

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Medical Center • October 2014

Myths About VA Health Care for Women Veterans: Know the Facts

More women are serving our country in the U.S. Armed Forces than ever before. Women make up nearly 15 percent of today's active duty military and 12 percent of our service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Women now represent the fastest growing demographic in the Veteran community, and the number of women Veterans using VA health services has more than doubled since 2000.

The VA has responded to these demographic shifts by expanding its women's health services and changing its culture to provide the best care possible to these extraordinary, brave women.

However, many women Veterans remain unaware of health care benefits available to them through the VA.

Here are some commonly held myths about VA health care for women Veterans and the truth about what women Veterans can expect from the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC).

Myth: Only Veterans who have combat experience are eligible for VA health care.

Fact: Any Veteran who served in the active military, naval, or air

service and is separated under any condition besides dishonorable may be eligible for VA health benefits. You may even be eligible if you were called to active duty as a member of the Reserves or the National Guard. To learn more about your eligibility for VA health benefits, you can contact the Women Veterans Call Center at (855) VA-WOMEN.

Myth: VA Medical Centers do not provide specialized health services for women.

Fact: SFVAMC provides a number of services that address the unique health care needs of women Veterans. Our Women's Health Center offers breast and cervical cancer screening, reproductive care, contraceptive counseling and management, menopause management, osteoporosis evaluation and care, and many more essential women's health services.

Visit www.sanfrancisco.va.gov/services/women/index.asp for a complete list of SFVAMC's Women's Health Program services.

Myth: I can't receive mental health services through the VA.

Fact: Women Veterans can access a wide array of mental health

services through SFVAMC. Our mental health professionals provide assistance for issues including depression, mood and anxiety disorders, intimate partner and domestic violence, sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and much more.

The VA also provides free and confidential counseling and treatment for women (and men) who have experienced military sexual trauma.

The SFVAMC Women's Health Center is located in Bldg. 203, 1st Floor, Suite 1B. To make an appointment call (415) 750-2174.

If you are a woman Veteran, consider enrolling in the VA Health Care System today. To enroll, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/online/.



Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Did you know that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime? (Men can also develop breast cancer, though it is rare. Breast cancer is about 100 times more common among women.) The good news is, when breast cancer is detected early, in the localized stage, the 5-year survival rate is 98 percent.

According to the National Cancer Society, symptoms of breast cancer may include:

- A lump or swelling of all or part of a breast
- Skin dimpling or irritation
- Nipple retraction (turning inward)
- Redness, scaling, or thickening of the nipple or breast skin
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk
- Breast or nipple pain

Per the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the best way to fight breast cancer is to have a plan that helps you detect the disease in its early stages.

Your plan should include reminders to do breast self-exams and schedule clinical breast exams and mammograms based on your age and health history. If you notice any breast changes, see your VA healthcare provider as soon as possible for an evaluation.

VA Provides Treatment, Safe Place for IPV Survivors

October is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Awareness Month.

IPV occurs when a current or former partner uses behaviors or threats that can make you feel scared, controlled, or intimidated.

A relationship in which IPV occurs is known as an abusive relationship, and can involve physical violence, sexual violence, threats of abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, stalking or unwanted contact. IPV can happen to both women and men.

Women Veterans and active duty military women are more likely than non-Veterans to have experienced IPV. Among women Veterans, 39 percent report having experienced IPV at some point in their lives.

VA has a number of resources available for both male and female Veterans who are experiencing or have experienced IPV.

“Please talk with your VA primary care provider if you feel unsafe or have any concerns about IPV,” says Director of the SFVAMC Women’s Mental Health Program Caitlin Hasser, MD.

“There are resources available, and there is hope and help to make sense of these experiences and to become a survivor and a thriver,” says Dr. Hasser.

SFVAMC’s Women’s Mental Health Program has all women providers who are specially trained in IPV and can offer numerous resources, treatments, and above all, a safe place.

“We train all SFVAMC primary care providers and social workers annually in mental health and legal issues regarding IPV,” says Dr. Hasser.

Below are some resources for those who are actively experiencing IPV or who have experienced it in the past. **For emergencies, call 911.**

24-hour National Domestic Violence Hotline

(800) 799-SAFE (7233)

National Sexual Assault Hotline

(800) 656-4673

Asian Women’s Shelter

3548 18th St. #19, San Francisco
(877) 751-0880 or (415) 751-7110

Woman INC (Women Organized to Make Abuse Nonexistent, Inc.)

33 Valencia St., Suite 450, SF
(877) 384-3578 or (415) 864-4722

La Casa de las Madres

1663 Mission St., Suite 225, SF
(877) 503-1850 or (415) 503-0500

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