

Panel #44

TITLE:	Impact of Age on Perceived Veteran-Friendliness of Resource Referrals from a Wisconsin Community Resource Referral Service
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ABSTRACT:	Background: United States military veterans face high rates of mental health issues, homelessness, and legal problems. Stigma and barriers often hinder their access to social services. Peer mentorship has been identified as effective in overcoming these challenges. In Wisconsin, where over 50% of veterans are 65 or older, veterans have significantly higher rates of mental, physical, and functional impairments than civilian older adults. Veteran Peer Mentors are well-suited to provide age-appropriate referrals to social services. However, research on tailoring these referrals to veteran sub-groups remains limited. Objective: This study explores what makes a community resource referral veteran-friendly, how age influences these factors, and examines the usability and veteran-friendliness of a Wisconsin resource referral resource. Methods: Dryhooch of America, in partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin, facilitated the recruitment of 8 Veteran Peer Mentors for a focus group. The focus group was recorded, transcribed, and will be analyzed thematically using grounded theory principles. Results: Initial findings describe the importance of a Veteran Peer Mentor's personal experience with a resource, allowing them to verify that the resource's employees and environment are supportive of veterans. Generational differences and age affect resource recommendations for topics such as mental health support. The significance of persistence, inquiry, and overcoming obstacles in working with community resources was emphasized. Important considerations of peer mentors when making referrals often include a veteran's education level, childcare needs, physical ability, and mobility, particularly for older veterans. Conclusion: The analysis underscores the value of a mentor's familiarity with resources, understanding of cultural and age-related backgrounds, and persistence in identifying veteran-friendly resources. The Wisconsin resource referral source offers veteran-specific resources, but mentors often take a hands-on approach to ensure appropriateness. The findings will be used to help the resource referral source improve its services for veterans, with future research focusing on additional referral factors.
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TOPIC AREA:	Behavioral Health; Food access; Health care access/quality; Housing; Mental health; Social determinants of health; Socioeconomic status/poverty; Veteran health