



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Responding to the growing numbers of women Veterans, VA Research has focused additional attention on the unique or special health needs of this population. Areas of focus include posttraumatic stress, barriers to health care access, reproductive health, and sexual trauma. Many diseases common among women—such as cancer, osteoporosis, arthritis, and depression—are the focus of biomedical studies and clinical trials at numerous VA sites.

EXAMPLES OF VA RESEARCH ADVANCES

HOMELESSNESS AMONG WOMEN VETERANS—Women Veterans are up to four times more likely to be homeless than non-Veteran women. A series of Los Angeles focus groups identified five experiences that initiated pathways toward homelessness in these women: unemployment; childhood adversity; trauma or substance abuse during military service; post-military abuse, adversity, or relationship termination; and post-military mental health, substance abuse, or medical problems. A West Haven, Conn., VA team found that homeless women are just as likely as homeless men to have mental health problems or substance use problems.

SOY SUPPLEMENTS DON'T MEASURE UP—Concerns about hormone replacement therapy have led many women to seek natural alternatives. But a Miami VA team's research showed that taking soy tablets doesn't boost bone density or help ease menopause symptoms. Older women who had recently reached menopause took either 200 mg of soy isoflavones or a placebo pill each day. After two years, there were no differences in bone density in the women's spines, hips, or femurs. More women taking soy said they had hot flashes and constipation, compared with those taking placebos.

BRAIN INJURIES DIFFERENT IN WOMEN—Women Veterans with deployment-related traumatic brain injury (TBI) are less likely than men to have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, they are more likely to have depression or another type of anxiety disorder. Women also reported more severe TBI symptoms than men did. The VA's National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder looked at diagnoses and symptoms in 12,605 Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who were evaluated as having deployment-related TBI. They note that other conditions besides PTSD may be linked with TBI, particularly in women, and care providers should identify and treat these conditions appropriately.

★ **FACTS ABOUT WOMEN'S HEALTH**—*There are more than 1.8 million women Veterans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, accounting for 7.5 percent of the U.S. Veteran population. If current trends continue, by 2030, 14 percent of Veterans will be women. More than 200,000 women were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, making this the largest wartime deployment of women in the history of the United States. Women Veterans are younger than their male counterparts. About half are married, and about half of those who are married are in dual-military marriages. About 11 percent of women Veterans are single mothers. VA has taken steps to significantly increase the participation of women Veterans in 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.*