

Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 – Toxic Exposure Screening



NASEM - April 3, 2024



Choose VA

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA Toxic Exposure Screening Quick Facts

- **Who:** All Veterans enrolled in VA health care.
- **What:** A brief screening averaging 5–10 minutes to identify and document any potential exposures to toxins during military service.
- **When:** At least once every 5 years.
- **Where:** At VA medical centers/clinics, including virtual encounters.
- **Why:** To support the long-term health plan of the Veteran—ensuring they receive informed, whole-health care—and connect them with follow-up resources as requested.

⇒ **EXPOSURE-INFORMED CARE**

TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING AT A GLANCE

WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT IS NOT
<p>A CONVERSATION STARTER The screening asks Veterans if they believe they experienced toxic exposures while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.</p>	<p>A COMPREHENSIVE EXAM No specific diagnostic tests or physical exams are indicated to screen for illness based solely on self-reported exposure to toxins.</p>
<p>A CONNECTION Veterans will be offered connections and information on benefits, registry exams, and clinical resources, as appropriate.</p>	<p>A PATH TO BENEFITS The screening does not play a role in determining disability compensation, but Veterans who report exposures will receive information about <u>filing a claim</u>.</p>
<p>A RECORD Veterans' responses are added to the VA medical record to be included as part of their care.</p>	<p>A VERIFICATION OF EXPOSURE The screening provides no legal or medical verification.</p>
<p>EXPOSURE-INFORMED CARE This approach includes exposure concerns as a cornerstone of Veteran care across their lifetime.</p>	<p>A REGISTRY EVALUATION The screening is not part of VA's <u>environmental health registries</u> and does not serve as a registry evaluation.</p>

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Health Administration | For more information, visit VA.gov/PACT →

Toxic Exposure Screening and Exposure Informed Care for Veterans

PHASES

Screening

Medical Evaluation

Exposure Informed Care

KEY



Veteran Directed Component



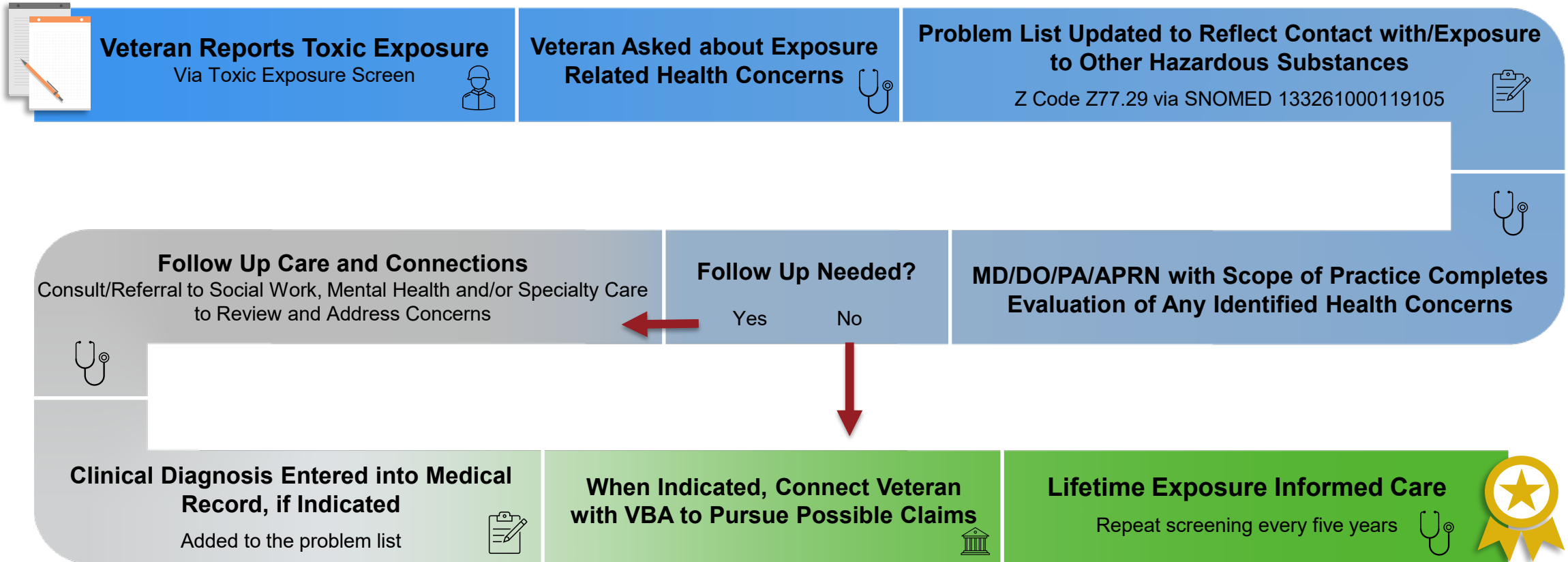
Clinical Component



Documentation/Administrative Component



Veterans Benefits Component



NOTE: The process map depicted here is a guide and may be adjusted depending on case complexity.

TES Actions

Screen & SERVE

Supportive Education & Resources for Veterans with Exposures

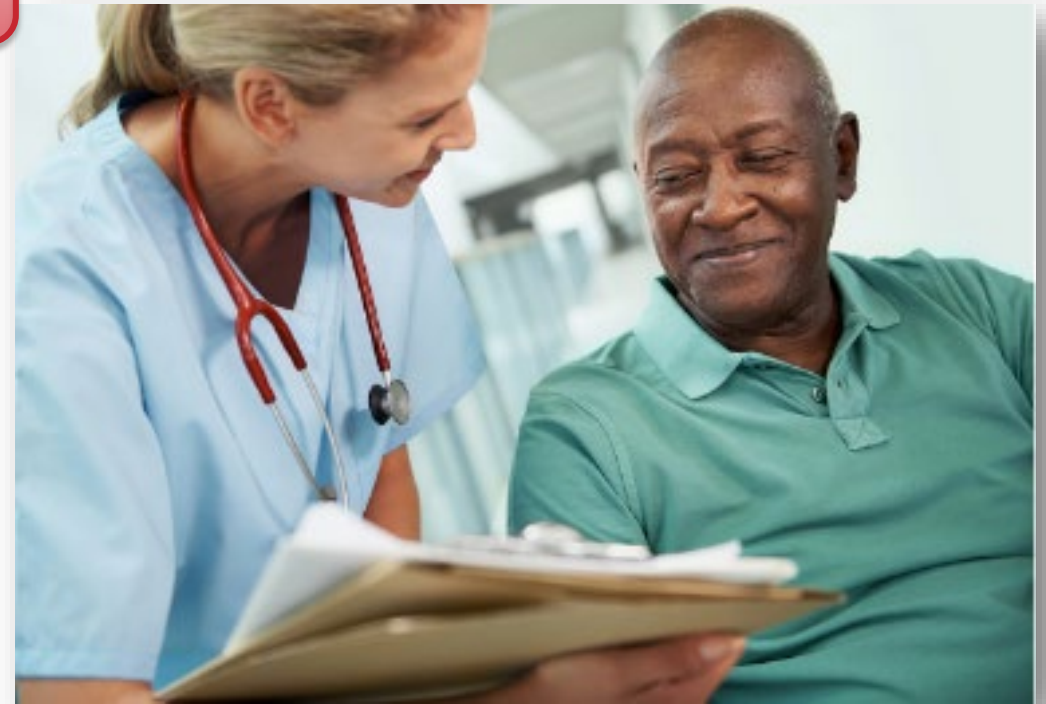
Affirmation of VA commitment to Veterans with exposures*

Inform on presumptive conditions* & provide guidance on submitting claims*

Provide information about Registries and how to enroll*

Provide standardized information on exposures of concern**

Add code to PL* and Advise the Veteran to stay connected with their VA healthcare team for Veteran-centered, team-based, integrated and Whole Health oriented care



Exposure-Informed care!

*Guidance built in TES

**Information in Exposure Ed App & at WRIISC

Toxic Exposure Screen (TES) – Stage 1 (CPRS)

1. Ask the Question



Do you believe you experienced any toxic exposure(s), such as Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit, Gulf War related exposures, Agent Orange, Radiation, contaminated water at Camp Lejeune or other such exposures, while serving in the Armed Forces?

- Yes:
- No
- Don't Know:
- Declines Screening

2. *If Veteran indicates “yes” ask about exposure & select/check any box



* Do you believe you were exposed to any of the following while serving in the Armed Forces?

- Open Burn Pits/Airborne Hazards:
- Gulf War related exposures:
- Agent Orange:
- Radiation:
- Camp Lejeune contaminated water exposure:

Other exposures: **Opens a free text box to record the Veteran's reported exposure**

***The first five exposure categories are the most common exposure concerns for Veterans**

Toxic Exposure Screen (TES) – Stage 2 (CPRS)

1. Confirm status Veteran medical Concerns

Yes Concern: *

Additional comment if needed

Exposure Concern(s):

Environmental Exposure Screen
10/07/2022 Airborne Hazards/Open Burn Pit - Toxic Exposure Concern

Follow-up Question(s):
10/07/2022 No Questions - Toxic Exposure Concern

++ To be completed by an authorized closer. TES mandatory training must be completed before use. ++

++ NOTE: Using the ICD-10 code Z77.29 automatically added to this encounter ADD "Exposure to potentially hazardous substance" to the problem list. ++

* Veteran/caregiver reported a health/medical concern related to their concern of environmental exposure:

Yes

No

Veteran declines further assistance at this time.

Unable to contact Veteran/caregiver for follow-up of toxic exposure concerns.

2. Make connections to follow-up resources as appropriate.

- Local contact information should be populated.

* Veteran/caregiver has the following connections given:

Consult/Referral to Registry Program

Consult/Referral to TES Navigator

Consult/Referral to Social Work

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for Benefits/claims: 1-800-827-1000

Veteran Service Officer/Organization (VSO) LOCAL VSO CONTACT NUMBER HERE

No connections needed at this time

Military Environmental (Toxic) Exposure Relationships

Toxic Exposures and BH/MH (Behavioral Health/Mental Health) Conditions

- Neurobehavioral Effects (cognitive decline and neuropsychiatric disorders): data are lacking¹ on long-term effects related to jet fuel exposure, but we know that they act on the brain and have seen signals for an association in the preliminary data from our internal Veteran studies. In the case of Camp Lejeune, there may be affects of exposure to benzene on mental health that persist after the exposure has ended.

¹Hoisington, A.J., Stearns-Yoder, K.A., Kovacs, E.J. *et al.* Airborne Exposure to Pollutants and Mental Health: A Review with Implications for United States Veterans. *Curr Envir Health Rpt* (2024).



Choose **VA**

Draft - Pre-Decisional Deliberative Document
Internal VA Use Only

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Military Environmental (Toxic) Exposure Relationships

Toxic Exposures and Other Health Outcomes in accordance with PACT Act

- Screening results allow for tracking of demographic, geographic, and Service Period across the following exposures which have presumptives: Agent Orange exposure, Gulf Deployment exposures, Airborne Hazard and Open Burn Pit exposure, ionizing radiation exposure, ground water contamination at Camp Lejeune
 - Given absence of valid exposure data the potential relationships between exposures and outcomes are based on the Precautionary Principle and presumptive approach
 - Serves as the basis for Exposure-Informed Care and the inclusion of potential exposures in the risk profile of Veterans
- Data is not available on “other” exposures for which there are no designated presumptive conditions
 - In these cases, services/resources/benefits are awarded based on “case by case” review using standard OEM principles/practices
 - Evidence must be provided to support exposure dose/duration
 - Nexus opinion by trained/qualified examiner may be required

TES and the Precautionary Principle

Precautionary Principle

An approach to assessing potential harm in the presence of uncertainty due to the absence of scientific information or data.

In most military environmental exposures, we have no exposure data because the environments in which the exposures occurred were not monitored.

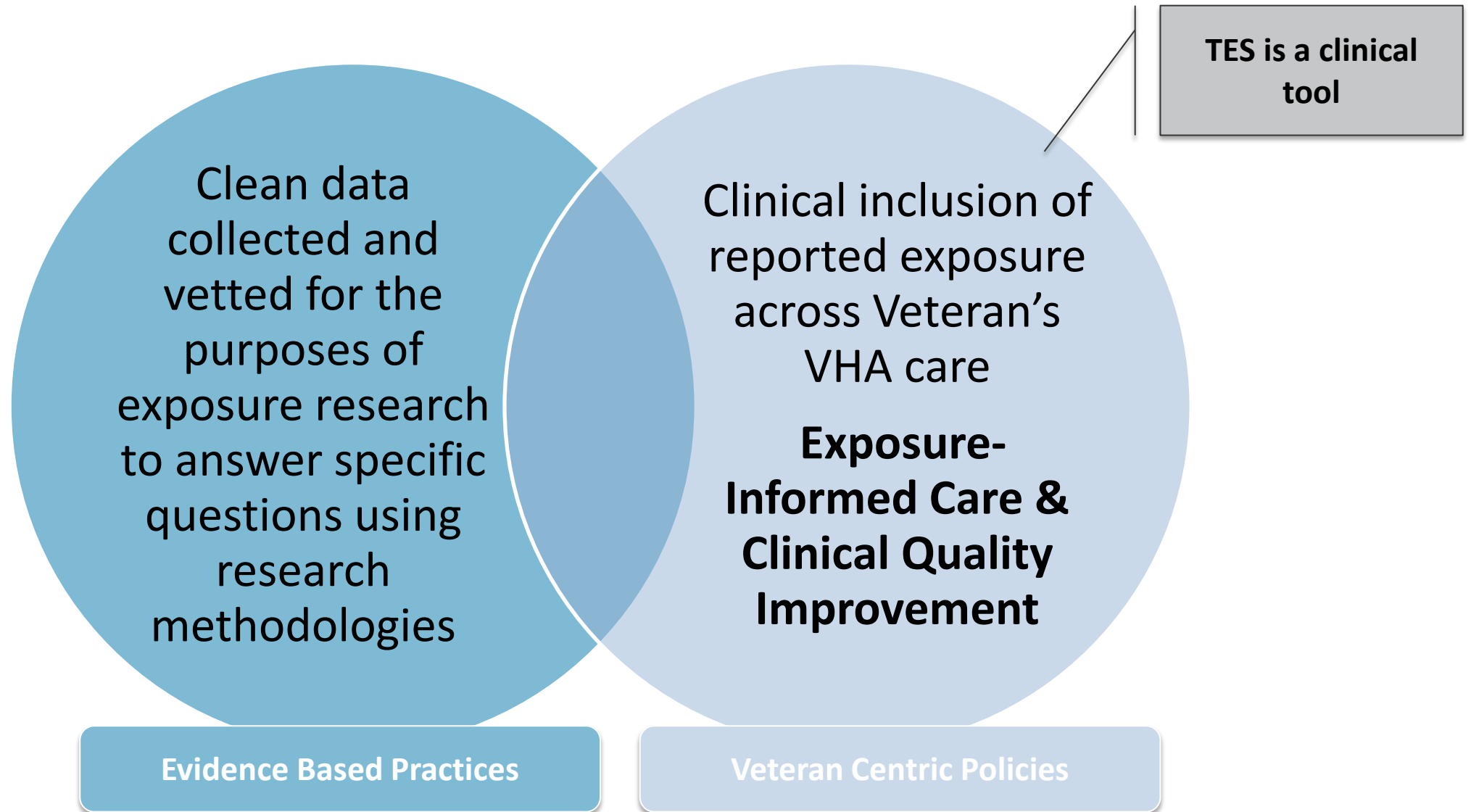
In the absence of data, we turn to policies (based on values and mission, not science), which in VA are Veteran-centric.

We give the benefit of any doubt to the Veteran.

In VA this led to the “presumptive approach” to providing support for Veterans who may have been exposed to a potentially harmful substance:

1. If you were in an area at the time during which the potentially toxic substance was present, you are “presumed” to have been exposed: **“presumptive exposure”**
2. If there is any evidence that the health outcome of concern could be related to the exposure, it is “presumed” that the exposure contributed to the condition (“presumed association or presumed nexus”) and the condition is designated as a **“presumptive condition”**.

Research vs. Clinical Data Collection

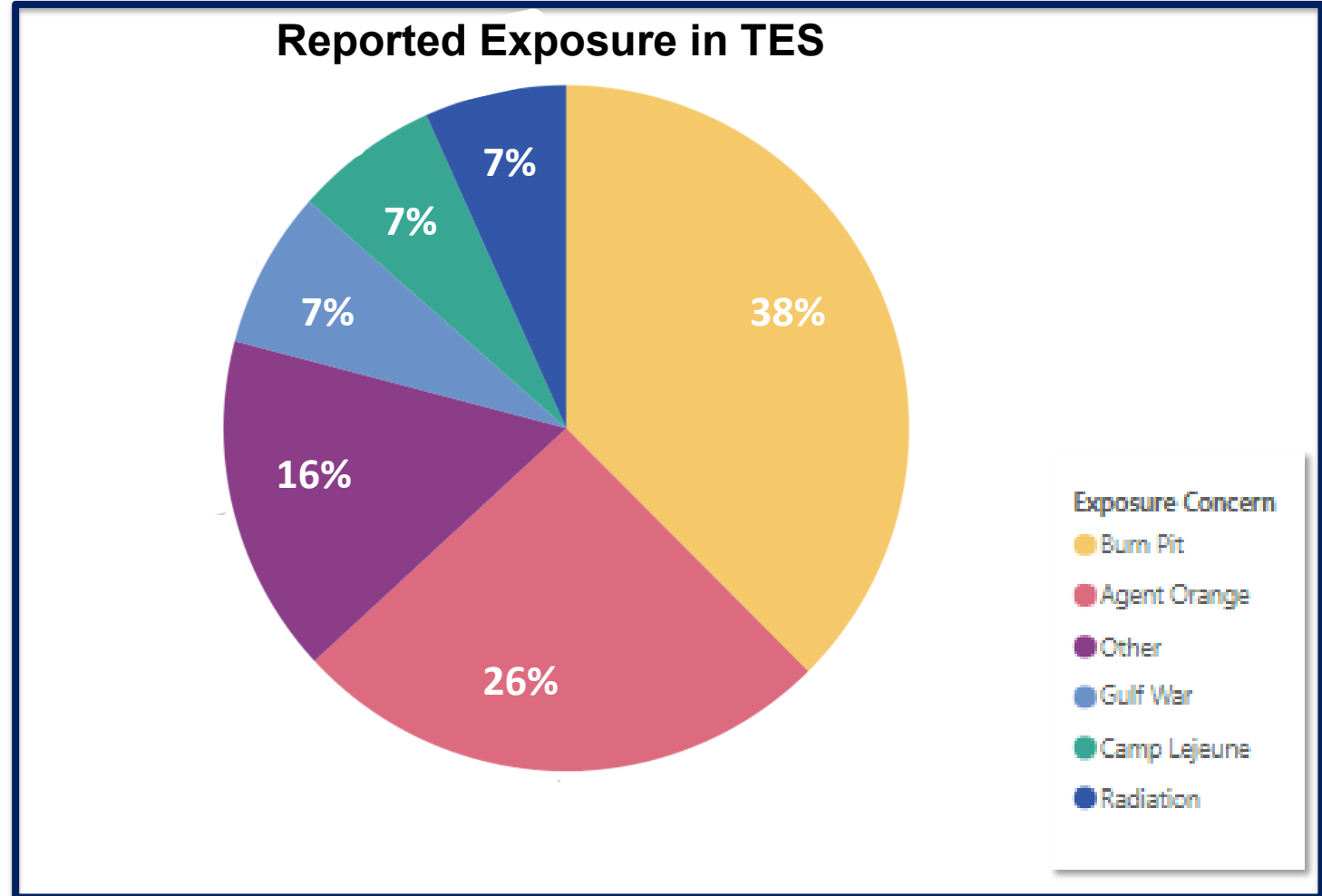
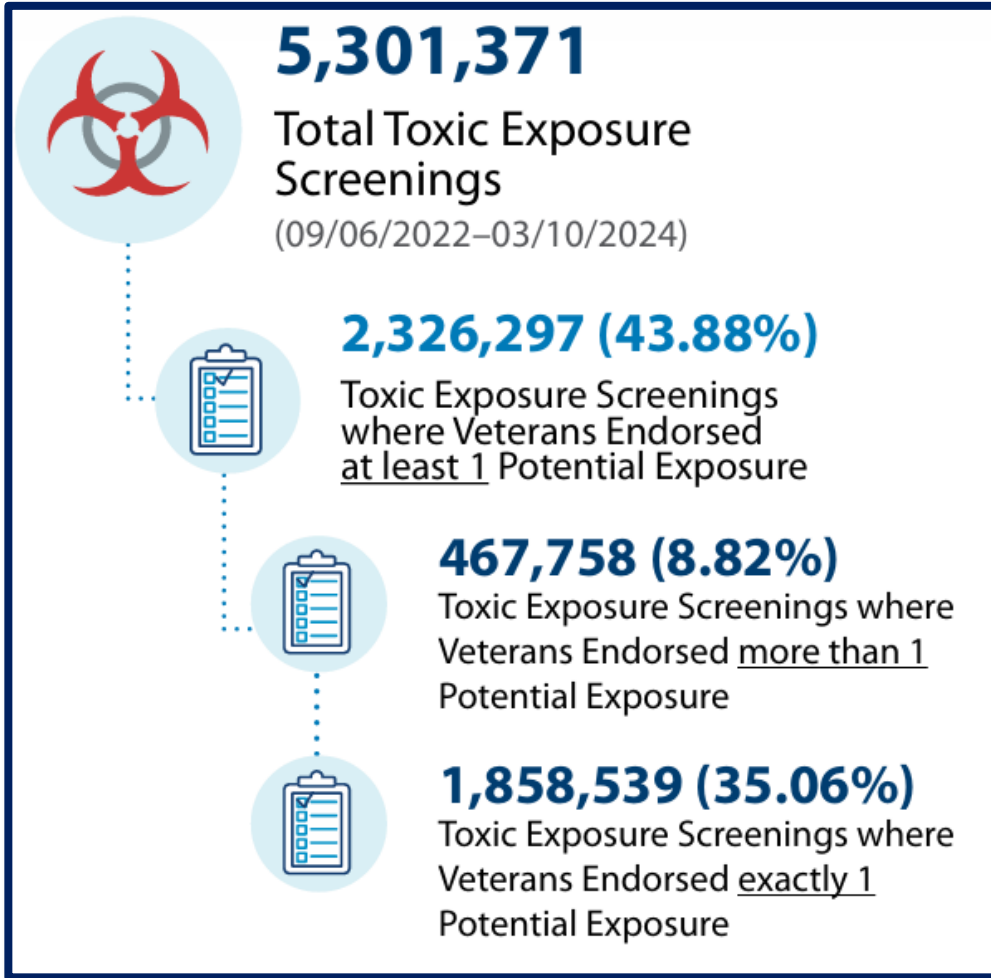


Exposure Data Complexities

Exposure variables available from TES

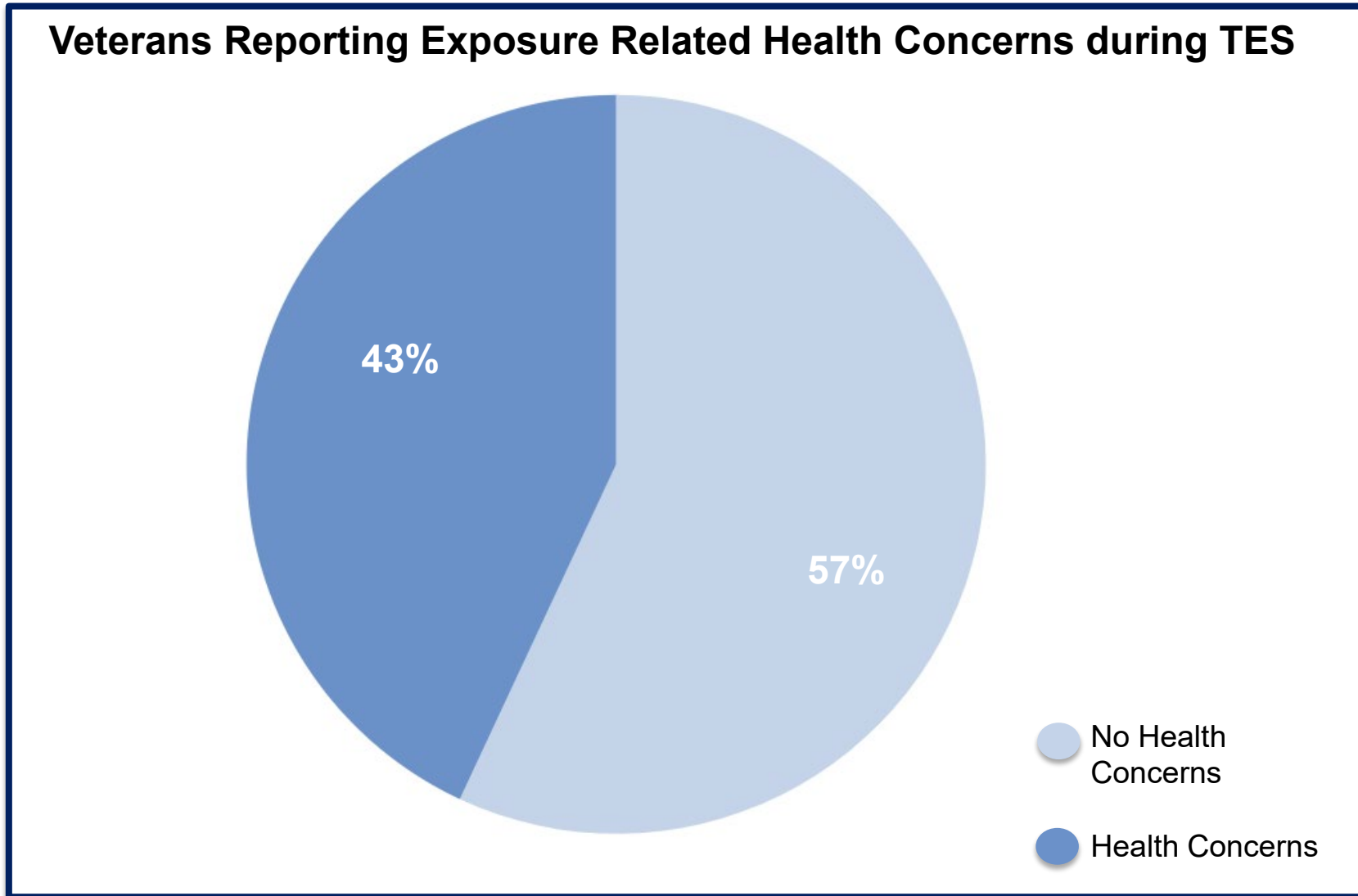
- What exposure variables can be gleaned from TES data? **None**
 - TES screen offers no exposure data;
 - there are no “exposure variables” just as there are no valid exposure data on nearly all of the Military Environmental Exposures;
 - this is because the environments in which the exposures were encountered were not being monitored for the exposures involved;
- During TES, exposures are self-reported
- In VA, exposure is presumed if Veteran was in a location during which the toxin was also present
 - Using other proxies for exposure, such as trying to geolocate individuals during times of potential exposure or using reported or even documented risk activities proved to have significant limitations in the past for such exposures as Agent Orange or exposure to ground water contamination at Camp Lejeune;
 - until presumptive conditions were designated reliably establishing links between exposure and health outcome proved to be seriously limited

TES Data 3/11/24



[VA Pact Act | Veterans Affairs](#)

TES Data



Veteran Facing Resources

- Visit www.va.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MyVA411, then press 8
- Access information on military environmental exposures: www.PublicHealth.va.gov/exposures/index.asp
- Access exposure benefits information: www.va.gov/disability/eligibility
- There is a suite of toxic exposure screening resources at the end of this comprehensive blog: <https://news.va.gov/109115/spread-word-pact-act-health-care-eligibility/>
- Download the free VA Exposure Ed mobile app: mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed



Screening Demographics

- Rurality
- Gender
- Race
- as well as any information (including demographic information and service period) that you have about who has been screened. TES screening data