

VIEWS OF IDAHO VETERANS
REGARDING
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



2015 VETERANS SURVEY RESULTS
IDAHO SEN. MIKE CRAPO

Special Thanks

- Thank you to all the survey participants for taking the time to share your insights and experiences. This project would not be possible without you.
- Thank you to all the Idahoans who gave feedback to Senator Crapo and his staff on the 2014 Veterans Survey. Their comments, thoughts, and suggestions led to great discussions about veterans issues in Idaho and to a much-improved survey in 2015.
- Thank you to Idaho's veterans service organizations and their members, and all the veteran county service officers. Staff interviews and survey comments all reflect the important role VSOs and county service officers serve in helping our veterans. Thank you for all you do to care for the veterans in your communities.

Dear Friend:

In April 2014, news outlets reported incidents following the gross mismanagement of the Phoenix Health Care System. Subsequent investigations into the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Medical Center led to reports that exposed poor practices elsewhere in the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system. Although the focus of the news reporting had been on the Veterans Health Administration, several Idahoans contacted me with concerns about other aspects of the VA. As a result, I conducted the 2014 Veterans Survey reaching out to Idaho's veterans, as well as their friends and families, to improve my understanding of what Idahoans like about the VA system and areas for improvement.

The results of the 2014 Veterans Survey demonstrated that the solution to "fixing" the VA is not based on broad reforms and funding increases alone. The insights provided by veterans showed that reforms must take place both at the top-level and at the local VA level. For VA policies to work in Idaho, policies established in DC must permeate the whole VA organization to be implemented properly. Likewise, the top-level VA must receive information about the unique situations the local VA faces.

In response to the feedback from veterans in the 2014 Veterans Survey, I co-sponsored several pieces of legislation and assisted many veterans with unresolved VA issues. Although these are positive steps, more needed to be done to continue to improve the VA for Idahoans. My staff formed working groups with local VA officials and individuals in their local veterans community to discuss survey results and potential areas for further improvement. Together, these working groups came up with suggestions for some of the questions in the 2015 Veterans Survey.

The results of the 2015 Veterans Survey continue to improve my understanding of what Idahoans like about the VA system and what could improve. This survey will drive my veterans policy agenda for the next year as I focus my efforts on reforms that will actually make a difference to our veterans. I will also work to protect and promote the policies and practices that are working well for Idaho's veterans.

I encourage you to read the survey results and share your thoughts with me. Please continue to contact me to share your thoughts and experiences. I look forward to an ongoing partnership with Idaho's veterans to address their current and future needs.

Sincerely,



Mike Crapo
United States Senator

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Executive Summary

The VA provides vital assistance to our nation's veterans, who deserve special attention for their service and sacrifice to our country. Ensuring that our veterans receive the upmost attention, care, and services in a timely and responsive manner must remain a priority for the department and our federal government. The nation's commitment to our veterans must continue to reflect the sacrifices and important contributions made in service. The VA provides the direct link to ensuring vital services are delivered to those veterans.

The 2015 Veterans Survey was conducted between July 2015 and October 2015. It was made available both electronically and in paper form throughout the state. Nine hundred and twenty-four individuals across Idaho participated; 96 percent of participants have served in the U.S. military. The remaining 4 percent self-identified as family, friends and members of the veterans community.

Each survey represents a unique perspective, and a reflection of an Idahoan's account of positive and/or negative experiences with the VA, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The survey results are organized by quantitative and qualitative data and are presented in a way that distinguishes overall VA results from VHA results and VBA results.

Statewide, most participants used the Boise VA Regional Office (VARO) for VBA services and the Boise VA Medical Center (VAMC) Service Area for VHA services. This is also the area where the majority of Idaho's veterans live.

Overall, 52 percent of participants rated their experiences with the VA as "satisfying" or better, while 27 percent of participants rated their experiences "dissatisfying" or worse.

Several common themes emerged across the completed surveys. Based on the survey data, the following conclusions can be made:

- Effective, clear, and courteous communications between VA representatives and veterans remains crucial.
- Timely and responsive service is an important component of customer service that directly impacts veterans' satisfaction with the VA.
- Participants want more access to care in the community... but they do not like the Veterans Choice Program.
- The VBA needs special attention.

Survey Methodology

Survey Objectives:

The 2015 Veterans Survey is a snapshot assessment of perceptions of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) held by Idahoans who have served in the U.S. military and their families. The results will help inform VA officials and congressional oversight leaders of areas where the department performs well and needs improvement. Future surveys will help highlight where improvements have been made and areas in which further attention is warranted.

As the population directly affected by the delivery of VA benefits, the veteran community's overall satisfaction level and personal experiences are the most important metric for ensuring the VA meets its mandate. The survey also provides an understanding of which Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities Idahoans use when they typically receive health care, and which benefits they use most frequently.

Survey Development:

Development of the 2015 Veterans Survey focused on including feedback from the veterans working groups created at the conclusion of the 2014 Veterans Survey. The questions were reorganized and divided by corresponding VA entity (Veterans Benefit Administration and VHA). The questions were also expanded in order to provide stakeholders and decisionmakers within the veterans community more specific information.

After completing the survey questions, a robust outreach effort was made to ensure the highest possible participation of the target audience: veterans, servicemembers, and their families and friends. The survey was primarily web-based, but paper versions of the survey were created so that Idahoans wishing to participate could take the survey in person. Staff was also trained to help participants take the survey over the telephone.

In an effort to protect the integrity of the incoming information, participants were required to complete name and address forms. Participants were asked to self-identify their relationship with veterans: this question was used to determine if the survey reached those with first-hand knowledge of the VA.

Idahoans took the survey between July 2015 and October 2015.

Data Processing:

All incoming survey information has been maintained; however, only surveys from Idaho residents were considered valid for analysis. Occasionally, participants would take the survey more than once. On these occasions, the most recent survey was considered the valid survey. In total, there were 924 valid surveys.

The data received through the survey is divided into two types: qualitative and quantitative. Questions that required participants to select an answer (or multiple answers) that can be easily quantified provide the quantitative data. Questions that asked the participant to share (optional) text answers about their experiences and recommendations provide the basis for the qualitative data.

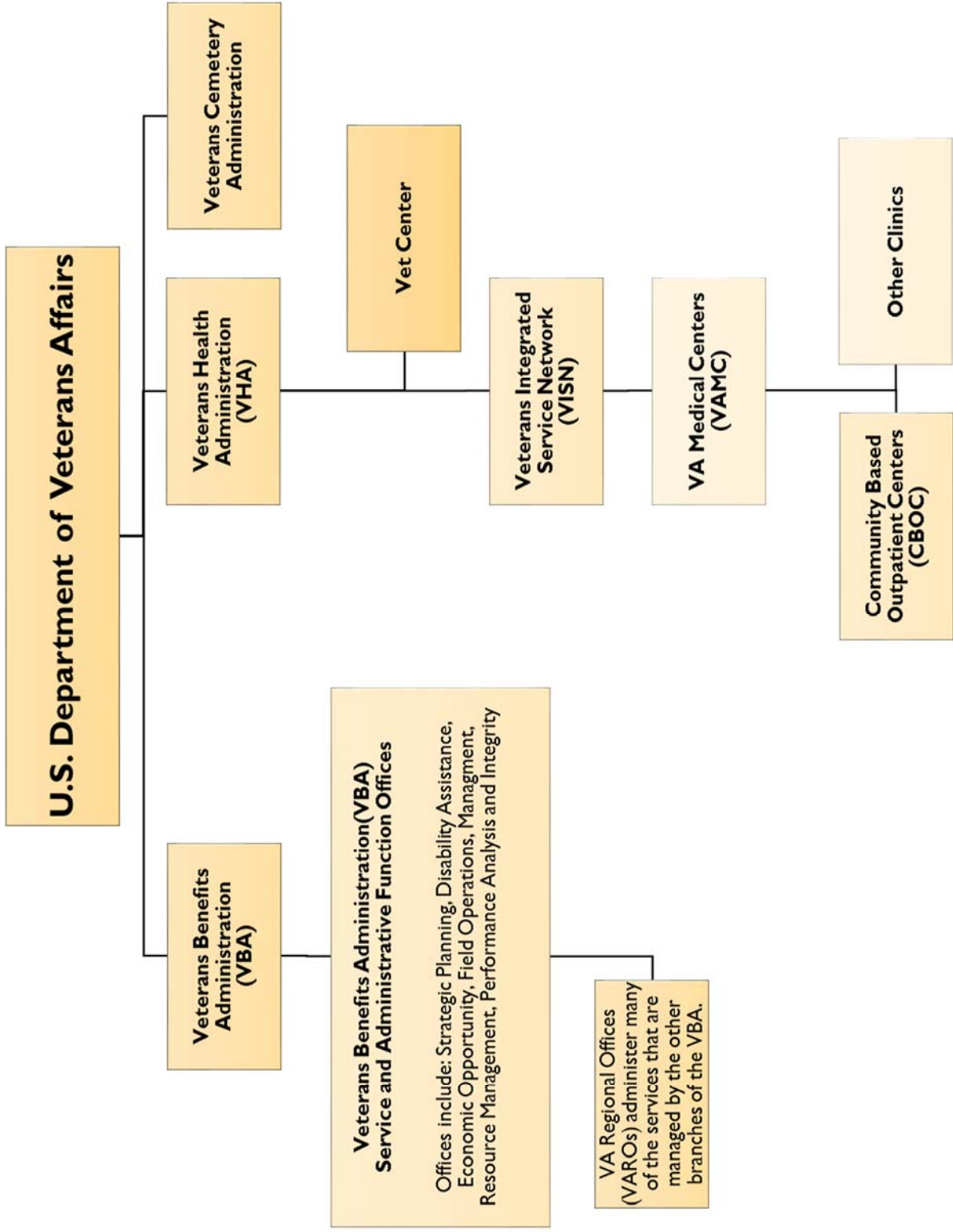
Data Presentation:

The data is presented in the Results section. The Results section is broken down into four sections. The first three sections present the quantitative data organized by subject matter. The fourth section presents the qualitative data.

Frequently Used Acronyms

- **BVA** – Board of Veterans Appeals
- **CBOC** – Community Based Outpatient Center
- **DOD** –Department of Defense
- **PTSD** – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- **VA** – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- **VAMC** – Veterans Affairs Medical Center
- **VARO** – Veterans Affairs Regional Office
- **VBA** – Veterans Benefits Administration
- **VHA** – Veterans Health Administration
- **VISN** – Veterans Integrated Service Network
- **VCP** – Veterans Choice Program
- **VSO** – Veterans Service Organization

Simplified Organizational Chart for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Results

Idaho’s Veterans *page 10*

Provides the results for the questions in Parts 1, 2, 6, and 7 of the survey and more information on the survey participants and their overall views of the VA.

Veterans Benefits Administration *page 14*

Presents the results for the survey questions in Part 3 of the survey, about experiences with the VBA. It also shows how satisfaction breaks down by the benefits Idahoans are using.

Veterans Health Administration *page 29*

Presents the results for the questions in Part 4 of the survey, showing Idahoans’ overall view of the VHA and presents data based on the VA Medical Center (VAMC) Service Area they use.

Participants’ Experiences *page 53*

Presents results for open-ended questions throughout the survey that asked for addition information form the participants.

Wondering what questions were asked in each part of the survey?

A copy of the survey can be found on page 59.



Veterans Survey

Our office's use of information contained in responses to this survey.

Our office intends to report publicly the results of this survey without identifying any survey respondent by name. Our report will include aggregate data collected in response to survey questions as well as select quotations by survey participants. Such quotations, while anonymous, may be made public in a variety of ways and may relate to particular health care facilities, specific locations within the State, or contain other particular information to put the quotation in

Survey Results: Idaho's Veterans

Who took the 2015 Veterans Survey? What do they think about the VA?

The 2015 Veterans Survey received 1,009 responses. Some of these responses were from people who do not live in Idaho and some participants took the survey more than once. Responses from non-Idahoans were removed from the results. If an Idahoan took the survey more than once, both surveys were read, but only the most recent survey was counted and used for data purposes. After removing non-Idahoans and duplicates, 924 survey responses remained for analysis.

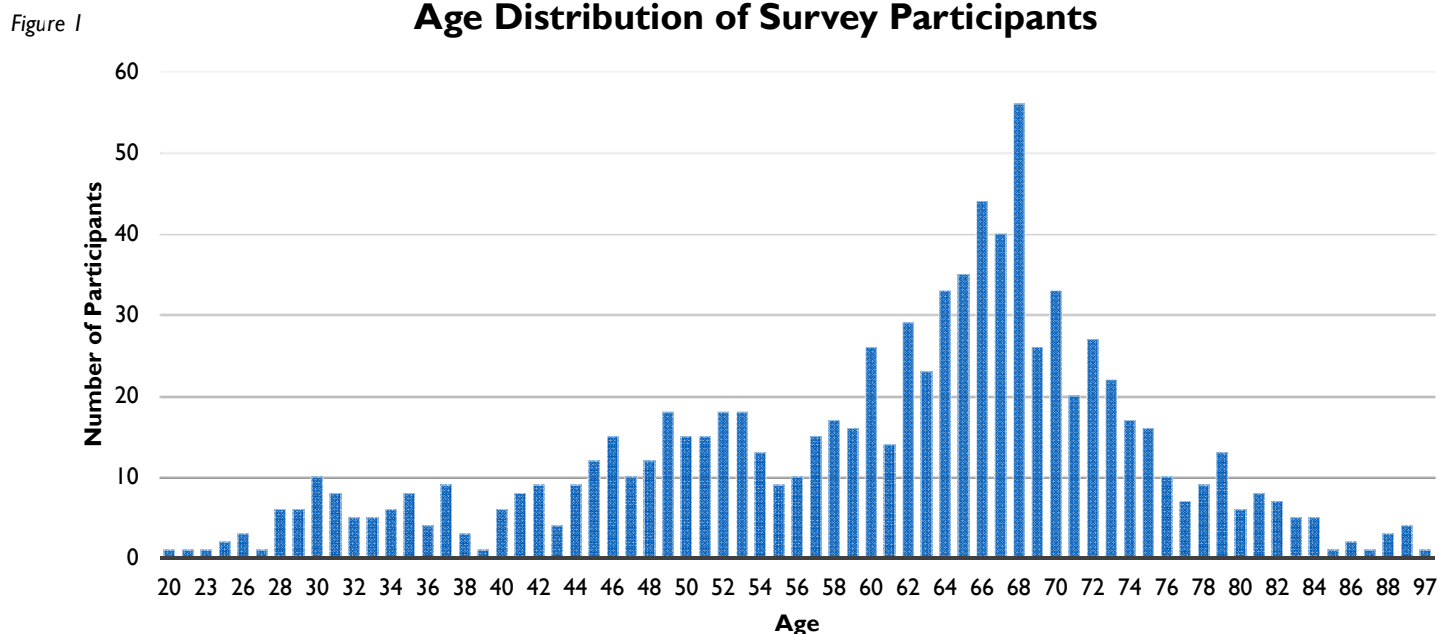
In the first part of the survey, Idahoans were asked to provide personal information, including contact information. Participants had the option of providing information about their age and gender.

Almost 88 percent of survey participants identified themselves as male. Only 10 percent of survey participants identified themselves as female. This is consistent with the VA's estimate of the size of the female veteran population¹.

Gender*	
Age*	

*I am asking about your gender and your experience as a man or woman

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the participants. The average age of survey participants was 60.5 years old. The youngest person to take the veterans survey was 20 years old and the oldest was 97 years old.



¹ For more on this topic, please visit the VA's website on Facts and Statistics about Women Veterans: <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/womenshealth/latestinformation/facts.asp>

Part 2- Relationship with Veterans

- 2.1) What is your relationship with veterans and service members? Please select one.
- I have served in the U.S. military.
 - I am the family member of someone who has served in the U.S. military.
 - I have a personal relationship with someone who served in the U.S. military (e.g. friend, colleague, neighbor).
- 2.2) Do you or your veteran belong to any veterans' organizations?
- Yes
 - No
- If yes, please specify: _____

After providing contact information, participants were asked about their relationships with veterans. **Ninety-six percent of survey participants have served in the U.S. military.** The remaining four percent of participants include family members, friends, and members of the community who have relationships with veterans.

Sixty percent of Idahoans surveyed belong to at least one Veterans Service Organization (VSO). The most frequently mentioned VSOs were the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled Veterans of America.

Parts 3 and 4 asked questions about the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The results for those portions of the survey are presented in subsequent sections of this report. Part 5 of the survey asked participants to share additional positive and/or negative experiences. This section cannot be quantified and the results of this portion of the survey are shared on page 53.

Part 6 of the 2015 Veterans Survey asked participants to characterize their overall satisfaction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and to share information about change within the VA over the past year. **Overall, 52 percent of survey participants were “satisfied” or better with their experiences with the VA. Twenty-seven percent were “dissatisfied” or worse.**

Part 6 – C
6.1) Overall, how would you (or your veteran) characterize your experience with Veterans Affairs? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

6.2) Did you take my veterans survey last year?

- Yes
- No

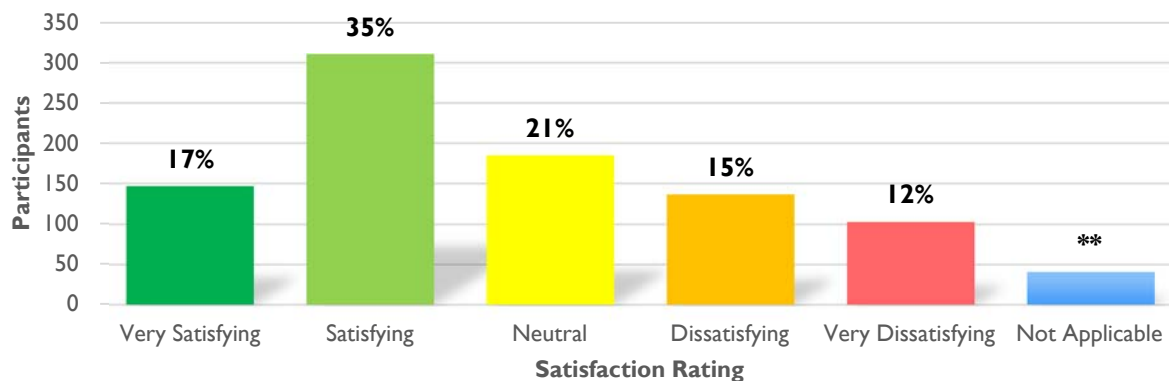
6.3) Since August 2014, do you think your experience with Veterans Affairs has...

- Improved significantly
- Improved somewhat
- Remained the same
- Worsened somewhat
- Worsened significantly

6.4) Do you have recommendations for VA improvement?

Figure 2

Overall, how would you characterize your experience with the US Department of Veterans Affairs?



** “Not applicable” responses were excluded from the satisfaction percentages calculated above. The “not applicable” responses will not be shown in following figures that show the proportion of satisfaction ratings unless otherwise stated. Only results from applicable participants will be shown.

Improving the VA is an ongoing process. The 2015 Veterans Survey asked participants to rate the change, if any, they experienced with the VA since August 2014, the time period in which the 2014 Veterans Survey was conducted. As seen in Figure 3, the majority of participants responded that their experiences with the VA have remained the same. **Twenty-four percent of participants think their experiences with the VA have improved “somewhat” or better.**

Slightly more than half of this year’s survey participants (51 percent) took the 2014 Veterans Survey.

Figure 4 compares change in participants’ experiences with the VA since August 2014 relative to whether or not the participant took the 2014 Veterans Survey. A slightly larger portion of the participants who took the survey in 2014 and 2015 saw positive change with their VA experiences.

Figure 3

Change in VA Experience Since August 2014

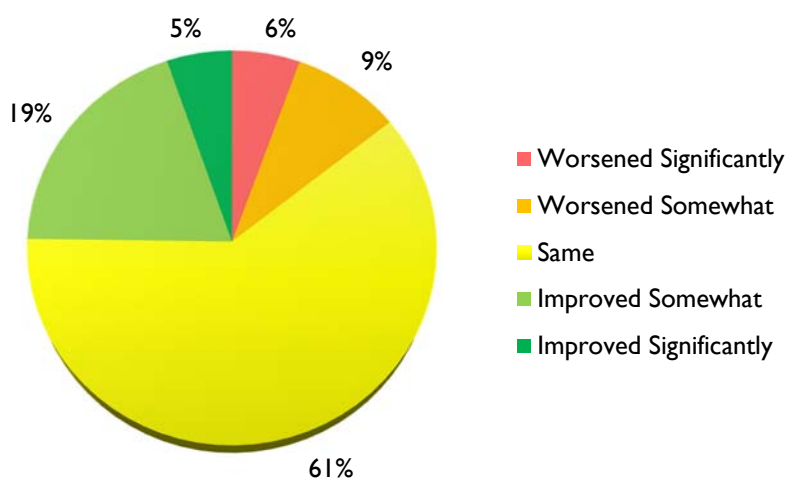
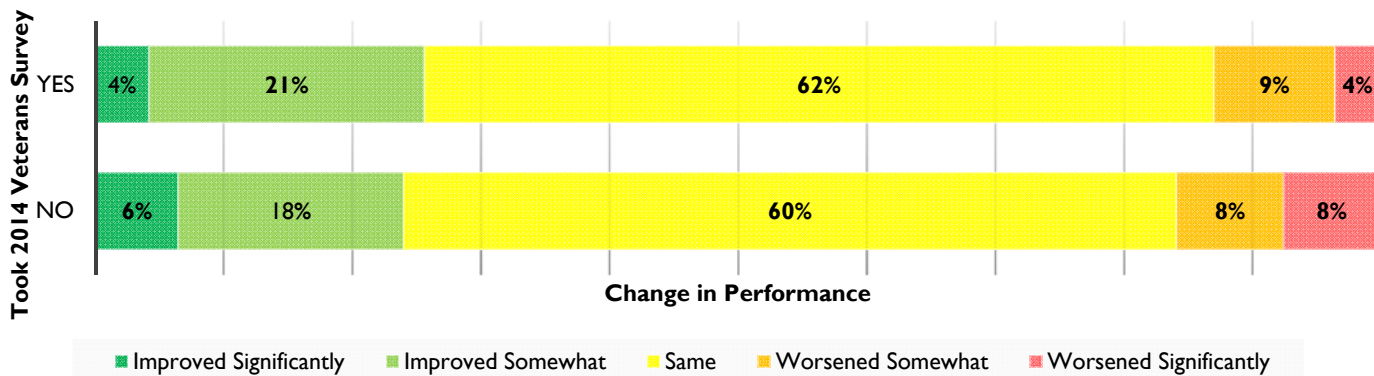


Figure 4

Change in Perception Compared Between Participants Who Took the 2014 Veterans Survey and Those Who Did Not



At the end of the survey (in Part 7), participants were asked if they had an ongoing issue with the VA with which they would like assistance. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents said “yes.”

Sixty-five percent of those who said they had an ongoing issue requested that staff from Senator Crapo’s office reach out to discuss the matter. In all, 16 percent of survey participants asked that staff contact them directly to discuss a VA matter with which they wanted assistance.

Need help with a federal agency?

Many Idahoans are unaware that they can come to Senator Crapo for help with personal issues that involve federal agencies.

From January 2015 to the end of October 2015, Senator Crapo helped Idahoans receive \$1,100,175.46 in missing benefits. Seventy-two percent of these benefits, or \$787,677.86, came to veterans and their families from the VA.

Please visit http://crapo.senate.gov/services/personal_assistance.cfm if you are interested in learning more about what Senator Crapo can do for you.

Survey Results: Veterans Benefits Administration

What do Idahoans think about the VBA?

Part 3 – Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

3.1) Are your (or your veteran's) VA claims handled by the Boise Regional Office?

- Yes
- No

If no, which VBA office do you (or your veteran) use? _____

If you use multiple VBA offices, please list the offices you use: _____

3.2) Overall, how would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experiences with the VBA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

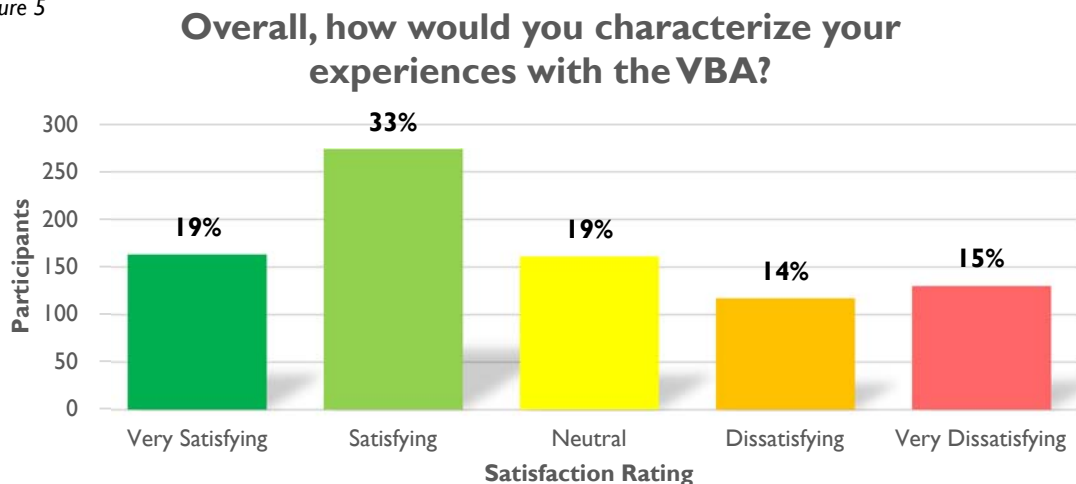
Part 3 focused on participants' experiences with the VBA. The survey separated questions about the VBA and VHA at the request of individuals in the veterans community.

Seventy-one percent of Idahoans said their claims were being handled through the Boise VA Regional Office (VARO). Many of the remaining participants indicated that they were not currently eligible for benefits through the VBA. Others

said their claims were handled by the Portland VARO, the Salt Lake City VARO, or the Fort Harrison VARO.

Fifty-two percent of participants were “satisfied” or better with their experiences with the VBA while 29 percent were “dissatisfied” or worse.

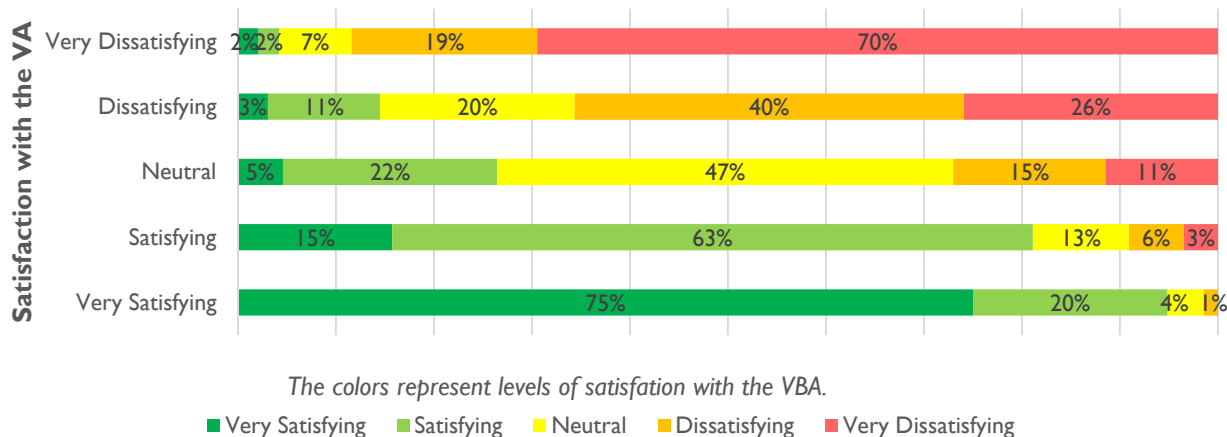
Figure 5



The relationship between a participant’s overall satisfaction with the VA and his or her satisfaction with the VBA. Figure 6 shows a strong correlation between participants’ satisfaction with the VA and their satisfaction with the VBA. Ninety-five percent of participants who were very satisfied with the VA were “satisfied” or better with the VBA. Conversely, 89 percent of participants who were very dissatisfied with the VA were “dissatisfied” or worse with the VBA.

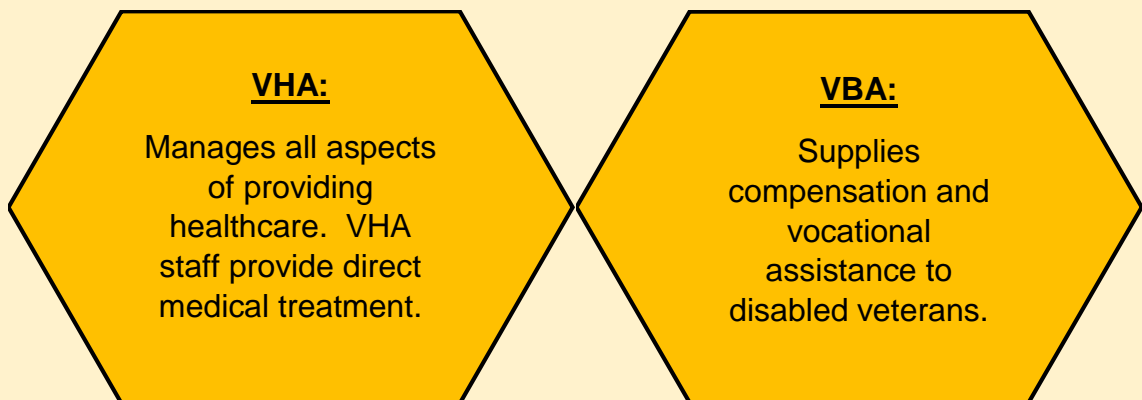
Figure 6

Comparison of Satisfaction with the VA to Satisfaction with the VBA



What is the difference between the VHA and the VBA?

The VA is composed of three unique Administrations—the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration. Often, individuals cannot distinguish between the VBA and the VHA although they have shared, yet distinctly different missions:



The survey asked participants to share information about which benefits they use currently or plan to use in the future. Participants were able to select as many benefits as they liked.

Figure 7

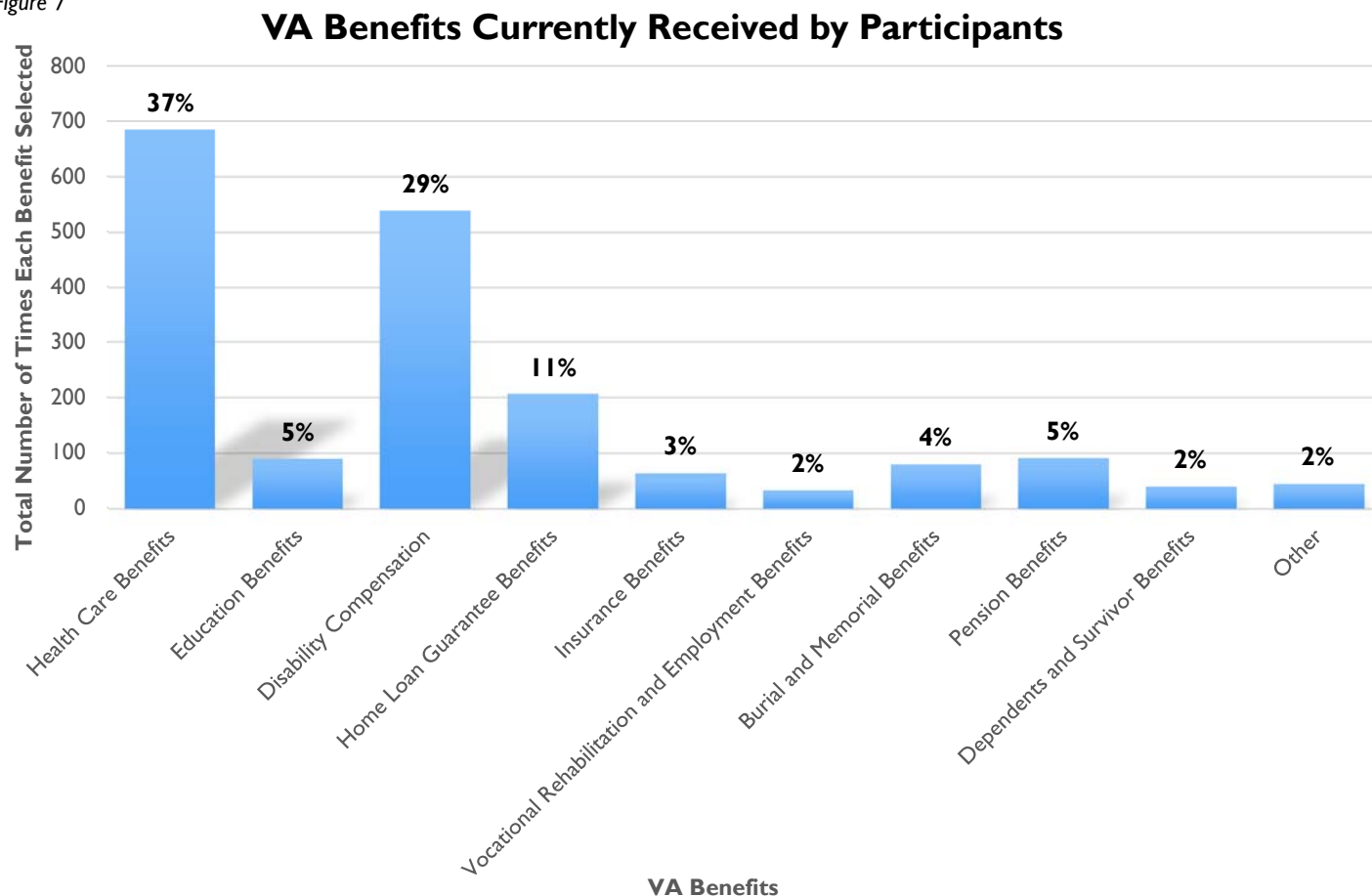


Figure 7 excludes the four percent of participants who indicated this question was “not applicable” to them. The results above are the benefits used by the remaining 96 percent of participants.

Do you want to learn more about the benefits available to U.S. servicemembers?

- You can learn more from the VA online at <http://benefits.va.gov/benefits/factsheets.asp>
- You can also call the VA at 1-(800)-827-1000.
- You may also consider contacting the Idaho Division of Veterans Services (IDVS):

IDVS
351 Collins Road
Boise, ID 83702
(208) 780-1300

There are a few differences between the benefits participants currently use and the benefits they plan to use in the future. Four percent of participants said they currently use burial and memorial benefits, but 20 percent of participants plan to use them in the future.

To learn more about burial and memorial benefits, please visit the VA's National Cemetery Administration:

- www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits
- 1-(800)-827-1000

Although 37 percent of participants use health care benefits currently, only 25 percent plan to use them in the future. Similarly, 29 percent of participants currently receive disability compensation while 19 percent expect to receive disability compensation in the future.

Figure 8

VA Benefits Participants Plan to Receive in the Future

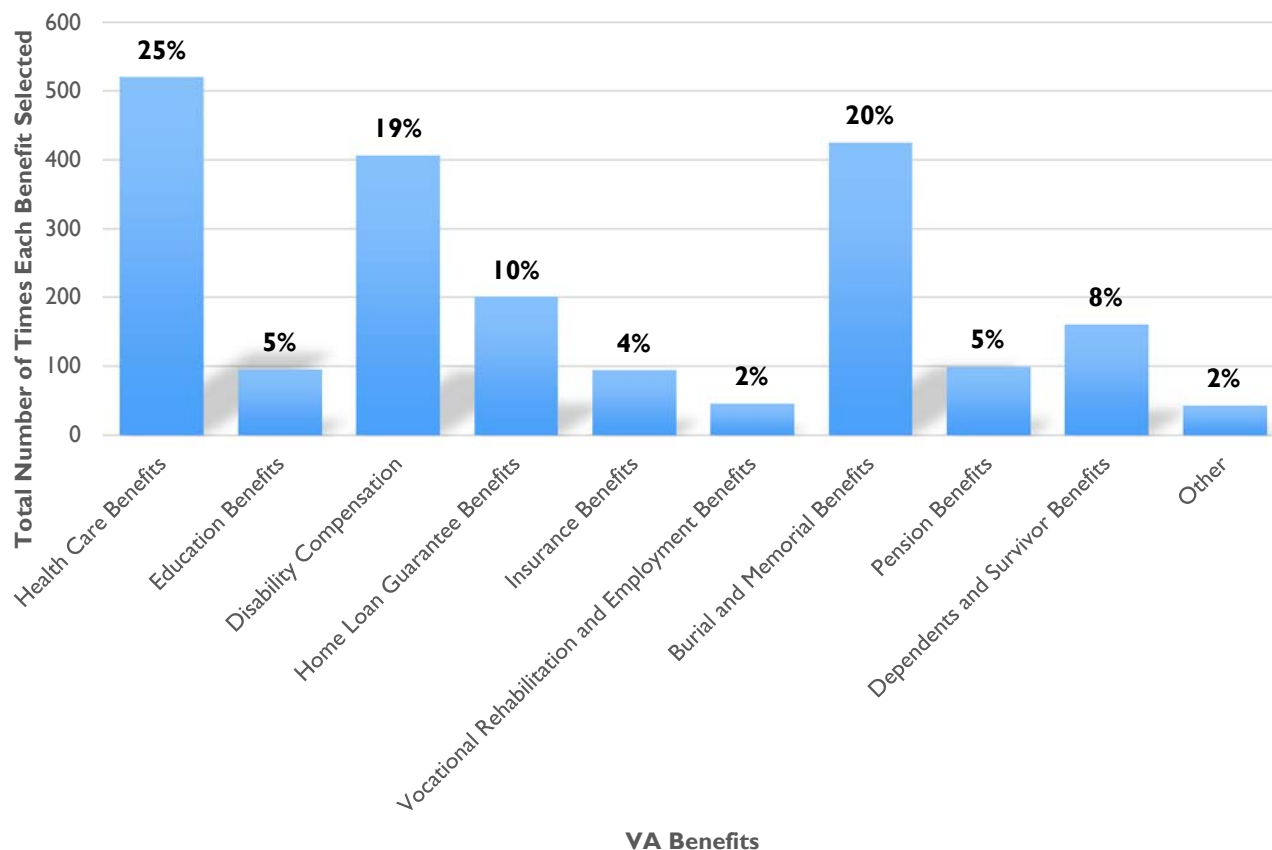


Figure 8 excludes the five percent of survey participants who said this question was “not applicable” to them.

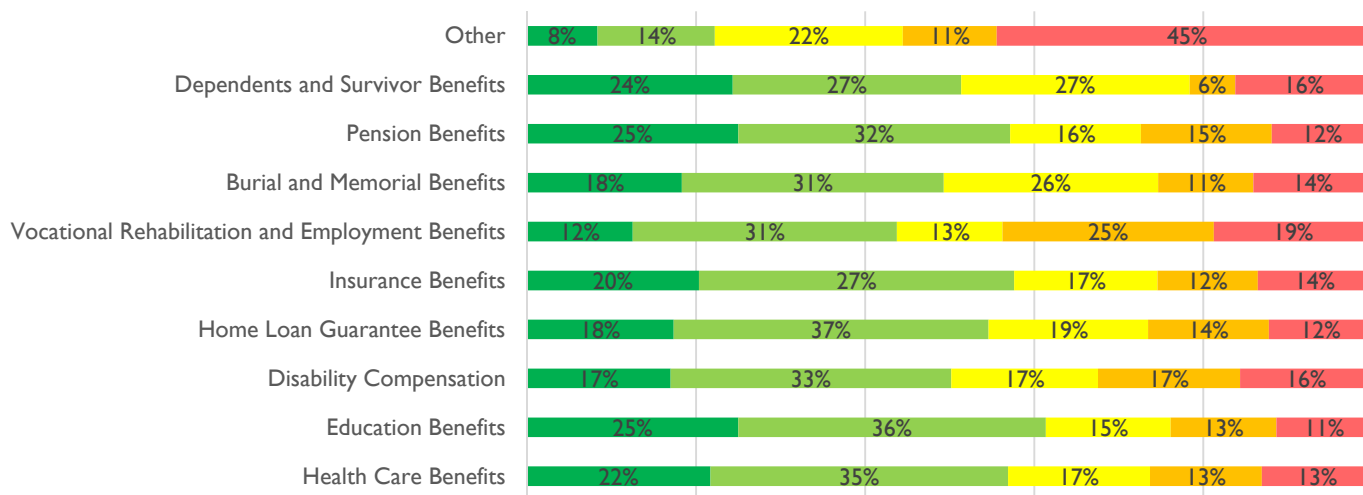
Figure 9 breaks down participant satisfaction with the VBA by the benefits participants currently use. These variables were cross-analyzed in order to see if there are certain benefits that have a higher proportion of participants with very satisfying or very dissatisfying VBA experiences. The only relationship of note is found in the “Other” benefit used by participants. Here, 45 percent of participants are “very dissatisfied.” Most of these participants did not explain which “Other” benefits they receive.

3.3) What VA benefits do you (or your veteran) receive at this time? Please select all that apply.

- Health Care Benefits
- Educational Benefits
- Disability Compensation
- Home Loan Guarantee Benefits
- Insurance Benefits
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits
- Burial and Memorial Benefits
- Pension Benefits
- Dependents and Survivors Benefits
- Not Applicable
- Other: _____

Figure 9

Comparison of Benefits Used By VBA Satisfaction



The colors represent level of satisfaction with the VBA.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying

In Figure 9, each line corresponds to the benefit to the left. The colors of the line explain how users of that benefit characterized their satisfaction with the VBA.

What's the difference between the "claims process" and the "claims appeals process?"

There are many types of VA **claims**. Claims can be based on disabilities that existed when entering military service but were made worse, disabilities that occurred during service, or disabilities that arose after leaving military service. Some claims can be filed for special circumstances. **Filing a claim is the initial step to seeking compensation benefits.** For more information, please visit:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/process.asp>

A **claims appeal** is a secondary request to petition the VA to reconsider a denied claim. Anyone not satisfied with the results of a claim for benefits may file a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) to initiate an appeal of a decision. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.bva.va.gov/docs/Pamphlets/How-Do-I-Appeal-Booklet--508Compliance.pdf>

Survey participants were asked to characterize their experiences with the claims process and the claims appeal process.

Forty-one percent of participants said their experiences with claims processing were "satisfying" or better, while 39 percent said their experiences were "dissatisfying" or worse. Fourteen percent of Idahoans said the question about the claims process was "not applicable" to them.

3.5) How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experience with claims processing? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

3.6) How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experience with the claims appeal process? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Figure 10

How would you characterize your experience with claims processing?

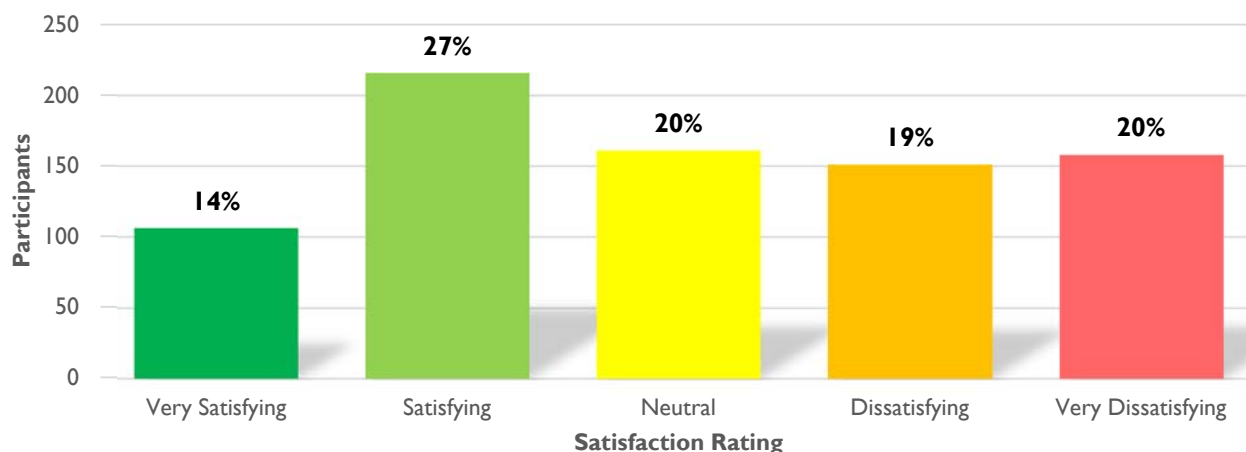
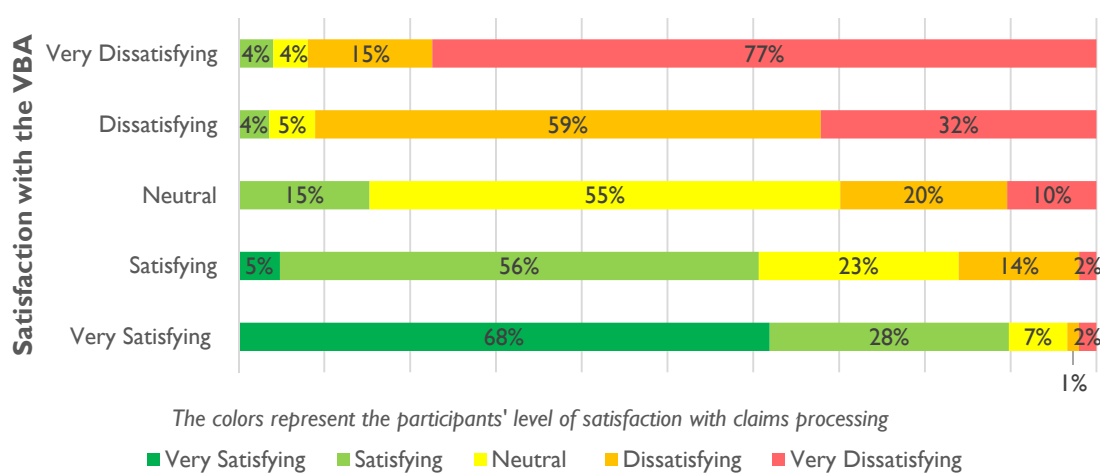


Figure 11 compares participants' satisfaction with the VBA to their experience with claims processing in order to see if claims processing has any bearing on their satisfaction with the VBA. The satisfaction ratings are clearly correlated: those who had very satisfying experiences with the VBA also had very satisfying experiences with claims processing. Those who were very dissatisfied with the VBA had very dissatisfying experiences with the VBA. **Of all the participants who rated overall satisfaction with the VBA as “dissatisfying” or worse, not a single participant rated his or her experience with claims processing as “very satisfying.”**

Figure 11

VBA Satisfaction Rating Compared to Satisfaction with Claims Processing



Do you know about the Fully Developed Claims (FDC) program?

The FDC program is an optional initiative that offers veterans and survivors faster decisions from the VA on compensation, pension, and survivor benefit claims.

For more information on the FDC program, please visit:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/FDC/index.asp>

For more information on the steps of the FDC process, please refer to:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/FDC/walkthrough.asp>

If you need assistance offline, you may wish to call 1-(800)-827-1000.

Figure 12

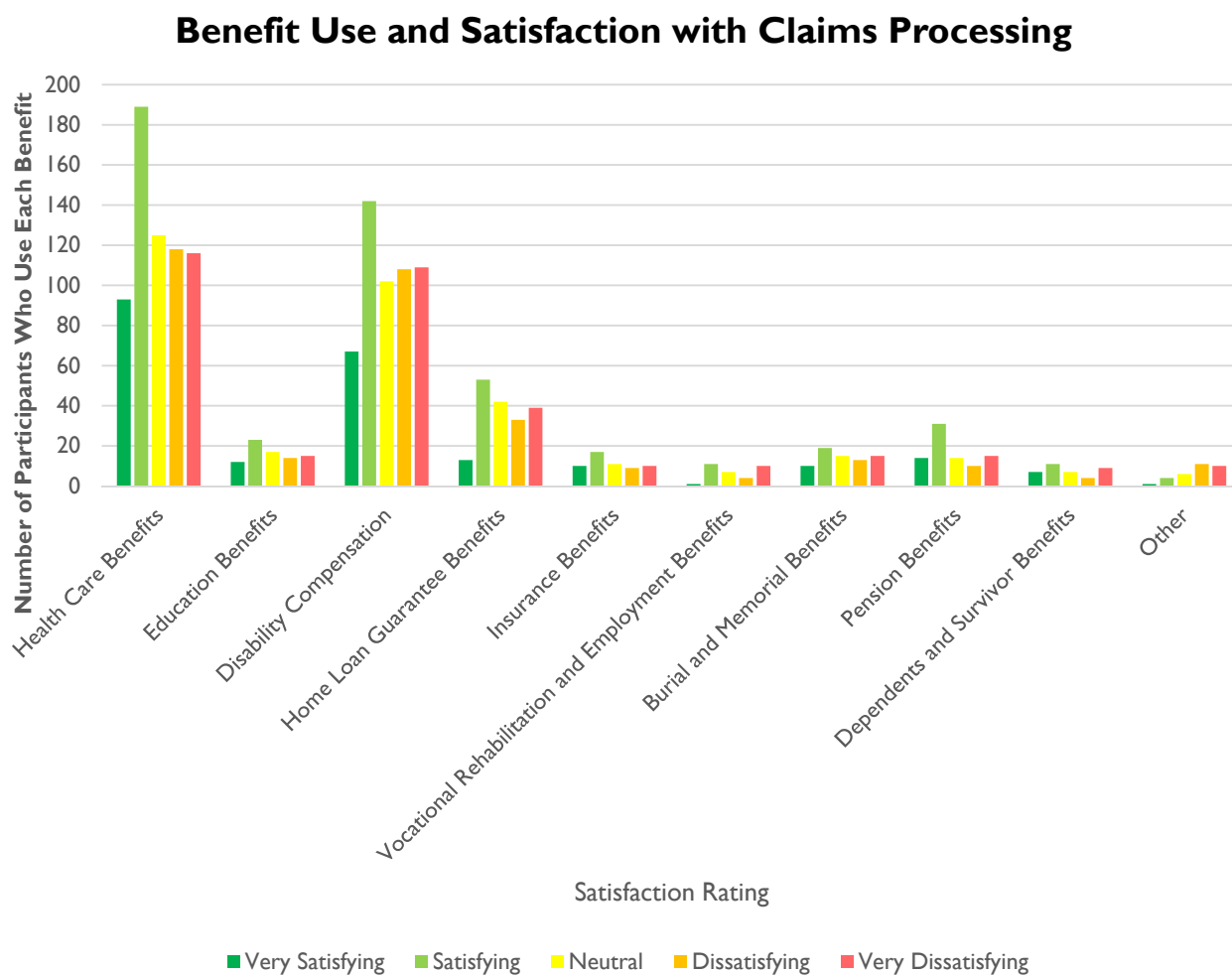


Figure 12 displays the benefits used by those who characterized their satisfaction with the claims process. For those who use health care benefits, 44 percent were “satisfied” or better with the claims process while 37 percent were “dissatisfied” or worse with the claims process. There were more participants “very dissatisfied” with claims processing than “very satisfied” for every category of benefit except insurance benefits.

After characterizing their experiences with claims processing, participants were asked to characterize their experiences with the claims appeal process. Whereas 14 percent of participants said the question about the claims process was not applicable to them, 41 percent of participants said the question about the claims appeal process was not applicable. Fewer people appeal claims.

For the participants who rated the claims appeal process, **48 percent said their experience with the process was “dissatisfying” or worse**. Only 25 percent of participants said their experiences with claims processing were “satisfying” or better. This is a clear area where there is room for improvement.

Figure 13

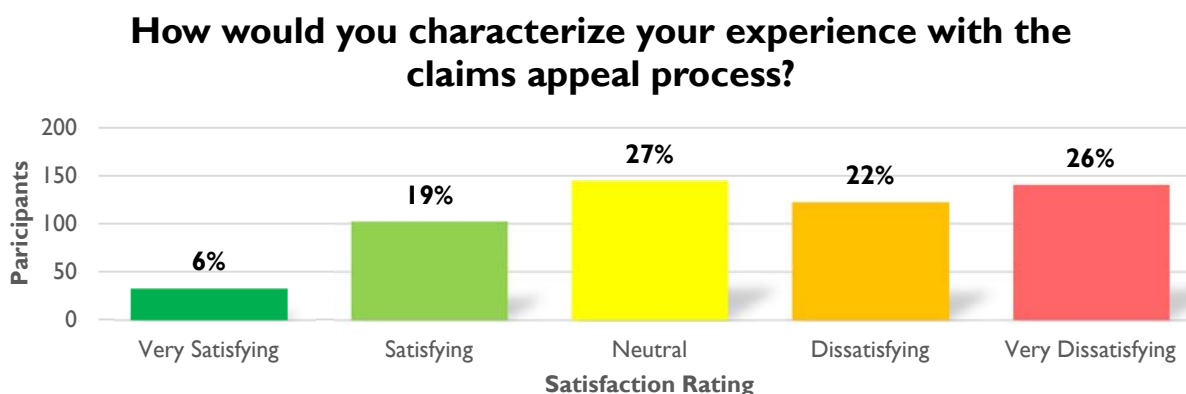


Figure 13 compares participants’ satisfaction with the VBA to their experience with the claims appeal process in order to see if the claims appeal process has any bearing on their satisfaction with the VBA. Seventy-seven percent of those very satisfied with VBA were “satisfied” or better with the claims appeal process. **Ninety-one percent of those very dissatisfied with the VBA were “dissatisfied” or worse with the claims appeals process.**

Figure 14

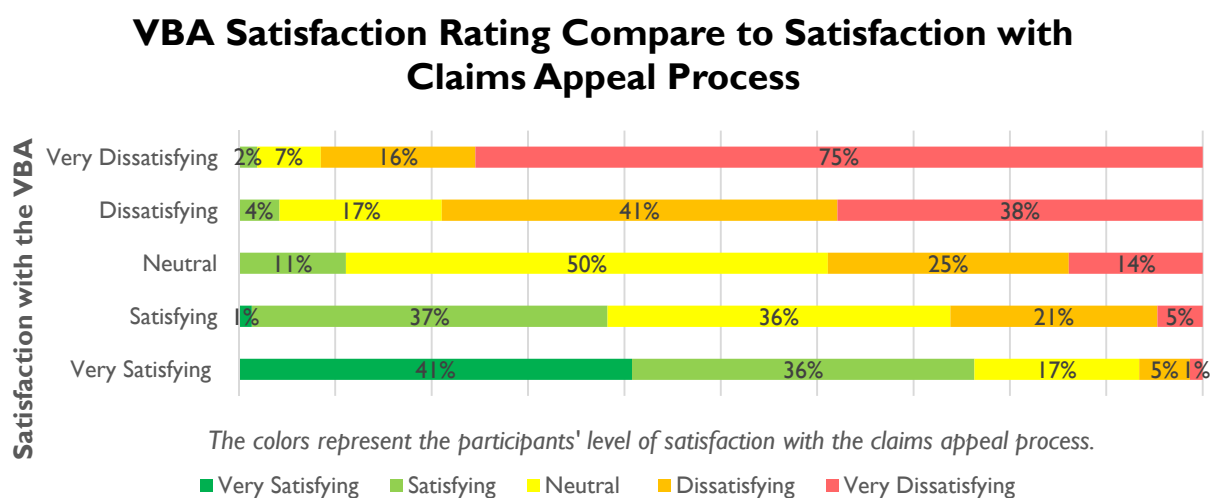
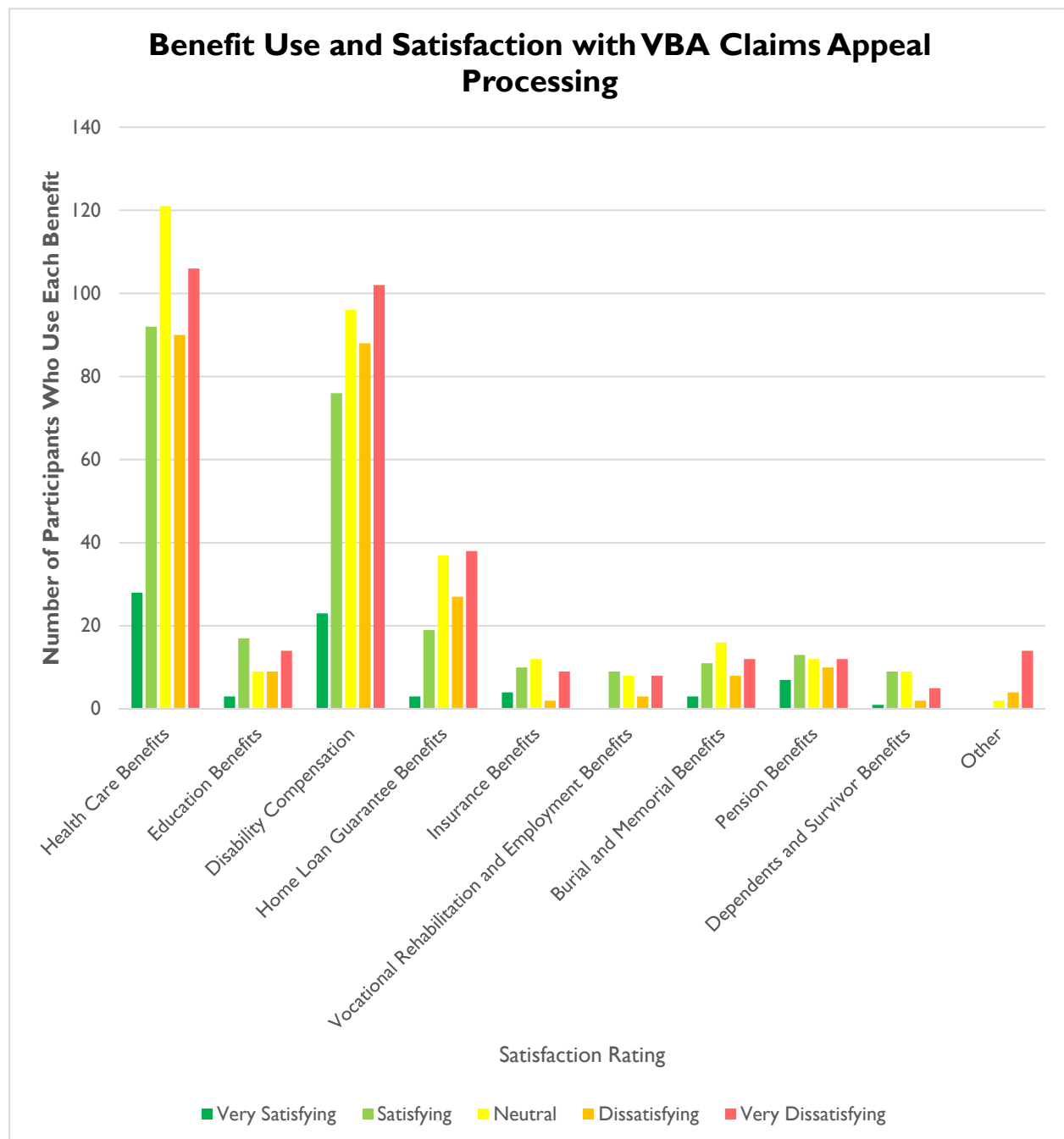


Figure 15 shows participants' satisfaction with claims appeals processing relative to the benefits they used. The majority of participants who rated their experiences with the VBA claims appeal process as "dissatisfying" or worse use health care benefits and/or disability compensation.

Figure 15



3.7) How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) interactions with VBA staff? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

The 2014 Veterans Survey found that customer service is an important determinate of an Idahoan's satisfaction with the VA. The 2015 Veterans Survey asked participants to rate their experiences with staff at the VBA as a way of gauging their

satisfaction with VBA's customer service. The results of this year's survey show the quality of the interactions veterans have with VBA staff has a strong correlation with the overall satisfaction the participant has with the VBA.

Fifty-three percent of the remaining participants characterized their interactions with VBA staff as "satisfying" or better. Twenty-two percent of survey participants characterized their interactions with VBA staff as "dissatisfying" or worse. **For this question, there are more than twice as many "satisfied" and better participants than there are "dissatisfied" and worse.** Thirteen percent of participants said this question was "not applicable."

Figure 16

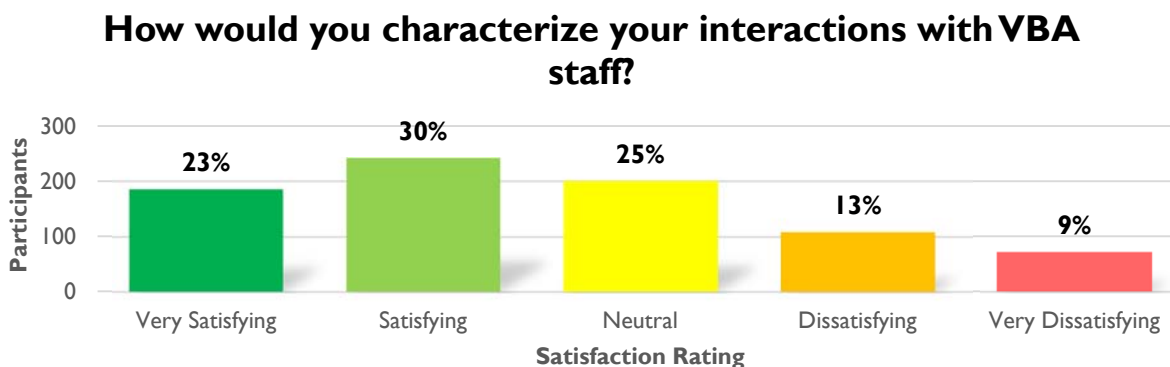


Figure 17 clearly shows the relationship between customer service and satisfaction with the VBA. **Ninety-six percent of participants who were "very satisfied" with the VBA were "satisfied" or better with their interactions with VBA staff.**

Figure 17

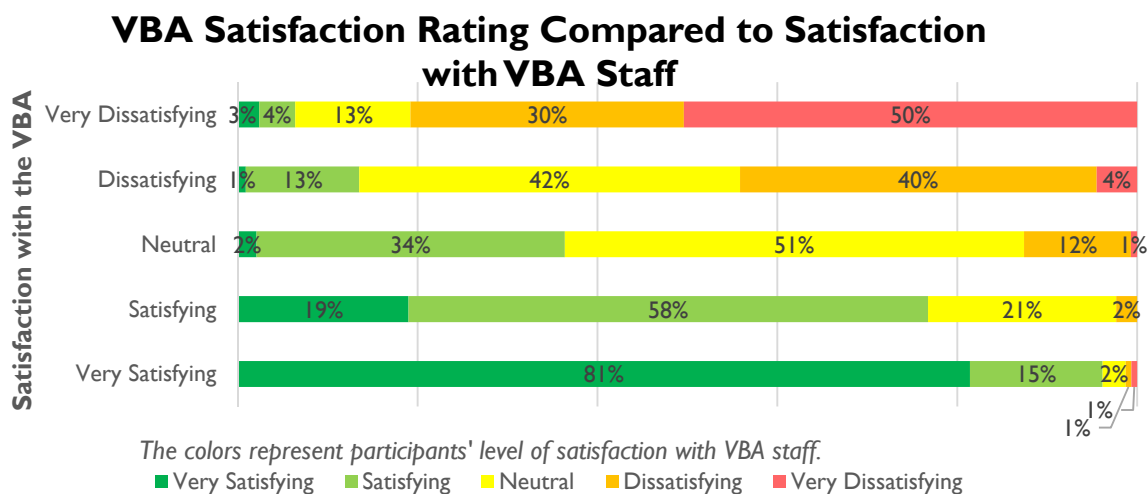
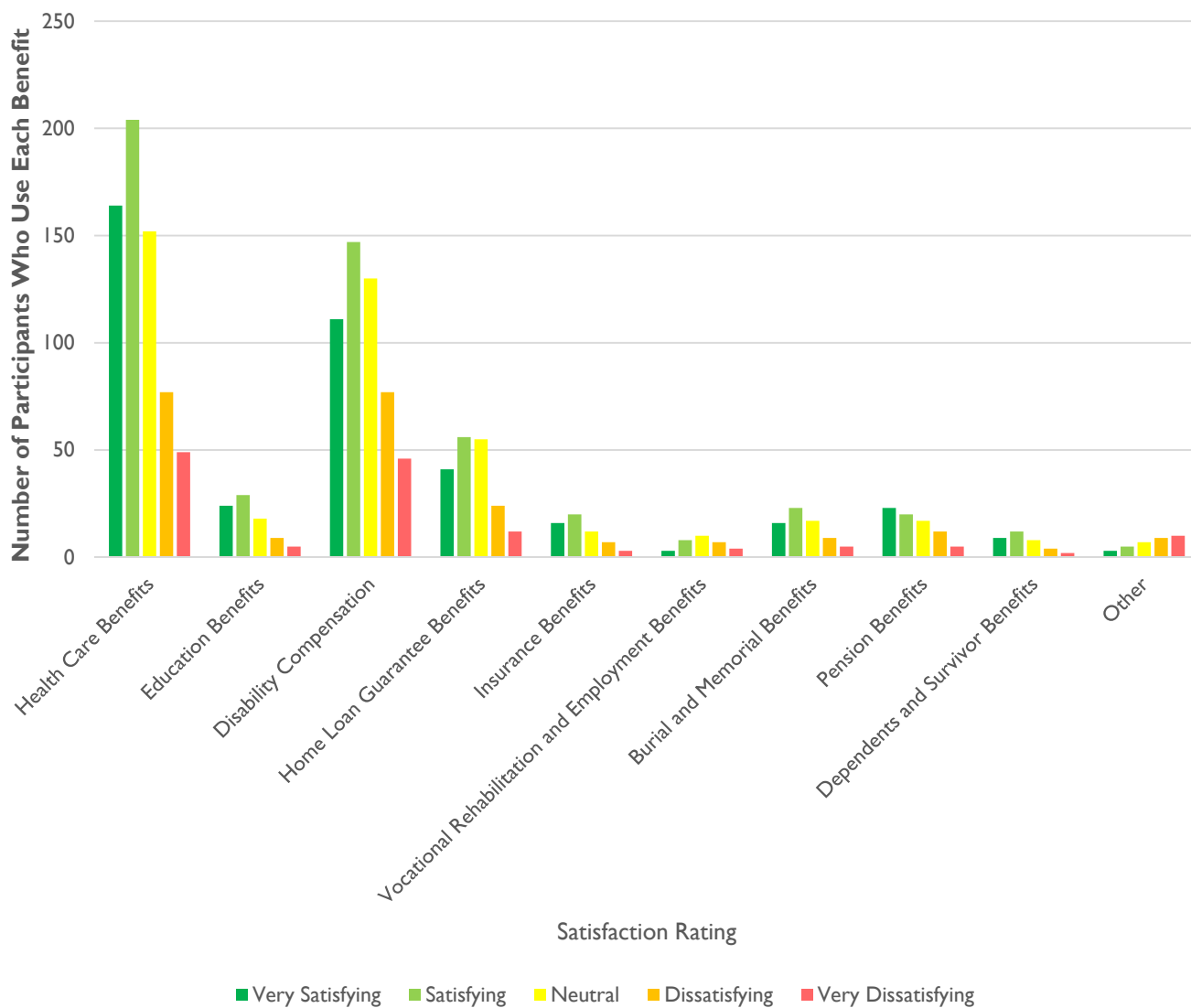


Figure 18 shows the satisfaction ratings for participants' interactions with VBA staff relative to the benefits they currently receive. This figure reinforces the finding that participants are generally "satisfied" or better with their interactions with the VBA staff.

Figure 18

Benefit Use and Satisfaction with VBA Staff



In the final question of the VBA portion of the survey, participants were asked how they would characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VBA. This question was asked because timeliness and responsiveness were important determinants of satisfaction in the 2014 Veterans Survey.

3.8) How would you characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VBA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Participants' experiences are split almost evenly between those with "satisfying" and better experiences and those with "dissatisfying" or worse experiences. Twelve percent of survey participants said this question was "not applicable" to them.

316 participants rated timeliness and responsiveness as "satisfying" or better.

315 participants rated timeliness and responsiveness as "dissatisfying or worse."

Figure 19

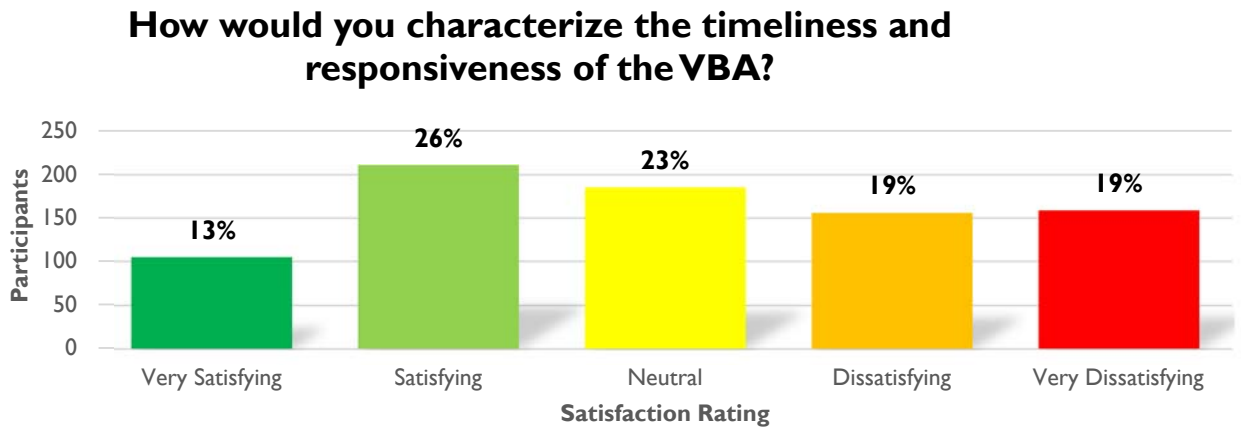


Figure 20

VBA Satisfaction Rating Compared to Satisfaction with Timeliness and Responsiveness

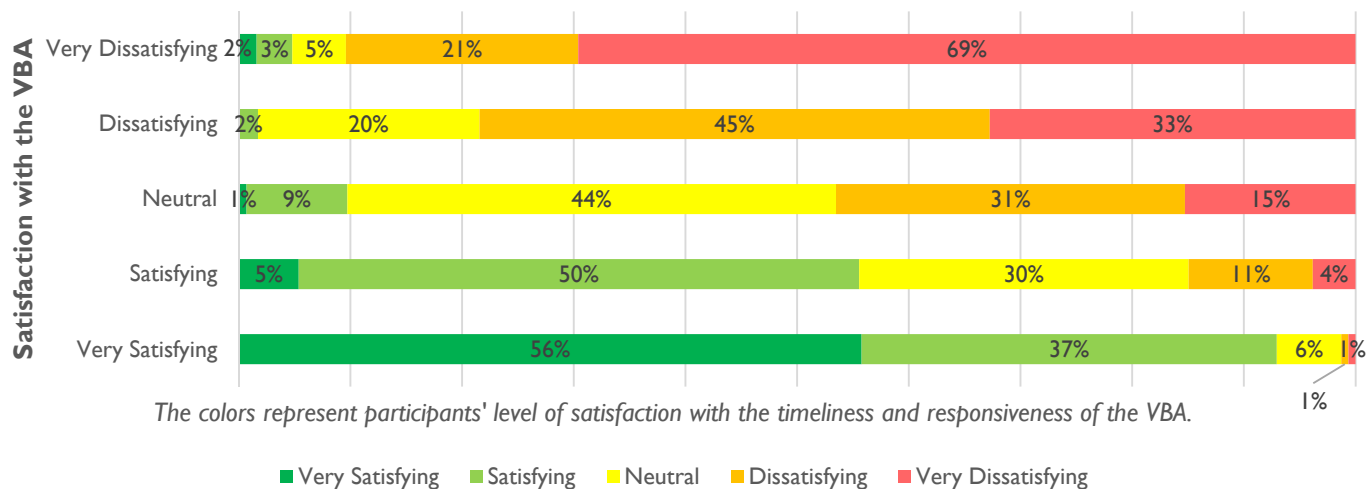
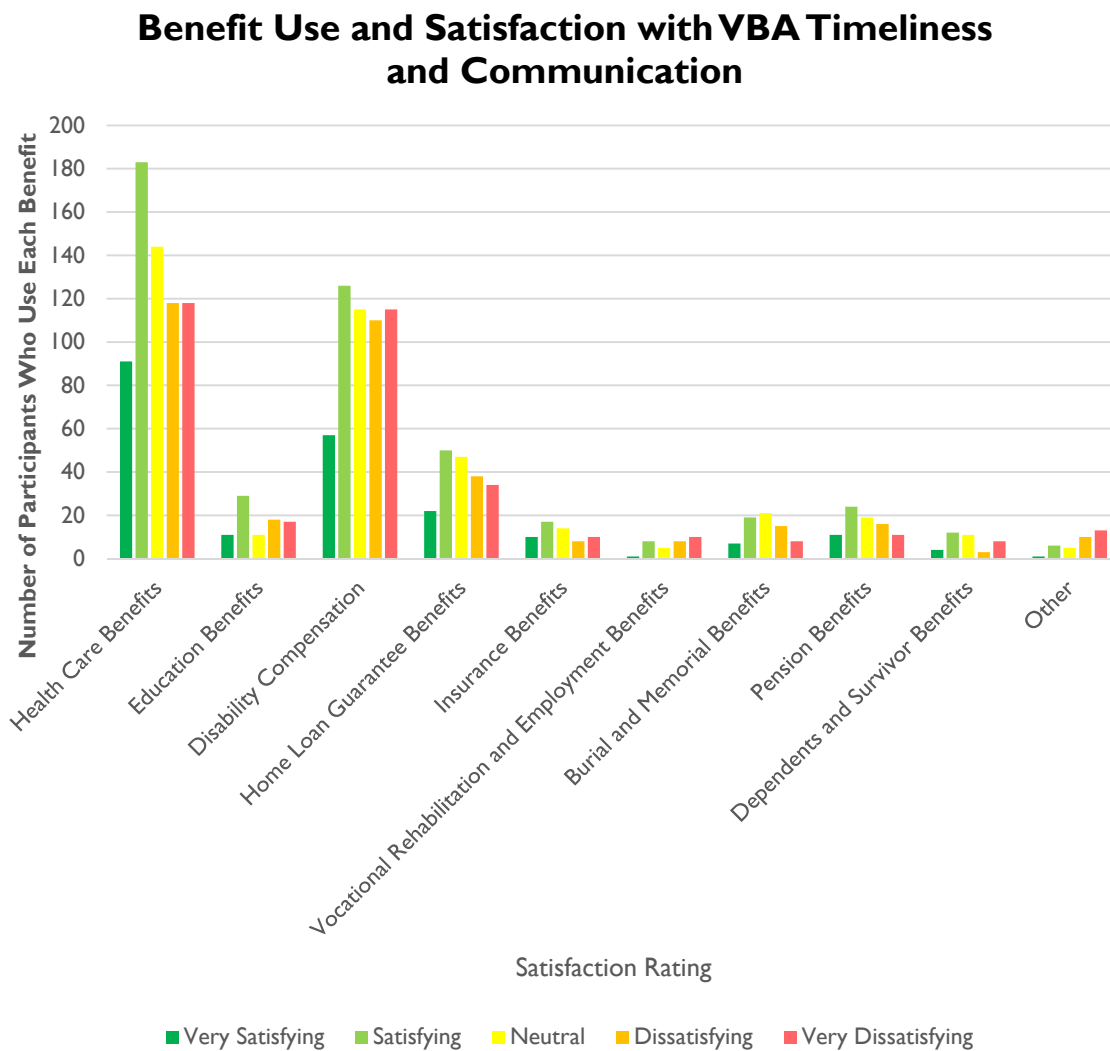


Figure 20 compares participants' satisfaction with the VBA's timeliness and responsiveness with their overall satisfaction with the VBA. These two variables are strongly correlated. **Ninety-three percent of participants who were "very satisfied" with the VBA rated their satisfaction with its timeliness and responsiveness as "satisfying" or better. Ninety percent of those "dissatisfied" or worse with the VBA rated its timeliness and responsiveness as "dissatisfying" or worse.**

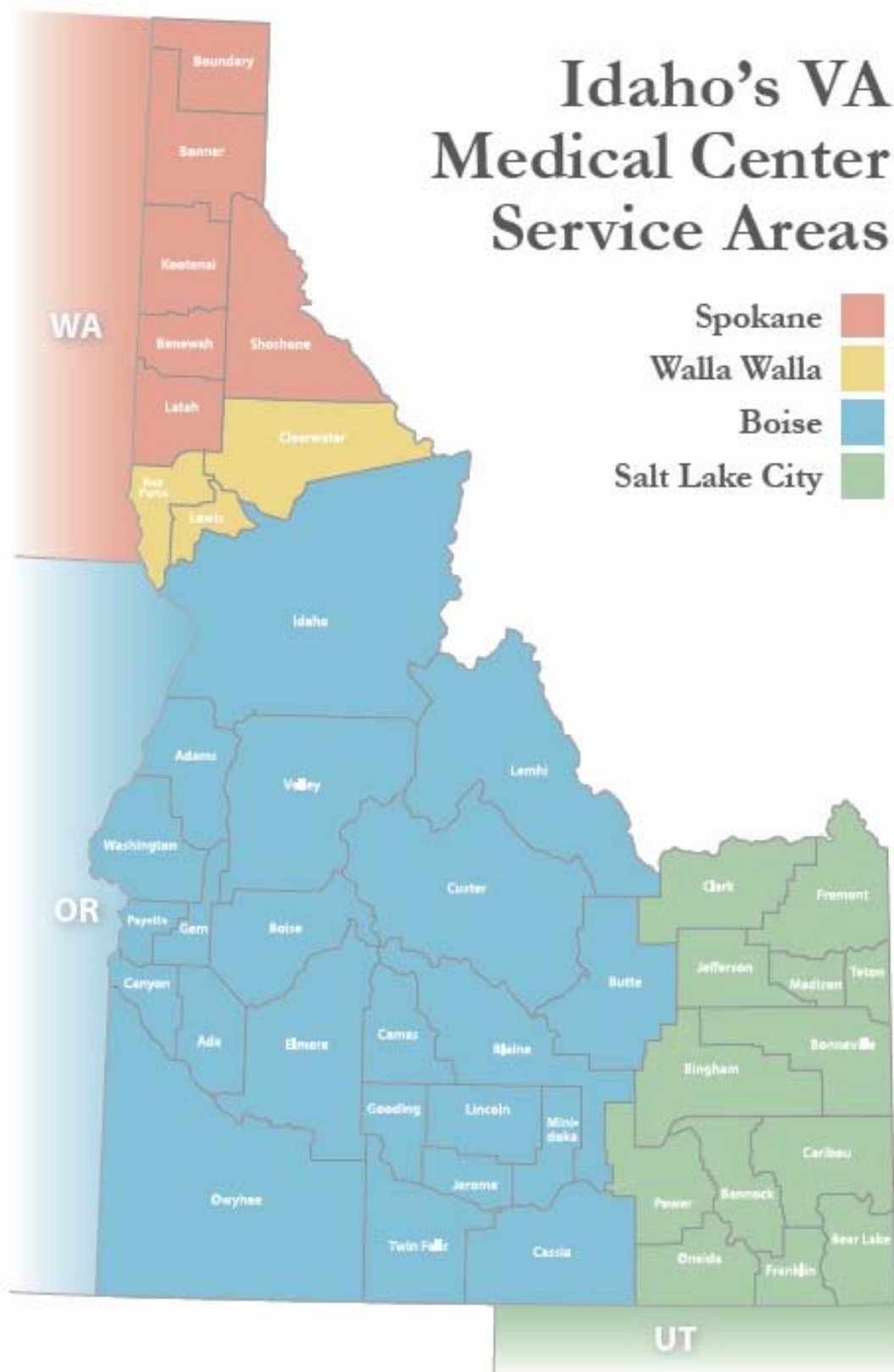
Figure 21 shows the participants' satisfaction with the VBA's timeliness and responsiveness broken down by the benefit participants use.

Figure 21



Survey Results: Veterans Health Administration

What do Idahoans think about the VHA?



Part 4 – Veterans Health Administration

4.1) Which VA facilities do you (or your veteran) use if health care treatment is received through the VA? Please check all that apply, including any Community Based Outpatient Centers (CBOCs.)

Part 4 of the 2015

Veterans Survey asked participants to identify which facilities they (or their veteran) used when accessing care through the VA. Participants were able to select all facilities that applied. Only 8 percent of respondents said this question was “not applicable” to them.

The participants who selected “Other”

described many things. Some used this space to say they were ineligible for VA health care benefits, others used this space to describe received care in the community through the Veterans Choice Program.

- Boise VAMC Service Area
 - Boise VAMC
 - Burns-Hines CBOC
 - Caldwell CBOC
 - Mountain Home CBOC
 - Twin Falls CBOC
 - Salmon CBOC
- Spokane VAMC Service Area
 - Spokane VAMC
 - North Idaho (Coeur d'Alene) CBOC
 - Sandpoint Rural Health Clinic (Ponderay)
- Walla Walla VAMC Service Area
 - Walla Walla WAMC
 - Lewiston CBOC
 - Grangeville CBOC
- Salt Lake City VAMC Service Area
 - Salt Lake City VAMC
 - Pocatello CBOC
 - Idaho Falls Outreach Clinic
- Not Applicable
- Other. Please describe: _____

For reference, below is a map depicting the organization of VHA facilities Idahoans use:

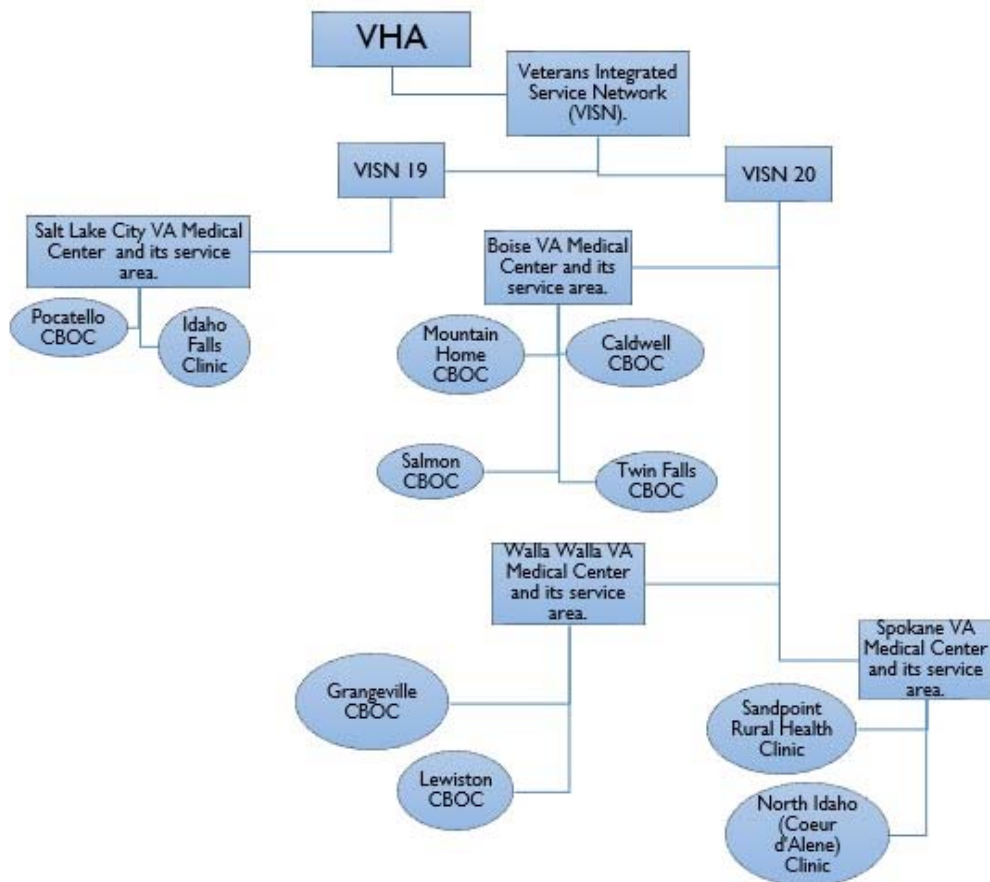
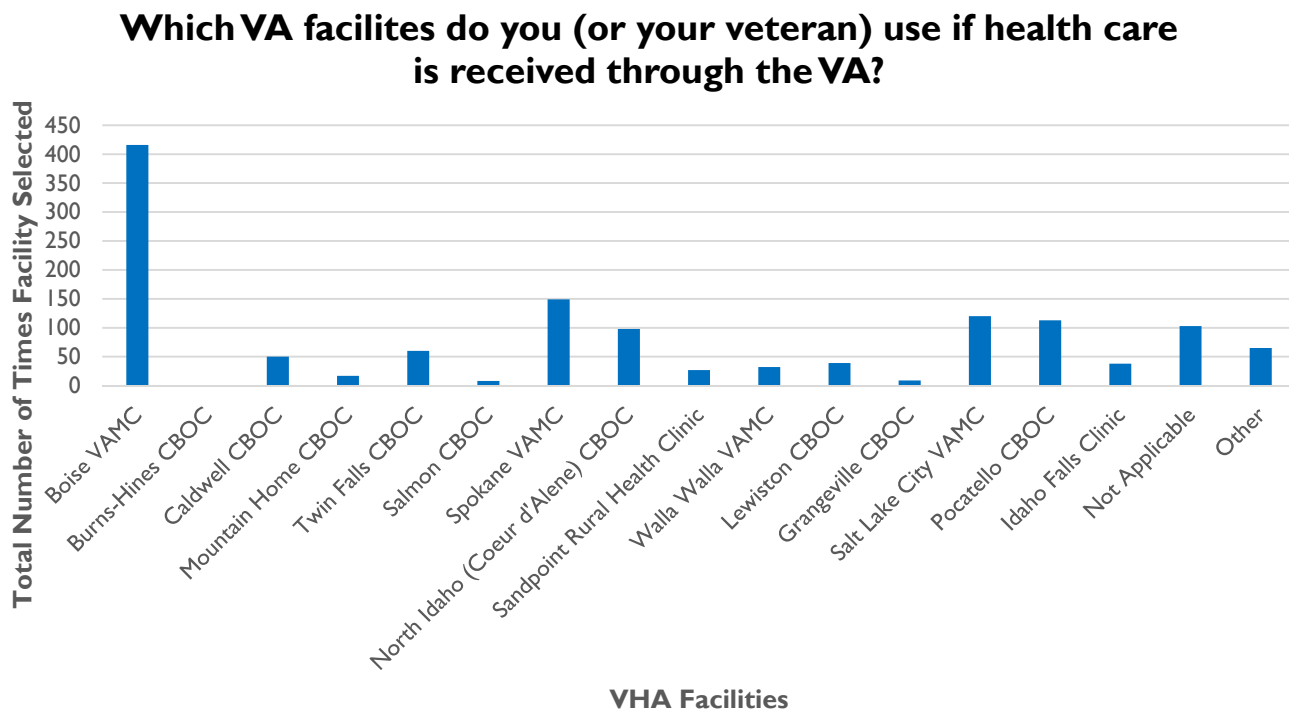


Figure 22



No one in Idaho surveyed uses the Burns-Hines CBOC, located in Oregon. It is part of the Boise VAMC Service Area.

92 percent of participants use the VHA facilities in one of the following VA Medical Center (VAMC) service areas:

- Boise VAMC Service Area;
- Spokane VAMC Service Area;
- Walla Walla VAMC Service Area;
- Salt Lake City VAMC Service Area.

Figure 23 shows the proportion of participants that use each service area. Those who answered “not applicable” are excluded from the graph. A plurality of survey participants use VHA facilities in the Boise VAMC Service Area.

Figure 23

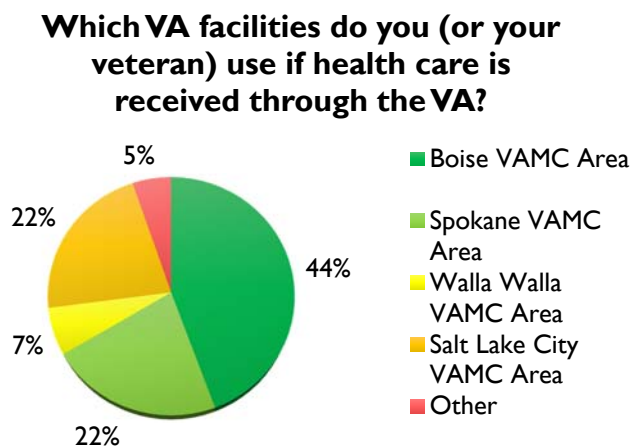


Figure 24

Participants in the Boise VAMC Service Area use the following facilities:

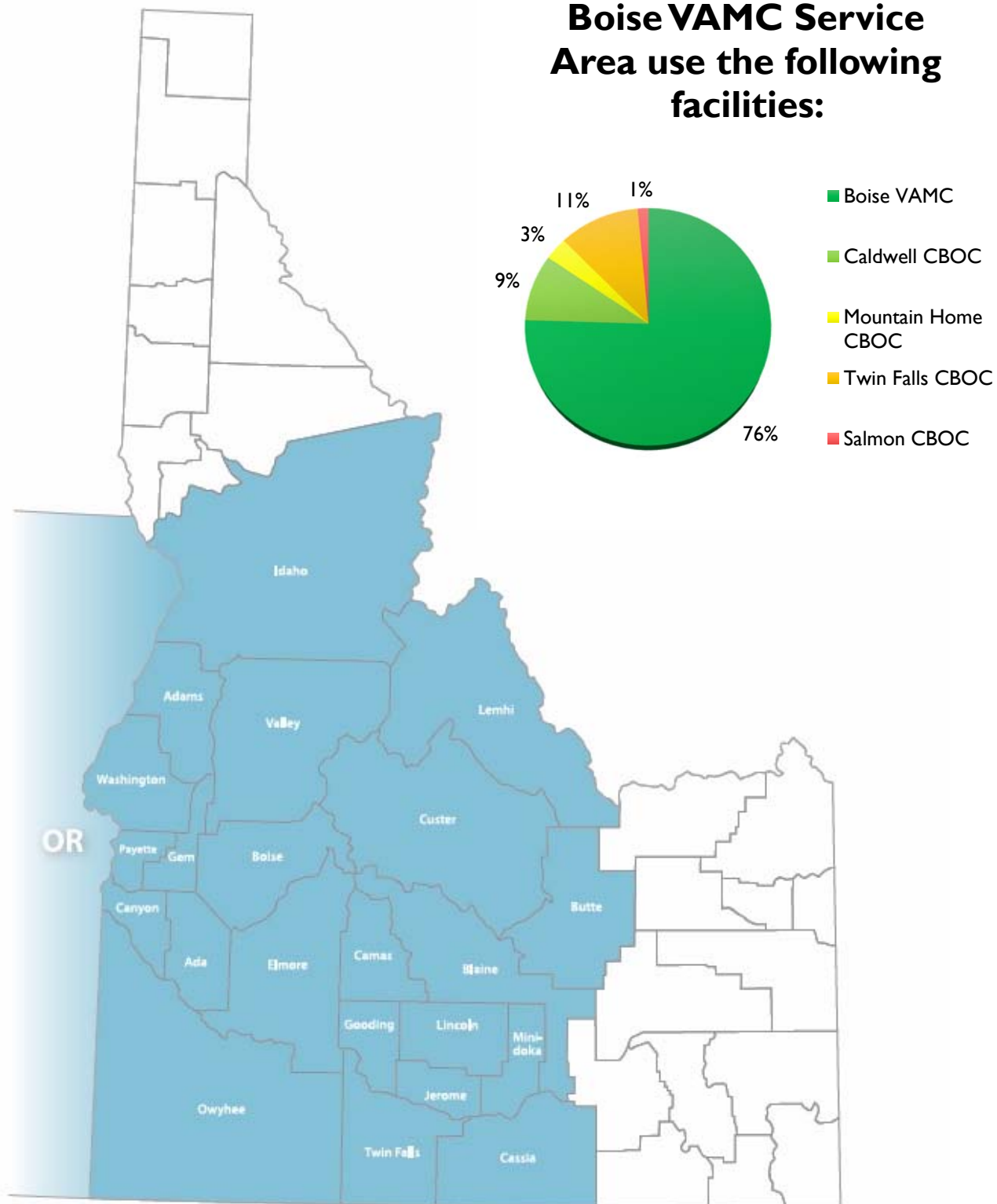


Figure 25

Participants in the Spokane VAMC Service Area use the following facilities:

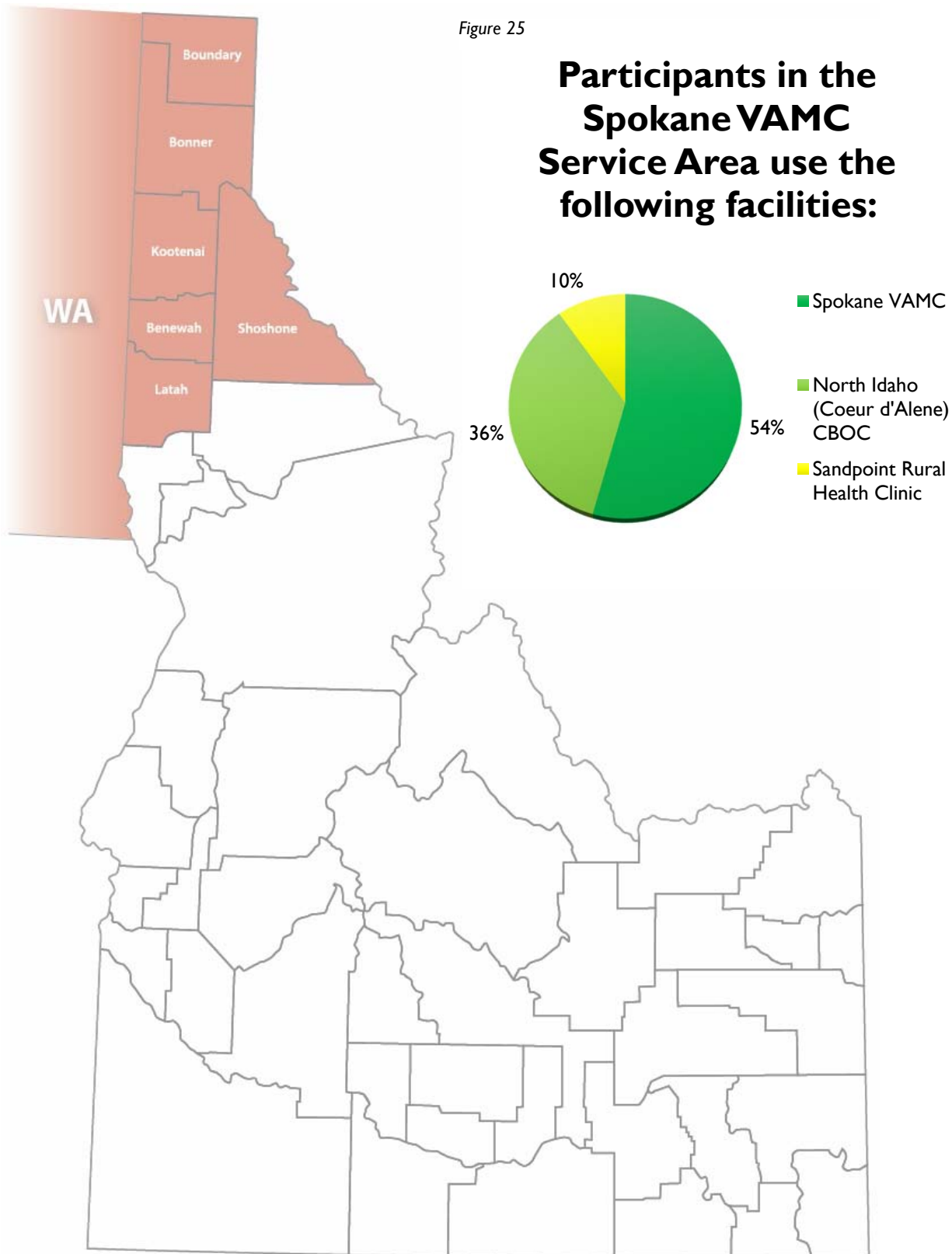


Figure 26

Participants in the Walla Walla VAMC Service Area use the following facilities:

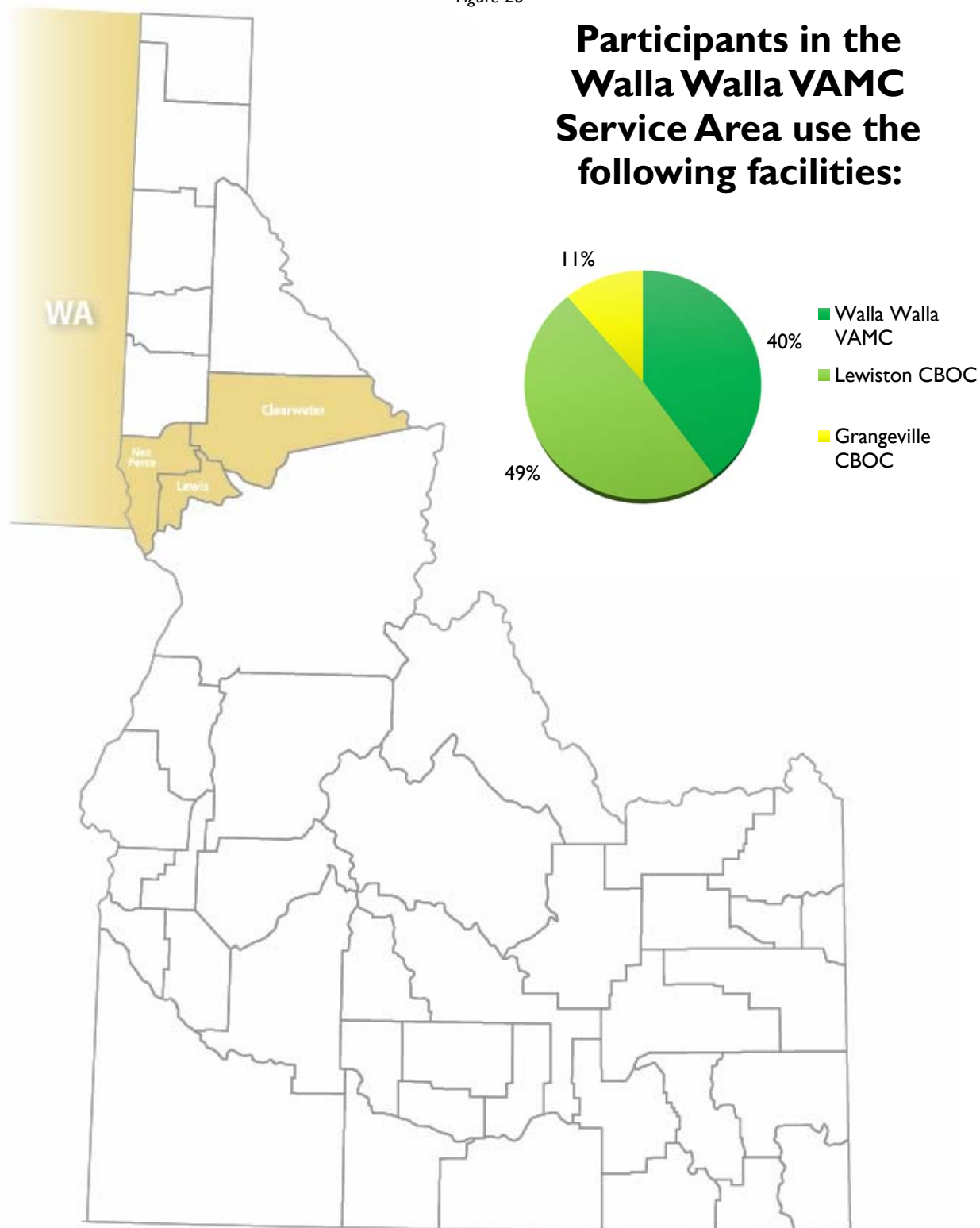
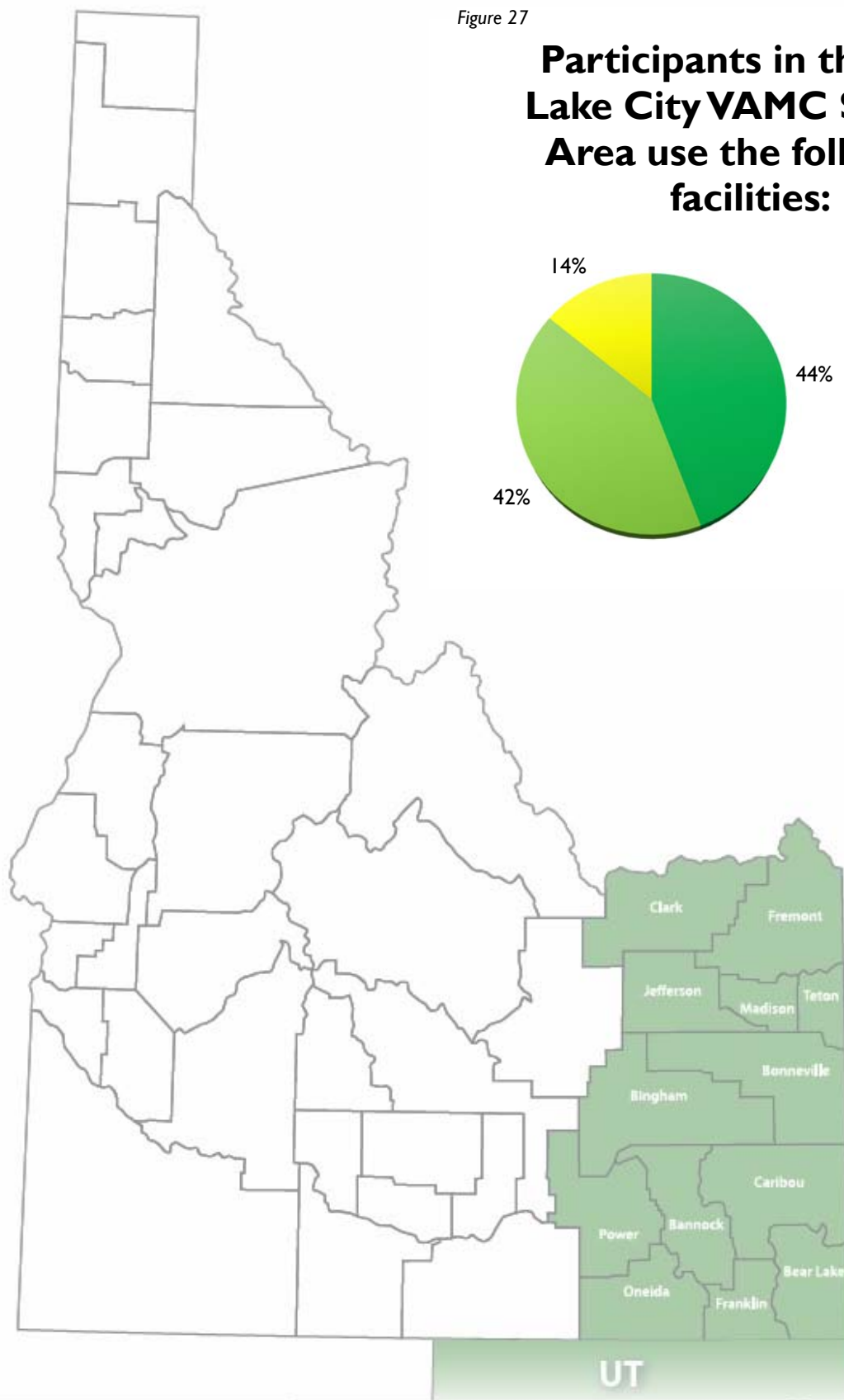
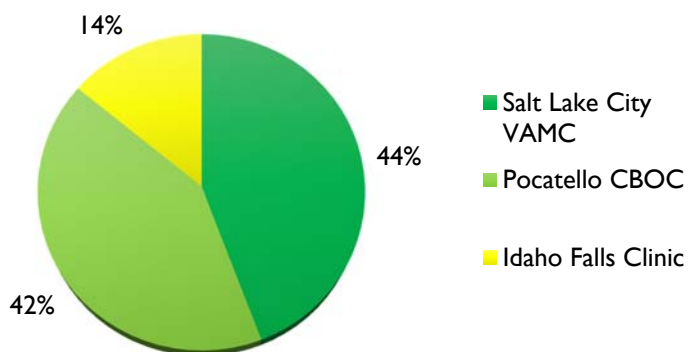


Figure 27

Participants in the Salt Lake City VAMC Service Area use the following facilities:



After identifying which facilities they used for health care, participants were asked to characterize their experiences with the VHA. Nine percent of Idahoans said this question was “not applicable” to them. Of the remaining participants, 66 percent characterized their experiences with the VHA as “satisfying” or better.

Figure 28

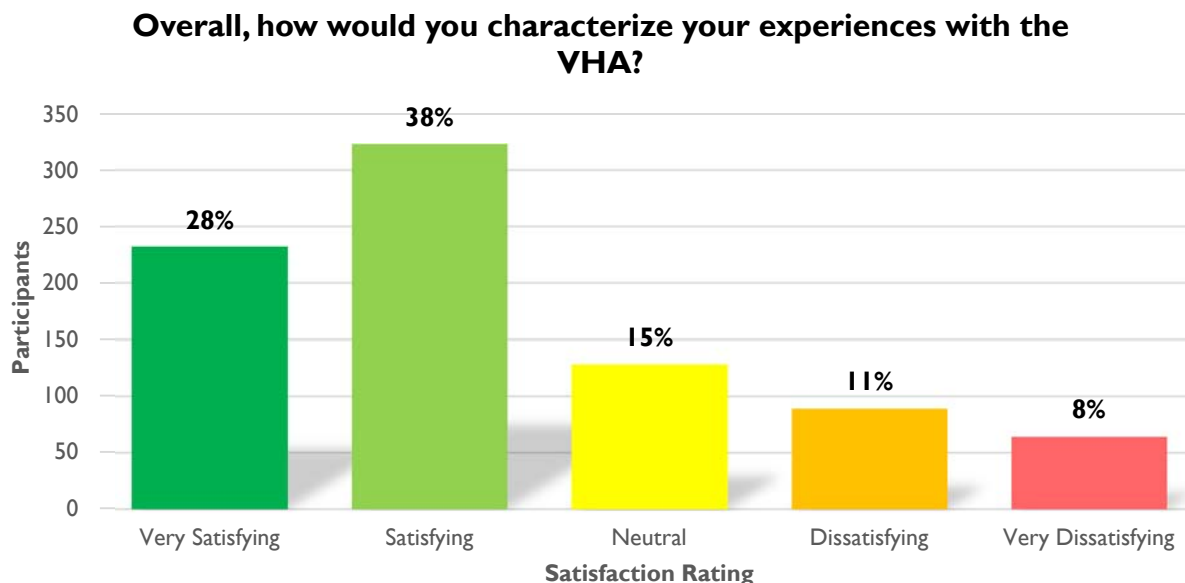


Figure 29

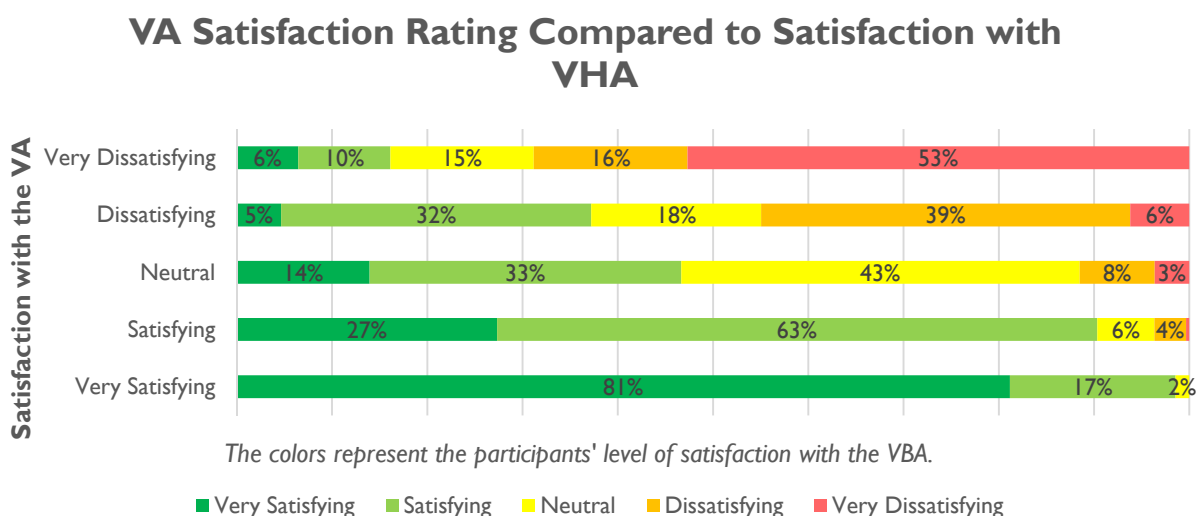
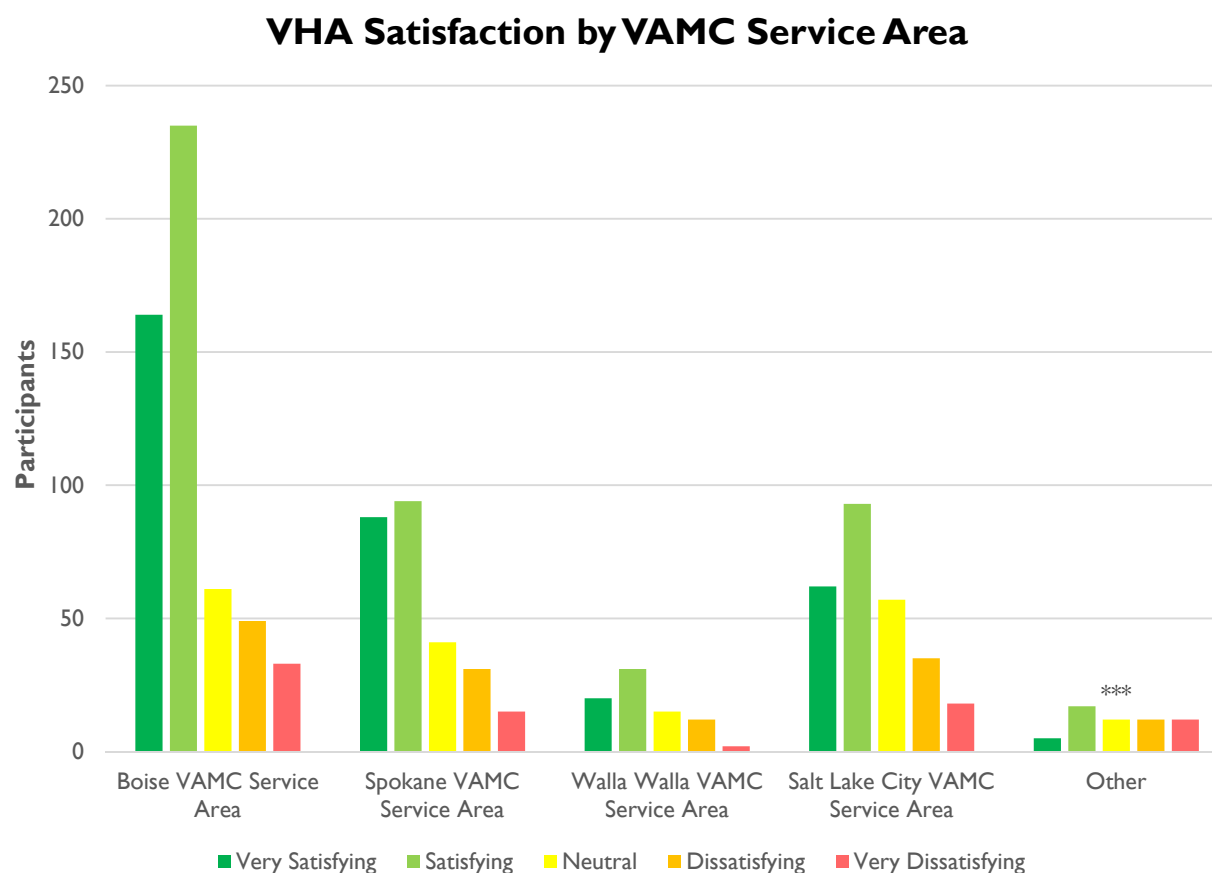


Figure 29 compares participants' satisfaction with the VA to their satisfaction with the VHA. **Ninety-eight percent of participants who were “very satisfied” with the VA were “satisfied” or better with the VHA.** The vast majority of those participants were “very satisfied” with the VHA. Ninety percent of those who were “satisfied” with the VA were “satisfied” or better with the VHA. The majority of participants who were “very dissatisfied” with the VA were also “very dissatisfied” with the VHA. **There is a strong correlation between satisfaction with the VHA and satisfaction with the VA.**

Figure 30



***In Figure 30, the “Other” category from survey question 4.1 is included. Participants used “Other” to describe situations in which they received care in other parts of the country or used the Veterans Choice Program. They also used “Other” to describe circumstance in which the participant was not eligible for health care through the VHA. “Other” will be excluded from the following VAMC Service Area figures.

Figure 30 shows participants’ overall satisfaction with VHA as organized by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care. With the exception of “Other,” each VAMC Service Area had a high percentage of participants who were “satisfied” or better with the VHA. **Seventy-four percent of the participants who use facilities in the Boise VAMC Service Area rate the VHA as “satisfying” or better.** The Salt Lake City VAMC Service Area had the smallest proportion of “satisfied” and better users: fifty-eight of the participants who use facilities in this service area were “satisfied” or better with the VHA.

After asking participants to identify the VHA facilities they use and their overall satisfaction with the VHA, the 2015 Veterans Survey asked participants to share information about specific aspects of customer service and agency communications. Communications and customer service are important determinates of satisfaction.

4.3) How would you characterize the VHA's communication with you (or your veteran) regarding appointment scheduling (making appointments, cancelling appointments, rescheduling appointments, etc.)?

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

The first question in this category asked participants to characterize their communication with the VHA regarding appointment scheduling. “Appointment scheduling” refers to activities such as making appointments, cancelling appointments, rescheduling appointments, et cetera. Twelve percent of participants said this questions was “not applicable.” **69 percent of Idahoans surveyed were “satisfied” or better with VHA communication regarding appointment scheduling.**

Figure 31

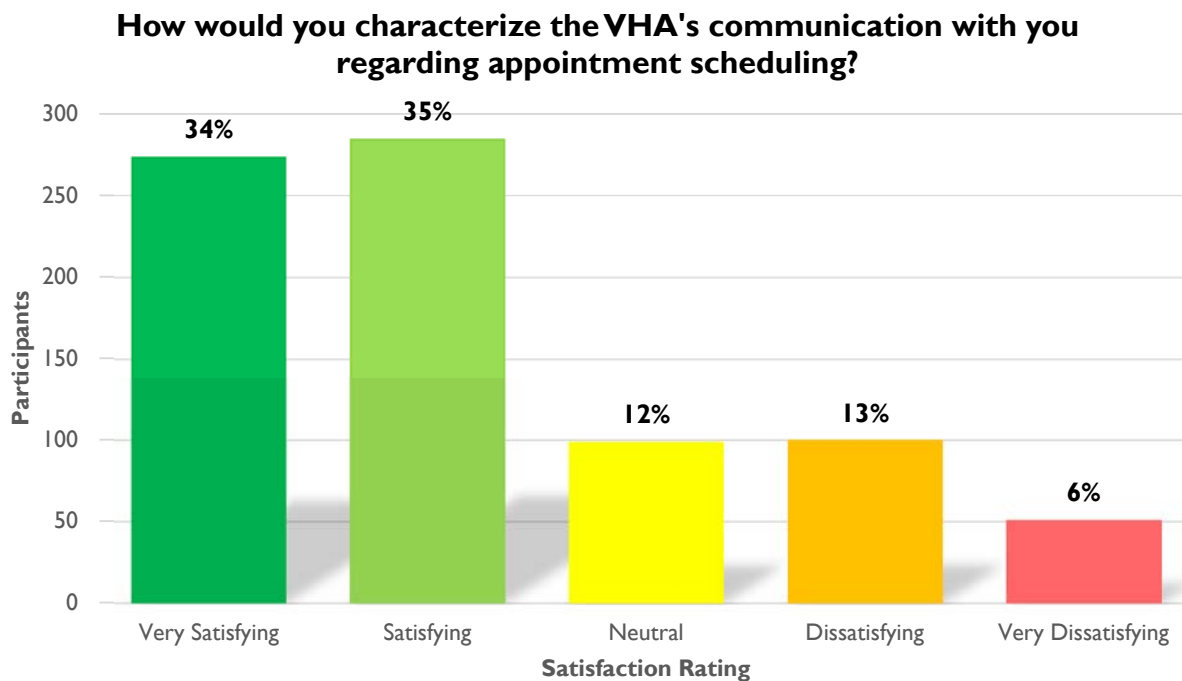


Figure 32 compares participants' satisfaction with VHA communication regarding appointment scheduling to their overall satisfaction with the VHA. There is a positive correlation between satisfaction with scheduling communication and satisfaction with the VHA. **Eighty-one percent of participants who are “very satisfied” with the VHA were also “very satisfied” with VHA communication regarding appointment scheduling.**

Figure 32

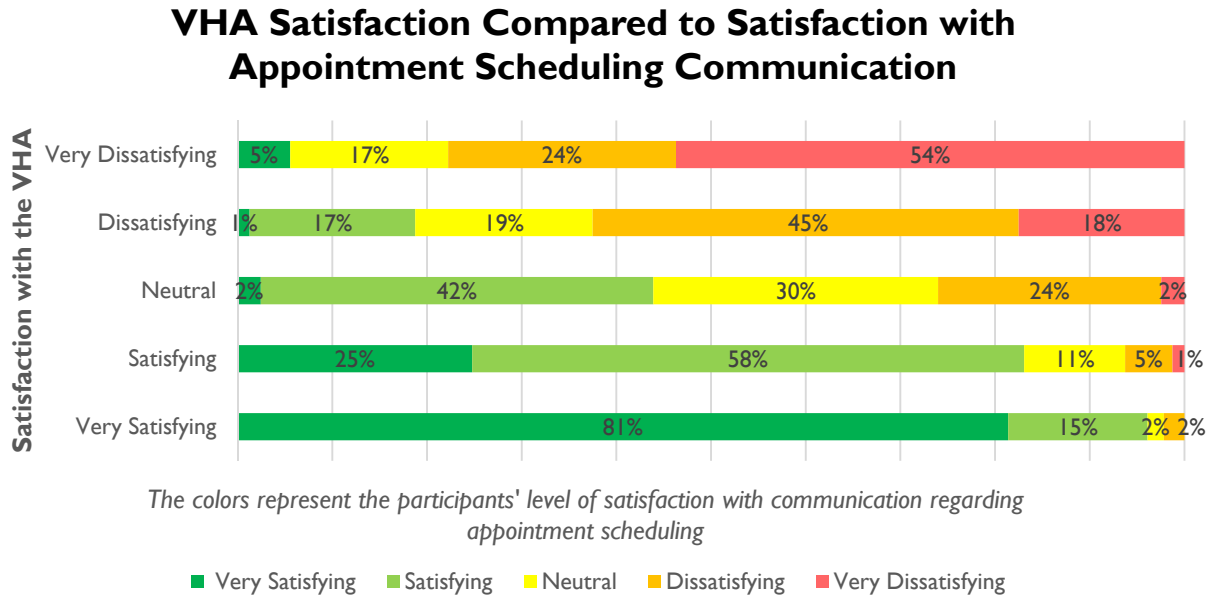
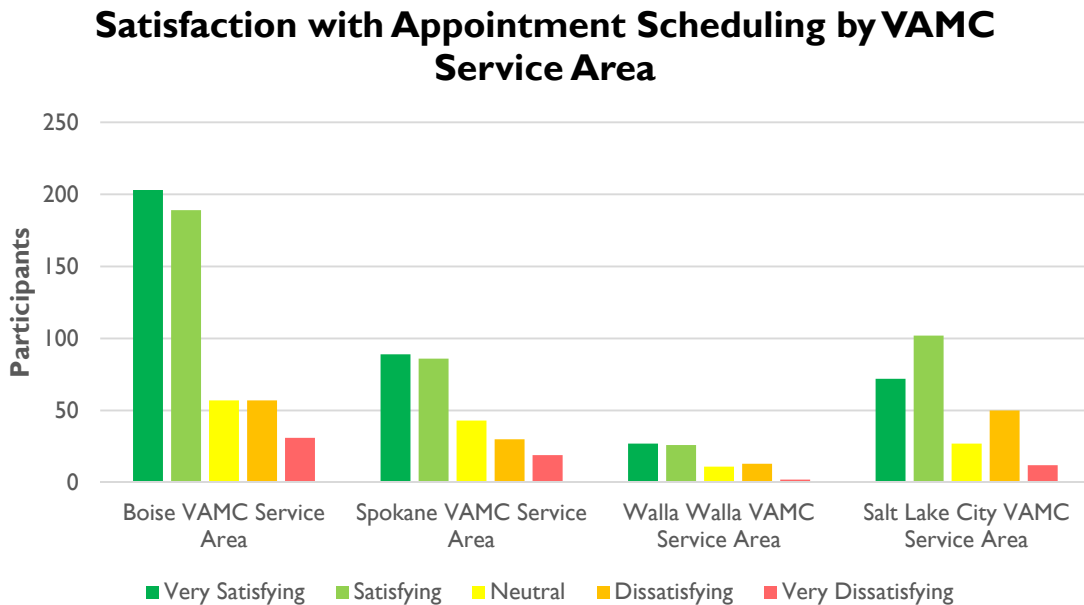


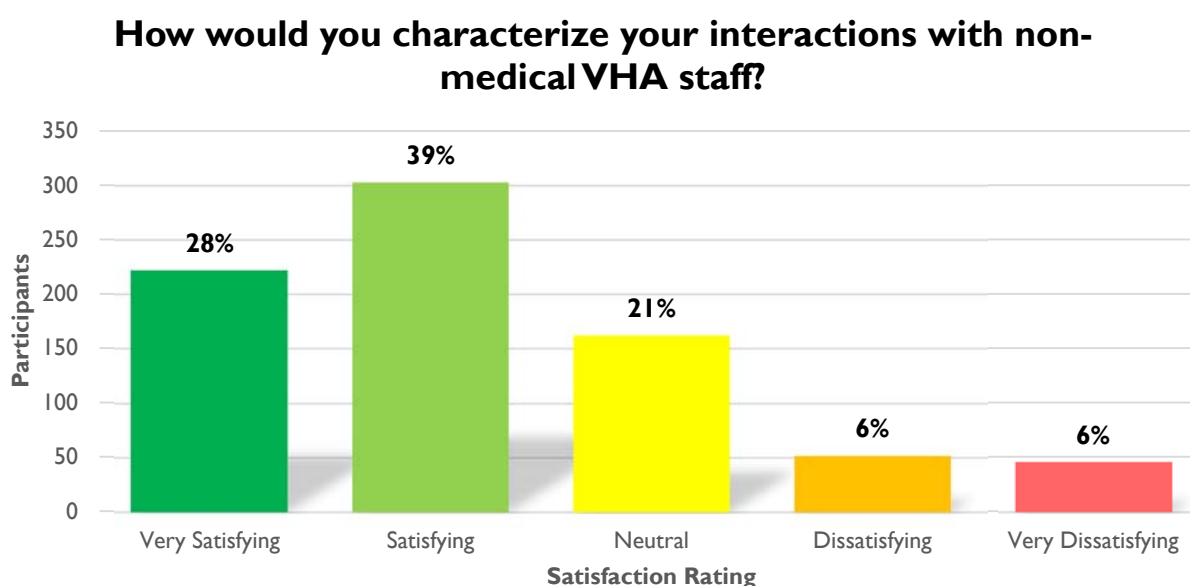
Figure 33



The next questions in 2015 Veterans Survey also relate to customer service and agency communications. The stories shared in the 2014 Veterans Survey differentiated between the interactions participants had with medical staff and non-medical staff, which is why the 2015 Veterans Survey asked about medical staff interactions and non-medical staff interactions separately. Fifteen percent of survey participants said the question about their interactions with non-medical VHA staff was “not applicable,” and 12 percent of participants said the question about interaction with medical VHA staff was “not applicable.”

Sixty-seven percent of participants characterized their interactions with non-medical staff as “satisfying” or better. Only 12 percent of participants were “dissatisfied” or worse.

Figure 34



What’s the difference between eBenefits and MyHealthVet?

- **eBenefits** is an online collaboration between the VA and U.S. Department of Defense. It offers servicemembers, veterans, family members, and caregivers online access to perform tasks related to disability compensation and benefits. It also provides employment resources. Find out more at:
 - <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/about>
- **MyHealthVet** is an online health record for servicemembers, veterans, family members and caregivers. It allows authorized users to access health records online, interact with providers, and fill prescriptions. Find out more at:
 - <https://www.myhealth.va.gov>

Figure 35

VHA Satisfaction Compared to Satisfaction with Non-Medical Staff

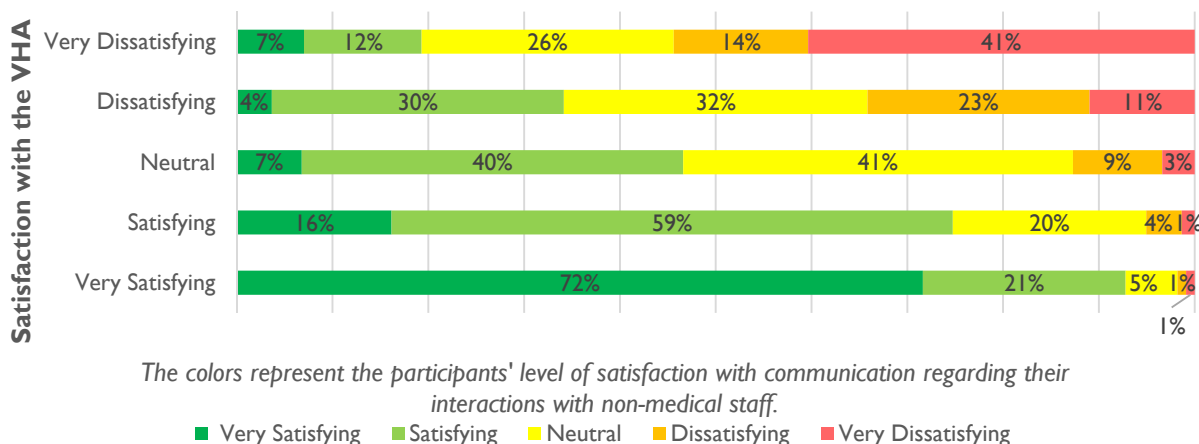


Figure 35 compares participants' satisfaction with VHA non-medical staff interactions and their overall satisfaction with the VHA. **Ninety-three percent of participants who were “very satisfied” with the VHA were “satisfied” or better with their interactions with non-medical staff.** The majority of these participants were “very satisfied.”

Agent Orange

Many of Idaho's veterans served in Vietnam and were impacted by the use of the Agent Orange, an herbicide used to defoliate the jungles. As a result of hearing the experiences of Vietnam veterans in the 2014 Veterans Survey, Senator Crapo co-sponsored two important pieces of legislation, both of which are awaiting further consideration by the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee:

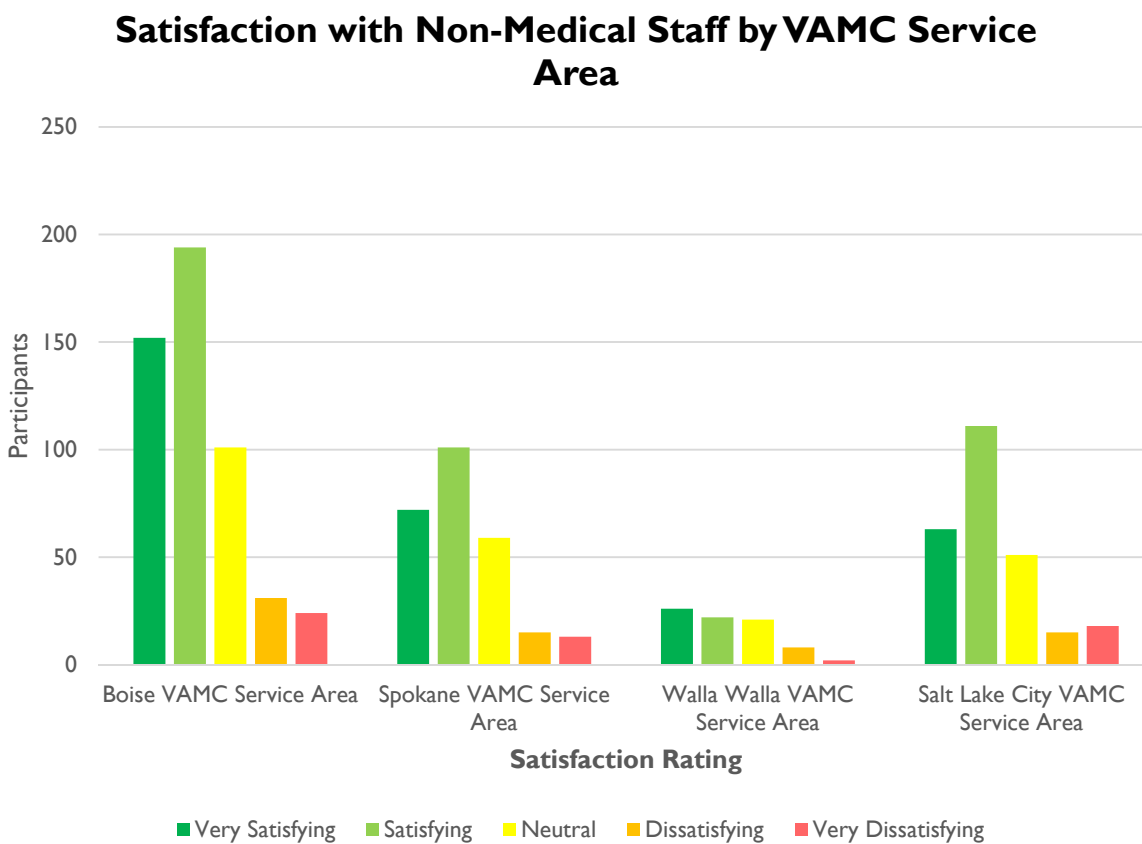
- S. 681, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which was introduced by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on March 9, 2015. This measure would include territorial seas as part of the Republic of Vietnam in order to provide presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure by veterans to certain herbicide agents while in Vietnam.
- S. 901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act, which was introduced by Senator Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) on April 13, 2015. This measure would establish a national center for the diagnosis, treatment, and research of health conditions of the descendants of veterans exposed to toxic substances during service in the armed services. This measure would also direct the U.S. Department of Defense to declassify documents related to any known incident in which at least 100 members of the Armed Forces were exposed to a toxic substance that resulted in at least one case of an associated disability.

To learn more about Agent Orange, and the basic of VA's benefits and care for those exposed to the herbicide, please visit:

<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/17744/10-things-every-veteran-know-agent-orange/>

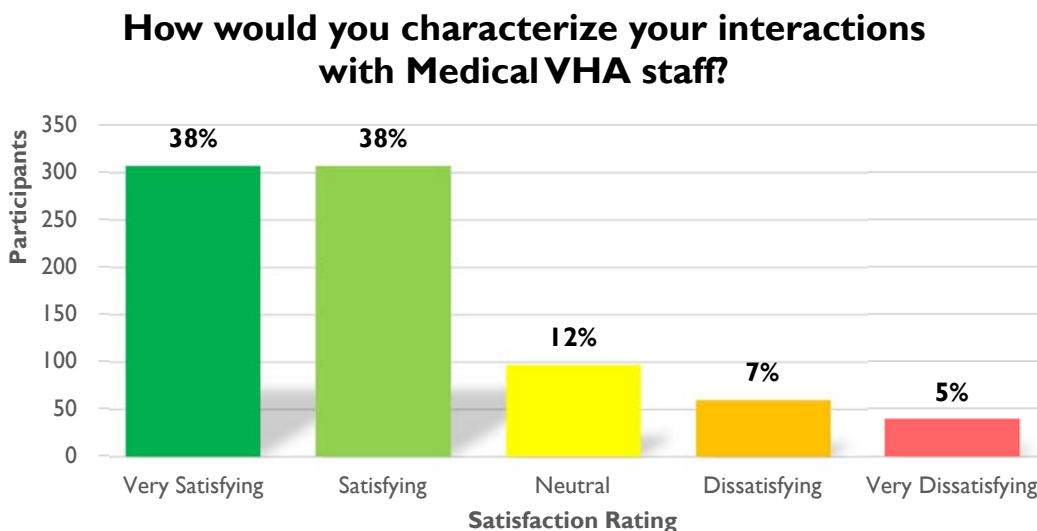
Figure 36 shows participants' satisfaction with non-medical staff organized by VAMC Service Area. **Sixty percent or more of the participants in each service area are “satisfied” or better with their interactions with non-medical staff. Thirteen percent or fewer of the participants in each service area are “dissatisfied” or worse with their interactions with non-medical staff.**

Figure 36



Overall, survey participants were more satisfied with the medical staff at the VHA than with the non-medical staff.

Figure 37



Seventy-six percent of participants were “satisfied” or better with their interactions with medical staff at the VHA. Only 12 percent were “dissatisfied” or worse. Twelve percent of all survey participants said this question was “not applicable.”

Figure 38 shows the strong correlation between participants’ level of satisfaction with the medical staff and their overall satisfaction with the VHA. Nearly 100 percent of the time, participants who were “very satisfied” with the VHA were “satisfied” or better with the interactions they had with the medical staff.

Figure 38

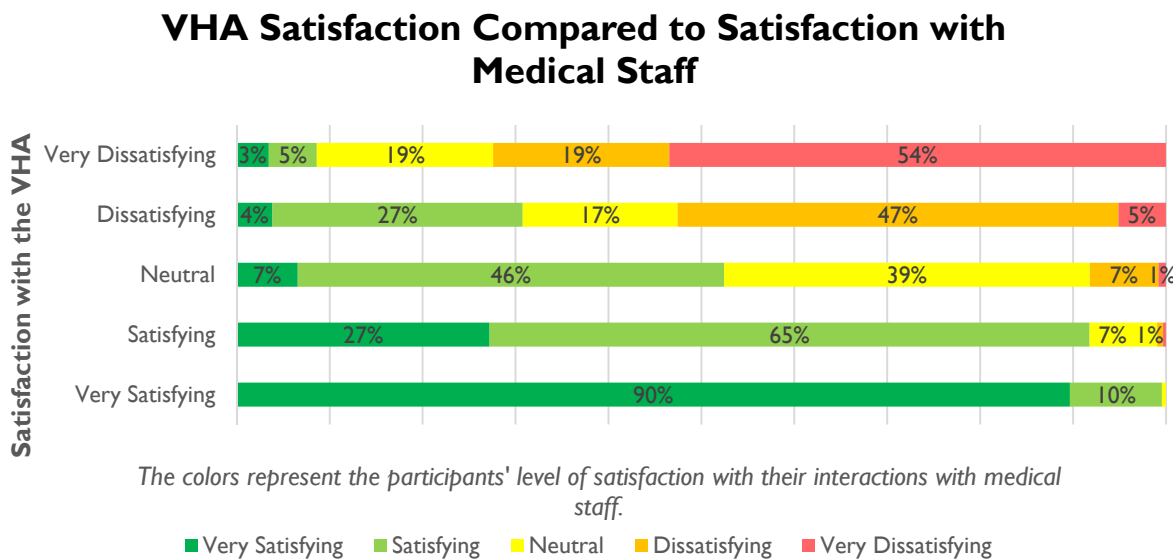
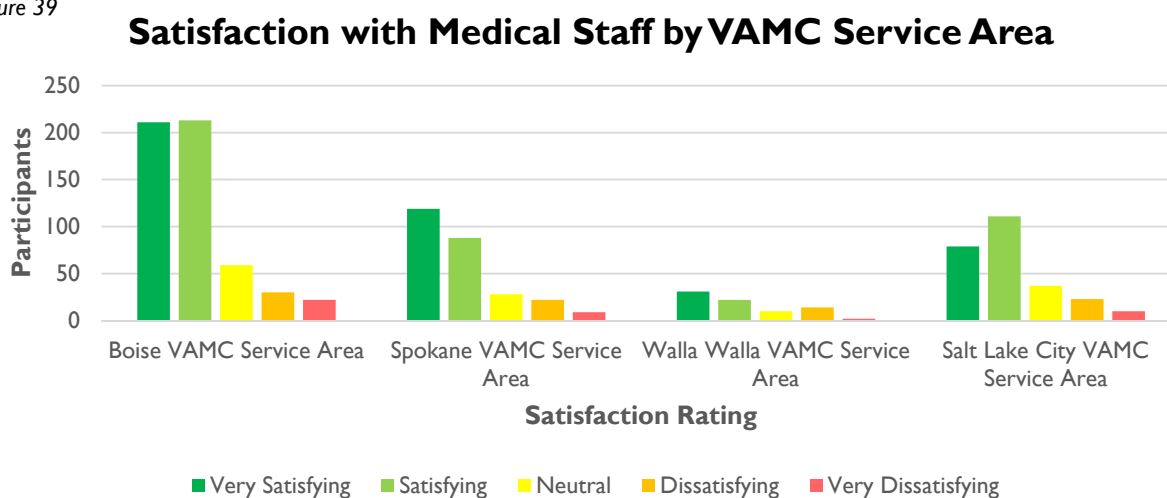


Figure 39 shows participants' level of satisfaction with medical staff organized by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care. **Participants were most satisfied with the medical staff in the Boise VAMC Service Area.** This service area had the highest percentage of participants “satisfied” or better with medical staff (79 percent of participants). It also had the fewest percentage of participants “dissatisfied” with medical staff (10 percent of participants).

Most of the other service areas had no more than 13 percent of its participants “dissatisfied” or worse with the interactions with medical staff. The exception is the Walla Walla Service Area, where 20 percent of participants are “dissatisfied” or worse with their interactions with medical staff.

Figure 39



Emergency Care and the VA

Many veterans may not know that their visit to the emergency room may not be reimbursable. The VA has strict guidelines for reimbursement for veterans who use non-VA facilities for emergency care. These guidelines vary based on if the veteran is seeking care for service-connection conditions. Things to remember:

- Reimbursement for non-VA care may be limited if the veteran's condition is stable enough for him or her to travel to a VA facility.
- The veteran must have received care by a VA health care provider within the last 24 months (excludes C&P, Agent Orange, Ionized Radiation and Persian Gulf exams).
- Reimbursement for non-VA care may be affected if the veteran has any other form of health care insurance.
- For non-service connected emergencies, the VA may not reimburse non-VA care if other federal facilities could have been feasibly available at the time of the emergency.
- To qualify as an “emergency,” a reasonable person must be able to determine that any delay in seeking immediate medical attention would be hazardous to the veteran's life or health.

To review all requirements for receiving compensation for emergency services, please visit:

http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/emergency_care.asp

You may also call 1-800-827-1000 for more information.

The 2014 Veterans Survey demonstrated the importance of timeliness and responsiveness in participants' overall satisfaction with the VA. The next question in the 2015 Veterans Survey asked participants to characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA.

4.6) How would you characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Eleven percent of survey participants said that this question was not applicable to them. Of the remaining 89 percent, **58 percent were “satisfied” or better with the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA.** Twenty-four percent of participants were “dissatisfied” or worse with the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA.

Figure 41 compares participants' satisfaction with VHA timeliness and responsiveness to their overall satisfaction with the VHA. **Only six percent of participants who ranked the VHA “dissatisfying” ranked the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA as “satisfying” or better. None of the participants who ranked the VHA as “very dissatisfying” ranked VHA timeliness and responsiveness as “satisfying” or better.**

Figure 40

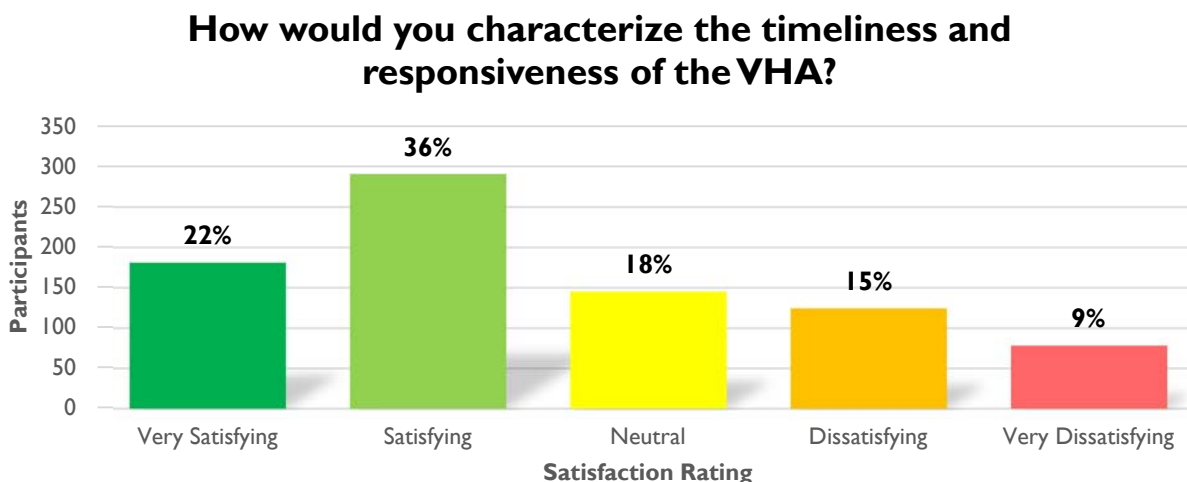


Figure 41

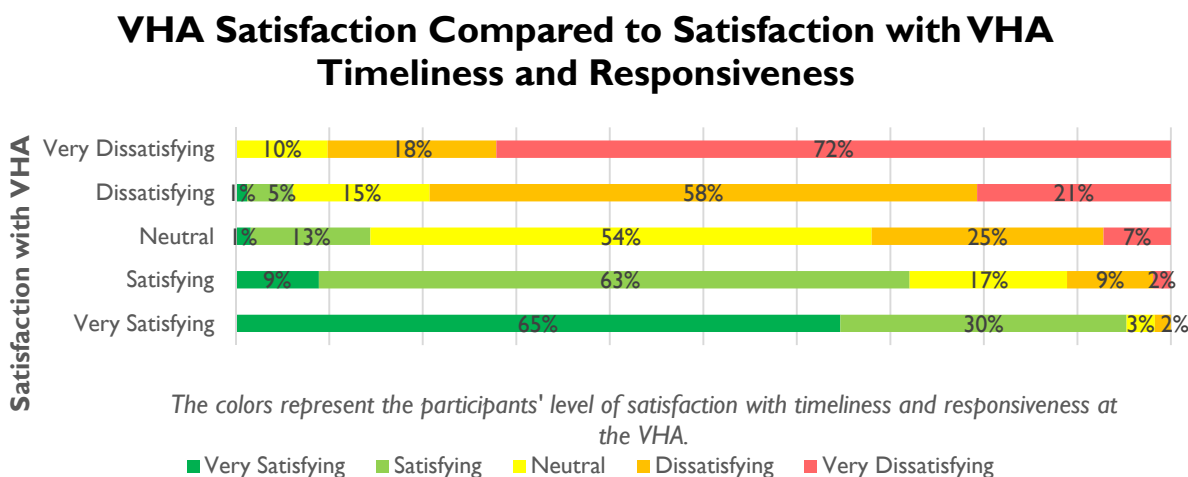


Figure 42

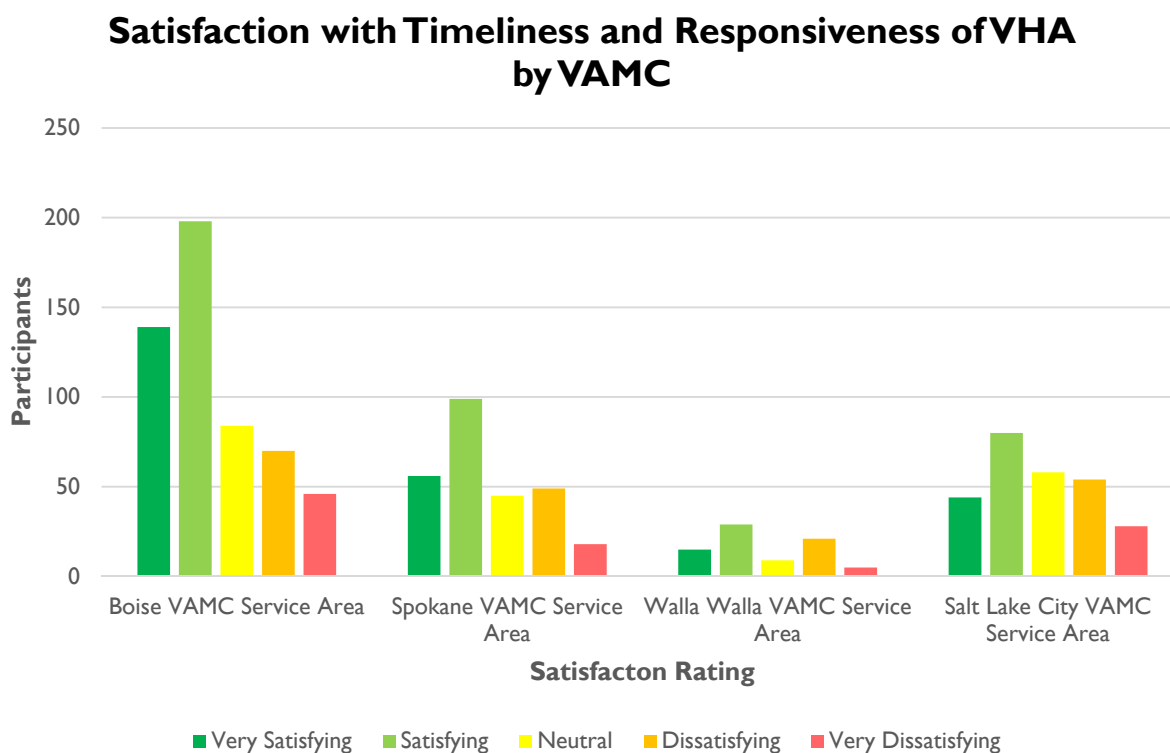


Figure 42 shows participants' level of satisfaction with the VHA's timeliness and responsiveness organized by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care. There were considerable differences between the satisfaction levels of participants in different service areas. The relatively high levels of dissatisfaction indicate this is an area in which improvement is needed.

VAMC Service Area	Percent of Participants "Satisfied" or Better	Percent of Participants "Dissatisfied" or Worse
Boise	63 percent	21 percent
Spokane	58 percent	25 percent
Walla Walla	56 percent	33 percent
Salt Lake City	47 percent	31 percent

In addition to asking questions about customer service issues and agency communications issues, the 2015 Veterans Survey also asked participants to characterize the quality of the care they receive through the VHA.

4.7) How would you characterize the quality of care you (or your veteran) receive(s) at the VHA?
Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Fourteen percent of participants said this question was not applicable to them. **Seventy-three percent of participants characterized the quality of care received at the VHA as “satisfying” or better.** Thirteen percent of participants characterized quality of care as “dissatisfying” or worse.

Figure 43

How would you characterize the quality of care you (or your veteran) receive(s) at the VHA?

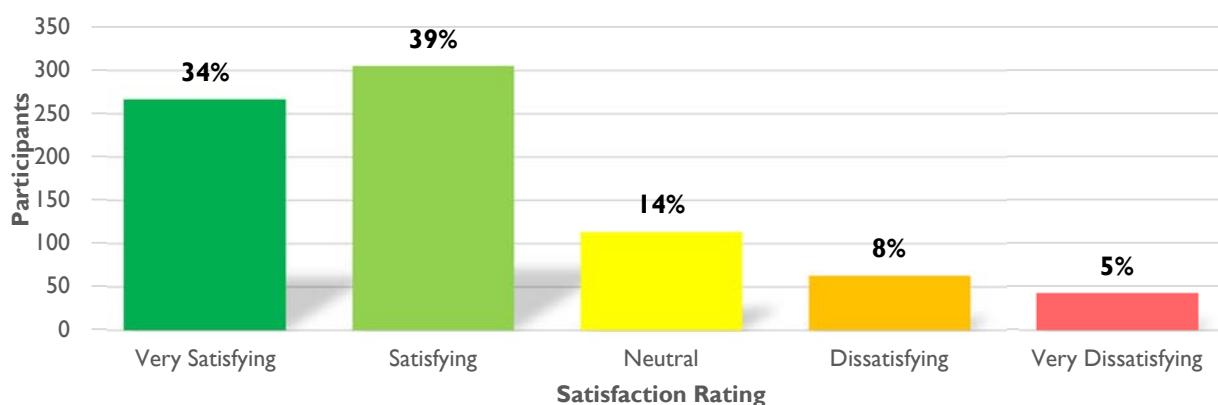


Figure 44 compares participants’ satisfaction with VHA quality of care to their overall satisfaction with the VHA. **Almost 100% of participants who were very satisfied with the VHA overall characterized the quality of care as “satisfying” or better.** The vast majority of these participants were “very satisfied” with the quality of care.

Figure 44

VHA Satisfaction Compared to Satisfaction with Quality of Care

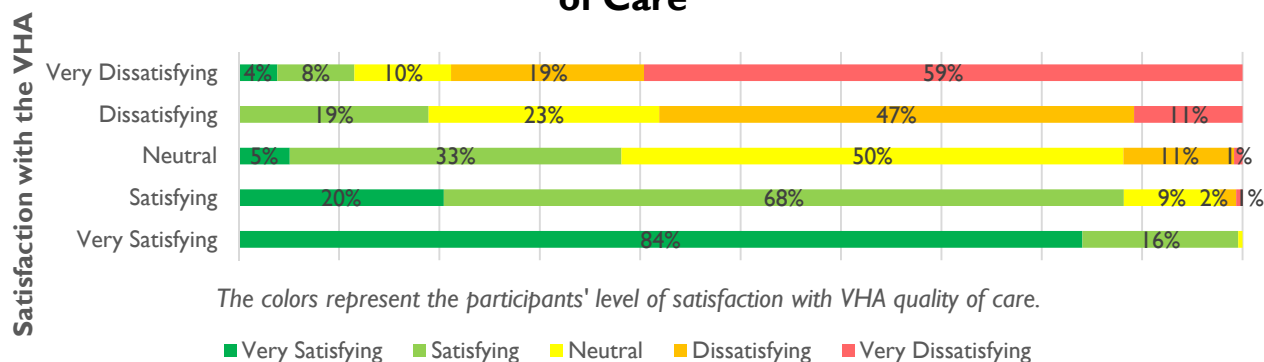
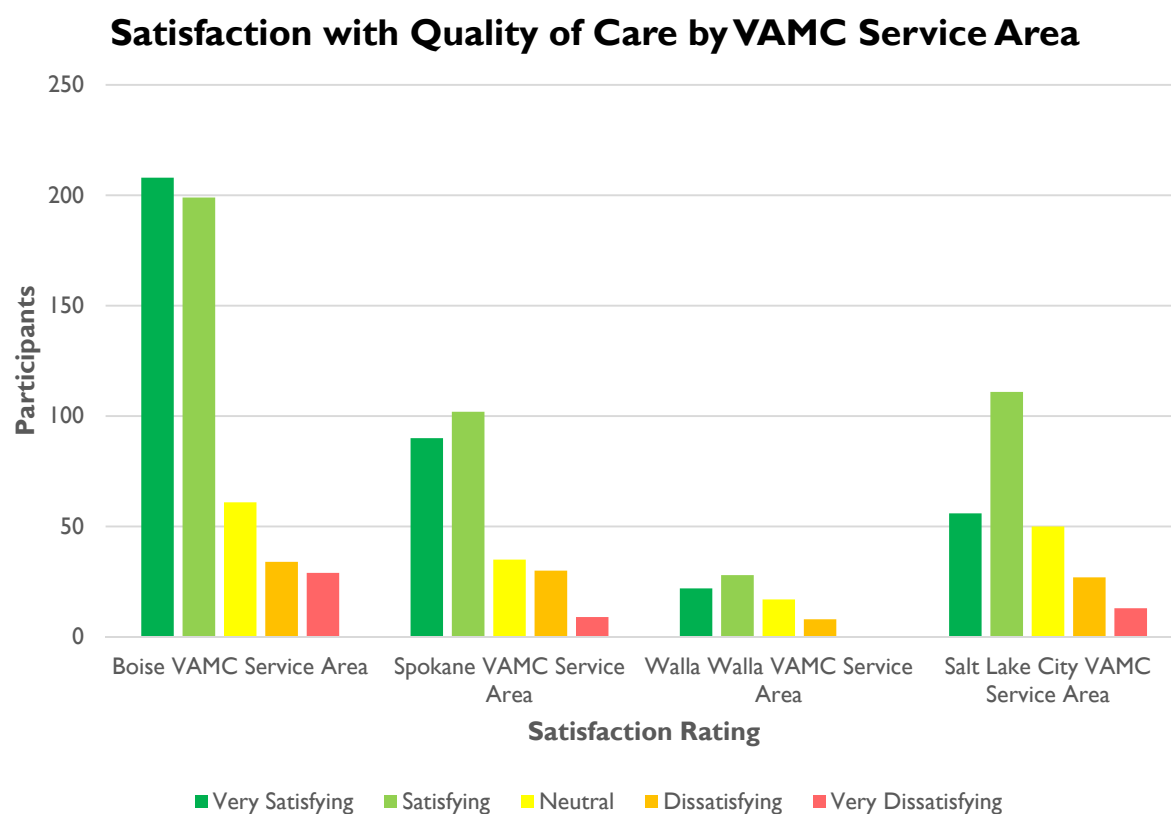


Figure 45 shows participants' level of satisfaction with the quality of care they receive at the VHA organized by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care. The Boise VAMC had the greatest proportion of participants satisfied with the quality of care: 77 percent of participants who use facilities in the Boise VAMC Service Area were “satisfied” or better with the quality of care. The Boise VAMC Service Area had the smallest percentage of participants who were “dissatisfied” or worse (11 percent). **The Walla Walla VAMC Service Area was the only area with no participants who were very dissatisfied with the quality of care they received.**

Figure 45

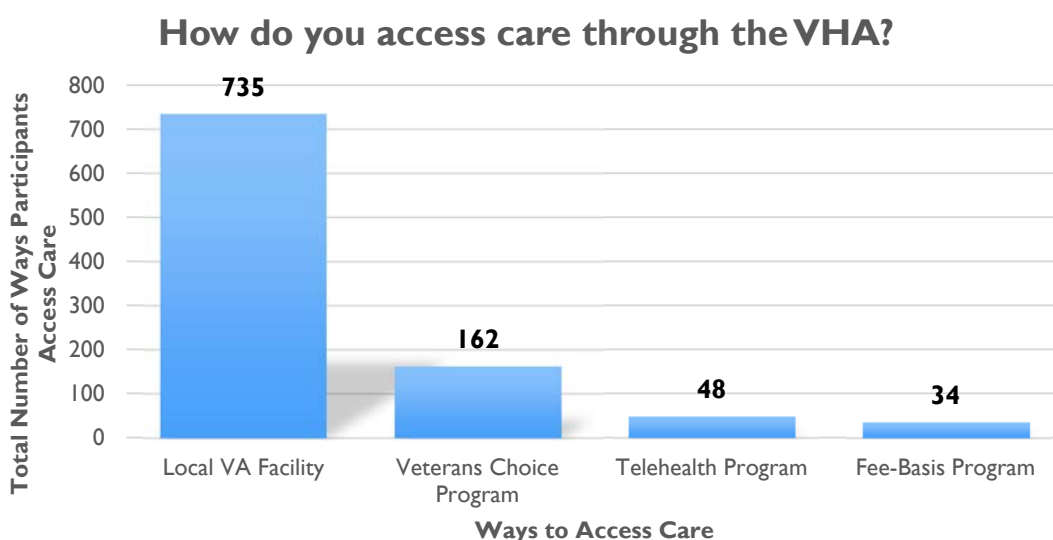


Many of Idaho’s veterans live in rural or semi-rural communities. The 2015 Veterans Survey sought to gain a better understanding of how these veterans use the VA for health care by asking participants to select all the ways in which they access care through the VHA. **Eighty percent of participants access health care through a local VA facility.** Fifteen percent of participants said this question was not applicable to them.

4.8) How do you (or your veteran) access care through the VHA? Please select all that apply.

- Local VA facility
- Veterans Choice Program
- Telehealth Program
- Fee-Basis Program
- Not Applicable

Figure 46



What is the “Fee-Basis” Program?

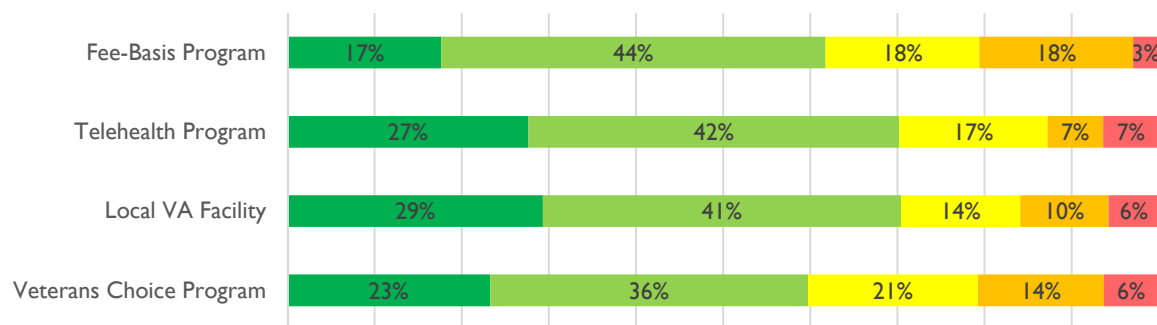
- There are several “non-VA care” programs that the VA uses to send veterans outside of the VHA system for medical care. Collectively, these programs can be referred to as “the fee-basis program.”
 - In the 2015 Veterans Survey, the term “Fee-Basis Program” referred to all non-VA care programs other than the Veterans Choice Program (VCP).
- A few years ago, the VA renamed the fee-basis program category as “non-VA care programs.”
 - The “fee basis program(s)” and “non-VA care programs” all refer to the ways VA can send an individual into the community for care. Colloquially, these terms generally do not include the VCP, although it is technically one of the non-VA care programs.
- Senator Crapo wants the VA to make these programs easier to use. For more, see Senator Crapo’s letter to the VA Secretary: http://www.crapo.senate.gov/media/newsreleases/release_full.cfm?id=360796

VA’s Non-VA Care Programs		
Veterans Choice Program	Emergency care for nonservice-connected conditions	Patient Centered Community Care (PC3)
Care in hospital facilities operated by DOD, the Public Health Service, or other federal hospitals with beds allocated to the VA.	Emergency care for service-connected conditions	Contracts for health-care resources with institutions affiliated with VA under 38 U.S.C. 7302, including medical practice groups and other approved entities associated with affiliated institutions (e.g. universities, nonprofit agencies).
Project ARCH	Sharing of health care resources with DOD	

Figure 47 compares participants' satisfaction with the ways in which they access care to their overall satisfaction with the VHA. Few apparent correlations can be drawn from the data.

Figure 47

Methods of Accessing Care Compared to VHA Satisfaction Rates



The colors represent the participants' level of satisfaction with the VHA.

Very Satisfying Satisfying Neutral Dissatisfying Very Dissatisfying

The final two questions in this portion of the 2015 Veterans Survey focus on two specific resources available to veterans who need to access care: the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) and the Telehealth Program.

As shown in Figure 48, the majority of participants (56 percent) said that the VCP question was not applicable to them. A plurality of the remaining participants were dissatisfied or worse with the VCP.

Figure 48

How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) satisfaction with the Veterans Choice Program?

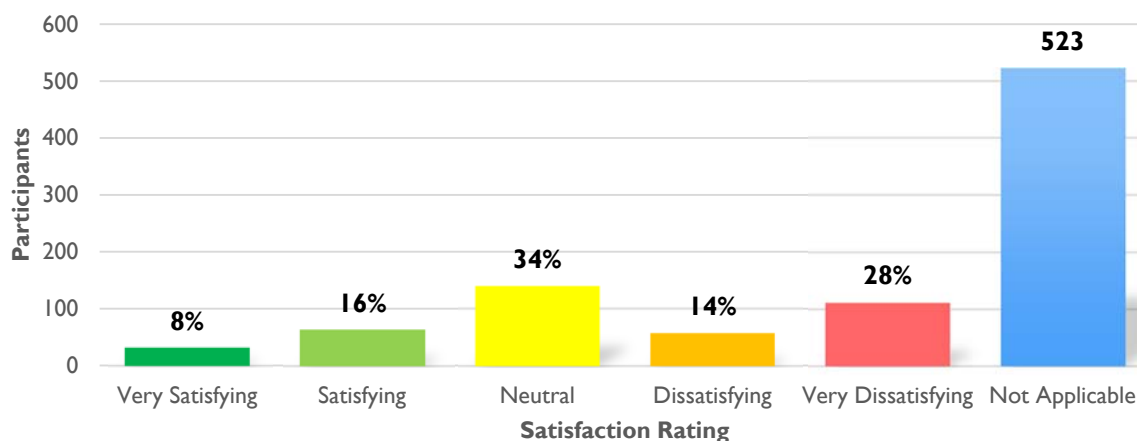
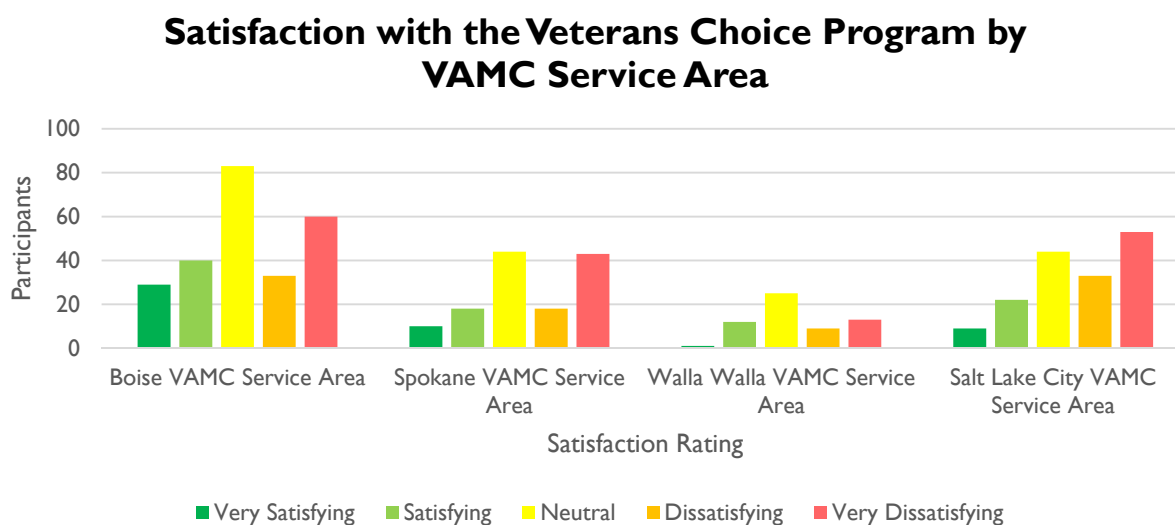


Figure 49 shows participants' level of satisfaction with the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) organized by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care. Within every VAMC service area, there are more participants dissatisfied or worse with VCP than there are participants who are "satisfied" or better with the program. **Serious changes must be made to the VCP if it is going to work for veterans.**

VAMC Service Area	Percent of Participants "Satisfied" or Better	Percent of Participants "Dissatisfied" or Worse
Boise	28 percent	38 percent
Spokane	21 percent	46 percent
Walla Walla	22 percent	37 percent
Salt Lake City	20 percent	53 percent

Figure 49



The penultimate question in the VHA portion of the survey asked participants about their use of the VA's Telehealth Program. As shown in Figure 50, the majority of participants (74 percent) said that the question about Telehealth was not applicable to them. Most of the remaining participants were "neutral" about the program.

Figure 50

How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) satisfaction with the VA's Telehealth Program?

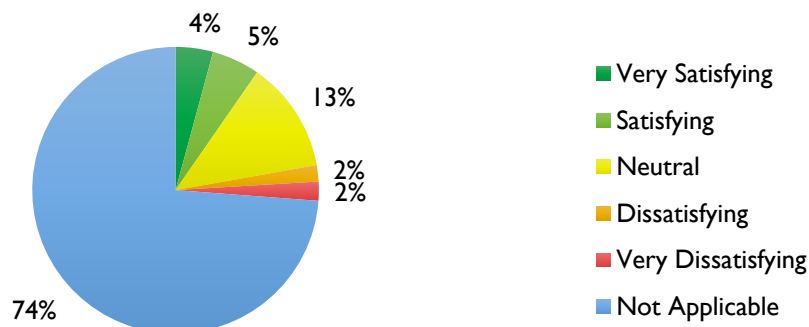


Figure 51

How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) satisfaction with the VA's Telehealth Program?

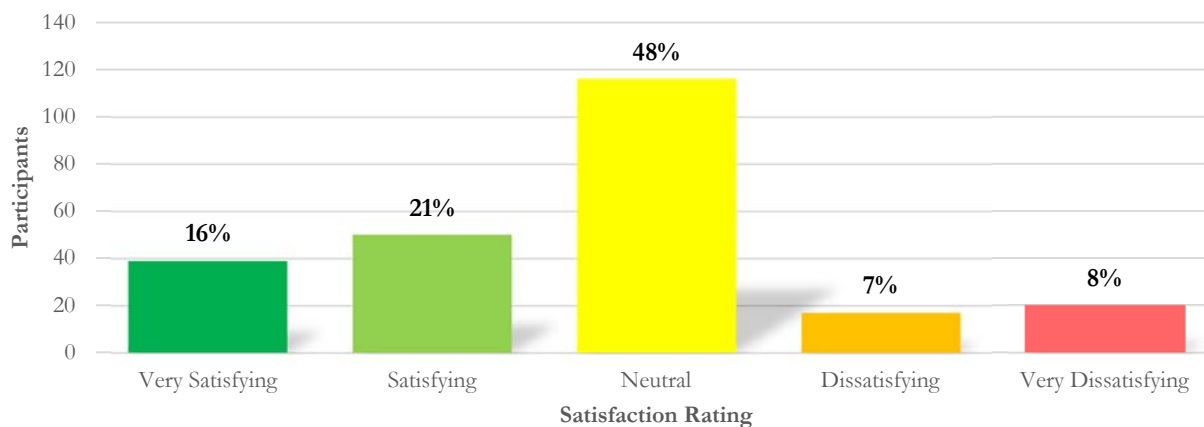
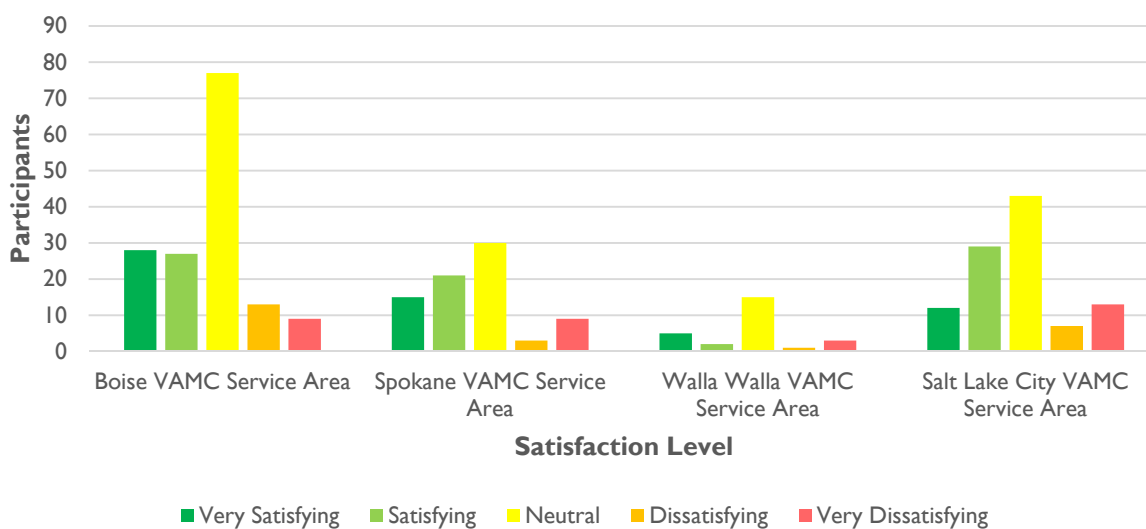


Figure 52 shows participants' level of satisfaction with the Telehealth Program by the VAMC Service Area in which they receive care.

Figure 52

Satisfaction with Telehealth Program by VAMC Service Area



Survey Results: Participants' Experiences

Every survey represents a unique reflection of the participants' experiences with the VA. Each contribution and the information provided therein is valuable and provides insight into the operations of the agency. In the instances where veterans have follow up needs or questions, staff has already initiated the contact to begin the process of helping where we can.

While each participant's experience is unique, themes emerged across many completed surveys. These repeated messages illustrate common perspectives worthy of highlighting.

Comments regarding the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA):

- Participants frequently commented on the slow pace at which the VBA works.
- In a large portion of the surveys, participants expressed frustrations with the delay in claims processing.
- Participants frequently stated that telephone assistance was poor and that they often could not reach a person to help them.
- Several individuals claimed they had never interacted with the VBA because they were not aware of benefits available to them.
- A large portion of participants expressed their sense that the VBA's general policy is to deny all claims and require veterans to go through an appeal process before a claim is fully considered. Several participants expressed this sentiment as "deny, deny, until you die."
- Many individuals expressed their frustrations with travel reimbursement processes. Where travel reimbursements used to be paid in cash on the day of visits, travel reimbursements now take up to a month or more for the reimbursement to deposit into the veteran patient's checking account, which veterans say places an undue burden on many rural veterans who cannot afford high travel costs.

Comments regarding the Veterans Health Administration (VHA):

- Many participants mentioned frustrations with communications issues with the VA.
- Several veterans shared experiences in which they had difficulty communicating with the VA during an emergency. In the experiences shared, the communications failure often made it difficult for the veterans to get pre-approval for the emergency care.
- In a significant number of surveys, participants shared their grievances with the lack of accessible parking at the Boise VAMC.
- Many participants shared their thoughts on interactions with VHA staff. Typically, participants' shared positive information about their experiences with medical staff while sharing negative information about non-medical staff.
 - Frequently, participants complimented specific VHA staff on their above-and-beyond service to the veteran. Participants also mentioned the names of county service officers who are outstanding.
- A large number of participants shared their frustrations with appointment notification procedures. In some instances, appointments were made without notification and the veterans were penalized when he or she missed the appointment. In other instances,

appointments were cancelled without notification, frequently after veterans had travelled long distances. Participants' frustrations were further exacerbated when they had to wait long periods of time to reschedule.

- Some survey participants believe the VHA is understaffed.
- Several responses shared specific instances of times when a VHA facility had lost the participant's medical documents or paperwork.
- Several veterans expressed frustrations with the VA's mental health care system.
- Many veterans were frustrated with the evaluation process for PTSD.

General Comments:

- Many veterans shared their views on the VA's Veterans Choice Program. Some respondents do not want to use it because the program is too confusing. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the program.
- Many veterans want improved access to private care in their local communities.
- Several participants said they would not know how to follow-up with the VA on their own without the help of a Veteran Service Officer or other person outside of the VA.
- A vast majority of participants expressed frustrations with the inordinate amount of "bureaucracy" they experienced with the VA. The phrase "bureaucracy" is used broadly by the participants, and frequently referred to daunting amounts of paperwork, lack of efficiency, and too many hoops to jump through.

Findings and Conclusions

Findings

Overall, the majority of participants (52 percent) characterized their experiences with the VA as “satisfying” or better. This is a slight increase from the 2014 Veterans Survey, in which 51 percent of participants were satisfied or better with their VA experiences. The VA is improving, even if slowly. This is reinforced by the decrease in proportion of participants who are “dissatisfied” or worse with the VA. In 2014, 30 percent of participants were dissatisfied or worse. In 2015, 27 percent of participants characterized their VA experiences as “dissatisfying” or worse. While this is an improvement from last year, more work needs to be done to lower the proportion of those in the veterans community who report dissatisfying and very dissatisfying experiences.

The results show there is considerable difference in the quality of experiences participants have with the VHA and VBA. The VHA consistently had higher satisfaction levels than the VBA. Overall, the VBA’s satisfaction levels reflect the overall VA satisfaction levels.

Satisfaction Level	Overall VA	VBA	VHA
Percent of participants who rated experience as “satisfying” or “very satisfying”	52 percent	52 percent	66 percent
Percent of participants who rated experience as “dissatisfying” or “very dissatisfying”	27 percent	29 percent	19 percent

The VBA did not have more than 53 percent of participants satisfied or better for any of the survey questions. Similarly, more than 20 percent of participants were dissatisfied or worse for every question asked. This indicated that there are systemic problems in each of these areas and they require more focus and attention.

VBA Survey Question	Percent of participants who rated experience as “satisfying” or “very satisfying”	Percent of participants who rated experience as “dissatisfying” or “very dissatisfying”	Extra Focus Needed?
3.5) Satisfaction with Claims Processing	41 percent	39 percent	Yes
3.6) Satisfaction with Claims Appeals Processing	25 percent	48 percent	Yes
3.7) Satisfaction with VBA Staff	53 percent	22 percent	Yes
3.8) Satisfaction with Timeliness and Responsiveness	39 percent	38 percent	Yes

The VHA is performing very well in many areas. In these areas, extra focus and attention may only be required in individual, case-by-case circumstances. There are two areas that need more focus and attention: VHA’s timeliness and responsiveness and the Veterans Choice Program.

VHA Survey Question	Percent of participants who rated experience as “satisfying” or “very satisfying”	Percent of participants who rated experience as “dissatisfying” or “very dissatisfying”	Extra Focus Needed?
4.3) Satisfaction with Scheduling Communication	69 percent	19 percent	Case-by-Case
4.4) Satisfaction with Non-Medical Staff	67 percent	12 percent	Case-by-Case
4.5) Satisfaction with Medical Staff	76 percent	12 percent	Case-by-Case
4.6) Satisfaction with Timeliness and Responsiveness	58 percent	24 percent	Yes
4.7) Satisfaction with Quality of Care	73 percent	13 percent	Case-by-Case
4.9) Satisfaction with Veterans Choice Program	24 percent	42 percent	Yes
4.10) Satisfaction with Telehealth Program	37 percent	15 percent	Case-by-Case

The quantitative data received through the multiple choice survey questions was reinforced by the quantitative data shared through participants’ experiences and recommendations (i.e. survey questions 3.9, 4.11, and Part 5).

Conclusions

Effective, clear, and courteous communications between VA representatives and veterans remain crucial.

In the survey, examples of both positive and negative communication were evident. Examples of good communication included the doctor making the patient feel heard and respected or the staff being accessible, helpful and providing information and feedback, even in circumstances where there is little or no progress. The veterans felt involved in their treatment and aware of the ongoing process and situation. Examples of bad communication include staff or doctors being rude or unresponsive, with veterans feeling as though the doctor is not listening or unaware of the patient’s situation, feeling as though they cannot reach VA staff to ask questions, receiving no response about status of claims or feeling “left in limbo.” Lack of communication led to a large amount of frustration and anger in our respondents, while the positive communication eased frustration and led to more positive experiences and perception of the VA.

Timely and responsive service is an important component of customer service that directly impacts veterans' satisfaction with the VA.

The VA must be prompt and complete in its responses to veterans' needs. Satisfaction in this area builds upon the positive satisfaction that is created through positive interactions with VA staff. Responsive service means that staff acknowledges and responds to the veterans needs, concerns, and desires; it means VA staff explain what the VA is doing in a particular circumstance and *why* the VA is pursuing that course of action. Far too often, participants expressed concern that the specifics of their situation were not considered.

Participants want more access to care in the community... but they don't like the Veterans Choice Program (VCP).

Many participants mentioned that they would like to be able to use local health care providers more easily, especially for specialty care. Many participants are dissatisfied with the VCP, which has been the VA's preferred method of providing veterans with non-VA care since Fall 2014. More must be done to make it easier to access care in the community, and it must be done in a way that reduces the burden currently placed on local VA staff and veterans.

Senator Crapo has already begun working on this issue. In July 2015, Congress passed the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act (H.R. 3236; P.L. 114-41). This measure contains a provision that requires the VA to consolidate its various non-VA care programs (the new, consolidated program would still be called the Veterans Choice Program). Senator Crapo is working with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and the VA to ensure that changes to the non-VA programs reflect the lessons learned from the failures of the VCP. For more information on this effort, please see Senator Crapo's news release online:

http://www.crapo.senate.gov/media/newsreleases/release_full.cfm?id=360796

The VBA needs special attention.

The VBA's satisfaction levels clearly demonstrate there are several areas requiring extra focus and attention. Senator Crapo's staff will work with local VA officials, IDVS officials, county service officers, VA officials in Washington, D.C., and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to improve these areas.

Congressional casework is an important tool available to veterans.

Congressional offices have the ability to provide constituents assistance with personal issues that involve federal agencies. From January 2015 to the end of October 2015, Senator Crapo helped Idaho's veterans and their families receive \$787,677.86, in missing benefits.

It is too soon to tell the direct impact of casework that resulted from the survey, but 153 Idahoans were contacted by Senator Crapo's casework team after they indicated they wanted staff to reach out to them. Several more individuals were called in response to experiences they shared in their surveys.

Please visit http://crapo.senate.gov/services/personal_assistance.cfm if you are interested in learning more about what Senator Crapo can do for you.

Appendix: The 2015 Veterans Survey

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Veterans Survey

Our office's use of information contained in responses to this survey.

Our office intends to report publicly the results of this survey without identifying any survey respondent by name. Our report will include aggregate data collected in response to survey questions as well as select quotations by survey participants. Such quotations, while anonymous, may be made public in a variety of ways and may relate to particular health care facilities, specific locations within the State, or contain other particular information to put the quotation in context. Our office will not release any other information contained in survey responses, unless authorized by our Privacy Policy, which is contained on our website, <http://www.crapo.senate.gov/contact/privacy.cfm>, or may be obtained from our staff.

By completing and returning this survey, you represent that you have the authority to disclose the information you provide and consent to the use of such information by our office, as explained above.

Part 1- Contact Information

First Name	
Last Name	
Address	
City	
State	
Zip Code	
Email Address	
Phone Number	
Gender*	
Age*	

*I am asking about your gender and age so I have a better understanding of VA satisfaction based on your experience as a man or woman. I also want to see if OEF/OIF era veterans have different VA experiences than Vietnam and Korea era veterans.

Part 2- Relationship with Veterans

2.1) *What is your relationship with veterans and service members? Please select one.*

- I have served in the U.S. military.
- I am the family member of someone who has served in the U.S. military.
- I have a personal relationship with someone who served in the U.S. military (e.g. friend, colleague, neighbor).

2.2) *Do you or your veteran belong to any veterans' organizations?*

- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify: _____

Part 3 – Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

3.1) *Are your (or your veteran's) VA claims handled by the Boise Regional Office?*

- Yes
- No

If no, which VBA office do you (or your veteran) use? _____

If you use multiple VBA offices, please list the offices you use: _____

3.2) *Overall, how would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experiences with the VBA? Please select one.*

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

3.3) *What VA benefits do you (or your veteran) receive at this time? Please select all that apply.*

- Health Care Benefits
- Educational Benefits
- Disability Compensation
- Home Loan Guarantee Benefits
- Insurance Benefits
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits
- Burial and Memorial Benefits
- Pension Benefits
- Dependents and Survivors Benefits
- Not Applicable
- Other: _____

3.4) *What VA benefits do you (or your veteran) plan to receive? Please select all that apply.*

- Health Care Benefits
- Educational Benefits
- Disability Compensation
- Home Loan Guarantee Benefits
- Insurance Benefits
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits
- Burial and Memorial Benefits
- Pension Benefits
- Dependents and Survivors Benefits
- Not Applicable
- Other: _____

3.5) *How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experience with claims processing? Please select one.*

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

3.6) *How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experience with the claims appeal process? Please select one.*

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

3.7) *How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) interactions with VBA staff? Please select one.*

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

3.8) *How would you characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VBA? Please select one.*

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Additional Information about the VBA

3.9) *Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience with the VBA?*

Part 4 – Veterans Health Administration

4.1) Which VA facilities do you (or your veteran's) use if health care treatment is received through the VA? Please check all that apply, including any Community Based Outpatient Centers (CBOCs.)

- Boise VAMC Service Area
 - Boise VAMC
 - Burns-Hines CBOC
 - Caldwell CBOC
 - Mountain Home CBOC
 - Twin Falls CBOC
 - Salmon CBOC
- Spokane VAMC Service Area
 - Spokane VAMC
 - North Idaho (Coeur d'Alene) CBOC
 - Sandpoint Rural Health Clinic (Ponderay)
- Walla Walla VAMC Service Area
 - Walla Walla WAMC
 - Lewiston CBOC
 - Grangeville CBOC
- Salt Lake City VAMC Service Area
 - Salt Lake City VAMC
 - Pocatello CBOC
 - Idaho Falls Outreach Clinic
- Not Applicable
- Other. Please describe: _____

4.2) Overall, how would you characterize your (or your veteran's) experiences with the VHA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.3) How would you characterize the VHA's communication with you (or your veteran) regarding appointment scheduling (making appointments, cancelling appointments, rescheduling appointments, etc.)?

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.4) How would you characterize your interactions with non-medical VHA staff? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.5) How would you characterize your interactions with medical VHA staff? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.6) How would you characterize the timeliness and responsiveness of the VHA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.7) How would you characterize the quality of care you (or your veteran) receive(s) at the VHA? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.8) How do you (or your veteran) access care through the VHA? Please select all that apply.

- Local VA facility
- Veterans Choice Program
- Telehealth Program
- Fee-Basis Program
- Not Applicable

4.9) How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) satisfaction with the Veterans Choice Program? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

4.10) How would you characterize your (or your veteran's) satisfaction with the VA's Telehealth Program? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

Additional Information about the VHA

4.11) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience with the VHA?

Part 5- Additional VA Experiences

I am very interested in learning more about the experiences of veterans in Idaho who seek assistance through the VA. Do you have any additional positive or negative information you would like to share with me? Please share here.

Part 6 – Other Questions

6.1) Overall, how would you (or your veteran) characterize your experience with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs? Please select one.

- Very Satisfying
- Satisfying
- Neutral
- Dissatisfying
- Very Dissatisfying
- Not Applicable

6.2) Did you take my veterans survey last year?

- Yes
- No

6.3) Since August 2014, do you think your experiences with the VA have:

- Improved significantly
- Improved somewhat
- Remained the same
- Worsened somewhat
- Worsened significantly

6.4) Do you have recommendations for VA improvement moving forward?

Part 7- Ongoing Issue with the Department of Veterans Affairs

7.1) Do you have an ongoing issue with the VA with which you would like assistance?

- Yes
 No

7.2) Would you like someone from my office to contact you to discuss the matter with which you would like assistance?

- Yes. Please use the contact information I provided earlier in this survey.
 No. If I need further assistance from your office, I will contact you directly.

Thank You

Thank you for completing the survey. I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with me.

Congress must improve the delivery of assistance to our nation's veterans. As we move forward, your input will help me ensure future legislative proposals have a meaningful impact on our veterans in Idaho.

The input of Idahoans is very valuable as we work together to tackle these significant national challenges. I encourage you to share this survey with others and I look forward to sharing the results with you.


Survey Return Information

Please return this survey to one of my offices:

<u>Washington, DC</u> 239 Dirksen Senate Building Washington, DC 20510 Phone: (202) 224-6142 Fax: (202) 228-1375	<u>Eastern Idaho, North</u> 410 Memorial Drive Suite 204 Idaho Falls, ID 83402 Phone: (208) 522-9779 Fax: (208) 529-8367	<u>Idaho State Office</u> 251 East Front Street Suite 205 Boise, ID 83702 Phone: (208) 334-1776 Fax: (208) 334-9044	<u>North-Central Idaho</u> 313 'D' Street Suite 105 Lewiston, ID 83501 Phone: (208) 743-1492 Fax: (208) 743-6484
<u>South-Central Idaho</u> 202 Falls Avenue Suite 2 Twin Falls, ID 83301 Phone: (208) 734-2515 Fax: (208) 733-0414	<u>Eastern Idaho, South</u> 275 South 5th Avenue Suite 225 Pocatello, ID 83201 Phone: (208) 236-6775 Fax: (208) 236-6935	<u>North Idaho</u> 610 Hubbard Street Suite 209 Coeur d' Alene, ID 83814 Phone: (208) 664-5490 Fax: (208) 664-0889	Thank you again!

Appendix: Senator Crapo's Regional Office Divisions and Contacts

Idaho State Office

Located in Boise

Mr. Bryan Ricker

(208) 334-1776

- Counties include: Ada, Adams, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem, Owyhee, Payette, Valley, and Washington.
 - Cities include: Atlanta, Boise, Bruneau, Caldwell, Cambridge, Cascade, Council, Crouch, Donnelly, Eagle, Emmett, Fruitland, Garden City, Garden Valley, Glens Ferry, Grand View, Grasmere, Greenleaf, Homedale, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho City, Kuna, Lowman, McCall, Melba, Meridian, Middleton, Midvale, Mountain Home, Murphy, Nampa, New Meadows, New Plymouth, Notus, Ola, Oreana, Parma, Payette, Placerville, Reynolds, Riddle, Silver City, Star, Sweet, Weiser, Wilder and Yellow Pine.

North Idaho

Located in Coeur d'Alene

Ms. Karen Roetter

(208) 664-5490

- Counties included: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Shoshone.
 - Cities included: Athol, Bonners Ferry, Clark Fork, Coeur d'Alene, Dalton Gardens, Dover, East Hope, Fernan Lake Village, Harrison, Hauser, Hayden, Hayden Lake, Hope, Huetter, Kellogg, Kootenai, Moyie Springs, Mullan, Oldtown, Osburn, Pinehurst, Plummer, Ponderay, Post Falls, Priest River, Rathdrum, Sandpoint, Smeltonville, Spirit Lake, St. Maries, State Line, Tensed, Wallace, Wardner and Worley.

Eastern Idaho, North

Located in Idaho Falls

Ms. Kathryn Hitch

(208) 552-9779

- Counties included: Bonneville, Butte, Clark, Custer, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, Madison and Teton.
 - Cities included: Ammon, Arco, Ashton, Challis, Chester, Driggs, Hamer, Idaho Falls, Irwin, Island Park, Lewisville, Mackey, May, Menan, Newdale, North Fork, Rexburg, Rigby, Ririe, Roberts, Salmon, St. Anthony, Swan Valley, Tetonia and Victor.

North-Central

Located in Lewiston

Mr. Tony Snodderly

(208) 743-1492

- Counties included: Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis and Nez Perce.
 - Cities included: Bovill, Cottonwood, Craigmont, Culatesac, Deary, Elk River, Ferdinand, Genesee, Grangeville, Juliaetta, Kamiah, Kendrick, Kooskia, Lapwai, Lewiston, Moscow, Nezperce, Onaway, Orofino, Peck, Pierce, Potlatch, Reubens, Riggins, Stites, Troy, Weippe, White Bird and Winchester.

Eastern Idaho, South

Located in Pocatello

Ms. Farhana Hibbert

(208) 236-6775

- Counties included: Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida and Power.
 - Cities included: Aberdeen, American Falls, Arimo, Atomic City, Bancroft, Basalt, Blackfoot, Bloomington, Chubbuck, Clifton, Dayton, Downey, Firth, Franklin, Georgetown, Grace, Inkom, Lava Hot Springs, Malad, McCammon, Montpelier, Oxford, Paris, Pocatello, Preston, Rockland, Shelley, Soda Springs, St. Charles and Weston.

South-Central

Located in Twin Falls

Ms. Samantha Marshall

(208) 734-2515

- Counties included: Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka and Twin Falls.
 - Cities included: Acequia, Albion, Bellevue, Bliss, Buhl, Burley, Carey, Castleford, Declo, Dietrich, Eden, Fairfield, Filer, Gooding, Hagerman, Hansen, Hailey, Hazelton, Heyburn, Hollister, Jerome, Ketchum, Kimberly, Malta, Minidoka, Murtaugh, Oakley, Paul, Richfield, Rupert, Shoshone, Sun Valley, Twin Falls and Wendell.