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Press

- > [Today in DoD](#)
- > [News Releases](#)
- > [Press Advisories](#)
- > [Publications](#)
- > [Transcripts](#)
- > [Audio Clips](#)

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- > [Imagery Archive](#)
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- > [Week in Photos](#)

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New Guide Helps Communities Aid Homeless Women Vets

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 20, 2011 – The Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor has released an online publication that will help community service providers aid homeless women veterans, Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis said today.

Solis addressed an audience of several hundred at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Theater on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery.

“Where we’re falling short in meeting the challenge of service women is when they come home,” Solis said.

“Too many women who once wore our uniform now go to sleep in our streets,” she added. “It breaks my heart to see that because many of them are sick [and] in need of help, and many are hungry. And it isn’t just them -- some of them have children.”

The publication, called Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide for Service Providers, also known as the Trauma Guide, is the result of nationwide listening sessions with women veterans and service providers about the challenges of homelessness.

Women now make up 20 percent of new recruits, 14 percent of the military and 18 percent of the National Guard and Reserve.

Women represent only 8 percent of veterans, according to the guide, but they are at a four-times-greater risk of homelessness than their nonveteran male counterparts.

The female veteran population is estimated to grow from 1.8 million in 2010 to 2.1 million by 2036, according to Labor Department statistics, resulting in a greater likelihood that more women veterans will need physical and psychological services.

Today, service providers often treat women veterans using the same methods used for their male counterparts.

“This guide acknowledges the experiences and challenges facing women veterans,” Solis said, “and will result in better assistance and better outcomes for these deserving women.”

According to the guide, research suggests that up to 93 percent of female veterans have been exposed to some kind of trauma, including before they joined the military services. And Defense Department officials say one in three military women has been sexually assaulted, compared to one in six civilians.

Women in the military also have different kinds of problems from those of their male counterparts, the guide says.

“According to a report by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, more than 40 percent [of women in the military] have children, and about 30,000 single mothers have been deployed,” the guide says, and women report higher levels of stress over the impact of their deployment on family and relationships.

The needs of homeless women vets include therapy to address the impact of trauma, supportive services, transitional employment and job training, safe living environments and options for substance abuse treatment.

For those who provide services to these women, the principles of trauma-informed care include understanding trauma and its impact; promoting safety; ensuring cultural competence; supporting control, choice and autonomy; and understanding that recovery is possible.

“No one,” Women’s Bureau Director Sara Manzano-Díaz said, “pays a higher price for freedom than our veterans and their families and we owe them a debt of gratitude.”

Solis said the new guide isn’t just about the Labor Department.

“I want to thank the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, the Office of Personnel Management, the White House and ... all the branches that are here,” Solis said, “because we’re all in this together.”

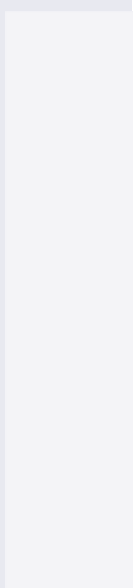
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7/21/2011 12:46:18 PM

These women are deserving of all this country can do to support and assist them. I am a woman vet - how can I help
- Heidi Henderson, BTA Arlington VA

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- [Home](#)
- [Today in DOD](#)
- [About DOD](#)
 - [Leaders](#)
 - [Organization](#)
 - [Mission](#)
 - [History](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 - [Available jobs with DOD](#)
- [Top Issues](#)
 - [Afghanistan](#)
 - [Iraq](#)
 - [Warrior Care](#)
- [News](#)
 - [DOD News Page](#)
 - [Today in DOD](#)
 - [News Releases](#)
 - [Press Advisories](#)
 - [Publications](#)
 - [News Transcripts](#)
 - [Speeches](#)
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 - [Contracts](#)
 - [Casualty Releases](#)
 - [Special Reports](#)
 - [Audio Clips](#)
 - [AFPS Articles](#)
- [Photos/Videos](#)
 - [The Pentagon Channel](#)
 - [Lead Photo Archive](#)
 - [Photo Essays](#)
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 - [News Photos](#)
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