

Military Edge

Access to health care substantially improves cancer outcomes and can help bridge racial disparities.

September 13, 2021 By [Bob Barnett](#)

Active-duty members of the U.S. military, retirees, National Guard members and family members have free or low-cost health care provided by the U.S. Military Health System. If they are diagnosed with colorectal cancer, they have an 18% lower risk of death than civilians, report researchers in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*. The survival benefit is greater for Black patients, who typically have poorer colon cancer survival rates than white Americans. They are 26% less likely to die than civilians.

The study adds to a growing body of research showing that access to health care substantially improves cancer outcomes and can help bridge racial disparities. In an unrelated study presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology 2021 Annual Meeting, researchers found that in states that chose not to expand access to Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, cancer mortality was higher. For example, women diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer in states that limit access to Medicaid were 31% more likely to die.

In the military study, lead author Craig D. Shriver, MD, director of the Murtha Cancer Center Research Program at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, stated, “Our findings provide solid evidence of the benefits of access to universal health care. What’s more, when medical care is universally provided to all patients, racial disparity in colon cancer outcomes can be reduced.”
