

VFW Works to Ensure Women Receive Proper Care

VFW over the years has worked to guarantee women veterans are accurately represented

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Women veterans, much like their male counterparts, have served in all services of the military and have contributed a significant amount to defend the United States. A top VFW priority is to make certain that women veterans receive earned benefits and services.

Focusing on women's VA health care has been one of VFW's priorities, even after years of advocacy and improvements to women's care in recent years. Women are the fastest-growing segment of the veterans population — it has never been more important to ensure that women can access top-quality benefits and health care after leaving the military.

VFW National Veterans Service Assistant Director of Field Operations Cindy Noel said more work needs to be done to make certain female veterans are treated fairly.

"I think we are heading in the right direction, but it's a slow-moving train," said Noel, a retired Air Force master sergeant. "But we are trying to stop at each station to pick up people, and while we are getting to the next station, we help them."

BETTER HEALTH CARE

For 2024, VFW has made it a priority to "enhance programs and services for women and underserved veterans." According to VFW Res. 607, 25 percent of female veterans in 2019 were not using VA health care facilities.

Improvements have been made. For example, VA recently reported that 80 percent of enrolled women veterans are assigned to providers who have "experience and training" in women's health care. However, female patients in the VA health care system have reported "concerns regarding gender-specific competencies" of VA health care staff.

In Res. 607, VFW agrees that VA needs to:

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

- Improve outreach to women veterans.
- Allow women to choose the gender of their VA health care providers.
- Train VA's workforce to treat women veterans with respect and dignity.

VFW Res. 607 states that VFW urges "VA to continue to improve the staffing, equipping, monitoring and enhancing of health care services available to women veterans at all VA medical facilities." The resolution also states that VA needs to "expand its designated women's health program to mental health care." This would "ensure access to mental health care providers who understand women-specific mental health conditions."

ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

VFW continues to support military sexual trauma survivors in their journey to recovery from past events. VA says about 1-in-3 women have told their VA health care provider that they experienced sexual harassment or assault in the military.

For 2024, VFW has it as a priority goal to "eliminate sexual assault and harassment from the military." VFW Res. 402 also states that VFW "strongly" demands the Department of Defense becomes "more aggressive" in its efforts to reduce sexual assault and harassment.

"[DOD needs to] provide victims with proper and necessary medical and mental health care, as well as assistance with disability claims as may be required," Res. 402 states.

The resolution also requires VFW to spur DOD to "aggressively and diligently investigate every reported incident and punish attackers, as well as individuals involved in acts of retribution and retaliation."

In Res. 402, VFW states that the DOD in 2021 released a report that contained "the worst reports on sexual harm in the military and at the academies" since the DOD started reporting on military sexual trauma.

"The VFW does such good work," Noel said. "It is important for women to create a sisterhood in the organization. We just need to put in the work."

To learn more about what VFW is doing for women veterans, visit vfw.org/WomenVeterans.

This article is featured in the 2024 March issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.