

## VA Programs for Women

VA has responded to the growing number of women veterans by targeting programs to meet their unique health-care needs. A Veterans Health Administration office to address women's health issues was first created in 1988.

Public Law 102-585, Veterans Health Care Act of 1992, authorized new and expanded services for women veterans, including counseling for sexual trauma on a priority basis; specific health services for women, such as Pap smears, mammography, and general reproductive health care (including birth control and treatment of menopause) at many VA medical facilities.

The Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996 expanded services further to include maternity and infertility benefits. In fiscal year 1997, the Under Secretary for Health appointed the first full-time Director for the Women Veterans Health Program. The program provides a comprehensive system of cost-effective medical and psychosocial services for women.

This Women Veterans Health Program has as its mission to promote the health, welfare and dignity of women veterans, and their families, by ensuring equitable access to timely, sensitive and quality health care.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SEXUAL ABUSE COUNSELING

VA is committed to assist women veterans with a wide range of mental health and psychosocial services. The services include sexual trauma counseling, substance abuse treatment, and evaluation and treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which includes women veterans Stress Disorder Treatment Teams. In addition, there are programs for homeless women veterans, victims of domestic violence, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Public Law 102-585 in 1992 authorized VA to include outreach and counseling services for women veterans who experienced incidents of sexual trauma while serving on active duty in the military. The law was later amended and authorized VA to provide counseling to men as well as women. The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act of 1999 extended the provision of counseling and treatment services to veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma through December 31, 2004.

Women veterans seeking assistance may call 1-800-827-1000 or John P. March Jr. at 860-928-1133 for referral to a trained sexual trauma counselor. In addition, every VA Medical Center has a Women Veterans Program Manager who is available to assist women veterans. Women veterans interested in receiving care at the VA are encouraged to contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager.

## MEDICAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS

As part of VA's continuum of health care services, women veterans receive preventive health attention. Unless contrary to medical indications, each woman veteran receiving VA care will be

offered regular Pap smears and mammograms. In addition to preventive services, the high quality medical services available to women veterans include primary care, gender-specific care, reproductive health care, and evaluation and treatment for osteoporosis. In 1999, the uniform benefits package included a maternity care benefit for women veterans as well as infertility evaluation and limited treatment. Special initiatives include Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Centers and Clinical Programs of Excellence.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

VA is the largest health care system providing education and training to health professionals. The Women Veterans Health Program aims to enhance the equity and quality of health care for women veterans and to promote information exchange and training of health-care providers to meet the health needs of women veterans more comprehensively.

Training methodologies include Women's Health Fellowship Programs, Resident training, Allied Health academic training, video/satellite training, and clinical updates in contemporary women's health issues, mini-residencies, sensitivity training and customer service.

## RESEARCH

Since May 1991, VA policy has required that all applicants for VA research funding must consider and document the inclusion of women in proposed studies. Current women veteran's research initiatives include aging, breast and other cancers, chronic diseases, reproductive health, mental health, substance abuse, and women's health services and systems.

## COMPENSATION FOR WOMEN VETERANS

VBA has assigned Women Veterans Coordinators in all VA Regional Offices to assist women veterans with development of claims. These coordinators have been trained to assist in handling claims for gender-specific conditions and claims based on sexual trauma.

Regional office staffs make women who file claims based on sexual trauma fully aware that they can receive priority care for personal trauma counseling at a VA Medical Center even if they do not have a VA disability rating. For more information, call 1-800-827-1000.

## NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

Women veterans discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. For more information, call 1-800-827-1000 and speak with a Veterans Benefits Counselor.

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The estimated population of women veterans as of 2001 was 1.6 million, or about 7.2 percent of the total veteran population. 10.26% of the 22.8 million veterans who use VA for healthcare are

women. Currently, women make up 14.8 percent of the active duty military force and approximately 22.8 percent of the reserve force. By 2010, they are expected to represent over 14 percent of the total veteran population. Fifty-six percent of women veterans who use VA are less than 45 years of age. Sixty-two percent of women veterans are less than 45 years of age.