VA Awards Grants to Improve Care for Women Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced in January that it would award 32 new grants to help improve health care access for women veterans across the nation.

The nearly three dozen grants will expand medical residency training in areas including gynecology and emergency obstetrics, military sexual trauma (MST) and breast health. The funding will also go toward purchasing more gender-specific medical supplies and equipment at VA facilities and expanding online and telehealth resources for women veterans in rural areas.

“Our goal is 100 percent accessibility for women veterans who need our care,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “These new projects will improve access and quality of critical health care services for women.”

Dedicating resources to create more comprehensive care for women veterans is part of the VA’s plan to meet the needs of this fastest growing demographic. And these newly awarded grants represent the largest ever one-year total for enhancing health services for women veterans.

“We’ve seen improvements at VA facilities across the country,” said Deputy National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “In order to help meet women’s specific needs and concerns, a number of clinics have been overhauling their spaces and services to make sure patients can receive all their care in one area.”

The Minneapolis VA medical center, for instance, was awarded $217,000 from the VA. The facility will use the funding to support video conferencing to provide women veterans telepharmacy services, such as counseling for contraceptives, menopause management and chronic disease management.
As 78 percent of the new generation of women veterans are younger than 40, the Minneapolis VA is also using a portion of its funding to expand a pilot project for telehealth programs for maternity care.

In Baltimore, the VA medical center staff is helping keep the VA as the nation’s leader in breast cancer screenings. The VA Maryland Health Care System is now the first health care system in the state, and the first within the VA, to offer three-dimensional mammograms to patients. The technology allows for more detailed and accurate readings, fewer biopsies and better detection rates than standard two-dimensional mammograms. The Baltimore facility has also brought aboard a physician dedicated to reading the new 3-D mammograms, which will help yield earlier detection and a better prognosis for women veterans by looking at tissue layer by layer.

The Baltimore VA has also invested in a redesign and rededication of space for women veterans. Part of the $11-million plan to expand the facility inward included funds to create a women’s only waiting room and private exam rooms. The staff also has been expanded and now includes two additional full-time registered nurses, a licensed practical nurse, health technician and a social worker.

This kind of comprehensive care model means women veterans can access primary care and preventative medicine, as well as inpatient health services such as surgery and mental health counseling, all in one place.

With the VA estimating a steady and continual rise in the women veterans population, these efforts will help the department develop a more sophisticated care model through which women feel welcome as patients and, as such, opt to receive their services through the VA.