

- The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2009 -

A bill to assess, expand and improve health care services to women veterans, particularly those brave women who have served our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. This bill aims to equip the VA for the long-term needs that will be associated with a larger women veteran population.

A Fast Growing Population with Unique Needs

Women veterans have unique mental and physical health care needs that the VA is currently underprepared to handle.

- Women make up 15 percent of our current active duty, guard and reserves.
- Today, there are approximately 1.8 million total women veterans, who make up more than 7 percent of the 23.4 million total veteran population.
- It is projected that the number of female veterans who use the VA system will double in the next five years, assuming current enrollment rates stay the same, making female veterans one of the fastest growing demographics of veterans.
- Among the issues women disproportionately face upon returning home are the effects of Military Sexual Trauma (reported by 22 percent of women veterans), the difficulties of being thrust into a care-giving role, child birth, and the difficulties of being less likely to have military service recognized or appreciated.

A Look at What the VA is Doing and What More Needs to be Done

This bill authorizes several new assessments of the care we are and should be providing to women veterans.

- Authorizes a study of women that have served in Iraq and Afghanistan to assess the effects of those conflicts on their physical, mental, and reproductive health. This study would be conducted by an independent non-VA organization and submitted to Congress.
- Requires the Secretary of the VA to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the barriers women currently face in accessing care through the VA. Among the many factors the Secretary is required to consider are the availability of child care and the personal safety and comfort of women.
- Requires the Secretary of the VA to submit to Congress a report verifying employment of full-time women veterans program managers at VA medical centers to ensure that the health care needs of women veterans are met.

New Programs that Will Prepare the VA for Today and Tomorrow

This bill authorizes new programs aimed at improving the VA's capacity to care for women veterans' mental and physical health care needs.

- Provides the VA with authority to care for newborn children of women veterans who are receiving maternity care from the VA.
- Requires that the VA implement a program to train, educate, and certify VA mental health professionals to care for women with sexual trauma using evidence-based treatments.
- Requires the VA to begin a pilot program that provides child care to women veterans that seek mental health care services at the VA.
- Requires that the VA begin a pilot program that provides readjustment counseling to women veterans in group retreat settings.
- Requires the inclusion of women that are recently separated from service on VA advisory boards.