



## SPECIAL POPULATION FOCUS: VETERANS FLASH GUIDE

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As part of the National Outreach Initiative (NOI), ASDA highlights special populations that may have unique care needs. This Chapter Flash Guide is meant to serve as an aid to your chapter by offering background on providing care to veterans.

When it comes to receiving dental care in this country, many veterans fall through the cracks. According to surveys administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), dental care was consistently ranked by homeless veterans as one of their top three unmet needs (alongside long-term housing and childcare).<sup>1</sup> The pain associated with dental infections, missing teeth and poor oral hygiene can have debilitating effects, especially for those seeking employment opportunities. Given the unique medical needs of this population, in part due to the injuries and illnesses acquired in combat abroad, financing the health care of veterans is of high concern.

While the VA offers dental care to veterans, the eligibility criteria are limited to those classified as 100% disabled, having service-related dental disabilities or former prisoners of war. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2016, about half of all veterans had health insurance coverage through Medicare (being aged 65 or older). Of the other half of the veteran population, age 19 to 64, 5.5 percent were uninsured.<sup>2</sup> As such, many veterans are left with unmet dental needs and forced to turn to outreach events from private and corporate offices or dental schools offering free dental care in honor of their service to our country.

Through the NOI, ASDA chapters are encouraged to create events to reach out to this population and help address dental and social needs. In dentistry, these patients can present with extensive restorative needs, complex medical histories and the need for mental health awareness. Furthermore, studies have shown that after receiving dental care, veterans report a significant improvement in perceived overall health as well as self-esteem, reinforcing the importance of dental care in reintegration.<sup>3</sup>

There are many resources available for chapters in implementing community outreach. Please refer to ASDA's Chapter How-To Guide: [Community Service](#) for additional aid in getting your event off the ground. Chapters may [reach out to Colgate](#), the official sponsor of the NOI, who is graciously offering oral hygiene kits to chapters hosting dental outreach events.

Contact the Council on Professional Issues at [professionalissues@ASDAnet.org](mailto:professionalissues@ASDAnet.org) with questions.

<sup>1</sup> Homeless Veterans Dental Program, <https://www.va.gov/homeless/dental.asp>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#), 2013-2016.

<sup>3</sup> E. Nunez, G. Gibson, J. A. Jones, J. A. Schinka, "Evaluating the Impact of Dental Care on Housing Intervention Program Outcomes Among Homeless Veterans," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. S2 (December 1, 2013): pp. S368-S373.

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ASDA chapters are encouraged to create events to engage this special population and help address its dental and social needs. Here's one example of a successful event that brought dental students and veterans together.

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Name of project: Cookies for Veterans

ASDA chapter: South Carolina

Description: Every year for Veteran's Day, students bake cookies for the College of Dental Medicine faculty and staff that have served in the military. We write a note to each veteran thanking them for their service and sacrifice to our country and attach it to the bag of cookies.

Target audience: Veterans at the MUSC College of Dental Medicine

Planning time: One week to get updated list of names of those who have served in the military, bake the cookies, write thank-you notes, and deliver the cookies to their offices on Veteran's Day.

Volunteers required: One student to gather names, two students to bake, and three students to deliver cookies.

Other participating groups (if applicable): None

Budget (including cost of the event and any funds raised by event, if applicable): \$40 in expenses

Contact person: Kelsey Fierstein, community outreach coordinator, [muscasda@gmail.com](mailto:muscasda@gmail.com)

