

Hampton Roads' Military Population

According to the United States Census Bureau, the Hampton Roads region is home to 188,402 veterans, approximately 42.8% of whom are prime working age (between 16 and 54 years old). The following provides a breakdown of this population in Hampton Roads by age:

Age	Veteran Population	Percent of Population
18 to 34 years	20,464	10.9%
35 to 54 years	59,986	31.8%
55 to 64 years	43,974	23.3%
65 to 74 years	35,937	19.1%
75 years and over	28,041	14.9%

Every year, 15,000 servicemembers in Hampton Roads leave the military. Some of these individuals separate from the military and immediately transition into the civilian workforce while others leave the military through retirement. The dynamics around military retirement and separations in Hampton Roads are complex and require some explanation, as a "retirement" from military service does not mean an individual is no longer participating in the regional workforce.

To retire from the military and receive the requisite benefits, a servicemember must have either:

- Served on active duty in the U.S Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, or Marine Corps for a period of 20 years or more; or
- Retired medically from the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, or Marine Corps.

For those with less than 20 years of service, a disability determination of 30% or more and that the servicemember is unfit for service will qualify a servicemember for retirement benefits. Migraines, asthma, back and neck conditions, nerve damage, and mental disorders are common examples of qualifying conditions. If a servicemember requests to be medically retired due to these or any other condition, they must go through an examination process to determine if the condition is permanent, and this process ultimately results in one of several different findings:

- If a permanent disability rating of 30% or more is determined and the servicemember has less than 20 years of service, then they will be placed on the Permanent Disability Retired List and are entitled to retirement benefits.

- If a servicemember has more than 20 years of service and any percentage of permanent disability is found, then they will be placed on the Permanent Disability Retired List and are entitled to retirement benefits.
- If a permanent disability rating of less than 30% is determined and the servicemember has less than 20 years of service, then they will be separated with severance pay, but will not be medically retired.
- An individual's condition may also be determined to be temporary and that they are fit for service, at which point they may be ordered to return to active duty.

For servicemembers with more than 20 years of service, they may request to retire with full retirement benefits. For enlisted members who joined at their earliest age of eligibility for military service (17 years old), they may qualify to retire at the age of 37, meaning they are still well within the prime working age. In fact, according to the United States Department of Defense's latest Statistical Report on the Military Retirement System, in fiscal year 2021, 64.5% of all military retirees were aged 54 or younger at the time of their military retirement. This means that 29,830 of the 46,243 military retirees in the United States in fiscal year 2021 are still classified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as prime working age.

Approximately 200,000 individuals leave military service each year. Assuming 2021 statistics hold true, this would mean that nearly a quarter of all servicemembers retire from military service, while 75% separate from military service. Applying that to regional figures, this would mean that approximately 11,250 individuals separate from military service in Hampton Roads, while the remaining 3,750 retire. Applying the nationwide retirement metrics to this figure, approximately 2,419 of those individuals who retired should still be of prime working age. This would mean that approximately 91% of the individuals leaving military service in Hampton Roads each year would participate in the regional labor force.

Veteran participation in the labor force generally tends to be higher than that of the general civilian population. In September 2023, the unemployment rate for the United States was 3.8%. Among veterans, the rate was 3.5%. In addition, the labor force participation rate among nonveterans is 46.8%, while the rate among veterans is 78.1% according to the Census Bureau. The veteran population - both retired and separated - provides a unique employment opportunity, especially in Hampton Roads, as this population provides a relatively young workforce that is more likely than the civilian population to hold a job and participate in the labor market.