

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (DVA)

IMPACT OF TRAUMA

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to honoring America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Veterans may experience trauma prior to, during, and/or following their military service, making it an issue of key concern for VA. VA has a special emphasis on addressing issues related to combat trauma, military sexual trauma (sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment occurring during military service), and other traumas experienced during service. However, experiences of trauma at any point during a Veteran's lifetime can have a significant impact upon his/her health, treatment needs, and need for assistance with other issues, such as employment or homelessness.

Additional statistics on women, information about the impact of trauma, and sources for further information can be found in the first Federal Partners Report on Women and Trauma <http://nicic.gov/Library/025082>.

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

VA offers a full continuum of mental health services for women Veterans, including assessment, outpatient treatment, and inpatient and residential care. Having trauma-informed and gender-sensitive medical and mental health treatment programming available is key to ensuring that Veterans' needs secondary to trauma are adequately addressed.

The VA's National Center for PTSD is a long-standing center of excellence for research and education on the prevention, understanding, and treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. The Center's highest priority is supporting VA clinicians and Veterans through the development of evidence-based treatments for PTSD and the dissemination of best-practices throughout the VA system.

Because trauma is associated with a range of mental health problems, VA's services for PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and general mental health are a key component of VA's efforts. Starting in 2007, VA began a rollout of trainings on evidence-based treatments for trauma-related mental health disorders for its mental health providers.



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Major Accomplishments 2010-2013

Since 2006, VA has funded a national Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Support Team that monitors MST screening and treatment, expands national MST-related education and training, and promotes best practices in care for Veterans who experienced MST. The team hosts an annual conference and monthly training calls available to all VA staff, and develops a range of MST-specific resources and initiatives targeting both VA staff and Veterans.

National policy requires all mental health and primary care providers to complete training on issues related to MST. VA has also established national policy that all Veterans seen for health care services are screened for experiences of MST to ensure that they are aware of free, specialized services available and that their trauma history is considered in provision of care.

Since August 2012, the Women's Mental Health Section of VA Mental Health Services has hosted a teleconference educational series to provide information and training to VA staff about women's mental health. Examples of training topics include: gender differences in PTSD and their implications for the mental health care of Veterans; women Veterans and homelessness; and providing care to women Veterans who are experiencing interpersonal violence.

The National Center on PTSD has also developed a number of online courses, continuing education opportunities, clinician guides, and mobile apps in support of trauma-focused care in the VA.

New Directions and Collaborations

During FY 2012, the Women's Mental Health Section of VA Mental Health Services completed a national survey of all VA facilities to assess availability of current mental health care services for women Veterans and those who experience MST, including existing services, challenges, and best practices for provision of gender-sensitive mental health care. The results of this survey will be used to identify gaps in services available and inform future program development efforts.

In order to lower barriers to engagement in mental health treatment, VA is transforming its systems of care delivery to prioritize integrated primary/behavioral health care http://www.ptsd.va.gov/about/mission/looking_ahead.asp.

VA continues to collaborate with the Department of Defense and community agencies working with Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve personnel, in order to ensure that Veterans who have been exposed to trauma are able to access appropriate services more smoothly and expeditiously.

Additional Resources

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<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp>

<http://Veteranscrisisline.net>

<http://vaww.mst.va.gov>

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The Peace Corps is a federal agency that works to build capacity in developing countries. Currently 8,073 Peace Corps Volunteers are serving 27-month tours in 76 countries. Trauma can impact both Volunteers and staff, who may be victims of crime, be exposed to civil unrest and political violence, live through natural disasters, or suffer accidents. Volunteers and staff may suffer vicarious trauma living in post-conflict nations where they are exposed to the lingering effects of violence through close association with their communities. Other personnel may witness the devastating effects of poverty, famine, disease, or disaster on a daily basis. Because the Peace Corps is a tight-knit community, trauma that directly impacts a staff member or Volunteer may ripple across the entire agency. Additional sources of information about the impact of trauma can be found in the first Federal Partners Report on Women and Trauma <http://nicic.gov/Library/025082>.

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

The Peace Corps has designed and implemented a new trauma-informed approach to care. As of October 2012, all Peace Corps medical officers have received clinically accredited training on trauma-informed care at Peace Corps annual continuing medical education conferences. All Volunteers are now treated with methods consistent with trauma-informed care approaches, which improve the quality of services, reduce re-traumatization, and support the healing process.

Every Peace Corps post provides comprehensive medical services under the direction of PCMOs. Volunteers may also receive mental health services via long distance or medical evacuation from trained mental health clinicians. PCMOs are always among the first staff members to become aware of assaults and other traumatic events affecting Volunteers. Approximately 70 percent of the PCMOs are physicians; the remaining 30 percent are physicians' assistants, nurse practitioners, or registered nurses. The PCMOs are supervised by regional and headquarters-based physicians in Washington, D.C.

