **Among veterans aged 26 or older in 2020:**
 - 0.1 percent (or 18,000 people) used cocaine in the past year
 - 1.3 percent (or 256,000 people) used methamphetamine in the past year
 - 0.6 percent (or 120,000 people) misused prescription stimulants in the past year
 - 0.3 percent (or 67,000 people) used LSD in the past year

Polysubstance Use and Mental Illness

Substance Use in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+; Major Depressive Episode (MDE) and Serious Mental Illness (SMI) in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+; By Level of Alcohol Use in Past Month

PAST YEAR/MONTH, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

⁺ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for people with past month use but not heavy alcohol use is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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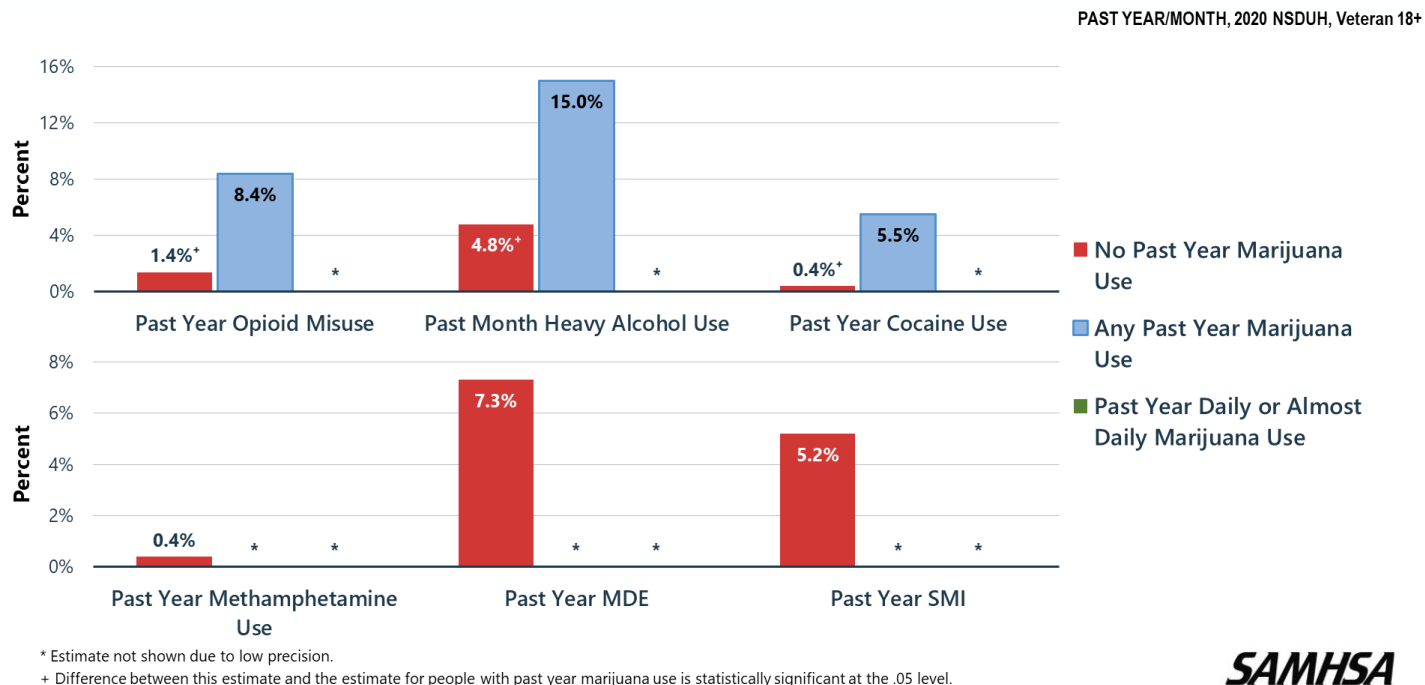
- Veterans aged 18 or older who did not drink alcohol in the past month had lower rates of marijuana use and opioid misuse in the past year than veterans who drank alcohol in the past month but had no heavy alcohol use.
- These findings are consistent with literature suggesting that having an SUD for one substance significantly increases risk for developing SUDs for additional substances (e.g., studies have found that individuals with an alcohol use disorder are at twice the risk for developing an opioid use disorder) (Crummy et al., 2020).

- NSDUH found that adults aged 18 or older engaging in heavy alcohol use had a higher percentage of an MDE and SMI in the past year than adults who used alcohol, but had no heavy alcohol use in the past month.
- Findings are consistent with literature suggesting depression and alcohol use disorder often co-occur. Studies have found that individuals with depression have a three-fold risk for developing alcohol use disorder in their lifetime (Schouten et al., 2022).

References

- Crummy, E. A., O'Neal, T. J., Baskin, B. M., & Ferguson, S. M. (2020). One is not enough: understanding and modeling polysubstance use. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 14, 569.
- Schouten, M. J., Christ, C., Dekker, J. J., Riper, H., Goudriaan, A. E., & Blankers, M. (2022). Digital interventions for people with co-occurring depression and problematic alcohol use: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 57(1), 113-124.

Substance Use in Past Year/Month: Among Veterans Aged 18+; Major Depressive Episode (MDE) and Serious Mental Illness (SMI) in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+; By Level of Marijuana Use in Past Year



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TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 or older who used marijuana daily or almost daily in the past year could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- Veterans aged 18 or older who did not use marijuana in the past year were less likely to have used or misused other substances than people who had used marijuana in the past year.

- Estimates for veterans who used marijuana in the past year and had an MDE or SMI in the past year could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- Co-occurring substance use and mental illness are common. Mental illness and substance use is often conceptualized as having a bidirectional relationship—in that substance use often leads to and exacerbates mental illness and mental illness can be a precursor for substance misuse. Literature has suggested that substance use (e.g., marijuana, alcohol) may be used as a way of regulating emotions (in the short term)—but exacerbating depression symptom severity in the long-term (Weiss et al., 2022).

Reference

Weiss, N. H., Kiefer, R., Goncharenko, S., Raudales, A. M., Forkus, S. R., Schick, M. R., & Contractor, A. A. (2022). Emotion regulation and substance use: A meta-analysis. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 230, 109131.

Data not shown – low precision

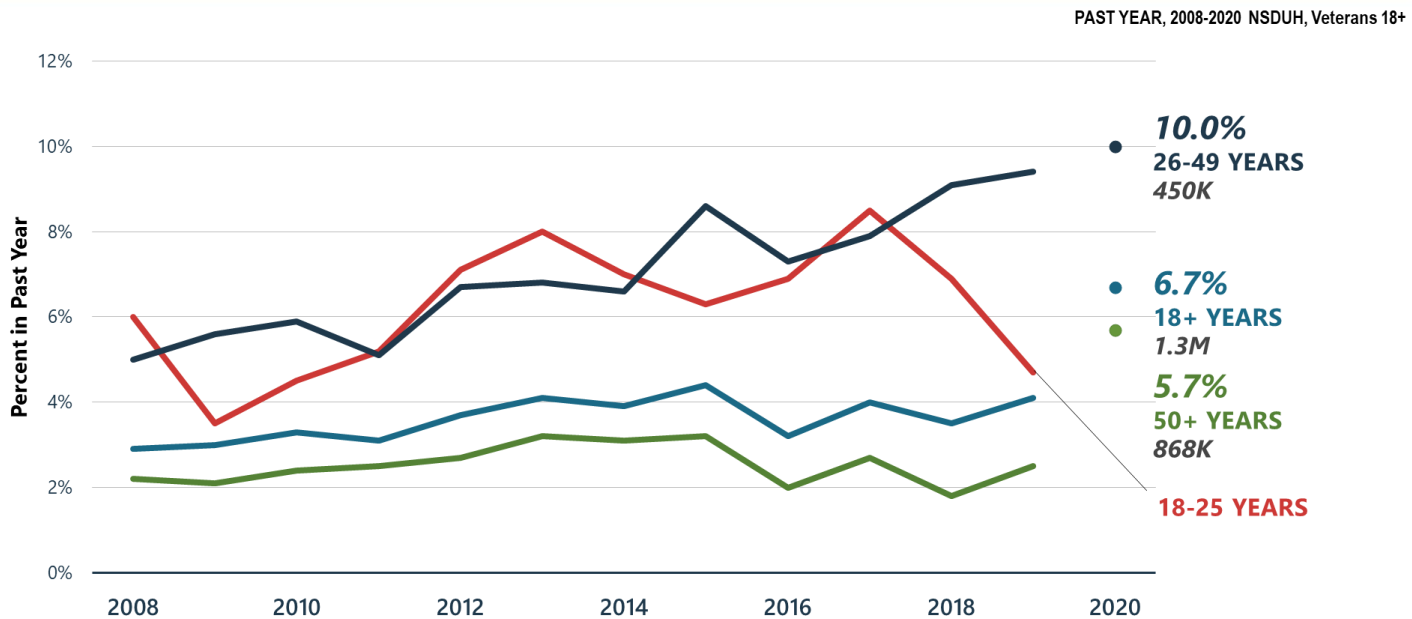
Data not shown – low precision

Summary

- Polysubstance use is common—if a person is having problems with one substance, they may be having problems with other substances
- Treatment providers must screen for and treat all substance use disorders and problem substance use
- Association of substance misuse and mental illness is clear—we must all do a better job of helping Americans understand these relationships and risks

Mental Health

Serious Mental Illness (SMI) in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



The 2020 estimate for people aged 18-25 was suppressed due to low precision.

There is no connecting line between 2019 and 2020 to indicate caution should be used when comparing estimates between 2020 and prior years because of methodological changes for 2020. Due to these changes, significance testing between 2020 and prior years was not performed. See the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Methodological Summary and Definitions for details.

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TALKING POINTS:

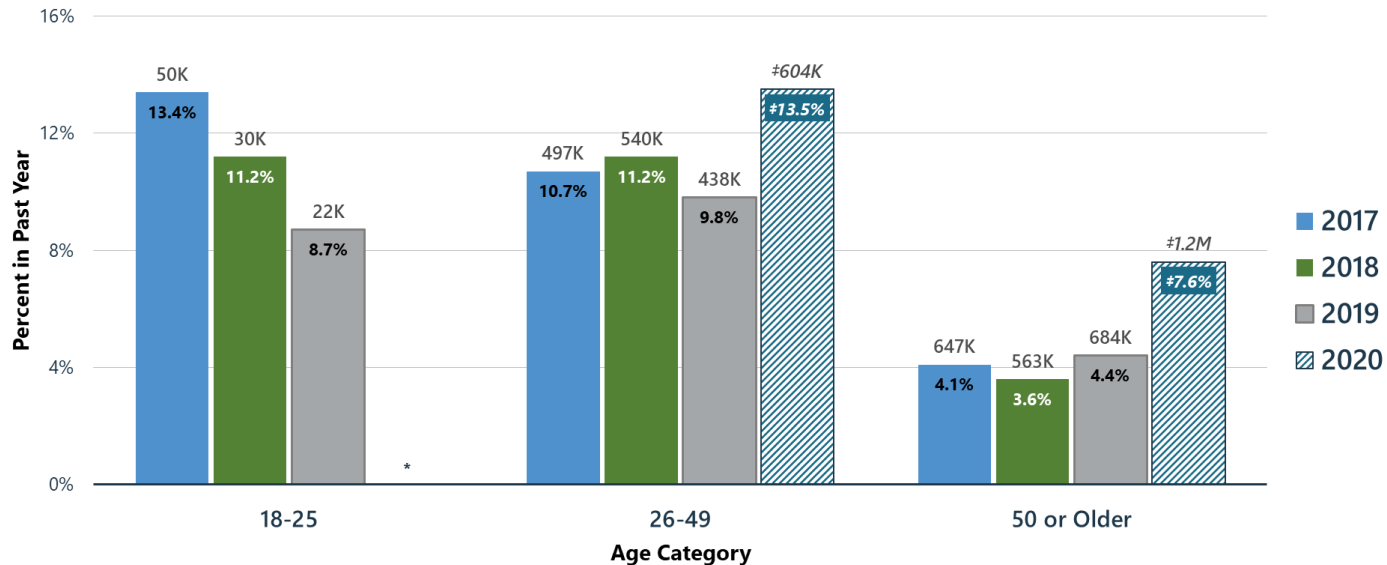
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- SMI continues to be on the rise, particularly in young adults, which is consistent with literature showing mental health concerns in young adults have significantly increased over the past decade (Twenge et al., 2019).

Reference

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 128(3), 185.

Major Depressive Episodes in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2017-2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

† Estimates on the 2020 bars are italicized to indicate caution should be used when comparing estimates between 2020 and prior years because of methodological changes for 2020. Due to these changes, significance testing between 2020 and prior years was not performed. See the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Methodological Summary and Definitions for details.

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TALKING POINTS:

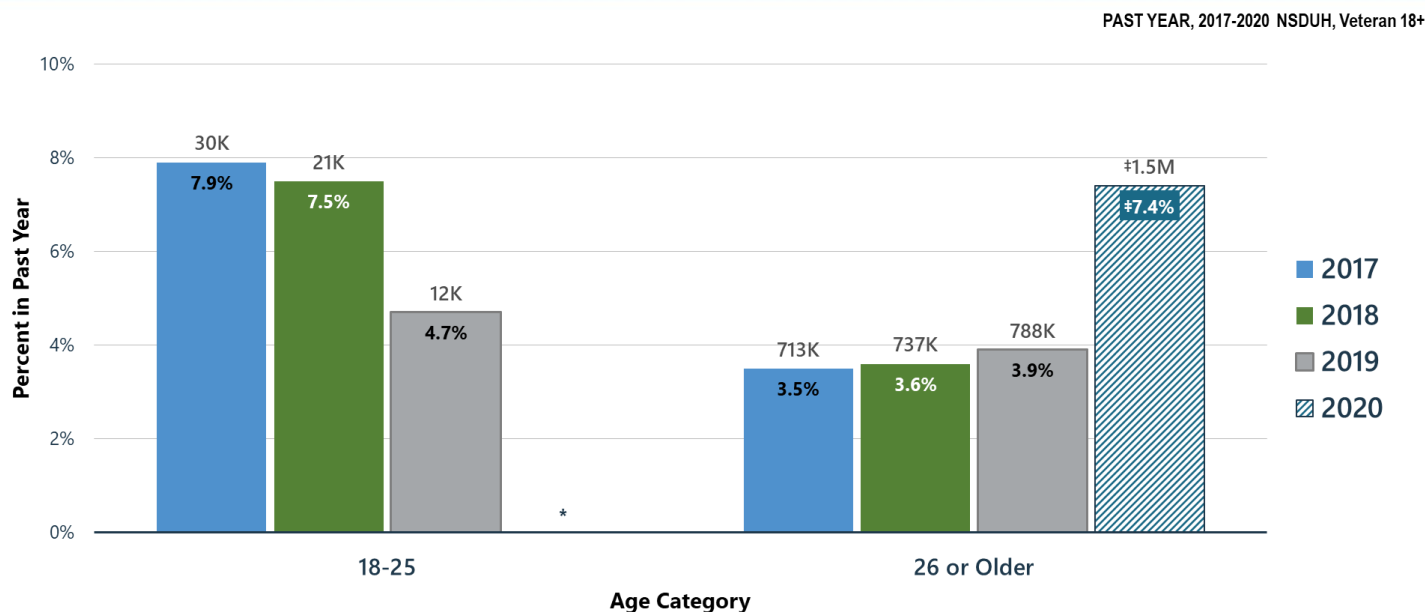
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- Veterans aged 26 to 49 had a higher percentage of an MDE in the past year than adults aged 50 or older.

- Youths and young adults continue to report rising rates of MDE, consistent with recent literature that found rates of depression increased by 52 percent between 2005 and 2017 among adolescents and 63 percent between 2009 and 2017 in young adults (Twenge et al., 2019).

Reference

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 128*(3), 185.

Major Depressive Episodes with Severe Impairment in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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TALKING POINTS:

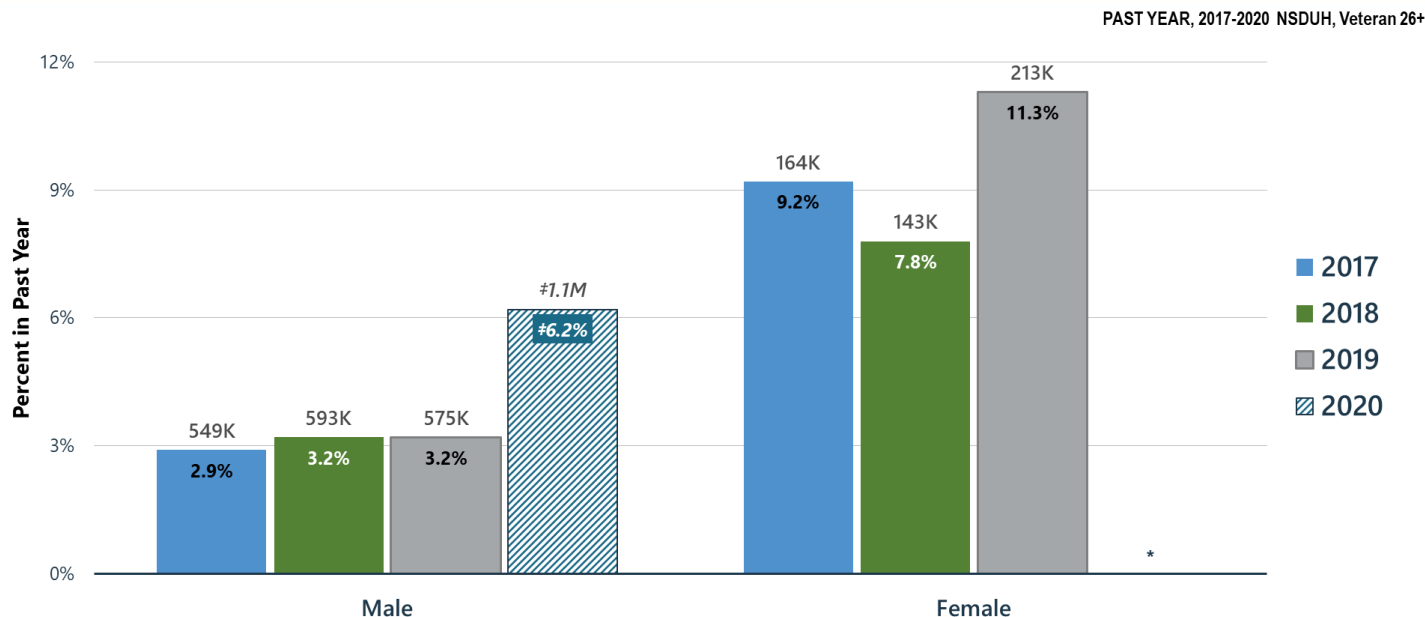
- MDE with Severe Impairment is defined as those individuals with higher scores on the Sheehan Disability Scale.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

- Literature suggests that rates of mental illness are rising more quickly in adolescents and young adults (Twenge et al., 2019).

Reference

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 128*(3), 185.

Major Depressive Episodes with Severe Impairment in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 26+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

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TALKING POINTS:

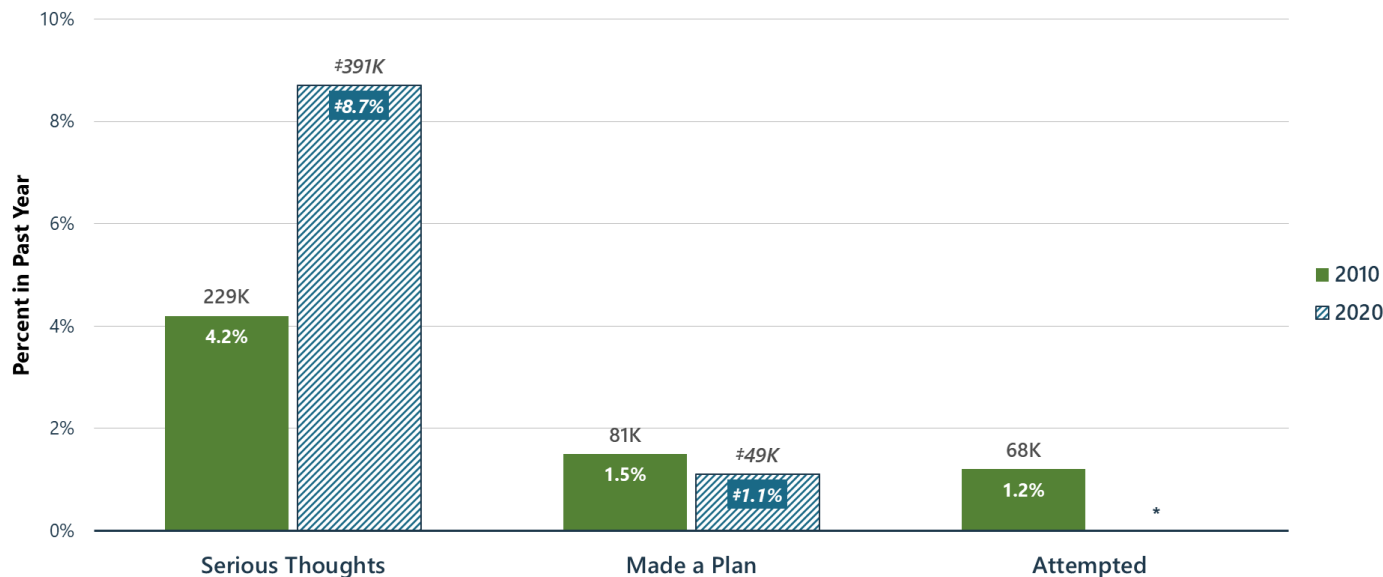
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 and females aged 26 or older could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- Recent research suggests that the rates of severe mood disorders have significantly increased among adolescents and young adults in the past 10 years, especially among females (e.g., Twenge et al., 2019; Yard et al., 2021).

References

- Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 128*(3), 185.
- Yard, E., Radhakrishnan, L., Ballesteros, M. F., Sheppard, M., Gates, A., Stein, Z., ... Stone, D. M. (2021). Emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts among persons aged 12–25 years before and during the COVID-19 pandemic—United States, January 2019–May 2021. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 70*(24), 888.

Suicidal Thoughts, Plans, and Attempts in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 26-49

PAST YEAR, 2010 and 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 26-49



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

† Estimates on the 2020 bars are italicized to indicate caution should be used when comparing estimates between 2020 and prior years because of methodological changes for 2020. Due to these changes, significance testing between 2020 and prior years was not performed. See the 2020 *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Methodological Summary and Definitions* for details.

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TALKING POINTS:

- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.
- Rates of planning or attempting suicide remain low—and illustrates two important points in the literature: (1) suicidal behaviors remain difficult to study due to low base rates, and (2) suicidal behaviors are underreported (e.g., Tøllefsen et al., 2012).

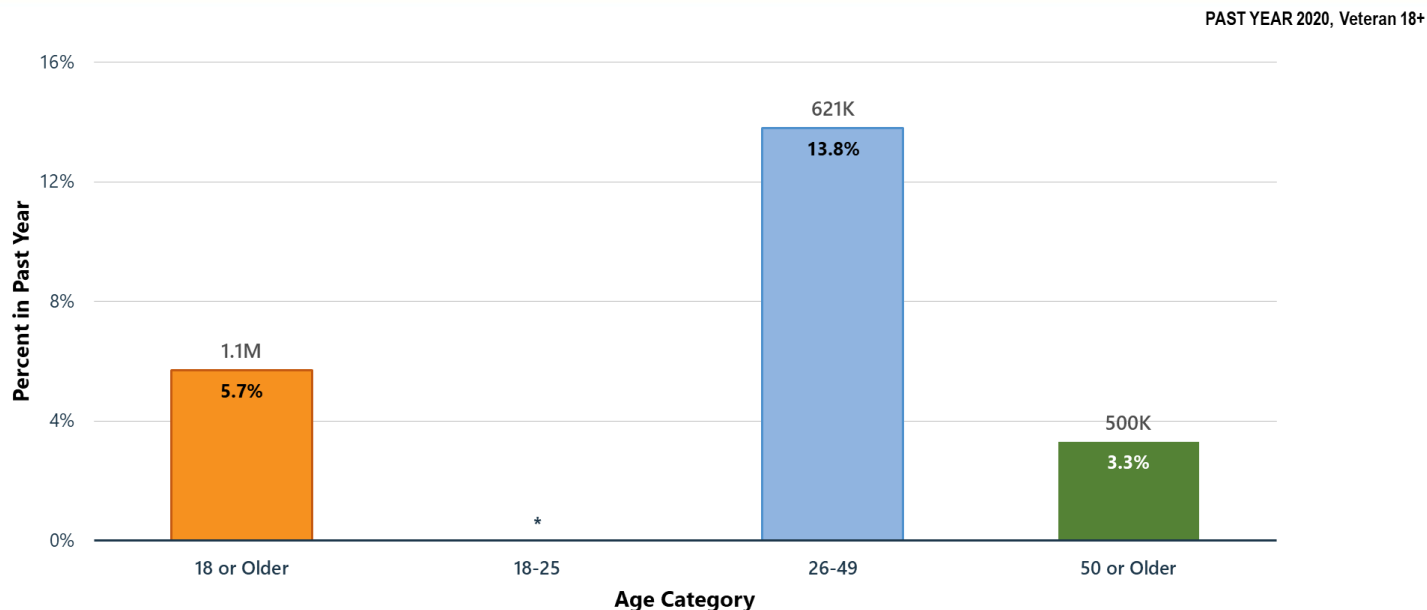
Reference

Tøllefsen, I. M., Hem, E., & Ekeberg, Ø. (2012). The reliability of suicide statistics: A systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 12(1), 1-11.

Co-Occurring Mental and Substance Use Disorders

Data not applicable

Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder and Any Mental Illness in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



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TALKING POINTS:

- Rates of co-occurring substance use disorder and any mental illness in the past year was higher among veterans aged 26 to 49 than veterans aged 50 or older.
- Estimates for veterans aged 18 to 25 could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

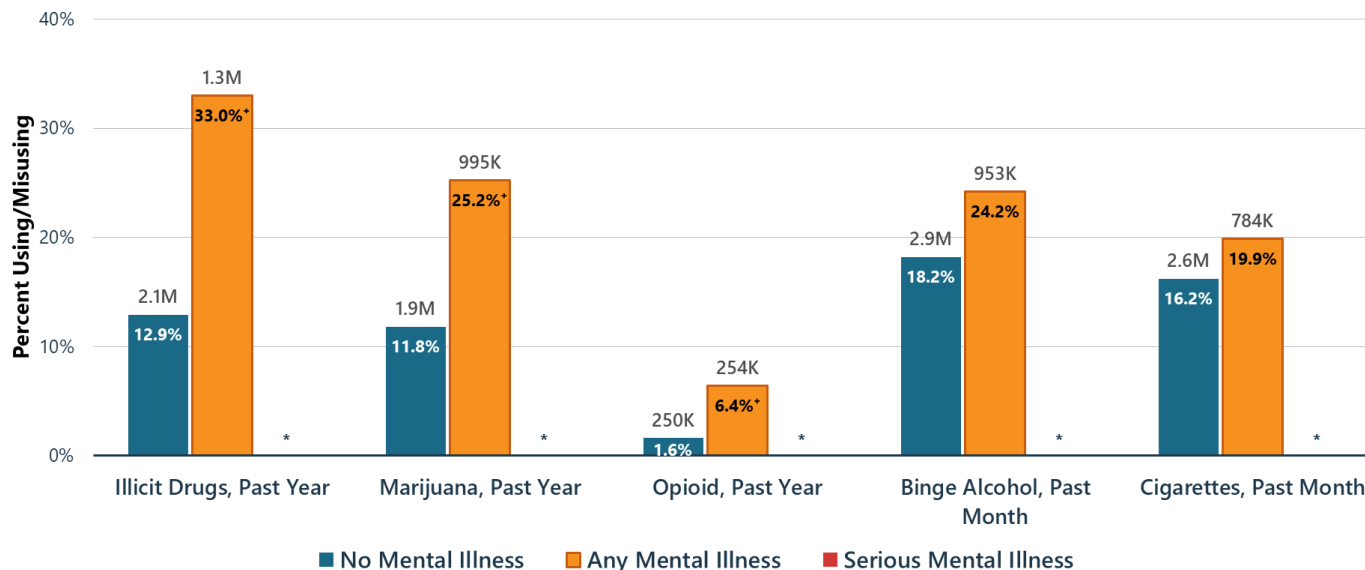
- Declining prevalence rates of mental illness across the lifespan, such that older adults report the lowest rates of mental illness, is well established in the literature (e.g., Westerhof & Keyes, 2010, Webster et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2016).

References

- Westerhof, G. J., & Keyes, C. L. (2010). Mental illness and mental health: The two continua model across the lifespan. *Journal of Adult Development*, 17(2), 110-119.
- Webster, J. D., Westerhof, G. J., & Bohlmeijer, E. T. (2014). Wisdom and mental health across the lifespan. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 69(2), 209-218.
- Thomas, M. L., Kaufmann, C. N., Palmer, B. W., Depp, C. A., Martin, A. S., Glorioso, D. K., ... Jeste, D. V. (2016). Paradoxical trend for improvement in mental health with aging: A community-based study of 1,546 adults aged 21-100 years. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 77(8), 8771.

Substance Use in Past Year/Month: Among Veterans Aged 18+; By Mental Illness Status

PAST YEAR/MONTH, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

+ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for adults without mental illness is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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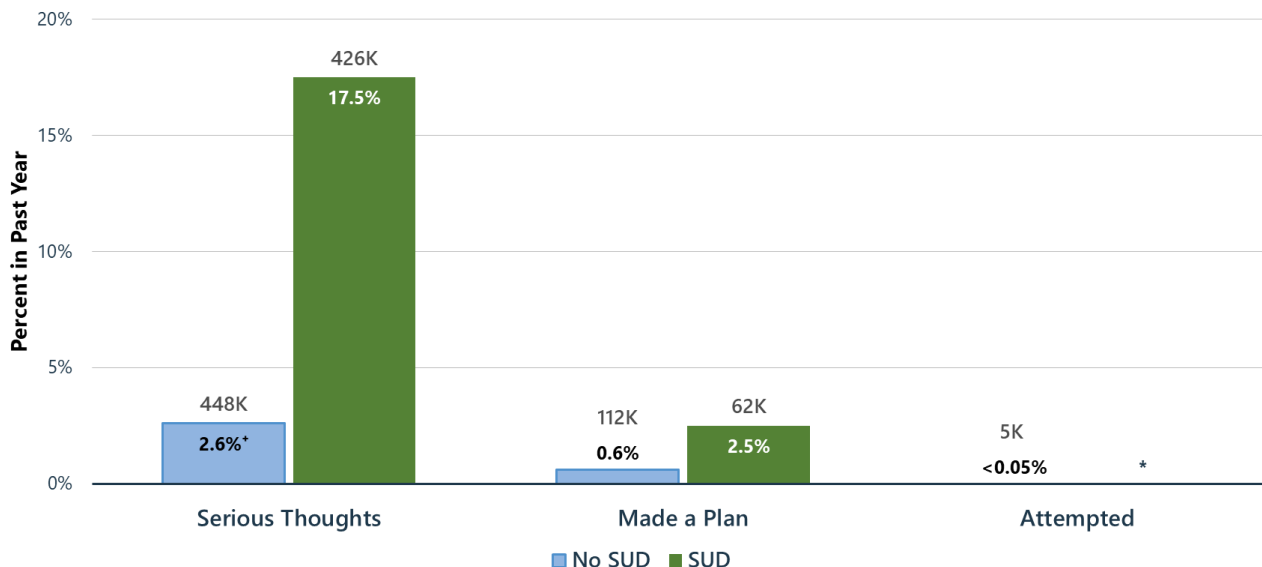
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TALKING POINTS:

- Co-occurrence of mental illness and substance use is common.
- Veterans aged 18 or older with any mental illness had significantly higher rates of illicit drug, marijuana, and opioid use over the past year than veterans without mental illness.
- Estimates for veterans with SMI in the past year could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Suicidal Thoughts, Plans, and Attempts in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+; By Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Status

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veteran 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

+ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for adults with SUD is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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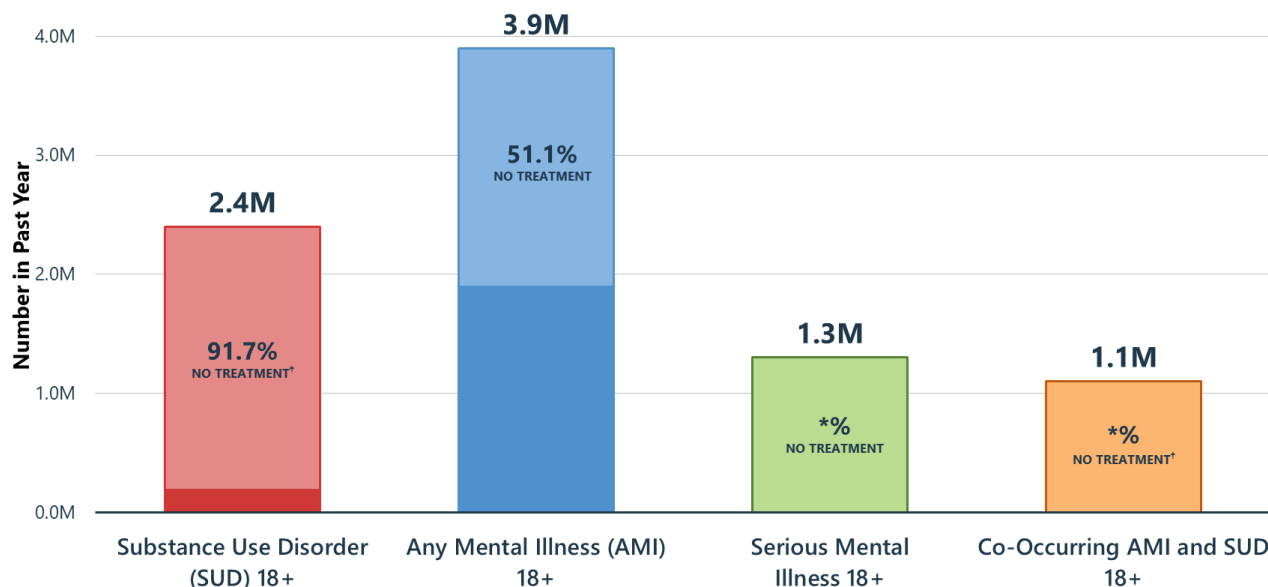
- Veterans aged 18 or older with an SUD had higher rates of serious thoughts of suicide in the past year than veterans who did not have an SUD.
- Literature has found that substance use often co-occurs with suicidal thoughts and behaviors and is a well-established risk factor for suicide attempts and death by suicide (Esang & Ahmed, 2018).

Reference

Esang, M., & Ahmed, S. (2018). A closer look at substance use and suicide. *American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal*, 13(6), 6-8.

Did Not Receive Substance Use Treatment or Mental Health Services in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+

PAST YEAR, 2020 NSDUH, Veterans 18+



† No Treatment for SUD is defined as not receiving treatment at any location, such as a hospital (inpatient), rehabilitation facility (inpatient or outpatient), mental health center, emergency room, private doctor's office, self-help group, or prison/jail.

* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

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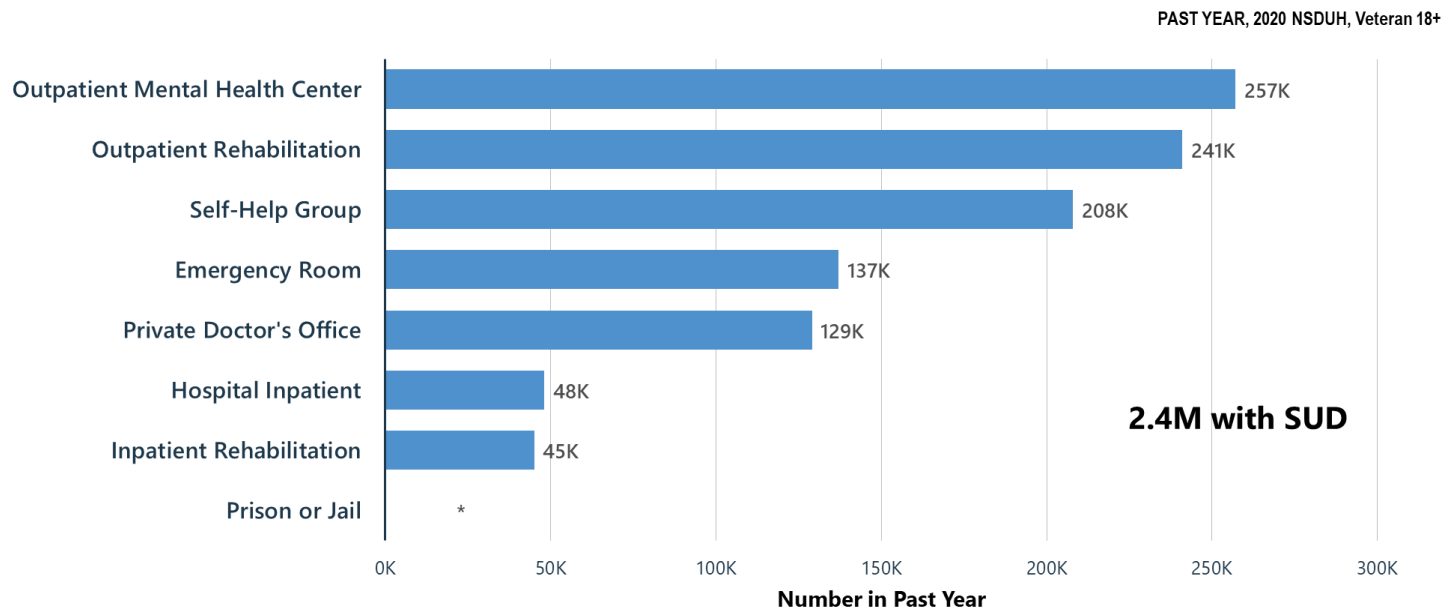
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TALKING POINTS:

- Understanding barriers to and increasing access to SUD and mental health treatment remains a focus for providers and policymakers.
- Well-established barriers to care include lack of insurance/cost, stigmatization of substance use and mental illness, and multicultural factors.
- More than half of veterans aged 18 or older with AMI did not receive treatment within the past year.
- Far fewer adults sought help for SUD. More than 90 percent do not receive treatment—highlighting barriers to care including stigmatization of SUD.
- Estimates of the receipt of treatment for veterans with SMI in the past year or co-occurring AMI and SUD could not be calculated with sufficient precision.

Locations Where Substance Use Treatment was Received in Past Year: Among Veterans Aged 18+



* Estimate not shown due to low precision.

Locations where people received substance use treatment are **not** mutually exclusive because respondents could report that they received treatment in more than one location in the past year.

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TALKING POINTS:

- Among veterans aged 18 or older, there was very little difference across treatment locations.
- The popularity of self-help groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) is in part due to reduced fears of stigmatization (or being misunderstood) because group leaders have shared lived experiences (Moos, 2008). In addition, self-help groups are typically free.

Reference

Moos, R. H. (2008). Active ingredients of substance use-focused self-help groups. *Addiction*, 103(3), 387-396.

Data not shown – low precision

Data not shown – low precision

Summary: Mental Health/Co-Occurring Issues in the United States in 2020

- Co-occurring substance use and mental disorders are common.
- **Adults:**
 - Significantly higher rates of substance use among adults with mental illness vs. adults without mental illness.
 - Significantly higher rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors than those without a substance use disorder