

Veterans by the Numbers

The VA announced the appointment of a new chief data officer on 23 September. Kshemendra Paul was named the executive director for data governance and analytics and the chief data office for the VA. This is in response to Public Law 115-435, the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 that was signed into law in January. Why is this important, you may ask? The Act requires all federal agencies to develop statistical evidence to support policymaking, maintain a comprehensive data inventory available to the public and implement protections to ensure security of confidential information. That is a long way of saying that federal policy decisions should be based on research and facts. I strongly endorse this policy. Too often policy at most levels of government are made on political partisan ideas and not on hard data analysis. For many of my years at MSUM while IT Director, I also served as the data privacy officer. For years the Institutional Research Director was in our office. I guess I still enjoy doing data research.

The VA has had a data reporting section on their website. Over the summer, probably in reaction to the new law, the VA redesigned the website and make it easier to use - www.va.gov/vetdata/. I did some searching on the website and found interesting data. Minnesota's Veteran population is 8.28% of the total adult population while nation-wide it is 5.5%. However, Minnesota does not appear to be a retirement state for Veterans with 5.87% of our Veterans retired while nationally it is 10.78%. It could be our wonderful climate. We do have a greater percent of Veterans age 65 and older, 54.56% compared to the national of 47.05%. About 10% of Minnesota's Veterans are female. The largest group of Veterans are of the Vietnam War. We only have fewer than 9,000 WWII Veterans in Minnesota. It is also interesting that the counties with the highest percent of Veterans are rural counties and those counties are mostly in the northern half of the state. North Dakota data show a larger percent of Veterans, 9.25 of the total adult population and a slightly larger percent of ND's Veterans are female. However, ND is also not a retirement state for Veterans with only 42.65 of ND's Veterans are 65 or older. Fewer than 600 of ND's Veterans are from WWII, the greatest number is from the Vietnam War.

In viewing other parts of the VA website, it appears that they are not as up-to-date as they should be. I found a report released 3 May 2019 stating the best available data was as of 30 September 2015. The Law requires greater transparency which is being done on the website. It also calls for a stronger effort on data privacy which is apparent because the only data I could find was summary data.