

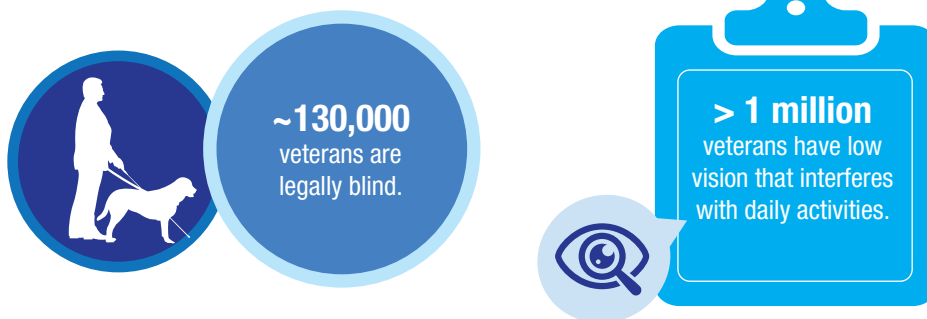


Ophthalmology

Many veterans in the VHA experience significant vision loss, ranging from legal blindness to low vision that impacts daily functioning. The most common causes among those served in Blind Rehabilitation and Visual Impairment programs include age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, retinal disorders, brain injury (including TBI), and a broad group of other ocular or neurologic conditions such as cataract, optic nerve disease, stroke related visual loss, and corneal or hereditary disorders.^{1,2}

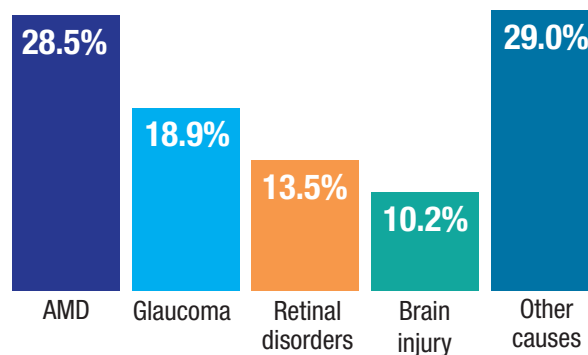
Technology-based Eye Care Services (TECS) is a national VA teleophthalmology program that screens across all US regions and reaches many highly rural veterans, while also providing eyeglasses, managing minor eye conditions such as dry eye, and facilitating referral to the National Subspecialty Ophthalmology Network, which delivers remote subspecialty services including glaucoma and retinal care.^{3,4} A TECS retrospective study showed that vision-threatening disease is more common in veterans who are older, non-Hispanic Black, unhoused, socially vulnerable, and those who have comorbidities — especially those who are rarely seen in primary care.^{3,4}

Estimates of Vision Impairment in the VHA^{1,2}



Leading Causes of Vision Loss

Based on veterans in the Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) and Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) population



AMD, age-related macular degeneration



Retinal disorders include diabetic retinopathy, retinal artery occlusion, and retinal vein occlusion. “Other causes” is a residual category in the BRS/VIST data and does not specify diagnoses; in VA vision loss reporting, this category typically includes cataract, optic nerve/neurologic causes, stroke-related visual loss, corneal disease, hereditary and congenital disorders, and miscellaneous or unspecified causes.

Technology-Based Eye Care Services in the VHA^{3,4}



A national VA study of TECS included more than 21,000 veterans seen in 2021. The program showed high patient satisfaction and provided earlier detection of vision-threatening eye disease (VTED).

TECS Reach



64.7

Average age



10.9%

Women



49.6%

Rural residence



2.5%

Highly rural



3-4

Average comorbidities

Overall Eye Disease Prevalence

Cataracts: **47.8%**

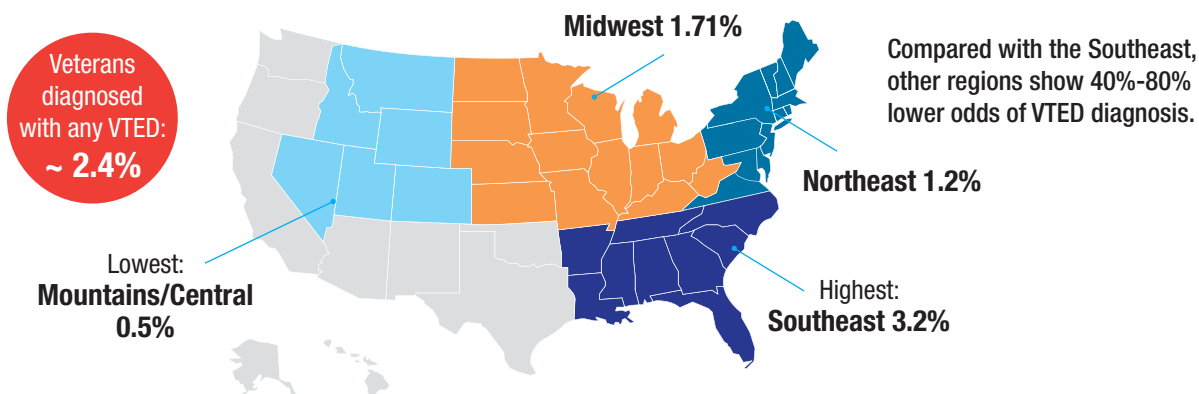
Glaucoma: **17.6%**

DR: **6.3%**

AMD: **5.8%**

DR, diabetic retinopathy

VTED Relative Regional Prevalence



Those at Highest Risk for VTED

