



A FORUM ON  
**WOMEN  
VETERANS**

# PTSD and Women's Mental Health Services

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## Objectives

- Present rates and risk factors for PTSD among female veterans
- Identify unique mental health needs for this population
- Describe services built to meet these needs



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## Rates of PTSD

- 20% of female veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with PTSD
- 27% of female Vietnam Veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD



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## Risk Factors for Developing PTSD

- Deployment
  - Serve in combat support roles
  - Exposure to unpredictable warfare
- Military sexual trauma
- Exposure to multiple traumas
  - Military sexual trauma and combat trauma
- Interpersonal violence
  - Domestic violence
- Lack of social support
  - Isolation
  - Family strain



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## Unique Presentation

- Women may be more likely to present specific PTSD symptoms
  - Psychological reactivity to trauma cues
  - Startle response
  - Restricted affect
  - Depression
  - Avoidance of trauma cues
- Women may be more likely to present with specific co-morbidities
  - Depression
  - Panic
  - Eating disorders
  - Somatic complaints



## Course and Treatment

- Women may be more likely to seek treatment
- Women may be more likely to develop chronic PTSD
- Women may have slower recoveries
- Psychotherapy and Pharmacotherapy
  - Cognitive-behavioral therapies
    - Prolonged exposure (PE)
    - cognitive processing (CPT)
  - Family therapy
  - Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's)
    - Sertraline (Zoloft) and paroxetine (Paxil)



# Women's Prevention, Outreach & Education Center (WPOEC)

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## WPOEC Mission

An interdisciplinary center for women veterans providing outreach, education, mental health promotion, comprehensive screening and assessment, and intensive outpatient mental health in a building dedicated to women's mental health services



## Stepped Care Service Model Levels I - III

Outreach & Education

Early Detection &  
Risk Reduction

*Intensive  
Mental  
Health*

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## Outreach & Education

- Increase access to care for women veterans
  - Referral assistance
  - Toll free line: 1-888-4HER-1VA
  - Email: [WPOEC@va.gov](mailto:WPOEC@va.gov)
- Develop and disseminate women's mental health program & educational materials
  - Outreach events
  - Outreach committee



# Outreach to Women Veterans

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YOU  
SERVED  
YOUR  
COUNTRY.  
NOW LET VA  
SERVE YOU.

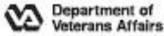
**THEN: MISSION-CRITICAL TRANSPORT  
NOW: MISSION — MALL PARKING LOT**

Getting back to civilian life isn't as easy as you might think. Chances are you're feeling out of sorts, even distant from your family and friends. Most returning veterans do. But you don't have to go it alone. VA supports a community of women like you—women helping one another reclaim their lives, women building a bright future. Come join us.



CONTACT A VA LOCATION NEAREST YOU  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

CREATED BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD  
VA PALM DESERT HEALTH CARE SYSTEM





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## Early Detection & Risk Reduction

- Gender-tailored screening
- Gender- tailored health promotion materials
  - Stress Management
  - Smoking Cessation
- Violence Prevention
  - Systematic screening for interpersonal violence
  - Safety planning and connection to community resources



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## Intensive Outpatient Mental Health

- Comprehensive assessment
- Interdisciplinary team meetings
- Individualized treatment plans
- Case management
  - Chronic PTSD
- Medication management
- Evidenced-based therapy
  - Individual and group
- Multiple modalities
  - Treat co-occurring disorders
- Collaborative care



# Treatment Environment

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## Conclusion: Unique Service Needs

- Gender-sensitive
  - Assessment and intervention
- Increase access
  - Proactive approach
  - Flexible services to meet treatment needs (e.g., target avoidance symptoms)
- Collaboration to facilitate all 3 levels of care
  - Outreach services (level I)
  - Women's health psychology (level II)
  - Specialty mental health care (level III)
- Privacy and safety
  - Treatment environment