Overview of the Center for Women Veterans: Monitoring and Coordination of VA’s Health Care and Benefits Services for Women Veterans

Irene Trowell-Harris, EdD, RN
Director, VA Center for Women Veterans
May 8, 2013
Overview

- Congressional Mandate
- VA Organizational Chart
- VA Priorities
- Our Mission – What we Do
- Women Veterans Demographics
- VA’s Benefits and Services
- Women Veterans Challenges
- VA Initiatives to Address Challenges
- Women Veterans Task Force
- Women Veterans Program
- How the Center Uses Partnerships

- Objectives of Our Partnerships
- How Other Organizations Can Help
- Joint Outreach Outcomes
- VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
- 2011 National Training Summit on Women Veterans
- VA Women Veterans-Specific Resources
- How Women Veterans Can Obtain Local Assistance
- Summary-Where We Are Going
- How to Contact the Center
November 1994, Public Law 103-446 required VA to create The Center for Women Veterans, to monitor and coordinate VA programs for women.
VA Priorities

- VA’s priorities: access, backlog, homelessness.
  - Improving access to benefits and services to eligible Veterans:
    • Promoting eBenefits registration to facilitate access to documentation and information.
    • Women Veterans are eligible for all health care services, including gender-specific care.
  - Aggressively attacking the claims backlog:
    • Using disability benefits questionnaires (DBQs) to shorten time needed to gather succinctly gather information needed to assess disabilities. (News release published March 22, 2012.)
    • Implementing a National deployment of a paperless claims processing system.
Ending Veteran homelessness:
- Women Veterans make up eight percent of homeless Veterans population.
- VA continues success on historic 3 year plan (2015).
- VA’s continuum of care includes services for special populations who may be at greater risk for homelessness, such as women and Veterans with families.
- Programs incorporate outreach to increase awareness of VA’s initiatives and prevention, temporary and transitional housing, and permanent housing with supportive services.
- Supportive Services Veteran Families (SSVF) is VA’s primary prevention program, designed to help Veterans and their families rapidly exit homelessness, or avoid entering homelessness.
Improving women Veterans’ access to and utilization of VA’s benefits and health care services is a component of this mission:

- Diversifying outreach materials to include more images of women in receipt of VA health care and services.
- Including this intent of diversifying outreach within a communications plan.
- Registering for eBenefits to facilitate access to documentation and information.
Monitor and coordinate VA’s administration of health care and benefits services, and programs for women Veterans.

Serve as an advocate for a cultural transformation (both within VA and in the general public) in recognizing the service and contributions of women Veterans and women in the military.

Raise awareness of the responsibility to treat women Veterans with dignity and respect.
Women Veterans Demographics

- Women are one of the fastest growing subpopulation of Veterans. Based on active duty and recruiting numbers, the percentage of female Veterans is projected to increase.

- 2.24 million living women Veterans of the 22.3 million Veterans (VetPop as of 9/30/12). Currently 10 percent of the total Veterans population. By 2020, they are estimated to be 12.4 percent the total Veterans population.

- Twenty percent of all military recruits are women.

- Median female Veteran’s age is 49; male Veteran’s age is 64 (as of 9/30/12).
Women are one of the fastest growing subpopulation of Veterans. Based on active duty and recruiting numbers, the percentage of female Veterans is projected to increase.

2.24 million living women Veterans of the 22.3 million Veterans (VetPop as of 9/30/12). Currently 10 percent of the total Veterans population. By 2020, they are estimated to be 12.4 percent the total Veterans population.

Twenty percent of all military recruits are women.

Median female Veteran’s age is 49; male Veteran’s age is 64 (as of 9/30/12).
VA offers a full continuum of comprehensive medical services including:

- Health promotion and disease prevention.
- Primary care, acute medical/surgical, telephone, emergency, education, vocational rehabilitation.
- Substance abuse treatment, mental health, domiciliary, homeless, rehabilitation and long term care.
- Women's gender-specific health care, such as hormone replacement therapy, breast and gynecological care, maternity and limited infertility (excluding in-vitro fertilization).
Other VA benefits of interest to women Veterans include:

- Children of women Vietnam Veterans may be eligible for health care and compensation for certain birth defects.
- Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for the loss or loss of use of specific organs or extremities, to include hysterectomy and loss of a percentage of tissue from a single breast, or both breasts due to mastectomy, or radiation treatment.
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) counseling and treatment, even without filing a service-connection claim for disability.
Women Veterans Challenges

- Women Veterans:
  - Are unaware of their Veteran status; they often do not self-identify as Veterans.
  - Do not apply for VA’s benefits and services, since they are not aware that they are Veterans.
  - Sometimes limited in access to VA’s gender-specific care and have to use fee-based care and contracts.
- Disparities in health care exist.
Women Veterans Challenges

- Experience a lack of child care options, limiting their ability to make appointments at VA, to acquire gainful employment and to pursue educational goals.

- Exhibit lower utilization of VA; outreaching to women Veterans who live in rural areas and on American Indian Reservations, and who are low income, or elderly can be a challenge.

- Lack of transportation to and from appointments.
Joint outreach to educate and raise awareness about eligibility. Sign up for eBenefits at: www.ebenefits.va.gov

Enhancement of Center for Women Veterans’ Web site to educate about VA’s programs, and utilization of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, VA Blog, Twitter, etc.

Collaboration with VA Administrations, and other Federal agencies to address disparities in care and services availability. VHA established the Office of Health Equity to address issues.
VA Initiatives to Address Challenges

- Pilot programs (drop-in programs in Northport, NY; Buffalo, NY; and Tacoma, WA) to determine the feasibility of VA providing child care options for women Veterans.
- Usage of fee basis and contracts when appropriate.
- Implemented newborn care coverage and caregivers.
- Utilization of transportation options such as Disabled American Veterans vans, taxi and other voucher programs.
- Sponsor joint hiring fairs with universities, various federal, state, private, and other organizations.
Women Veterans Task Force (WVTF)

- VA created a Women Veterans Task Force (WVTF) in 2011, to identify gaps in services and benefits for women Veterans and develop a comprehensive VA action plan to resolve them.

- The WVTF also identified lessons learned from the past, and best practices and policies that can be applied to today’s programs and services supporting women Veterans.

- VA’s Chief of Staff (COSVA) served as Chair of the WVTF and the director of the Center for Women Veterans served as Vice-Chair.
WVTF Sub-Working Groups:

- **Capacity and Coordination of Services** - Does VA currently have the capacity to provide consistent and coordinated access to comprehensive services and benefits that meet the unique needs of women Veterans.

- **Environment of Care and Experience of Women Veterans** - Gaps exist in privacy, dignity, security, and respect that negatively impact the overall WVs’ experience in the VA.

- **Employment and Training** - There is insufficient integration and collaboration within VA and among external resources in the area of employment and training for women Veterans.
WVTF Sub-Working Groups (cont’d):

- Data Collection and Evaluation of Services - One challenge VA faces in meeting the ongoing and emerging needs of WVVs is the lack of sufficient and actionable data used to deliver quality benefits and services.

- Planning for the Future – Need more effective delivery, accountability, resource management and sustainability of services and benefits.
The Women Veterans Program (WVP) was established under the recommendations of the WVTF. On September 11, 2012, responsibility for the WVP recommendations were officially transferred to the Center for Women Veterans (Center) for the Women Veterans Program (WVP). The Center coordinates biweekly meetings with Women Veteran Program Leads (representatives) from the three Administrations and Staff Offices to closely monitor the operating plan for completion of milestones and deliverables. The WVP Governing Board was established to provide the oversight and authority for the WVP to execute its work throughout the Administrations.
Collaborates and coordinates with VA’s three Administrations (VHA, VBA, NCA) and staff offices on their delivery of benefits and services, and their outreach initiatives targeting women Veterans.

Facilitates cross agency training with the White House; Federal, state and local agencies; women Veterans’ advocates; and other external partners to build understanding of how we can collaborate to assist women Veterans (example National Training Summit).

Educates VA staff on women Veterans’ contributions through active participation in all major Department-wide workgroups, task forces, and committees, and joint federal collaborative committees.
How the Center Uses Partnerships to Enhance Outreach to Women Veterans (cont.)
Objectives of Our Partnerships

- To improve extended knowledge among partners to enhance outreach to women Veterans.
- To describe how joint outreach is marketed to improve women Veterans’ aware of available benefits and services.
- To create collaborative partnerships with DoD and other federal, state and local organizations to raise awareness of VA benefits and services to women Veterans.
How Other Organizations Can Help with Outreach

- Serve as an advocate for women Veterans.

- Raise awareness and educate women, so they will self-identify and understand the benefits to which they are entitled.

- Encourage women Veterans to apply for benefits and services, such as compensation for injuries or illnesses incurred during military service, home loans, GI Bill for education, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Training, and health care, etc.
How Other Organizations Can Help with Outreach

- Collaborate and work with local women Veterans program managers and women Veterans coordinators, other staff in local VA facilities, and Veterans service organizations to facilitate Veterans’ access to services.

- Invite VA subject matter experts to present at various joint outreach local programs on services.

- Provide temporary financial assistance to help women Veterans, especially those with children, and those who are at risk for homelessness, where possible.

- Collaborate with local community and faith-based agencies that offer food and clothing assistance for women Veterans, especially those with children.
Joint Outreach Outcomes

- Sponsor women Veterans-centric events to jointly educate Veterans, VA staff, and others interested in women Veterans issues, such as VA’s National Training Summit on Women Veterans.

- Establishing training modules with VA Learning University to systematically educate VA employees.

- Conducting forums, town hall meetings, surveys, research and input to Women Veterans Task Force to help identify women Veterans’ needs and barriers to obtaining needed services or benefits.
Joint Outreach Outcomes

- Increasing access to educational advancement and Federal career opportunities
- Joint coordination on The White House Champions of Change honoring women Veterans.
- VA Central Office salute Women Veterans by partnering with Veterans Service Organizations on March 21, 2013, to hear about their initiatives for Women Veterans and share with them resources available focused on Women.
Established by PL 98-160 in 1983; charter renewed every 2 years.

Purpose is to provide advice to the Secretary, through Director of Center for Women Veterans, on the needs of women Veterans (2.24 million).

Currently 12 Members (diverse group of women and men, representing different military branches, ethnicities, and multiple eras of service--to include OEF/OIF/OND Veterans).

Ex-officio and advisor members from VHA, VBA, NCA, as well as Departments of Defense, Labor, and Health and Human Services, provide expertise.

Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris serves as the Designated Federal Officer (DFO).

The ACWV meets three times annually-- twice in Washington, DC, and once at a site visit in the field—and produces Congressionally mandated biennial report to Secretary. Last report submitted to Congress 12 Sep 12.

Last ACWV meeting April 9-11, 2013 at VACO, Washington, DC.
Key themes:
- Culture Change.
- Gender-Specific Comprehensive Primary Care.
- Role of Women Veterans Program Managers (WVPMs).
- Outreach and Marketing.
- Proficient Health Care Providers for Women Veterans.
- Agency Collaboration.
- Patient-Centered Care and Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT).
- Homelessness.
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST).
- Privacy, Safety, and Environment of Care (EOC).
VA Women Veterans-Specific Resources

- Full-time women Veterans program managers (WVPM) at VA health care facilities across the country to outreach to women Veterans and assist them with accessing VA’s health care services.

- Designated women Veterans coordinators (WVC) at all 56 VA regional offices (RO); staff trained on serving women Veterans (specifically on military sexual trauma claims).

- VA presence on social media sites: Blog, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube.

- Collaboration across program offices, stakeholders, and non-VA agencies to enhance mental health and homeless services among women Veterans.
How Women Veterans Can Obtain Local Assistance

- Women’s Health Services (formerly Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group): http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/
- WVCs at every VA regional office: www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash-1
- Homeless Veterans coordinators: www.va.gov/homeless/index.cfm
- eBenefits website: www.ebenefits.va.gov
- Minority Veterans program coordinator at every VA healthcare facility, regional office, and national cemetery: www.va.gov/centerforminorityVeterans/
- Other coordinators such as OIF/OEF, mental health, MST, Vet Center, etc.
Closely monitor the WVP operating plan for completion of milestones and deliverables.

Enhancing access and joint outreach efforts – a Secretarial priority.

Connecting women Veterans with knowledge of VA benefits and health care services through educational events, mass media and technology.
Summary - Where We Are Going

- Continuously promoting recognition of women Veterans’ service and contributions of women Veterans and women in the military, e.g. “Her Story” campaign, “the Right Place” PSA, and “Please Don’t Call Me Mister” campaigns.

![Image of PSA: Please don’t call me mister.](image)
How to Contact the Center

Staff Members:

- Dr. Betty Moseley Brown
- Desiree Long
- Shannon Middleton
- Michelle Terry
- Juanita Mullen (American Indian Liaison)
- Major Khanh T. Diep

Address:

Department of Veterans Affairs  
Center for Women Veterans (00W)  
810 Vermont Ave., NW  
Washington, DC  20420

Phone: 202-461-6193
Fax: 202-273-7092

Website: [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet)
Email: 00W@mail.va.gov