

THE NEED...

The expansion of women in the military is reshaping the veteran population. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has recently listed women veterans' health as one of his top priority areas for transformative work. Given the "perfect storm" of the growth of women veterans in VA, the significant burden of illness seen in this patient population, and the relatively limited women's health experience of a number of VA providers, the demand for evidence-based practice and policy is greater than ever before. Despite the interest in VA women's health research demonstrated by members of the VA Women's Health Research Interest Group and Women's Health Research Listserv, researchers have been hampered by lack of local mentorship, technical assistance and collaborative opportunities. Researchers have also encountered difficulties in recruiting sufficient sample sizes for single-site studies and commonly do not have enough cases to analyze findings by gender subgroup, which in turn means that valuable data are not used to their utmost potential. Federal agencies now require their funded researchers to include women in their research in sufficient numbers to enable valid analyses.

THE RESPONSE...

VA HSR&D Service has recently funded the development of the VA Women's Health Research Network (WHRN), composed of two partnered components, the Women's Health Research Consortium and the Women's Health Practice Based Research Network (PBRN). WHRN will enhance the conduct of VA women's health services research studies by building capacity, meeting field-based technical needs and reducing barriers to the conduct of multi-site studies.

- **Consortium Component** will: (1) Provide methodological training and mentorship for women's health researchers including cyberseminars, workshops and education/training sessions in key content areas, (2) Support a communications network that fosters information exchange and interactions among researchers who are involved and/or interested in VA women's health research, and (3) Enhance partnerships between researchers, managers and frontline providers, accelerating dissemination and implementation of VA Women's Health Research into evidence-based practice and policy.
- **PBRN Component** will facilitate the testing of VA-based women's health-related interventions and the conduct of other research studies that require recruitment of women veterans at multiple sites by: (1) Establishing a ready-to-use infrastructure of partnered VA health care facilities representing a substantial pool of women veterans, (2) Developing, testing and documenting research procedures for conducting multi-site studies of Women Veterans, and (3) Drawing on the experience and insight of practicing clinicians to identify and frame research questions whose answers can improve women's health clinical practice in VA.



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