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Health Costs of the Iraq and Afghan Wars: Short- and Long-Term Impacts on US Veterans Health Care

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Abstract: Public information about the use of health care through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars (OIF/OEF) underscores the potential for overestimating the impact on the taxpayer. Pressing needs of newly discharged veterans require immediate attention, especially for PTSD, TBI, and physical disability services, but the demand for immediate post-deployment VHA services is overshadowed nationally by the demands of the aging Korean and Vietnam War cohorts in terms of the number of patients and the total cost of their care. In addition, the long-run care needs for aging OIF/OEF veterans will be significant.

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TABLE 1 US Military Deaths and Casualties from Principal Wars*

Conflict	Number Serving Worldwide	Death	Wounded	Ratio Wounded:Dead
Civil War (1861-1865)	2,213,363	364,511	281,881	1:1
Spanish America War	306,760	2,446	1,662	1:2
World War I	4,734,991	116,516	204,002	2:1
World War II	16,112,566	405,399	671,846	2:1
Korea (1950-1953)	5,720,000	36,574	103,284	3:1
Vietnam (1964-1973)	8,744,000	58,209	153,303	3:1
Persian Gulf War (1990-1991)	2,225,000	382	467	1:1
OIF/OEF** (2001-present)	1,400,000	4,492	31,590**	7:1

*Data accessed April 17, 2008, Department of Defense

<http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/>

**Number from Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among US Southwest Asian War Veterans, VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards

TABLE 2 Amputation Rates for US Military Conflicts

Conflict	Number of Amputees	Number of Wounded	Amputees/Wounded
World War I (1917-1918)	2,610	204,002	1.3%
World War II (1941-1946)	14,912	671,846	2.2%
Korean War (1950-1953)	1,477	103,284	1.4%
Vietnam Conflict (1964-1973)	5,283	153,303	3.5%
OIF/OEF*	1,031	31,590	3.3%

**Data accessed April 17, 2008, Department of Defense

<http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/>

Data for WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam from Benjamin Potter and Charles Scoville, "Amputation is not Isolated: An Overview of the U.S. Army Amputation Patient Care Program and Associated Amputee Injuries," *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons*, vol. 14, no. 10, 2006.

Data for OIF/OEF amputations are from CRS Report for Congress, "United States Military Casualty Statistics: Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom," RS22452, March 18, 2008.