

### The Situation

- Today, women are serving in greater numbers in the U.S. military and make up 20% of new recruits, 17.5% of personnel serving on active duty, and 21.6% of the selected reserve members. Approximately 1.9 million women veterans live in the U.S. today. By 2040, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that 18% of veterans will be women.
- Women are now eligible to serve in all military occupations, giving way to increased exposure to combat and hazardous occupations, which results in increased risk for serious injuries such as amputations, traumatic brain injury, war-related environmental exposures as well as the consequent risks of developing post-traumatic stress or other post-deployment behavioral health issues.
- Likewise, the number of women veterans seeking VA health care services continues to increase. The number of women veterans using Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services has grown from 159,810 in 2001 to over 650,000 today. In fact, women make up 30% of all new VHA patients.
- Additionally, 63% of women veteran patients in VHA have a service-connected disability. Many have complex health care and mental health needs and are eligible for a lifetime of treatment, readjustment services, disability compensation, education and other VA benefits.

### The Challenge

- A rapid increase in the number of women veterans seeking VA medical care has resulted in challenges in providing timely, gender-specific primary care at all VA facilities, further compounded by a shortage of primary care providers with expertise in women's health capable of providing high quality comprehensive care for this patient population.
- VA's 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention report notes that between 2020 and 2021, the suicide rate among women veterans jumped 24.1%—nearly four times higher than the 6.3% increase among male veterans and vastly higher than the 2.6% increase among non-veteran women.
- Women veterans are also twice as likely to attempt suicide than male veterans and are 1.5 times more likely than non-veteran women to choose a firearm as a means to suicide. The stark reality is that 9 out of 10 suicide attempts with a gun prove lethal. In fact, self-inflicted firearm injury accounts for more than 50% of suicide deaths among women veterans.
- Additionally, according to the VA, one in four women seeking VA health care services reported experiencing inappropriate comments or harassment from male veterans.

Researchers found that women who reported harassment were more likely to feel unwelcome, unsafe and delay getting needed care.

### The Solution

- We urge Congress to conduct oversight, hold hearings, and provide the necessary resources to correct identified deficiencies, gaps in services and improve programs and access to services to meet the unique needs of women veterans.
- DAV's 2024 report—[\*Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness\*](#), focuses on the unique challenges women veterans face that put them at higher risk for suicide and what we can do to improve prevention efforts for this population. We urge Congress to enact legislation that is in line with the 50-plus recommendations made in this groundbreaking report to ensure that mental health services and programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of women veterans.
- We urge the VA to ensure the department has sufficient resources and staff to achieve the stated goals of its Stand Up to Stop Harassment Now! campaign—specifically, to advance a culture where harassment is never tolerated; create a safe, respectful and welcoming environment for all VA patients; empower veterans and staff to recognize and report harassment; and hold leaders accountable for tracking and addressing reports of harassment.