

White House Interagency Council on Women and Girls
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Women Veterans and Women VA Employees

I. Agency Overview (www.va.gov)

A. Executive Summary:

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on March 10, 2009, that delivery of enhanced primary care for women Veterans is one of VA's top priorities. VA recognizes that a growing number of women Veterans are choosing VA for their health care. Of the 1.8 million women Veterans in the United States, more than 450,000 women Veterans have enrolled for care. This number is expected to grow by 30 percent in the next five years. Women currently comprise approximately 14 percent of the active duty military, 17.6 percent of Guard and Reserves. By 2020, VA estimates women will constitute 15 percent of VA users.

Women who were deployed and served in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are enrolling in VA at historically high rates. Forty-four percent of all women who were deployed and served in Iraq or Afghanistan have enrolled, and 43 percent have used VA between two and 11 times. This suggests that many newer women Veterans are relying on VA to meet their health care needs.

VA has identified three main integrated objectives to guide the Department's strategies: (1) make it easier for Veterans and their families to receive the right benefits that meet their expectations for quality, timeliness, and responsiveness; (2) educate and empower Veterans and their families through proactive outreach and effective advocacy; and (3) build internal capacity to serve Veterans, their families, and its employees efficiently and effectively. VA's programs for women Veterans are aimed at meeting these objectives.

The primary VA entities/programs that impact women VA employees and women Veterans are:

- VA's Center for Women Veterans (www.va.gov/womenvet)
- Secretary's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (www.va.gov/advisory)
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group (WVHSHG), <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth/>
- Veterans Benefits Administration
- VA's Federal Women's Program
- VA Office of Diversity and Inclusion
- The Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Consortium Employee Assistance Program (EAP) of Veterans Affairs Central Office

B. Description of VA Programs Which Improve the Lives of Women Veterans:

VA Center for Women Veterans (the Center)

The Center was created by Congress under Public Law 103-446, "Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994." The mission of the Center is to:

- Ensure women Veterans have access to VA benefits and services on par with male Veterans.
- Ensure VA programs are responsive to the gender-specific needs of women Veterans.
- Perform joint outreach to improve women Veterans' awareness of VA services, benefits and eligibility criteria.
- Ensure that women Veterans are treated with dignity and respect.

The Center accomplishes its mission by monitoring the Department's programs and policies and recommending changes, revisions or new initiatives to address deficiencies to the Secretary; analyzing the impact of policy and legislative proposals on women Veterans; collaborating with VA's Administrations to make women employees and women Veterans more knowledgeable about changes in VA policies; ensuring that the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans is educated about VA to ensure clear, meaningful recommendations; coordinating the development, distribution, and processing of the Committee reports; and coordinating an annual Committee site visit to VA health care facilities, regional offices, Vet Centers, national cemeteries, and other related programs such as homeless and transitional housing.

Caring for our women Veterans does not stop within the confines of the Department. We conduct extensive outreach, coordination and collaboration with other agencies (military, federal, state, and local), as well as with Veterans service organizations and community-based organizations concerned with women Veterans issues.

The Center also facilitates a National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues, a quadrennial training event sponsored VA. The fourth Summit was held on June 20-22, 2008, at the Westin Center Hotel, Washington, DC. The purpose of the summit was to look at the issues and recommendations from the 2004 Summit, review VA's progress on these issues, provide information on current issues, and develop recommendations and a plan for continuous progress on women Veterans' issues. The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans served as facilitators for the event. More than 400 individuals attended, including women Veterans, women Veterans program managers and coordinators, congressional staffers from the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, women Veterans' organizations, representatives from other collaborating federal, state, and local agencies, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), and members of active duty military, Guard, and Reserve. Based on feedback received from Summit participants, the Center is posting updates on women Veterans' issues to our Web site (www.va.gov/woment).

Secretary's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (the Committee)

The Committee was established by Public Law 98-160 in November 1983, and submits a report every two years to the Secretary, and distributes it to Congress. The Committee assesses the needs of women Veterans with respect to adequate access to VA programs and services, and makes recommendations to the Secretary for change. The last report was distributed to Congress September 26, 2008. The report can be found on VA's advisory committee Web site (www.va.gov/advisory). Recommendations stem from data and information gathered in briefings from VA officials, Departments of Labor (DOL) and Defense (DoD) officials, members of House and Senate Congressional Committee staff offices, women Veterans, researchers, VSOs, internal VA reports, and site visits to Veterans Health Administrations (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and National Cemetery Administration (NCA) facilities. The Committee is confident that the 20 recommendations and supporting rationale provided in the 2008 report reflect value-added ways for VA to strategically and efficiently address many needs of women Veterans. There are currently 12 Committee members, including one Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group (WVHSHG)

The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group (WVHSHG), in collaboration with VHA Patient Care Services as well as other programs, provides programmatic and strategic support to ensure the highest quality and implement positive changes in the provision of care for all women Veterans. VHA's goal is to be a national leader in the provision of health care for women, thereby raising the standard of care for all women.

To fulfill this mission, the WVHSHG, in collaboration with other offices in VHA, works to make certain that all eligible women Veterans requesting VA health care are assured of:

Comprehensive primary care by a proficient and interested primary care provider

- Privacy, safety, dignity, and sensitivity to gender-specific needs
- The right care in the right place and time
- State-of-the-art health care equipment and technology
- High-quality preventive and clinical care, equal to that provided to male Veterans

Health Care for Women Veterans

Comprehensive Primary Care for Women Veterans:

VA is revitalizing women's health and expanding the focus beyond gender-specific care to complete comprehensive care to the growing women Veteran population. It is

implementing an innovative approach to women's health care that seeks to ensure care is coordinated, remove any quality disparities, and improve provider proficiency in women's health by fundamentally changing the experience of women Veterans in VA.

In March 2008, a workgroup was charged to define necessary actions for ensuring every woman Veteran has access to a VA primary care provider capable of meeting all her primary care needs, including gender-specific and mental health care, in the context of a continuous patient-clinician relationship. This new definition places a strong emphasis on improved coordination of care for women Veterans, continuity, and patient-centeredness. In November 2008, the workgroup released its final report, identifying recommendations for delivery of comprehensive primary care. These recommendations included: (1) delivering coordinated, comprehensive primary women's health care at every VA health care facility by recognizing best practices and developing systems and structure for care delivery appropriate to women Veterans; (2) integrating women's mental health care as part of primary care, including co-locating mental health providers; (3) promoting and incentivizing innovation in care delivery by supporting local best practices; (4) cultivating and enhancing capabilities of all VA staff to meet the comprehensive health care needs of women Veterans; and (5) achieving gender equity in the provision of clinical care.

Women's Health Education: VHA has recently initiated mini-residencies in women's health across the country in strategic geographic locations. Early results from this program indicate its success in increasing competencies in 12 areas of women's health care. Work is ongoing with VA's Office of Academic Affiliations to support women's health fellowships and advanced clinical training in women's health as well as the Office of Nursing Services to develop virtual simulation training on women's health for facility staff.

Reproductive Health: VA is addressing women's reproductive health issues. Reducing the risk of birth defects due to teratogenic medications is a top priority. Other important efforts include improving follow-up of abnormal mammograms, tracking the timeliness of breast cancer treatment, and developing specific clinical action strategies for women with human papilloma virus.

Communication and Partnerships: A VHA-wide communication plan is under development to focus on intentional inclusion of women Veterans. A national Women's Health Communications Workgroup develops and disseminates standardized outreach materials to raise awareness of the women Veteran population and their unique needs. Enhanced web capabilities are continually being implemented to improve the transfer of information among field and leadership personnel. VA is also working to ensure that women Veteran populations are represented clearly in statistical data, including demographics, epidemiology, health status, and quality of care.

Women's Health Research: VA's Office of Research and Development has a key role in documenting the health care needs and utilization of women Veterans, as well as their access and quality of care. Valuable information can be gained through risk assessments conducted on epidemiological data from women who served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and through the OEF/OIF Cohort

Study. VHA is also working to understand and eliminate quality disparities in performance measures of the care provided to male and female Veterans.

Special Needs of Specific Populations of Women Veteran: Some specific populations of women Veterans have special needs that require particular attention, for example, rural and homebound Veterans can benefit from emerging technology that will deliver care remotely through "e-clinics," mobile clinics, and home-based care services. Women Veterans with mental illnesses can benefit through integration of mental health services within primary care, so that necessary treatment is provided in a comprehensive and coordinated way. VHA is also working to enhance the availability of woman-safe inpatient acute psychiatric units. Aging women Veterans can benefit from the latest advances in medical science and technology to identify and address cardiovascular disease, as well as advances in treatments for diabetes, osteoporosis, and menopause.

Women Veterans Program Managers

At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM) is designated to advise and advocate for women Veterans. This program manager helps coordinate all the services one may need, from primary care to specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health.

Veterans Benefits Administration Services and Initiatives for Women Veterans

- Women Veterans Coordinators at each regional office to assist women Veterans
- Compensation and pension benefits
- Special monthly compensation for women Veterans with a service-connected disability to include hysterectomy and/or mastectomy or loss of creative organ
- A monthly monetary allowance for the children of Women Veterans who served in Vietnam
- Education and training, to include the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Vocational rehabilitation and employment services
- Home loan guaranty
- Dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors (predominantly women)
- Life insurance

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The mission of the Center is to coordinate VA's efforts to eliminate regulatory, contracting, and other programmatic obstacles to the participation of faith-based and other community organizations in the provision of social and community services to Veterans. The Center empowers faith-based and other community organizations to apply for federal social service grants. The Center supplies information and training, but it does not make the decisions about which groups will be funded. Those decisions are made through procedures established by each grant program, generally involving a competitive process. No grant funding is set aside for faith-based organizations.

Instead, the Faith-Based and Community Initiative creates a level-playing field for faith-based as well as other community organizations so that they can work with the government to meet the needs of America's communities (<http://www1.va.gov/opa/fbci/index.asp>).

VA Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE) and Business (www.vetbiz.gov/)

The CVE, along with the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, will support the Interagency Taskforce for Veterans Business Development, which is being organized by the Administrator of the Small Business Administration. The taskforce's mission is to coordinate efforts of Federal agencies to improve capital and business development opportunities for, and to work to achieve Federal contracting goals for small business concerns owned and controlled by Veterans, to include service-disabled Veterans and women Veterans. VA will work to achieve the goal of contracting and subcontracting five percent of the Department's prime and subcontracts dollars to women-owned small businesses.

National Cemetery Administration Services and Initiatives for Women Veterans

Women Veterans, whether single, married or divorced, are eligible for the same memorial benefits in their own right as men Veterans. These benefits include burial in any open VA national cemetery, a government headstone or marker, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a U.S. Burial Flag.

- NCA staff member is an ex-officio member of the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
- Developed a women and minority Veterans memorial benefits fact sheet
- Developed a women and minority Veterans memorial benefits web site
- Sent a women and minority Veterans memorial benefits kit to all VAMC women veteran program managers
- Sent a women and minority Veterans memorial benefits kit to all State Departments of Veterans Affairs

C. Programs Which Improve the Lives of VA Women Employees/Promote Work-Life Balance

Federal Women's Program

The Federal Women's Program (FWP) is a special emphasis program within the Equal Employment Opportunity Program of the United States Government. The objectives and mission of FWP are to increase professional and personal achievement of women employees. In August 1969, Executive Order No. 11478 integrated the FWP into the overall Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO) and placed the FWP under the direction of the EEO for each agency.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO) FWP has approximately 60 committee members who meet weekly during high activity periods and bi-weekly during low activity months. The goals of the FWP are to improve advancement opportunities for women in government, to increase respect for the work of women employees at all grade levels, and work to eliminate any sexual harassment that might exist in the workplace.

VACO's FWP has played a vital role in addressing concerns and issues relating to employment opportunities and the advancement of women at VACO. The FWP is led by the FWP Manager, and the FWP Vice-Manager. The FWP Manager serves a one year term, and the FWP Vice-Manager serves a two year term; the second year as the FWP Manager. Both positions are appointed by senior leadership. The FWP Manager plays a vital role in leading various initiatives which address women's concerns and issues relating to employment opportunities and the advancement of women in the Federal government.

Certain problems and issues are unique to women, regardless of race, age, national origin, educational level or disability. Many women employees and their managers are unaware of the employment and advancement barriers women face. The FWP works for the benefit of all federally employed women. The FWP seeks to increase professional and personal achievement of women employees by encouraging them to set goals.

Strategies for Success include:

- Eliminating any false barriers, customs and attitudes that might exist that hinder women from moving to certain occupations and high level positions.
- Improving self-confidence of women employees through education and training so they will become more competitive.
- Creating an appreciation by management and employees of the need for greater sensitivity to employee needs.
- Identifying any problems that might exist and devise appropriate responses with respect to the recruitment and advancement of women in government.

Ongoing FWP Initiatives:

- Women's History Month
- Take Our Children to Work Day
- Financial Literacy Workshops
- Dress for Success
- Suited for Change
- Professional Development Workshops
- George Washington University (GWU) Mammovan
- Women's Equality Day

Future Efforts:

Future initiatives are mainly determined by the FWP manager and committee members. The FWP will continue to pursue initiatives in line with its mission.

Overarching Recommendations:

The FWP is striving to be more of a solid source for women employees and Veterans. Many employees may not be aware of FWP and its mission. Further, the FWP spends a lot of time planning events and outreach. The FWP manager would like to see the FWP focus more on the mission of the FWP, which includes:

- To improve advancement opportunities for women in government.
- To increase respect for the work of women employees at all grade levels.
- To work toward the elimination of any sexual harassment that might exist in the workplace.
- To increase professional and personal achievement of women employees.

VA Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI)

Overall, VA employment of women in permanent and temporary positions grew from 59.34 percent in FY07 to 59.91 percent in FY08. Also in FY08, women in the leadership pipeline grew to 47.55 percent from 45.47. Women in Senior Executive Service positions grew from 30.60 percent in FY07 to 32.79 percent in FY08.

Onboard VA Women:

FY07 150,126

FY08 166,173

FY09 174,655 (through June)

Onboard Veteran VA Women:

FY07 17,875

FY08 19,650

FY09 20,923 (through June)

The following presents the programs, services, and initiatives provided by ODI that focus on women in the workplace, including those with disabilities and women of color:

- **Partnership with Federally Employed Women (FEW):** VA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Organization of Federally Employed Women in June of 2008. Under this MOU, VA, through ODI, supports FEW in its mission to advance women in Federal employment by promoting career development, networking, mentoring, and other developmental opportunities at FEW's National Annual Training Conference and throughout the year.

- **Interagency FEW Partners in Project:** ODI is an active participant in FEW's Partners in Projects initiative which is a network of Federal agencies established to share best practices, leverage resources, and promote events aimed at educating, supporting, and raising awareness to issues facing women in the workplace.
- **Pre-Conference Training Event at National FEW Conference:** ODI is hosting a pre-conference training event at FEW's 2009 National Training Conference in Orlando to educate women on paths to excellence and leadership in Federal government.
- **Diversity-focused Mentoring Program:** ODI is partnering with VA Learning University to establish a VA Mentoring Program aimed at supporting diversity in succession planning, with special emphasis on women's leadership development to break the "glass ceiling" in Federal government.
- **Workplace/Sexual Harassment Prevention Training:** ODI has developed new Workplace/Sexual Harassment Prevention mandatory training for employees and managers to raise awareness, educate individuals on their legal rights and responsibilities, and eradicate any behaviors that might lead to sexual (and other) harassment in the workplace. Aspects of this training are also included in a separate EEO, Diversity, and No FEAR Training for managers and supervisors to ensure they are informed of their legal obligation to eliminate any barriers to equal opportunity for women (and others) in all aspects of employment.
- **Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion Training:** ODI has developed a presentation that illustrates the business case for diversity and inclusion, and provides current research demonstrating the competitive business and performance advantages to gender diversity in the workplace and in organizational leadership. ODI is championing the business case for diversity and inclusion in VA and Federal government-wide.
- **VA Women's Special Emphasis Program:** ODI manages VA's National Special Emphasis Program, including the annual Women's History Month Program in March and Equality Day Observance in August to recognize and celebrate women's contributions and achievement through American history, and to promote awareness on equality issues for women, including pay equity, employment rights, and workplace protections.
- **VA Diversity Advisory Council:** ODI established VA's first Department-wide Diversity Advisory Council comprising senior leadership, unions, and affinity groups, to share best practices, leverage resources, and promote policies, programs, and services that eliminate any barriers that might exist for women and minorities in VA's workforce and programs.

- **VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan:** ODI led the development of VA's first Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan to "foster a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment" to ensure equal opportunity for women and minorities through workforce analysis, outreach, retention, and education. This Plan contains measurable objectives to achieve its goals, including addressing underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Progress will be reported in an upcoming Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Report.

The Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Consortium Employee Assistance Program (EAP) of Veterans Affairs Central Office

The current Federal Occupational Health Employee Assistance Program has been in place since September 1, 2006, when the contract was awarded to FOH. Since 2006, the EAP has provided psychosocial assessments, referrals, brief counseling, and educational information to one hundred sixty eight people (168), 88 of whom were women. These women ranged from SES level to the lowest level GS rank. Some were grandmothers who were guardians of granddaughters seen for family issues. Other issues included alcohol abuse, marital problems, domestic violence concerns, legal, financial, coworker and supervisor conflicts, as well as women vets with PTSD. All areas of VACO VHA, BVA, and NCA were represented by women using EAP services. Record keeping in the program in April 2009 has been changed from paper files to electronically stored encrypted files. This will provide more elaborate statistical feedback for future reports to management. VA Central Office of Administration Support Services directly oversees the FOH EAP.

The Veterans Affairs Central Office FOH Consortium Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has a variety of services that are easily utilized and free of cost to all employees including female Veterans and the daughters of all VACO employees. They are listed below:

- The EAP offers free voluntary individual brief counseling and psychosocial assessment and referral to health plans. Other community resources may be used such as the DC Women's Center, the Women's Center of Vienna, Virginia, and the Montgomery County Commission for Women.
- Stress management is addressed individually with a woman and can be offered in seminars for women employees at VACO. Balancing Work and Family Life and Dealing with Conflict are both programs that are heavily attended by women employees. Smoking Cessation consult is available as part of the EAP.
- Women with substance abuse issues can receive free individual assessment and referral for either individual outpatient or inpatient treatment as needed.
- Women of color are frequent users of all of the EAP services.
- Women dealing with legal issues such as separation and divorce, end of life issues, or setting up wills and estates can utilize the discounted rates of the EAP Legal Service. Clients are eligible for one free consult in the Legal service program of the EAP.

- Women with financial issues such as credit card debt, mortgage payments and budgeting questions can take advantage of the EAP free telephonic Financial Services Program.
- EAP can provide women with disabilities a free life needs assessment and referrals to regional disabilities services provided under American Disabilities Act for career guidance, emotional support, and for housing and other assistance tailored to meet unique needs of these women.
- Women often are caregivers of loved ones. The EAP has numerous educational and telephonic eldercare resources free to these women.
- EAP services are available 24 hours/7 days a week at 800-222-3624.

Programs that Create Work-life Balance for Women VA Employees

Leave Administration:

VA provides leave flexibilities that are specifically designed to help employees better manage their work and personal life responsibilities. Employees have access to the following leave programs:

- Annual Leave – use for vacation time
- Sick Leave – up to a total of 12 administrative weeks per leave year
 - Sick Leave for Family Care or Bereavement
 - Sick Leave to Care for a Family Member with a Serious Health Condition
- Voluntary Leave Transfer Program – employees may donate annual leave to employees who have depleted use of her annual and sick leave due to a medical emergency
- Family and Medical Act Leave (FMLA) – may use up to a total of 12 weeks of non-pay leave annually for family care and the birth and care of a new born
- Organ Donor Leave – entitlement to 30 days of authorized absence in connection with the donation or receipt of an organ
- Bone Marrow Leave – entitled to 7 days of authorized absence for bone marrow donation
- Court Leave – granted excused absence for purpose of meeting jury duty obligations
- Military Leave – entitled to 15 days of military leave (authorized absence) to meet active duty military obligations; additional 22 days if called to active duty in support of a contingency operation; five days excused absence if returning from Global War on Terror

Hours of Duty:

In addition to traditional work schedules, alternative work schedules (AWS) are offered to help organizations better serve customers and help employees maximize their

productive time and minimize the effects of outside responsibilities. Employees have access to the following alternative work schedules:

- Flexible Work Schedules
- Compressed Work Schedules
- Telework (work from home or other convenient satellite location, if position meets VA's telework criteria)
- Alternate Work Schedules for Registered Nurses
 - 36/40 Work Schedule (full-time) – works three 12 hours days (36 hours) during an administrative workweek and receives credit for 40 hours of work
 - 9-month on/3-month off work Schedule (part-time) – part-time work schedule in that the nurse works 9 months a year and receive 3 months off

VA Child Care Subsidy Program:

Program is designed to help eligible lower income VA employees (earning less than \$60,000 per annum) with the cost of child care. This Child Care Subsidy Program applies to employees whose children are under the age of 13, or disabled and under the age of 18, and are enrolled, or will be enrolled, in licensed family child care homes or center-based child care. The child care facility must be licensed and/or regulated by State and/or local authorities.

VA Health and Wellness Program:

Programs are designed to enhance workplace effectiveness and supports health promotion and disease prevention activities for employees. Employees have access to the following programs:

- **Employee Assistance Program** – basic service includes free, voluntary, short-term counseling and referral for various issues affecting employee mental and emotional well-being, such as alcohol and other substance abuse, stress, grief, family problems, and psychological disorders. EAP counselors also work in a consultative role with managers and supervisors to help address, prevent and cope with workplace violence, trauma, and other emergency response situations.
- **National President's Challenge** – program that specifically promotes 30 minutes of physical activity and good nutrition.

Worklife and Benefits Service Telework Statistics (as of July 15, 2009):

Telework Description	Total Employees	Total Female Employees Teleworking
Ad Hoc	1,510	817
Emergency Preparedness	240	102
National/Regional Emergency	2,601	1,516
Regular recurring	1,382	842
Situational (short term)	2,536	1,672
OWCP related	15	10
Total Teleworkers	8,284	4,959

D. Future Efforts:

- The Secretary of Veterans Affairs is establishing a VA Council to address programs and initiatives related to women Veterans and women VA employees within the next six months.
- Director of the Center for Women Veterans will continue to serve as ex-officio on the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services <http://www.defenselink.mil/dacowits/> to promote extensive collaboration and to facilitate proactive VA response to the needs of women Veterans.
- VA plans to establish and develop a joint outreach initiative for women Veterans with Department of Defense (DoD) using a Web site such as <https://www.DoDTechipedia.mil>.
- The Center will continue its partnership by providing women Veterans information on Business and Professional Women/USA (BPW) (www.bpwusa.org) Women Veterans Initiative, “*Women Joining Forces – Closing Ranks, Opening Doors (WJF)*,” which provides programming and resources including access to information and research that can help women Veterans successfully transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

Programs Open to all Employees Which Improve the Lives of America’s Women and Girls (VA women employees):

Worklife Balance Programs:

- WorkLife4You: Work Life Balance program
- Child Care Subsidy Program – based on family’s adjusted gross income
- VA Learning University – education and career development programs such as Aspiring Leaders, Leadership VA, Senior Academy Leadership Program, etc.

- Office of Diversity and Inclusion sponsored mentoring, internships, and training programs, etc.
- Child Care Centers
- Transit Benefits Program

Relevant Statistics:

- VA does not have grants for women-owned businesses.

II. Future Programs:

A. Target Population(s):

- The population includes women Veterans and women VA employees.
- VA does not have any programs aimed at female scientists; however the agency does have programs targeting women Veterans in business.

B. Benchmarks:

- VA does not have benchmarks with regard to small business grants for women Veterans; however the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (ACWV) made a recommendation in its 2008 report to establish a mechanism to collect statistics. The Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE) will establish procedures and systems to enable the routine collection and reporting of data specific to women Veteran-owned businesses, including verification of other statuses such as minority or service-disabled, which may enable increased access to Federal contracts. The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization/CVE will be supporting the Interagency Task Force for Veterans Business Development, which is being organized by the Administrator of the Small Business Administration (SBA), as required by Public Law (PL) 110-186. The mission of the Task Force, as identified in Title I, Section 102 of the law, "is to coordinate the efforts of Federal agencies necessary to improve capital and business development opportunities for, and ensure achievement of the pre-established Federal contracting goals for, small business concerns owned and controlled by service-disabled Veterans and small business concerns owned and controlled by Veterans."

C. Other Information:

Center for Women Veterans' Extensive Collaborative Outreach Efforts:

- Department of Defense – work in collaboration with the DOD Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)
- VA administrations and staff offices
- Other Federal agencies
- State agencies
- State women Veterans coordinators
- Congressional roundtables and hearings

- Policy and legislative groups
- Veterans Service Organizations
- County and private agencies
- Other minority and women's groups

D. Overarching Recommendations:

- Promoting continuous joint outreach, national communications, mass media, and education of VA staff to the needs of women Veterans.
- Improve collaboration with DoD, DOL, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services.
- Share crosscutting best practices with other agencies.
- Portray women Veterans and employees positively with illustrations of diversity in all media, brochures, and publications.
- Establish systematic training across federal agencies for all employees including women in executive leadership to include courses dealing with the media, and politics and how to negotiate jobs and salary. Include federal contactors in this initiative where appropriate.
- Review occupations and professional areas to recommend and make necessary changes.

E. Where VA is going with the Women Veterans Health Program:

- Continue to designate a full-time Women Veterans Program Manager at every VA health care facility.
- Implement comprehensive primary care (including gender specific care) at every VA medical site.
- Expand knowledge about the demographics and composition of women Veterans population by collecting and analyzing data.
- Increase the knowledge base about women's health issues among VA providers.
- Recruit primary care physicians who have knowledge of women's health.
- Further the integration of mental health services with primary care to achieve a more comprehensive women's health care program.
- Promote recognition of the unique needs of women Veterans and recognize women's military service and contribution to this Nation.

III. References and Sources:

1. This report was compiled from information and input from Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and staff offices such as Offices of Diversity and Inclusion, Federal Women's Program, Federal Occupational Health Employee Assistance Program, Employee Education System, VA Center for Veterans Enterprise and Business, Worklife and Benefits Service, Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Management/Budget, Nursing, Communications and Training/Education and VA's Health and Wellness Program, May-June 2009. All documents are on file in the Center for Women Veterans.

2. Testimony: Statement of the Honorable Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, March 10, 2009.
3. Testimony: Statement of Patricia Hayes, Ph.D., Chief Consultant, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the, Senate House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, July 14, 2009.
4. Testimony: Statement of Patricia Hayes, Ph.D., Chief Consultant, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Subcommittee on Health, July 16, 2009.
5. Testimony: Statement of Lawrence Deyton, MD, MSHP, Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Subcommittee on Health, July 16, 2009.
6. Testimony: Statement of Bradley G. Mayes, Director, Compensation and Pension Service, Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Subcommittee on Health, July 16, 2009.
7. Testimony: Statement of Irene Trowell-Harris, R.N., Ed.D., Director, Center for Women Veterans, Office of the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs, before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Subcommittee on Health, July 16, 2009.
8. Report of the Under Secretary for Health Workgroup, "Provision of Primary Care for Women Veterans," Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, November 2008.
9. Binder, Women Veterans Health Care, Veterans Health Administration, May 2009.

Historical Perspective on VA women Veterans Program Issues:

1982: The General Accounting Office (GAO) conducted a study and issued a report titled: "Actions Needed to Insure that Female Veterans Have Equal Access to VA Benefits."

1983: Congress passed Public Law 98-160, "Veterans' Health Care Amendments of 1983," mandating that VA establish an Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. The charge to the Committee was broad, but they were tasked with assessing the needs of women Veterans with respect to adequate access to VA programs and services, and empowered to make recommendations to the VA Secretary for change. A report is submitted to the Secretary and Congress every two years.

1984: The first report of the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans identified the need for strong outreach, and the lack of adequate privacy and gender-specific treatment for women at VA facilities as the most pressing areas of concern.

1988: A Veterans Health Administration Office to address women's health issues was first created. VA began providing medical and psychosocial services for women in 1988, when women represented 4.4 percent of all Veterans. In 2010, women Veterans make up more than 14 percent of the total U.S. Veteran population.

1991: GAO was tasked by Congress to do a follow-up study on VA health care for women. Their 1992 report was entitled, "VA Health Care for Women - Despite Progress, Improvement Needed."

1992: The 1992 GAO report, along with Congressional hearings related to sexual harassment and assault, led to the enactment of Public Law 102-585, "Veterans Health Care Act of 1992." It provided specific provisions for women's health and broadened the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to include care for the aftermath of sexual trauma associated with military duty.

1994: Secretary Jesse Brown established the Women Veterans Program Office within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning.

The Center for Women Veterans was created by Congress under Public Law 103-446, "Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994."

The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder created a Women's Health Sciences Division at the Boston VA Medical Center.

Three research projects were proposed by VA as an alternative to a comprehensive epidemiologic study of the long-term health effects experienced by 27 women who served in the Armed Forces in Vietnam, as mandated by Public Law 99-272, "Veterans' Health-Care Amendments of 1986."

1996: The first National Summit on Women Veterans Issues was held in Washington, DC, marking the first time that women Veterans from across the Nation had the opportunity to come together with policymakers and VA officials to jointly address all issues related to women Veterans.

2000: For the first time, VA allocated funds (\$3 million) to support programs specifically for women Veterans who were homeless. Three-year demonstration programs were designed at 11 locations across the country.

The Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, PL 106-419, authorized Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for women Veterans with a service-connected hysterectomy and/or mastectomy or loss of creative organ. Additionally, it provided benefits for children with birth defects born to women Vietnam Veterans.

2001: Women's Health National Strategic Work Group convened to develop progressive, state-of-the-art programs to provide high-quality comprehensive health care for FY 2002 through FY 2007. The Group commissioned Dr. Katherine M. Skinner to study the role of Women Veterans Coordinators.

2008: The Women's Veterans Health Program Office was elevated to the Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, as part of VA's readiness for the influx of new women Veterans. Patricia M. Hayes, PhD, was appointed Chief Consultant on April 13, 2008. The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans recommended the realignment of the Women Veterans Health Program Office to the status of a Strategic Healthcare Group and the Program Director position be designated as a Chief Consultant in their 2006 report. The Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group (WVHSHG) provides programmatic and strategic support to implement positive changes in the provision of care for all women Veterans.

Compiled by Irene Trowell-Harris, R.N., Ed.D., Director, Center for Women Veterans, July 28, 2009.