

# Female Veterans Need Better Services, Says VA

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Of 22.7 million living [military veterans](#), more than 1.8 million are women. After service, they need similar types of support as male veterans, as well as having some needs unique to their gender. Though women do not officially serve in combat, they enter combat zones and face some of the same risks as their male colleagues.

A reason for drawing attention to services for women veterans is that the front line is quite blurry nowadays.

Last month Spc. Devin Snyder, an Army [military](#) policewoman, was killed when her convoy was attacked on a highway in Afghanistan. She was 20 years old.

“Wars, with no clear front lines, put soldiers—all soldiers—at risk as never before, blurring the boundaries between combat and other than combat roles,” said said Eric K. Shinseki, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary, in a statement.

A veteran with the National Women Veterans United organization places a rose by the name of fallen female veteran on the Moving Wall display, a half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, on June 17, in Chicago. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

The Veterans Affairs Task Force (VA) is newly crafted to mediate benefit gaps for female veterans. Many suffer from homelessness, military sexual trauma, and child care problems. The 2011 National Training Summit on Women Veterans was held on July 16 to discuss measures that will be taken to solve these issues.

A broad action plan from the Department of Veterans Affairs will focus on key issues for female veterans. The plan is to be drafted by Jan. 1, 2012.

The task force will work with the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans and the Defense Department. The plan “will set our course for the next four years in everything we do, from planning to programming, to [budgeting](#), to education and training,” said Shinseki.

According to Shinseki, issues include obstetric and gynecological care, child care, military sexual trauma (MST), homelessness, aging and end-of-life issues, as well as others. Hypertension and [depression](#) were the top diagnostic categories for women veterans in 2010.

About one in five women responded, “Yes” when screened for military sexual trauma.

MST can impact a person's [mental](#) and physical health, even years later. Some problems include difficulty feeling safe, feelings [of depression](#) or numbness, and drug/alcohol abuse. The VA provides counseling to help survivors regain confidence regardless of era of service or length of term.

The department has propelled its “women's health research in biomedical, clinical sciences, rehabilitation, and health services,” according to Shinseki.

According to a VA survey, nearly a third of veterans were interested in child care services. Over 10 percent had to cancel or reschedule VA appointments due to a lack of child care.

Pilot programs will provide child care services, starting this summer. In Northport, N.Y., Buffalo, N.Y., and Tacoma, Wash., three child care centers will open for female veterans with VA appointments. The system provides free child care for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years.

This pilot program will benefit both men and women, but is particularly geared toward the growing number female veterans. It is part of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, signed by the president in May 2010.

There is also currently a special monthly compensation for female veterans who suffered loss of breast tissue related to their military service.

The VA also plans to end veteran homelessness within five years. According the VA, about 107,000 veterans are homeless on any given day. Only about 5 percent of those are women.

Homeless services include emergency shelter, transitional housing programs, and permanent housing. Additional services are also available to homeless women veterans with dependent children.

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VA's Compensated Work Therapy program for homeless veterans allows them to earn pay while learning new job skills. Veterans work about 33 hours per week, earning around \$732 per month. Approximately \$186 goes toward residential maintenance every month. The average length of stay is about 174 days.