

ISSUE BRIEF: WOMEN VETERANS

The Situation

- Today, women are serving in greater numbers in the U.S. military and make up 20% of new recruits, 15% of the 1.3 million personnel serving on active duty, and 18% of the National Guard and reserve forces.
- The roles of women in the military have changed. They are now eligible to serve in all military occupations, giving way to increased combat exposure and hazardous occupations, which can result in trauma, serious injuries such as limb loss, 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.
- In 2014, the number of women enrolled in the VA health care system was 663,643, of those 417,316 are receiving health care, an increase of 55,302 since 2012. 289,501 of the women receiving care in VA are within child bearing age.
- 57% of women veteran patients in VHA have a service connected disability, and are eligible for a lifetime of treatment, compensation, education and other VA benefits.

The Challenge

- Current wartime deployments and the recent integration of women into all military occupations have resulted in new transition and reintegration challenges for women veterans.
- A rapid increase in the number of women veterans seeking VA medical care has resulted in challenges in providing timely, sex-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.
- VA research indicates there are higher rates of homelessness and suicide among women veterans relative to non-veteran women and that women veterans are high users of VA mental health services.
- DAV's special report; *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*, highlights gaps in services for women across the landscape of current federal programs. The report notes that one of the most persistent problems is a military and veterans' culture that is not perceived by women as welcoming and does not afford them equal consideration.

The Solution

- We urge Congress to enact legislation that is in line with the 27 key recommendations made in DAV's women veterans report to ensure all federal programs are sensitive to the needs of women veterans, as well as equal in effectiveness and health outcomes when compared to the services furnished to male veterans.
- We urge Congress to conduct oversight, hold hearings, and provide the necessary resources to fix identified deficiencies and improve programs and services for women veterans.