



Executive Summary

MEASURING OUR COMMUNITIES:

The State of Military and Veteran Families in the United States

As two years of social science data regarding the effects of COVID-19 have begun to appear in original research, the effects of the novel disease are beginning to be parsed. This, along with a new administration in the White House and a variety of unprecedented foreign policy decisions, have had a particularly complex, variegated effect on the United States' active-duty service members, veterans and their families.

These conclusions are among the key findings in the 2022 report, **MEASURING OUR COMMUNITIES: The State of Military and Veteran Families in the United States**. The Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University authored the document in collaboration with subject matter experts.

IN THE REPORT The 2022 report features nine themes tracking the wellbeing of military families in the United States: demographics, community, employment, K-12 education, post-secondary education, housing, behavioral health, medical and financial. In each section, we share the current status of American military and veteran families using the most recent data available.

Unique to this report is an additional section on the status of military and veteran families both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in cases where such data is available.

Throughout the report are new data indicators, with the goal of using ever-more detailed and accurate tools to gauge the status of military families. At MFRI, we continually strive for an expanding data pool that can synthesize additional factors such as single parenthood, legal guardianship and unmarried domestic partners with a history of military service in order to yield a deeper understanding of how veterans, active service members and their families are faring in the current milieu.

SOURCES FOR THE DATA Data outlined in this report come from the Measuring Communities website, an online resource designed to strengthen community efforts to support military and veteran families. The initiative brings together expertise from two organizations at Purdue University: MFRI, with expertise about military and veteran families; and the Purdue Center for Regional Development, with expertise in data visualization and mapping.

More than 30 government and nonprofit sources provide us with military-specific data about communities across the United States, which are all collated on the site. Interactive maps as well as charts and tables display national and regional military- and veteran-specific information according to 10 domains, which largely overlap with the sections of the 2022 MEASURING OUR COMMUNITIES report: demographics, community, employment, K-12 education, post-secondary education, housing, behavioral health, medical, financial and legal.

Since 2016, individual users from across the nation and more than 160 organizations have used the Measuring Communities site to find gaps in local services, benchmark their communities against others and strengthen their engagement with the military and veteran community.

CHANGES TO THE ONLINE PORTAL Since the last report, we have added several new indicators, including racial diversity of veterans by state and participation by veteran families in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We also have added congressional districts

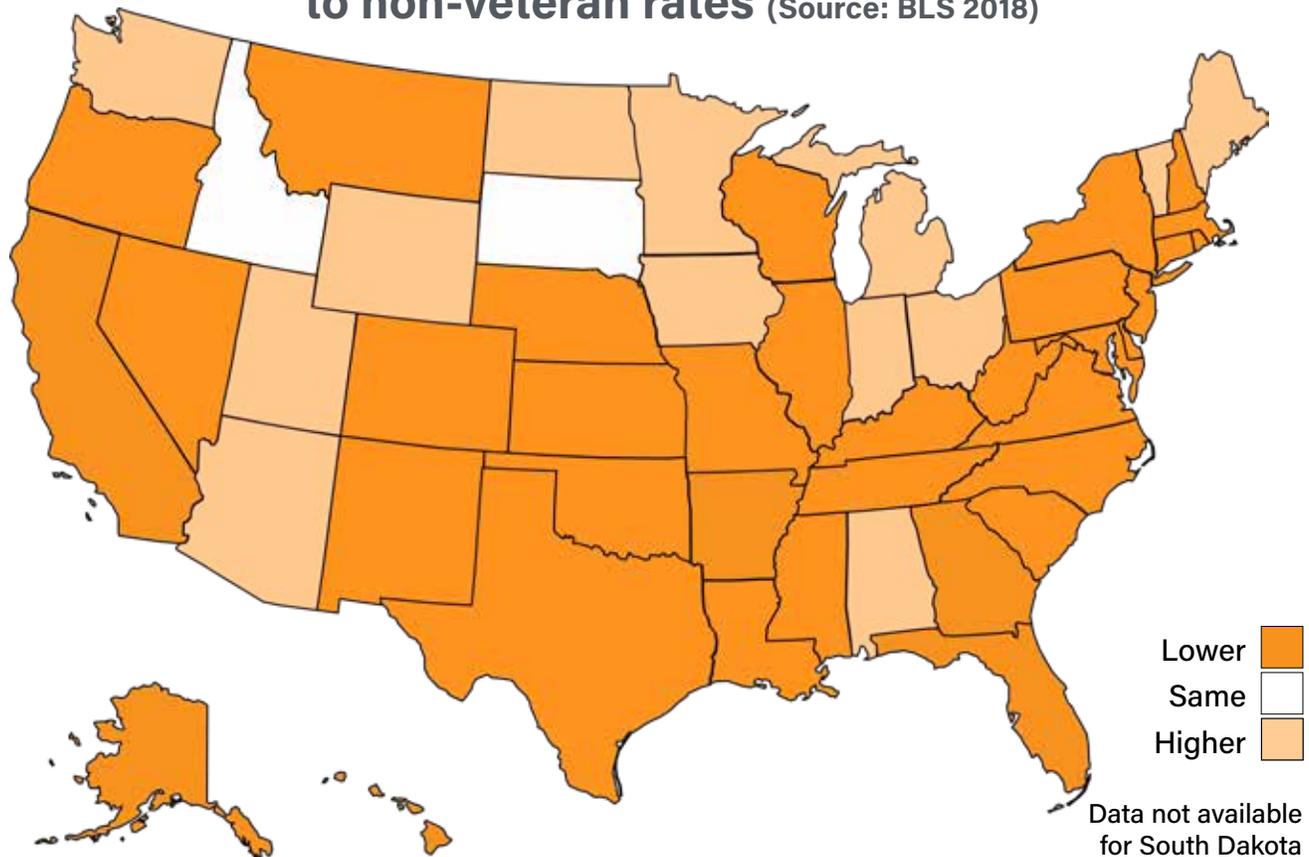
as a new resource for geographic assessments; at press time, we were still awaiting district-level updates from the U.S. Census Bureau for the 117th Congress.

Two new user tools are also available through a collaboration with Purdue University's Department of Public Health: state-level hospital reports comparing six different measures of quality for VA and non-VA hospitals, and congressional snapshots focusing on the health and well-being of veterans. Both types of reports are available for download.

AREAS WHERE COMMUNITIES HAVE MADE PROGRESS According to our analysis, significant positive progress has been made in areas including the following:

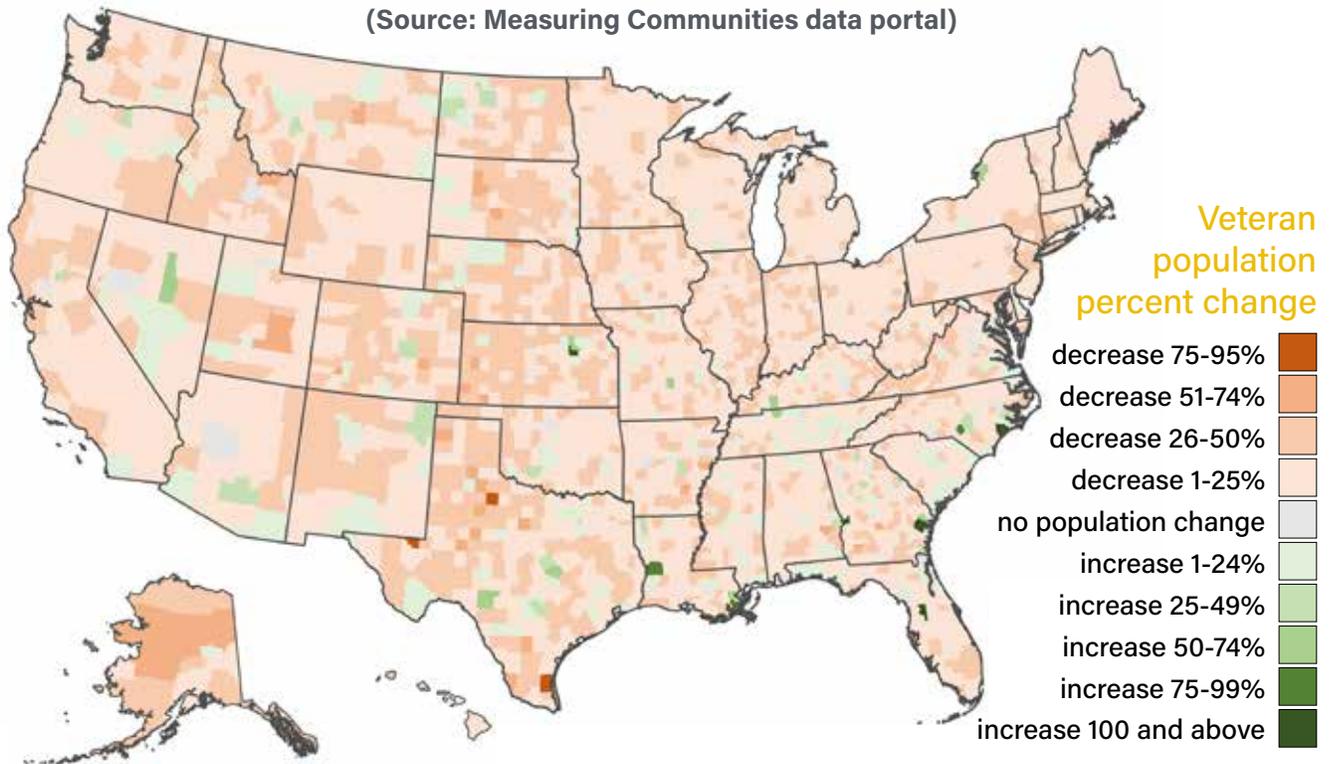
- **Veteran homelessness** has experienced a marked decrease since 2011, with an overall decline of 42%.
- COVID-19 has quickened the pace of **military deployments**, particularly within the continental United States. This trend may have had impacts

Unemployment rates: Veteran rates compared to non-veteran rates (Source: BLS 2018)



Veteran Population Change 2010-2019

(Source: Measuring Communities data portal)



on service members' sense of community connection that are only now appearing in data. Preliminary evidence suggests that while certain stressors have been aggravated by COVID-related deployments, these circumstances may have also bolstered service members' sense of belonging or meaning in their communities due to their increasing visibility to the civilian population.

- Even with the added unpredictability of COVID-19, **veteran employment** continues to improve in most areas of the country, maintaining the trend of veterans outpacing their civilian counterparts in workforce participation.
- The ease of telehealth among certain populations appears to have increased access to **healthcare among veterans** between January 2020 and January 2021. The Veterans Administration has charted a telehealth surge of 1,800% across all health services.

AREAS WHERE COMMUNITIES CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE Data also indicate challenges with military family wellbeing. Some appear to be part

of continuing, as-yet indelible trends which have presented themselves on a year-to-year basis, while others may have either emerged or been exacerbated due to conditions particular to the first year of the pandemic.

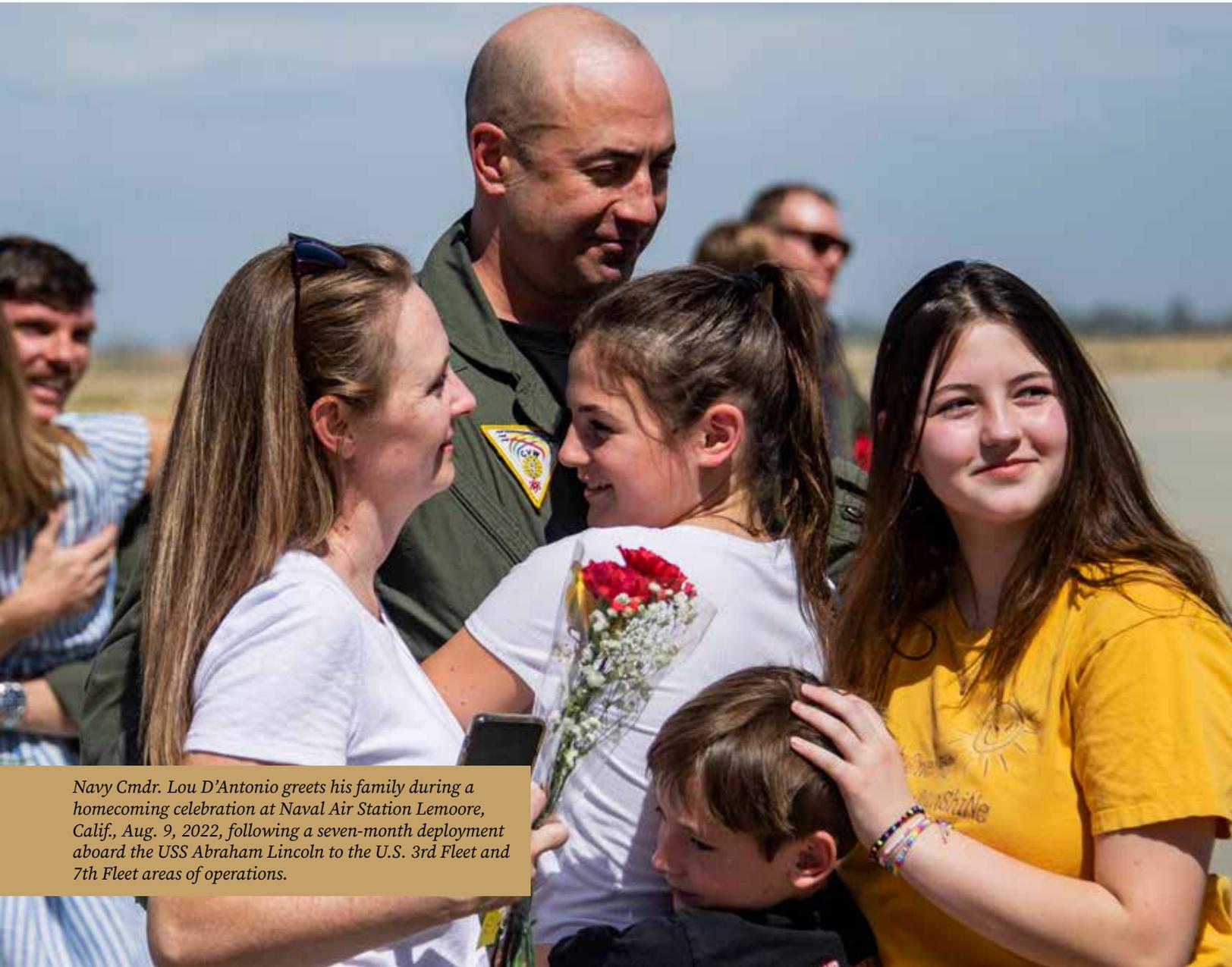
- Overall, the veteran population is shrinking. While not an inherent issue, the downward trend has led to community services often used by veterans scaling back both capacity and access in some areas.
- Initial data suggest that the negative effects of COVID-19 related **school closures** on the wellbeing of children were further exacerbated for military-connected students. Learning and social challenges caused by exclusively virtual schooling may have hit military children particularly hard, considering that families continued to change school districts during the early months of the pandemic.
- Suicide rates among both veterans and active service members continue to be of concern, raising questions about room for growth in the areas of medical and mental health care.

- Multiple data sources suggest that food insecurity among active duty and veteran households may have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which coalesces with preexisting data about large attendance increases at food pantries nationwide.

MEASURING COMMUNITIES IN ACTION The 2022 MEASURING OUR COMMUNITIES report is available in both print and digital versions. For deeper dives into the trends outlined in the document, the Measuring Communities site offers interactive data sets featuring current and historical data at county and congressional district levels.

We encourage all people and organizations working with military families to register for access at measuringcommunities.org. Individual- and organizational-level memberships are available, and the site is free to use.

Through the Measuring Communities site and reports, we hope to foster a scholarly community that is more capable of responding to the needs of all military communities nationwide. We hope you will join us in developing a deeper and richer understanding of the state of military and veteran families in the United States.



Navy Cmdr. Lou D'Antonio greets his family during a homecoming celebration at Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., Aug. 9, 2022, following a seven-month deployment aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln to the U.S. 3rd Fleet and 7th Fleet areas of operations.