

# **Report on the Study on the Women Veteran Coordinator Program**



**Department of Veterans Affairs**  
June 2021

## **I. Introduction**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Women Veterans Program (WVP) serves 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. The Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Office of Outreach, Transition and Economic Development (OTED) is responsible for the integration and efficient coordination of VA's outreach programs, activities and content to ensure effective, customer-focused engagement.

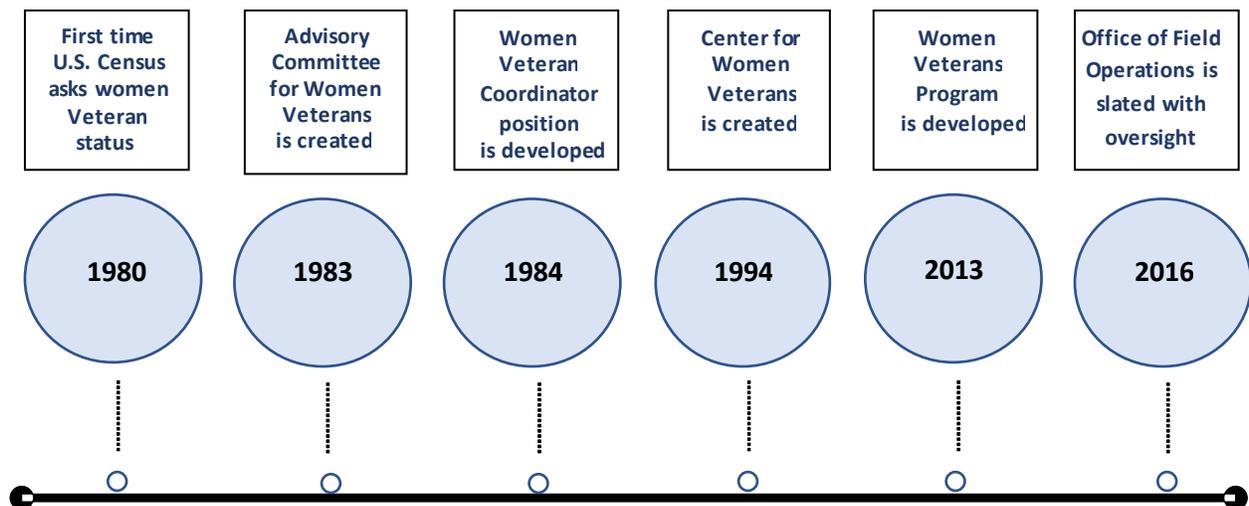
### **Report Requirement**

Section 5205 of the *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020* (P.L. 116-315) requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on the study on the Women Veteran Coordinator (WVC) program, Veterans Benefits Administration, no later than 180 days after the date of enactment. The report should identify:

- 1) If the program described in such subsection is appropriately staffed at each regional benefits office of the Department;
- 2) Whether each regional benefits office of the Department is staffed with a Women Veteran Coordinator;
- 3) The position description of the Women Veteran Coordinator;
- 4) Whether an individual serving in the Women Veteran Coordinator position concurrently serves in any other position, and if so, the allocation of time the individual spends in each such position; and,
- 5) A description of the metrics the Secretary uses to determine the job performance and effectiveness of the Women Veteran Coordinator.

This report includes information provided from VBA's study conducted on the WVC program at the regional benefits offices (RO).

## Background Discussion



### P.L. 98-160

Data from the 1980 Census indicated women Veterans were not utilizing earned benefits from VA. In response, P.L. 98-160 was passed in 1983 establishing an Advisory Committee on Women Veterans to assess the needs of women Veterans, with respect to VA programs such as compensation, health care, rehabilitation, outreach and other benefits and programs administered by VA. The Committee reviews VA programs, activities, research projects and initiatives designed to meet the needs of women Veterans and makes recommendations to the Secretary on ways to improve, modify and affect change in programs and services for women Veterans and follow up on all recommendations. The Committee submits a biannual report to Congress no later than July 1 of the even year.

The Committee's first report in 1984 identified the need for strong outreach and the lack of adequate privacy and gender-specific treatment for women at VA facilities as the most pressing areas of concern. In response to the Committee's recommendations, VA appointed the first Women Veteran Coordinators in 1985.

The 2010 Advisory Committee on Women Veterans annual report recommended VA establish permanent, full-time WVC positions in VA ROs that serve a catchment area greater than 40,000 women Veterans to provide direct assistance to women Veterans accessing benefits and services through VA.

### P.L. 103-446

Passed in 1994, P.L. 103-446 § 509 established the Center for Women Veterans, whose Executive Director serves as principal advisor to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the adoption and implementation of policies and programs affecting Veterans who are women.

## VA Directive 0803

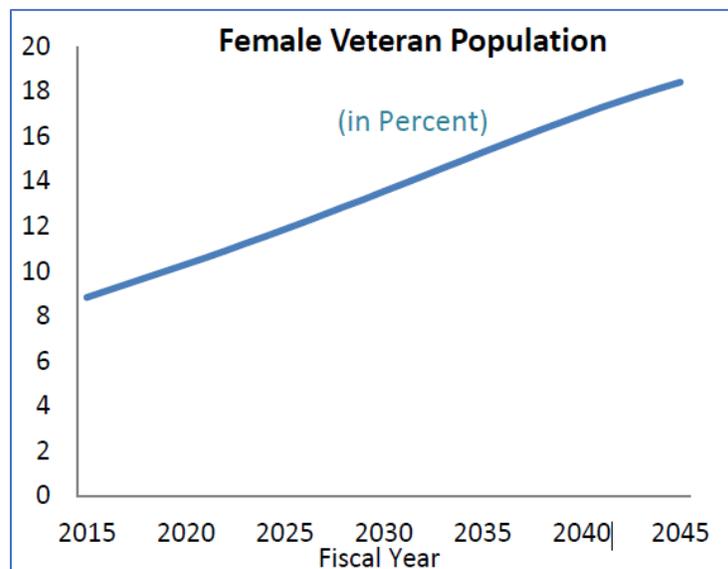
VA Directive 0803, *Women Veterans Program* published March 1, 2013, established VA WVPs along with the requirements and responsibilities for managing and implementing the program. The program was developed to ensure women Veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned in a manner that honors their service. WVP provides guidance to RO WVCs in providing outreach, improving awareness of VA benefits and services information, as well as providing claims assistance to women Veterans.

## 38 U.S.C. § 7703 (5)

Under 38 U.S.C. § 7703(5), VBA is responsible for the administration of outreach programs and other Veterans' services programs. Part of this responsibility is informing Service members, Veterans, survivors, dependents and eligible beneficiaries about the benefits and services to which they may be eligible. VBA's mission is to serve as a leading advocate for Service members, Veterans, their families and survivors by delivering excellent Veteran-centered and personalized benefits and services that honor their service, assisting in their readjustment, enhancing their lives and gaining their full trust.

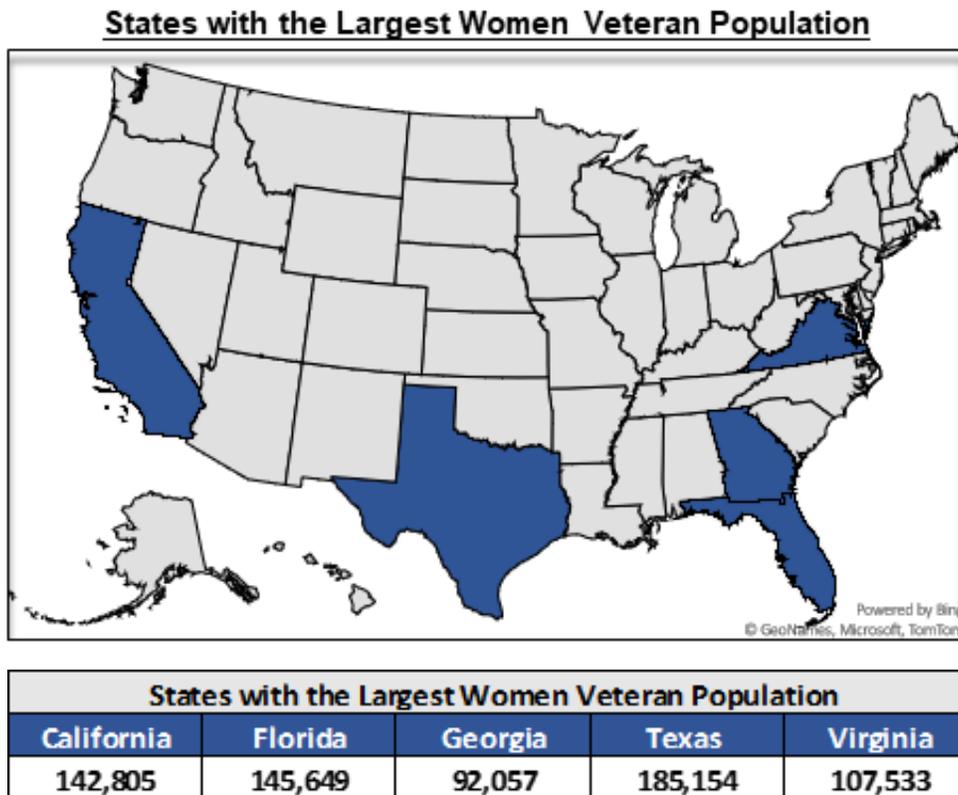
## **Women Veteran Population**

**Figure 1: Female Veteran Population Projection**



Women Veterans account for more than 10% of the Veteran population with a projected growth rate of 0.7% each year, from 2015 – 2045, as shown in Figure 1 above, because of their increased participation in the United States Armed Forces. It is projected that 12% of Veterans Nationwide will be women by 2025. Despite the change in the demographics of the Veteran population, only in recent years has the women utilization rate of VA benefits increased.

**Figure 2: Five States with the Largest Women Veterans Population**



Similar to the geographic patterns of the overall Veteran population models, information from the 2016 Veteran population data shows the largest populations of women Veterans are represented in Texas, Florida, California, Virginia and Georgia, as shown in Figure 2 above. Data from the VA Veteran, Table 6L: Population Projection Model (VetPop2016) show that in these states, women Veterans will make up 35%, or more than a third, of the entire Veteran population between 2018-2048. By having a WVC within each RO, we will continue to meet the growing needs of this population.

## **II. Methodology**

VBA used multiple resources to examine questions related to the WVC program. Data were collected from VBA's Outreach Reporting Tool Plus (ORT+) for fiscal years (FY) 2019-2020. Outreach coordinator data were obtained from an October 2020 District-level data call, and in May 2021, a customer feedback survey was administered to address the specific report requirements for the WVC program. VBA received a total of 80 responses to the survey to include 40 employees serving as WVCs, 14 alternates for the WVC duties and 26 employees with supervisory responsibility over the role. These counts include five supervisors who also serve as the WVC or the alternate for the role. OTED sought broad participation for this survey but did limit the submissions to two per RO. In doing so, OTED received 100% RO participation.

The collaborative data were analyzed to determine key findings from the requested information. The report on the study on the WVC Program provides insight into the WVC program, the WVC position at the RO and the resources and perspectives on performing the duties and responsibilities in the WVC role. All data are descriptive.

### III. Report Elements

The following sections provide information on each element of the study as required in sections 5205(b)(1)-(5) of the Act.

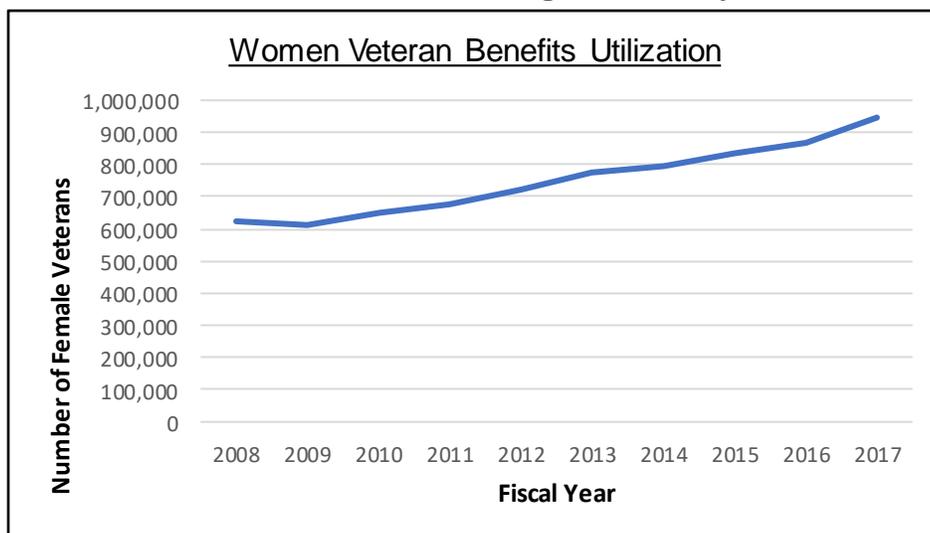
#### Section 5205(b)(1)

*(1) If the program described in such subsection is appropriately staffed at each regional benefits office of the Department.*

Currently, the ROs are appropriately staffed with at least one person assigned to the WVC role at each office as of May 2021. Nationwide, VA has 92 employees performing either the primary or alternate WVC duties across all 56 ROs. WVC respondents to a data call conducted by OTED reported that 31 of the ROs are involved in outreach efforts, and 41% of data call respondents stated RO leadership worked with the WVC to coordinate outreach efforts. In FY 2020, ORT+ documented 173 events and activities reaching 4,578 women Veterans at outreach events focused specifically on women Veterans Nationwide, an approximately 39% increase from FY 2019.

Supporting Information: Data from an FY 2017 VA utilization profile, displayed below in Figure 3 below, show women Veterans utilizing VA benefits changed from 36% in 2008 to 50% in 2017, representing a 4.8% annual increase. VA will continue to monitor staffing levels of the WVC roles as women Veterans' utilization of benefits changes.

**Figure 3: Number of Women Veterans Utilizing Benefits by Fiscal Year**



Despite the steady increase in usage, data from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Climate Snapshot Poll revealed women Veterans indicated the greatest need for resources during COVID-19 in the areas of benefits and claims assistance, financial assistance, education, employment and career development demonstrating there continues to be a need to provide awareness of where and how to obtain VA benefits and services among women Veterans. This also demonstrates that even with COVID-19 limitations on outreach operations, as seen with restrictions on travel, social interaction and the ability to perform in-person events, ROs must find creative ways, including virtual interactions and events, to make connections to the women Veteran population.

### **Section 5205(b)(2)**

*(2) Whether each regional benefits office of the Department is staffed with a Women Veteran Coordinator.*

Nationally, all 56 ROs have a primary WVC. Additionally, 35 ROs, or 63%, have an alternate WVC serving as a backup.

### **Section 5205(b)(3)**

*(3) The position description of the Women Veteran Coordinator.*

Although VA does not have a position description for WVCs, the M27-1, OTED's manual, provides guidelines to ROs for special emphasis outreach programs. Part II, Chapter IV of the manual, is specifically about women Veteran's outreach and provides the definition and duties of the WVC.

As defined in the manual, the WVC is a designated employee in each RO who is responsible for outreach to women Veterans; who assists male and female Veterans with claims involving issues of a sensitive nature, such as military sexual trauma and/or personal trauma; and who promotes the use of VA benefits, programs and services by women.

WVC duties include:

- Participating in local events and provides training or briefings to organizations that may include women Veterans.
- Conducting individual counseling or workshops to ensure that women Veterans have a clear understanding of VA benefits and services.
- Acting as the point of contact for VA and other service providers and, in some instances, for women Veterans with special needs.
- Establishing a network among community service providers and sharing information on claims processing with WVCs at VA medical centers, Vet Centers and other community organizations.
- Developing a resource directory of service providers within the RO community that may provide services specifically to women and distributing the directory to appropriate VA personnel and others providing assistance to women Veterans.

- Establishing a liaison with women Veterans' organizations or those with predominantly women members (e.g., the Women's Army Corps), maintaining rosters of the primary contacts and providing speakers for their meetings and for special events, when appropriate.
- Advertising information about VA benefits and services in places where women Veterans live or frequently visit.
- Participating in conference calls held by VA Central Office.
- Collecting and analyzing data generated by the RO for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

**Section 5205(b)(4)**

*(4) Whether an individual serving in the Women Veteran Coordinator position concurrently serves in any other position, and if so, the allocation of time the individual spends in each such position.*

The WVC role is part of the RO Public Contact Team (PCT). The PCT is a component of each RO Veterans Service Center and is responsible for meeting with claimants or beneficiaries who visit an RO to receive VA benefits information; assisting Veterans with filing claims; and responding to Veteran and partner inquiries. Of the 80 WVC study respondents, 51 or 64% indicated they have separate outreach duties in addition to their WVC outreach duties. Additionally, of the 80 WVC study respondents, 42 respondents, or 53%, stated that in the last 12 months, May 2020 to May 2021, they have spent 7 hours or less per month on WVC duties, as shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Average Time Survey Respondents Spent on Women Veteran Coordinator Duties Per Month**



**Section 5205(b)(5)**

*(5) A description of the metrics the Secretary uses to determine the job performance and effectiveness of the Women Veteran Coordinator.*

Beginning in FY 2021, VBA established a national outreach metric at the District and RO Director levels to create a national VBA baseline goal for outreach to Veterans,

survivors, family members, partners and all other persons in the Veteran community. The FY 2021 goal is 4,193 completed outreach events, including the efforts of the WVCs, nationally; at the end of May 2021, VBA was at 92.4% of the FY 2021 goal. Going forward, VBA will evaluate each year's completed outreach efforts to determine performance against the established baseline goal and to determine the goal for the next fiscal year.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Outreach is essential to VA's work to raise the awareness of Veterans, Service members, their families and survivors regarding the personalized benefits and services that honor their service. The study completed under P.L. 116-315 § 5205 provided insight into the WVC role and its pivotal position in ensuring that the progressively-growing population of women Veterans are provided effective, customer-focused activities and communication within their communities that meet their unique needs and concerns.

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