



Women's Health

In response to the increasing number of women veterans, VA Research has focused additional attention on the unique health needs of this population. Current studies are examining the general health issues and health care usage of women veterans; exploring the experiences of women veterans regarding sexual and military-related traumas; and assessing the delivery of VA care for female veterans and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Examples of VA research advances

- **Study examines women's perceptions of VA**—Many women veterans who are not enrolled in the VA health system are unaware that VA provides women's health care, according to a recent study by VA researchers in Los Angeles. The study also found that overall quality of care, access to gender-appropriate services, and a gender-sensitive environment that respects and allows for privacy were among the health care issues that matter most to women veterans.
- **Violence against servicewomen**—A VA research team is interviewing about 500 active-duty women and female veterans from five Midwestern states, all currently or formerly with the reserves or National Guard, with the goal of identifying risk factors for sexual assault and physical violence against women in the military. The study will also look at health outcomes for the study participants and any barriers to VA care.
- **New mammogram guidelines**—Dr. Douglas Owens, a health-services researcher at the Palo Alto VA and Stanford University, chaired an American College of Physicians committee that recently published a new set of mammogram guidelines for women in their 40s. The guidelines, based on a rigorous review of the medical literature, call for periodically performing individual assessments of breast-cancer risk; informing women of the potential benefits and harms of the procedure; and incorporating women's preferences and risk profiles into the screening decision.

With the fast-increasing presence of women in the U.S. armed forces, women veterans have risen exponentially as a segment of eligible VA health care users. Numbering 1.7 million currently, women make up 7 percent of the total veteran population, and are expected to account for 10 percent of veterans by the year 2020. VA is committed to delivering the best-quality care to meet the special health care needs of women veterans, including more than 250,000 who already use VA health care services. To support provision of this kind of world-class care, the VA has established research in women veterans' health as a top priority.

