

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**Fact Sheet**Office of Public Affairs
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420
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www.va.gov**Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014
Military Sexual Trauma****Section 401: Expansion of Eligibility for Sexual Trauma Counseling and
Treatment to Veterans on Inactive Duty Training****Section 402: Provision of Counseling and Treatment for Sexual Trauma by the
Department of Veterans Affairs to Members of the Armed Forces****Section 403: Reports on Military Sexual Trauma**

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146) ("Choice Act"). Technical revisions to the Choice Act were made on September 26, 2014, when the President signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-175). The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) goal continues to be to provide timely, high-quality health care for Veterans.

Sections 401-403 of the Choice Act relate to VA's treatment authority to provide counseling and care and services needed to overcome psychological trauma, which in the judgment of a VA mental health professional, resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the Veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training. Codified at 38 U.S.C. § 1720D(a)(1), this is commonly referred to as VA's authority to treat psychological trauma resulting from "Military Sexual Trauma" (MST).

Before enactment of the Choice Act, VA could only provide MST-related counseling and care for sexual trauma that occurred while a Veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training. Consequently, Veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving on inactive duty training (namely members of the National Guard and Reservists performing weekend drill) were not eligible to receive VA MST-related health care benefits. Section 401 of the Choice Act amended current authority to extend eligibility to Veterans who experienced MST while serving on inactive duty training. In so doing, it effectively closed this gap.

In addition, MST-related healthcare benefits were previously available only to Veterans. Section 402 amended current law to authorize VA, in consultation with the Department of Defense (DoD), to provide these benefits to members of the Armed Forces (including members of the National Guard and Reserves) on active duty to overcome the same type of described psychological trauma and, moreover, without the need for a referral.

VA MST-Related Counseling and Care for Veterans

VA offers counseling and a full continuum of mental health services for eligible Veterans who require such services to overcome psychological trauma resulting from MST. Every VA medical center provides MST-related mental health outpatient services. Services available include formal psychological assessment and evaluation, psychiatry, and individual and group psychotherapy. Specialty services are also available to target problems such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, depression, and homelessness. Evidence-based psychotherapies are available at all VA medical centers. Community-based Vet Centers also have MST-related outpatient counseling available. For Veterans who need more intensive treatment, many VA facilities offer Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs. VA also has inpatient programs available for acute care needs (e.g., psychiatric emergencies and stabilization, medication adjustment). Recognizing that MST survivors may have special needs and concerns, every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues.

Note: VA and DoD are still determining the feasibility and parameters of providing VA MST-related health care benefits to eligible Servicemembers on active duty.

Additional Information

VA's treatment authority in Section 1720D is gender-neutral. Eligibility for MST-related benefits under Section 1720D is not subject to any enrollment or copayment requirements. It is also not conditioned on the Veteran's receipt of an adjudicated award of service-connection for the disability/condition (for which VA MST-related treatment is sought).

Receipt of health care benefits under Section 1720D does not, however, constitute a claim for disability benefits. Nor does it constitute an award of service-connection for the MST-related condition. A Veteran must still submit a claim for disability with VBA and independently pursue VBA's disability claim process if the Veteran desires to obtain service-connection for a MST-related disability in addition to receipt of MST-related health care).

Timeline

Inclusion of the new cohort of Veterans who qualify for MST-related health care benefits is currently in effect. VA is currently working with DoD to decide how the provision of MST-related health care benefits to active duty Servicemembers will operate in practice. This latter program is scheduled to go into effect by September 2015. The Choice Act also instituted new reporting requirements that are subject to their own statutory deadlines.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who is eligible to receive VA MST-related services?

A: VA's treatment authority in Section 1720D is gender-neutral. Eligibility for MST-related health care benefits under Section 1720D is not subject to any enrollment or copayment requirements. It is also not conditioned on the Veteran's receipt of an adjudicated award of service-connection for the disability/condition for which VA MST-related treatment is sought.

Receipt of health care benefits under Section 1720D does not, however, constitute a claim for disability benefits. Nor does it constitute an award of service-connection for the MST-related condition. A Veteran must still submit a claim for disability with VBA and independently pursue VBA's disability claim process if the Veteran additionally seeks service-connection for a MST-related disability.

Q: When will these services be available?

A: The expansion of MST-related health care benefits to Veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving on inactive duty training is currently in effect. The program to provide health care benefits to active duty Servicemembers, if put in place, will tentatively be in effect by September 2015.

Q: Where can one find more information about MST and access services?

A: For more information about MST-related health care benefits and how to access them, please contact the MST Coordinator at your nearest VA medical center, or contact your local Vet Center. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at www.va.gov and www.vetcenter.va.gov. You can also call VA's general information hotline at 1-800-827-1000 or visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp.