



THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGISLATIVE POINT PAPERS

Improve Healthcare for Women Veterans

In 1973, when conscription came to an end and the U.S. Armed Forces moved to an all-volunteer military, women represented two percent of the enlisted forces and eight percent of the officer corps. Today, women represent 16 percent and 19 percent respectively.¹¹ Women are the fastest-growing demographic within the U.S. Armed Forces and the evolution of women's roles in the military are reshaping the profile of the veteran population.¹² As a result of these demographic changes, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will see an increased number of women veterans, specifically those falling within childbearing age. Women are a vital part of the U.S. Armed Forces and the community of veterans; thus, it is imperative that the nation recognize the importance of their service and for VA to account for demographic shifts by addressing the many challenges women veterans face when trying to attain their rightfully earned VA healthcare.

These barriers include not identifying as a veteran, not being recognized as a veteran by VA employees and staff, a lack of awareness and understanding of VA healthcare benefits, and perceptions that VA is an "all-male" healthcare system. Other gender-specific difficulties include women veterans being more likely to experience mental health issues and MST as well as problems with chronic pain management and musculoskeletal condition treatment. An FY2020 interactive VA social media campaign, conducted over various platforms, showed women veterans also had trouble accessing and receiving high-quality pre-natal care, fertility treatment, and childcare. To address these problems and barriers to care, VA must have care models and standards which are gender-specific and culturally competent.

Over the past several years, Congress and VA have taken strides in ensuring these needs are addressed. Since the last Congress, Congress has continued to oversee VA's implementation of *the Deborah Sampson Act*. This comprehensive women veteran's bill sought to create a gender-inclusive environment at VA medical facilities. Now, it is charged with administering S.796, *the Protecting Moms Who Served Act*, which will establish a VA maternity care coordination program, which was signed into law in late 2021. Furthermore, DoD has worked with VA to introduce the Women's Health Transition Training Program to reach Active-Duty women who are transitioning out of military service about VA to ensure a seamless transition and connect them with the resources they need.¹³

As we move forward, it is equally important to simultaneously oversee current programs and the implementation of past legislation impacting women veterans while also advocating for new

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations. (2020, July). *Demographics of the U.S. Military*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/demographics-us-military>

¹² Barroso, A. (2020, August 6). *www.pewresearch.org. The Changing Profile of the U.S. Military: Smaller in Size, More Diverse, More Women in Leadership*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/10/the-changing-profile-of-the-u-s-military/>

¹³ "VA Women's Health Transition Training." U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Women's Health Transition Training, October 10, 2018. <https://www.va.gov/womenvet/whtt/>.



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legislation which fills the gaps remaining. This means improving mammography services, mitigating the cost of contraceptive care, studying the need for women-specific drug and alcohol dependency rehabilitation programs as well as many other options.

Key Points

- Currently, about 9-in-10 veterans (89%) are men, while about 1-in-10 (11%) are women, according to VA's 2021 population model estimates. The number of female veterans is also projected to increase from around 2 million in 2021 to approximately 2.2 million in 2046.

What Can Congress Do?

- Improve access to and the provision of mammography services for women veterans.
- Increase access to childcare services and newborn care at VA medical centers.
- Support study into in-patient women veteran-specific alcohol and drug dependency rehabilitation programs.
- Provide timely oversight of legislation, which has been signed into law, which impacts women veterans.

Relevant Resolutions:

- Resolution No. 147 (2016): *Women Veterans*.¹⁴
- Resolution No. 37 (2016): *Improvements to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Women Veterans Programs*.¹⁵
- Resolution No. 13 (2021): *Newborn Care Through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*.¹⁶

¹⁴ The American Legion Resolution No. 147 (2016): [*Women Veterans*](#)

¹⁵ The American Legion Resolution No. 37 (2016): [*Improvements to Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Program's*](#)

¹⁶ The American Legion Resolution No. 13 (2021): [*Newborn Care Through the Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)*](#)