



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

Long-term health outcomes of Vietnam service – VA researchers are studying the long-term health outcomes of up to 10,000 women Veterans of the Vietnam era. Data will be collected through mail surveys, telephone interviews, and medical-chart reviews. Among other conditions, the researchers will examine lifetime and current incidence of PTSD, depression, diabetes, heart disease, and disability. The study is the most comprehensive look yet at the long-term health outcomes of this Veteran population.

Immunization rates lower among older women Veterans – A team with VA's Los Angeles-based Center for the Study of Health Care Provider Behavior found that older men were more likely than older women to receive immunizations against influenza and pneumonia. For influenza, 73 percent of men versus 69 percent of women were vaccinated. For pneumonia, the rates were 87 versus 83 percent. The researchers said that although overall immunization rates are higher in VA than in other settings, older female Veterans may benefit from educational outreach on this topic.

Metabolic syndrome and cognitive risk – Among older women, having metabolic syndrome increases the risk of cognitive impairment by 66 percent, according to a study by VA researchers and colleagues of nearly 5,000 post-menopausal women in 25 countries. Metabolic syndrome is the presence of three or more of the following: abdominal obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, or reduced HDL (the "good" cholesterol). The analysis was part of a clinical trial looking at the effects of the osteoporosis drug raloxifene on the risk of vertebral fractures in women.

Facts About Women's Health

As of Sept. 2008, there were more than 1.8 million women Veterans in the United States and Puerto Rico, accounting for nearly 8 percent of the U.S. Veteran population. More than 250,000 of these women rely on VA health care. In response to the growing number of women Veterans in recent years, VA has taken steps to significantly increase the participation of women Veterans in VA studies and to develop an expansive research agenda focused on their specific needs. Today, VA is recognized as a national leader in the investigation of women's health.

