

Spring 2024

www.va.gov/gulf-coast-health-care

Gulf Coast VA WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE NEWSLETTER



You served, you deserve



★ *the best care anywhere.*

You belong at VA!


Your VA benefits include personalized, comprehensive health care such as routine check-ups, cancer screenings, birth control, mammograms, maternity care, and so much more. VA also offers mental health care tailored to women Veterans. You are welcome at your VA medical center and you will be treated with the respect you deserve.

Come check us out!

Women Veterans Program Manager



Donna Maxwell, DNP, CNM

 850-912-2219

As the chilly days become fewer and the sunny days become longer and we head into spring, the Gulf Coast VA's Women Veterans Program is gearing up for another busy year. In February we wore RED on Fridays for women's heart health awareness. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the US. You can learn more about what your VA is doing to help women Veterans reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke on page three.

Did you know VA Women Veterans Programs are required by Congress to hold focus groups and public forums? These meetings are your opportunity to let your Gulf Coast VA leadership know what you need, what we do right, and how we can do better. Please join us for a Women Veteran Public Forum March 6 at 6 pm on the Biloxi campus (more details on page 12). Our next virtual women's focus group is April 25 at 2 pm. Attendance is limited, so please call me to register. Baby showers for pregnant and recently delivered Veterans will be scheduled in the summer, so stay tuned for our summer newsletter for dates and locations. If you have suggestions for events, need more information about a service, have general questions, or have concerns, please call me. It's my honor to be your Women Veterans Program Manager.

Donna

Meet Your Providers: Hayley McCarron, Pharm.D.

Hayley McCarron, Pharm.D., serves as a Women's Health Clinical Pharmacy Practitioner at the Mobile VA Outpatient Clinic. She graduated from the University of South Alabama with a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Science. She then went on to earn her Doctor of Pharmacy from Auburn University's Harrison College of Pharmacy and completed a PGY-1 Ambulatory Care focused residency at the Pensacola VA clinic in 2020.

Hayley has always been interested in Women's Health. During her residency she worked closely with the Women's Health team to gain additional training and education so she can provide our Women Veterans with specialized care. She continues to work on advancing her knowledge in the practice area of women's health as our Women Veteran population grows. As a clinical pharmacy practitioner, Hayley manages chronic disease states such as hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, heart failure, COPD, gout, hypothyroidism and more. She also provides prenatal, pregnancy and postpartum medication reviews as well as contraceptive care.

In her spare time she loves being a mama to her daughter and several fur babies. She also enjoys going to the beach or pool, cooking, gardening and spending time with family and friends.



Hayley McCarron

Pharm.D.

**Women's Health
Clinical Pharmacy
Practitioner**

Mobile VA Clinic



Health Term of the Quarter

Clinical Pharmacist Practitioner

The Clinical Pharmacist Practitioner (CPP) is a critical member of your health care team and is skilled in improving the quality of your care. CPPs are highly trained pharmacists who work collaboratively with your providers to ensure you receive the best care. They function as medication experts and assist the provider with managing chronic diseases, following up after hospitalization and reviewing medications with Veterans so you understand what you are taking and why.

This multidisciplinary approach allows providers to follow other aspects of your care, which increases your access to care and reduces the number of patients who are readmitted after a hospital stay.

Call or text **1-855-VA-WOMEN** or visit **www.womenshealth.va.gov** to learn more. If you haven't been using VA's health services, we invite you to give us a chance. And if there's something on your mind, talk to your VA health care team about it. We can most likely help!

Service Spotlight

Women's Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic

The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System is pleased to announce the launch of a new women's heart health program, the Women's Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women in the United States affecting all ages and causing 1 in 3 deaths each year.

- Health issues during pregnancy, such as high blood pressure, preeclampsia or gestational diabetes, raise the risk of heart disease later in life
- At menopause, your risk of heart disease increases because of decreasing estrogen levels.
- Among Black women ages 20 and older, nearly 59% have heart disease, and 58% of Black women have high blood pressure—more than any other race or ethnicity
- Veterans may have risk factors from military service (such as PTSD) that can increase the risk of heart disease.

Heart disease often has no symptoms you can feel or notice. However, uncontrolled risk factors may silently be allowing progression of the factors that ultimately may contribute to a heart attack, stroke or sudden death. The good news is we know what risk factors contribute to this process and these risk factors can be identified through a comprehensive medical history and laboratory examination. In many cases heart attacks and strokes can be prevented with education, medication when needed and lifestyle changes.

The Women's Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic is now available to help you identify your personal risk factors and can recommend changes that may be able to prevent a heart attack or stroke in your future. Additionally, addressing risk factors aggressively may also benefit anyone who has already had a heart attack or stroke in the past by reducing the risk of a recurrence in the future.

The Women's Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic is staffed by an internal medicine physician with more than 20 years of experience in working with women and heart disease risk reduction. The clinic staff also includes clinical pharmacy practitioners, a nutrition specialist, and a clinical psychologist, all trained in identifying and managing risk factors that contribute to heart disease and stroke in women.

We encourage you to take advantage of this new program at the Gulf Coast VA, particularly if you have been diagnosed with heart disease or have been told you have high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, have a strong family history of heart disease, if you smoke, if you are overweight, if you are physically inactive, if you suffer from depression or PTSD, if you have ever had any of these factors associated with pregnancy or if you just want to identify your potential future risk for heart disease or stroke. New evidence indicates that the earlier risk factors are identified, the greater chance of preventing heart disease in the future, so the time to act is now, no matter your age.

For further information call Women's Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Clinic at 850-912-2219.



Monthly Health Focus

MARCH: Healthy Sleep

Having trouble sleeping? You're not alone! Half of women Veterans experience sleep issues. As women, we unfortunately experience sleep issues more often and differently than men due to hormonal changes unique to us, like premenstrual syndrome (PMS), premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), pregnancy, or menopause. As a Veteran, you may experience mental health conditions that can also have a significant impact on your sleep. The good news is treatment is available.

If you're experiencing the following symptoms, you may have common sleep issues like insomnia, sleep apnea, or restless leg syndrome. Symptoms include:

- Frequent or chronic difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Waking up gasping for breath (or your partner says you stop breathing when you sleep)
- Waking up to uncomfortable sensations in your legs (or your partner says you move your legs rapidly during sleep)
- Snoring loudly (We know, most people snore! But excessive or loud snoring could be a sign of a deeper medical issue that could be improved with treatment – like sleep apnea.)
- Getting up from sleep more than twice to urinate
- Waking up feeling like you haven't slept enough or feeling exhausted during the day

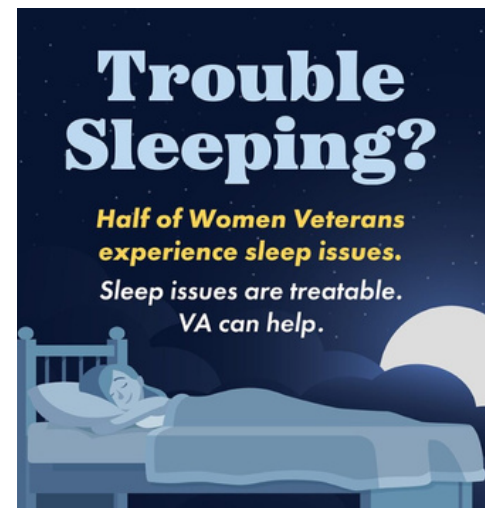
You may be surprised to learn about what could stop you from getting the rest you need. Before diving into professional help, try the following self-help tips to improve your sleep. They could make a big difference:

- Stick to the same sleep schedule and avoid napping
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, alcohol, and smoking a few hours before bedtime
- Avoid screens for a minimum of 30 minutes before bedtime
- Create a cool, dark, and quiet sleeping environment
- Exercise several hours ahead of bedtime to help you fall asleep more easily
- Follow a bedtime routine to help you wind down (reading, listening to music, a bath)
- Manage your stress and anxiety as best you can

To complement these tips, VA offers a few online resources you can access anytime:

- **VA Insomnia Coach App:** A free mobile app created for Veterans to help manage insomnia symptoms through a five-week training plan to reset your sleep system and build healthier sleep habits.
- **Path to Better Sleep Veteran Training:** A free four-part training program online that helps you screen for sleep disorders, understand sleep routines, self-manage insomnia, and learn about sleep apnea.
- **VA's Sleep Diary:** An online journal designed to help you track and review your own sleep patterns by logging information daily.

If self-help tips are not working, speak to your VA health care provider. Difficulty sleeping could be due to medical problems, such as pain, mental health, a diagnosable sleep condition and more. Don't snooze on your health! You may be eligible for treatments such as sleep therapy, at-home devices, medication and more advanced care. Speak with your VA health care provider about your sleep concerns.





APRIL: Eating Disorders and Nutrition

Eating disorders are mental illnesses, and although they revolve around eating and body weight, they aren't entirely about food but also about feelings and self-expression. An estimated 20 million American women are affected by an eating disorder sometime during their life. They are often more about control, feelings and self-expression than they are about food. Women with eating disorders often use food and dieting as ways of coping with life's stresses. For some, food becomes a source of comfort and nurturing, or a way to control or release stress. For others, losing weight may start as a way to gain the approval of friends and family. Eating disorders are not diets, signs of personal weakness or problems that simply will go away without proper treatment.



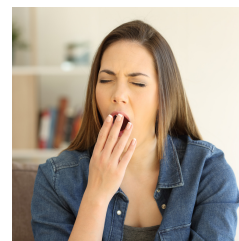
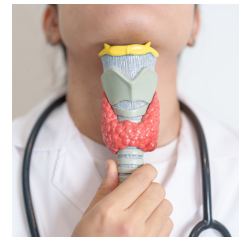
Eating disorders can be fatal due to various medical complications and the high risk of associated suicide. Treatment for eating disorders encompasses a mixture of strategies, including mental health counseling, nutrition counseling and individual, group and family therapy. Start with your primary care provider if you would like help for disordered eating. VA medical centers have designated primary care providers who can talk with you and guide you to the best resources for you. If you do not have a primary care provider, contact the Gulf Coast VA Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM). Your WVPM can help you coordinate the services you may need.



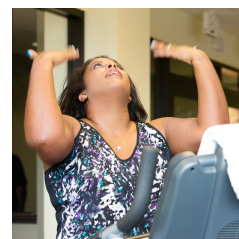
MAY: Thyroid Related Conditions

Your thyroid gland regulates your body's metabolism and growth. The functions of the thyroid gland have much to do with a woman's reproductive system, particularly if the thyroid is overactive or underactive. This imbalance in hormone levels may have the following effects on a woman's body:

- **Reproduction:** An overactive or underactive thyroid may affect ovulation. In addition, the ovaries are at an increased risk for cyst development if the woman has an underactive thyroid (hypothyroid). Severe hypothyroidism can actually cause milk production in the breast, while preventing ovulation.
- **Pregnancy and postpartum:** Thyroid disorders during pregnancy can harm the fetus and may lead to thyroid problems in the mother after birth, such as postpartum thyroiditis. A deficiency of thyroid hormone can cause miscarriages, preterm delivery, stillbirth and postpartum hemorrhage. Women with overactive thyroid during pregnancy are at risk of having more severe morning sickness.
- **Menopause:** Thyroid disorders may cause the early onset of menopause (before age 40 or in the early 40s). Some symptoms of overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism) may also be mistaken for early menopause. These include lack of menstruation, hot flashes, inability to sleep (insomnia) and mood swings. Treating hyperthyroidism can sometimes ease symptoms of early menopause or prevent early menopause from happening.



The first step in accessing thyroid screening services at VA is to make an appointment with your VA Women's Health Primary Care Provider. They will work with you to determine a plan that works best for you and refer you to any additional thyroid testing if necessary.



March is Women's History Month

During Women's History Month 2024, VA Office of Women's Health is honoring Native American women Veterans. VA recognizes the impact your advocacy, contributions and sacrifice have made on our military history. Native American women Veterans have had an exemplary tradition of military service for more than 200 years, overcoming adversity and serving at a higher rate compared to all other demographics.



VA understands your health care is shaped by language, culture and other social factors. We aim to provide culturally tailored health initiatives to improve your experience at VA and your health outcomes. From training our VA health care providers to consider your individual cultures, values and experiences, to acknowledging your holistic beliefs in health and preferences for traditional healing methods, we provide you with the care you need.

VA partners with Indian Health Service, Tribal Health Programs and Urban Indian Organizations (I-T-U) to improve your health care and ensure VA-enrolled, eligible Native American women Veterans and their families receive reimbursement for care from IHS facilities. If you're not currently enrolled in VA health care, we encourage you to give us a chance!

We're proud to serve Native American women Veterans and are continuously aiming to ensure we provide culturally sensitive and respectful care you can trust. Thank you for your service.



National Volunteer Week: April 14 - 20

Each year, we celebrate National Volunteer Week to recognize the contributions of our volunteers. National Volunteer Week was established in 1974 and has grown exponentially each year. Whether behind the scenes working in our Voluntary Services office, welcoming Veterans at our information desks or providing a Veteran a ride from the parking lot to the clinic, doing good at the VA comes in many forms, and we recognize and celebrate them all.

If you are looking for a volunteer opportunity, come join our volunteer teams and experience the rewards of helping our nation's Veterans. Volunteers can perform a number of services in both clinical and non-clinical areas. A volunteer's talents and interests are used to match them to one or more of our available assignments where they would be able to provide the most impact. For more information, contact our Voluntary Services team at vhabildce@va.gov.

Women Need CPR, Too!

Women receive bystander CPR less often than men – but women need CPR too! Cardiovascular (or heart) disease is the leading cause of death in women in the U.S., causing one in three deaths each year and affecting women of all ages. Hands-Only CPR could save a life, and yet, bystanders are less likely to help a woman experiencing a cardiac event out of fear of inappropriate touching, causing physical injury, performing CPR incorrectly or the misconception that women are less likely to have heart problems.

You do not need to be formally trained or certified to perform Hands-Only CPR. Compressions are good for the first few minutes someone is in cardiac arrest because you are pushing remaining oxygen through the body to keep vital organs alive. It also buys time until someone with more skills can provide help.



Be ready and learn Hands-Only CPR. You never know when it may help you save a life!

1. Call 911, put your phone on speaker, and start compressions.
2. Push hard and fast in the center of the chest at 100-120 compressions per minute.
3. Continue CPR until professional help arrives or an automated external defibrillator (AED) becomes available.

Learn Hands-Only CPR in less than two minutes by [watching this training video](#), and visit VA's [Women Veterans Heart Health page](#) to learn more.

Save the Date for our Veterans Enrollment and Benefits Fair!

Need assistance with a benefits claim? Want resources about VA health care and benefits, housing, employment and transportation? Don't miss this event at the Pensacola VA clinic!

At this event you will be able to get one-on-one assistance from a VBA Veterans Service Representative. You will also be able to check your VA eligibility, enroll in health care, schedule appointments, get your VA ID Card, receive a toxic exposure screening, and more. There will also be representatives from your local and state Veteran Support organizations, plus food, fun, music, and more!

Mark your calendars now!

Attention Gulf Coast Veterans

Gulf Coast VA Health Care System and Montgomery Veterans Benefits Administration invite you to attend a

Veterans Enrollment and Benefits Fair

at the Pensacola VA Clinic

Saturday, April 6, 2024



8 am - 12 pm

Pensacola VA Clinic
790 Veterans Way
Pensacola, FL 32507

- One-on-one Veterans benefits claim assistance
- VA health care information and enrollment services
- Same-day Veterans ID Cards
- Federal, state, county and local Veteran organizations
- State and local political representatives
- PACT Act resources
- Local Veteran-owned businesses and vendors



Choose VA
Your benefits. Our Mission.
choose.va.gov

Free and open to all Veterans and family members
Please provide proof of service to enroll in health care.

April is Whole Health Month - Be involved in YOUR Health Care



In April we celebrate person-centered care and Whole Health. Whole Health puts the “ME,” the person, in the center of the Circle of Health instead of a diagnosis or problem list. Think about what this means to you. Are you taking time for your own well-being?

Spring is a perfect time to get moving! Physical activity is essential to lose weight, get strong, reduce stress and Live Whole Health! To help meet your goals, download the [MOVE! Coach app](#). This app was specifically developed for Veterans, service members, their families and others who want to lose weight. It takes you through a 16-week program to lose weight and get active in an easy and convenient way. Participants can monitor and receive feedback regarding their progress with weight, diet and exercise goals.



Whole Health Month is also the perfect time to download the [Live Whole Health app](#). VA’s Live Whole Health app is a free, easy to use tool created for Veterans and others who are ready to take the next step in their Whole Health journey. With this app, you can fill out your Personal Health Inventory, set goals and learn more about Whole Health. Download the app today!



Get started living Whole Health by checking out Whole Health resources and interactive tools that can take you to the next step in your whole health journey. Get started at www.va.gov/WholeHealth.

VA2K Walk and Roll coming in May to promote healthy lifestyles



VA’s 14th annual VA2K Walk & Roll will be held on May 15, 2024

VA’s 14th annual VA2K Walk & Roll event is back with goals of moving the body in support of your Whole Health and well-being, while also helping homeless Veterans. The event is scheduled for **May 15, 2024** at VA medical centers around the nation. The community is invited to participate in the free, VA2K event which often includes a short two-kilometer walk (1.24 miles).

To help area homeless Veterans, participants are encouraged to bring a voluntary donation such as clothing, toiletries, packaged food or bottled water. These donations will be collected and distributed to local homeless Veterans. Donations are not required in order to participate. Since 2011, more than \$2.7 million in donations of these type have been raised nationally to help homeless Veterans.

Contact your Gulf Coast VA clinic to learn more about how you can participate in this year’s VA2K Walk & Roll event!

VA celebrates National Women's Health Week

The Office of Women's Health created National Women's Health Week as a way to encourage all women to make the choices that are right for them. This observance, which begins each Mother's Day, runs from May 12 to 15, 2024.

Women have unique health issues such as pregnancy and menopause. And some of the health issues that affect both men and women can touch women differently. Examples include osteoarthritis and urinary tract problems — both of which tend to affect women more. Women are among the fastest growing Veteran population, accounting for more than 30% of the increase in Veterans who served between 2014 and 2018. The number of women using VA health services has tripled since 2000. Prioritizing women's health and wellbeing, has never been more important.

During National Women's Health Week, VA encourages women Veterans to reflect on their individual needs and take steps to improve and maintain their overall health. Some of the most common conditions that affect women include preventative health, health disparities, reproductive and sexual health, heart disease, physical activity, mental health and cancer. VA offers a wide range of primary care and specialty services for women Veterans, such as health screenings, preconception counseling, maternity care, mental health treatment and more. Focusing on the different aspects of your personal health can help to improve your overall health for a healthier future.

How to Observe National Women's Health Week:

- **Visit your doctor:** Annual checkups are an absolute must for maintaining good health. If you haven't had a physical in a while, contact your doctor and book an appointment. Yes, even if you're feeling great.
- **Analyze your diet:** Check your eating habits to make sure you're getting the recommended daily allotment of nutrients. It's easy to slip into an unhealthy eating routine. Make National Women's Health Week a time to adjust your diet.
- **Get moving:** Get active to age well. Physical activity can help you stay healthy and independent as you age. Being active can make it easier to do everyday tasks like cleaning and grocery shopping, help ease pain and manage other health problems, and lower your risk of falls and your risk of an injury if you do fall.

Eat healthy. Stay active. And get some sleep! Most important?

Start today!



The PACT Act is for Women Veterans and family members...

The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 has been signed into law. This historic new law expands VA health care and benefits for all Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances during their service.

What does the PACT Act mean for you?

- It **expands and extends eligibility for VA health care** for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- **Adds 20+ more presumptive conditions** for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures to include reproductive cancers like ovarian, uterine, cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. Breast cancer is also considered a presumptive illness. Eligible Veterans should schedule a mammogram today
- **Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran**, to include women Veterans, enrolled in VA health care
- **Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment** related to toxic exposures
- **Makes more women Veterans eligible for VA healthcare and other PACT Act related benefits** to include disability claims

Please talk with your provider about your deployment history and any exposure related health concerns you may have. Toxic exposure screenings are available. It is our honor to provide generations of Veterans – and their survivors – with the care and benefits they have earned. For more information contact your Gulf Coast VA primary care provider or visit: [The PACT Act And Your VA Benefits \(https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/\)](https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/).



The advertisement features a portrait of a smiling Black woman on the left. The background is dark blue with a yellow banner at the bottom. Text and icons are in white and yellow. The text reads: 'Attention Women Veterans', 'Were you exposed to burn pits or other toxins during your military deployment?', 'If so, you may be eligible for expanded or new health care benefits.', and 'GET YOUR TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING'. Contact information includes '1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)' and a website link. Logos for VA and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are at the bottom right.

Attention Women Veterans

Were you exposed to burn pits or other toxins during your military deployment?

If so, you may be eligible for expanded or new health care benefits.

GET YOUR TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING

1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)
Find out more at <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Women Veterans Call Center: Check it out!

The Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) receives and responds to questions from women Veterans, their families and caregivers across the nation about available VA services and resources. **WVCC representatives are available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays. The phone number for the WVCC is 855-VA-WOMEN or 855-829-6636.**



The WVCC is staffed by knowledgeable VA employees who can provide information about benefits, eligibility and services, including health care services for women Veterans. The call center staff is trained to answer questions and provide referrals to the appropriate people to answer the women's questions. If there is an urgent matter, the Women Veteran Call Center can refer Veterans to the homeless call center and Veterans Crisis Line.

Gender Based Harassment is not tolerated at VA!



Have you ever been told to smile more? Been cat-called? Have you been stared at or had sexual gestures made at you? Has anyone ever questioned your Veteran status, maybe saying you don't "Look like a Veteran" or maybe you are "Too pretty to be a Veteran?" Harassment happens more often than you may think, but it is not tolerated at VA. About 1 in 5 women Veterans have reported being harassed while at a VA facility, so VA is working to address and end inappropriate behavior. If you ever feel unsafe or uncomfortable, it's important to know what to do. Everyone who visits a VA facility, including employees, Veterans, family members and caregivers, should take care to make sure their actions don't cause someone else to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. We all have a responsibility in keeping VA a safe place to get care. If you see or experience something that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, please speak up and report it when you feel safe to do so. There's no wrong way to report harassment. **VA will take action.**



If you ever experience harassment, we encourage you to report it to the facility's VA police, Patient Advocate, Women Veteran Program Manager or any VA staff member. **For additional help, you can call or text the Women Veterans Call Center at 1-855-829-6636. You can also call the VA Harassment Prevention Program at 1-888-566-3982.**



**YOU SERVED.
YOU DESERVE
A STABLE HOME.**

On any given day, **more than 3,000** women Veterans experience homelessness.

VA is here to help.

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans:

1-877-424-3838

www.womenshealth.va.gov

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Save the Date!

March 2024



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April 2024



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May 2024



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Look what's happening at your Gulf Coast VA.
Please join us!



Women Veteran Public Forum

- March 6, 6 pm @ the Biloxi campus, Building 30, 2nd floor, Rm 2C100



Women's Health Focus Groups

- All focus groups are virtual. Please call the Women Veterans Program Manager to register.
- April 26, 2pm



Veterans Enrollment and Benefits Fair

- April 6, 2024, 8 am - 12 pm, @ Pensacola VA Clinic, 790 Veterans Way, Pensacola, FL 32507



Gulf Coast VA Veteran Townhalls

In-person meetings to learn more about current operations at your VA clinic and to ask questions.

- April 18, 2024, 12 - 1 pm, Mobile area, location TBA (check Facebook for details)
- May 22, 2024, 5 - 8 pm, Biloxi VA Clinic Recreation Hall



VA2K Walk and Roll

- May 15, 2024, @ all Gulf Coast VA clinics. Please contact your clinic for specifics.

VA WANTS
EVERY WOMAN VETERAN
TO HAVE ACCESS TO RESOURCES THEY NEED AND TRUST

WOMEN VETERANS CALL CENTER
855-VA-WOMEN

VETERAN CRISIS HOTLINE
800-273-8255
PRESS 1

CAREGIVER SUPPORT LINE
855-260-3274

VA BENEFITS HOTLINE
1-800-827-1000

Women Veterans Health Care
#womenVets | www.womenshealth.va.gov



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs