

Office of Health Equity

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs



WOMEN VETERANS & HEALTHY LIVING FACT SHEET

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INTRODUCTION

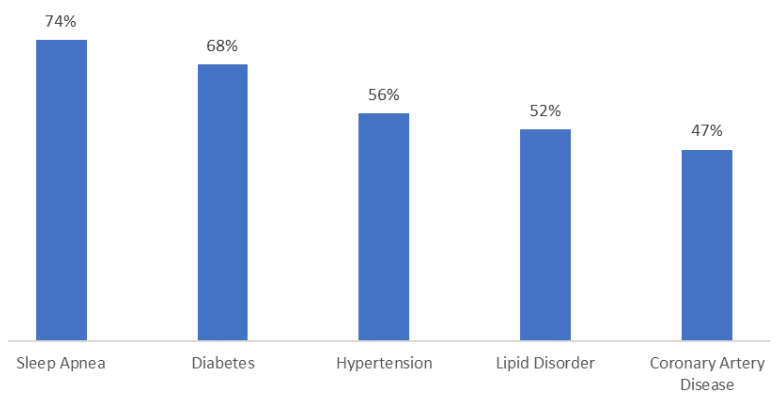
The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans.

There are 1.9 million women Veterans, making women a significant minority amongst Veterans because they make up 9.4% of the Veteran population.

HEALTH DISPARITIES

There is a high prevalence of obesity amongst Women Veterans receiving their care through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Approximately 44% of Women Veterans have obesity. Having excess weight increases the risk of developing chronic health conditions that include diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart disease and many Women Veterans who have obesity also have these co-morbid conditions as well.

Rates of Obesity Among Women Veteran VHA Users in Fiscal Year 2014 with Specific Obesity-related Conditions



Additionally, obesity is highly stigmatized and therefore, may negatively impact the experiences individuals with obesity have with their health care providers.

However, in one study within the VHA, Women Veterans with obesity reported higher average ratings of self-management support than Women Veterans without obesity. This link was stronger among women with more severe obesity, suggesting that Women Veterans are receiving support to help them with the behavioral changes required to manage obesity.



REDUCING DISPARITIES AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE

The Office of Health Equity supports national and local efforts by VA to reduce health disparities and increase access to services among Women Veterans by supporting initiatives like the Whole Health for Women Workshop series at the Columbia, SC VA Medical Center to assist Women Veterans in managing their chronic health conditions.

COLUMBIA VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WHOLE HEALTH FOR WOMEN WORKSHOP

The Whole Health for Women Workshop began in April 2019 to emphasize the importance of self-care areas using the VHA Whole Health Model. Women Veterans at the Columbia VA Health Care System often told their providers, “I take care of everyone else so I just don’t have time for me.” The workshop grew out of the realization that there was an incredible opportunity to spread the importance of self-care and empowerment while incorporating the “what matters to me” concept to Women Veterans. The workshop is 8 weeks long and each session focuses on an area of self-care from the Whole Health Model, “Power of the Mind”; “Working the

Body”; “Surroundings”; “Personal Development”; “Food and Drink”; “Recharge”; “Family, Friends, & Coworkers”; or “Spirit & Soul”. In addition to receiving education about these different areas of self-care, participants are given the opportunity to learn about different Whole Health integrative practices including tai chi; yoga; meditation and mindfulness; hypnotherapy; biofeedback; aroma therapy; battlefield acupuncture; progressive muscle therapy, deep breathing; guided imagery, and visualization.



For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit: <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

References

- Breland, J., et al. 2017 “The Obesity Epidemic in the Veterans Health Administration: Prevalence Among Key Populations of Women and Men Veterans.” *Journal of General Internal Medicine*; 32(S1), 11-17.
- Breland, J., et al. 2019 “Obesity and Health Care Experiences among Women and Men Veterans.” *Women’s Health Issues*; 29(S1), S32-S38.