

# THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF WOMEN VETERANS

As more women veterans seek additional mental health care, professionals must be well-equipped to ensure they have a smooth transition into civilian life.



## LIFE OUTSIDE THE MILITARY

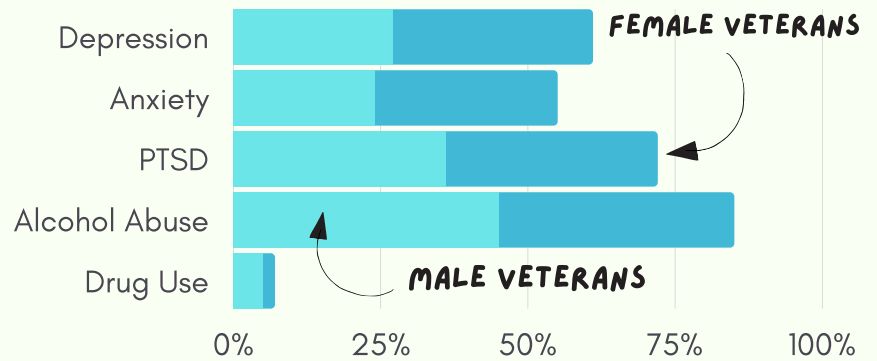
Women veterans represent **10%** of the U.S. veteran population, projecting to increase from 9% to 18% by 2045. As **two million women** reestablish life outside the military, many leave **earlier** than planned; reporting a lack of skills to enable a healthy and fulfilling transition to civilian life.

**FEMALE VETERANS MINIMIZE THEIR MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS, LEADING THEM TO NOT UTILIZE CARE SERVICES AND BENEFITS FOLLOWING SEPARATION FROM THE MILITARY. SUBSEQUENTLY, THEY STRUGGLE WITH MORE REINTEGRATION ISSUES.**



WHILE ALL WOMEN WORE THE SAME UNIFORMS, THE DIFFERENCES IN THEIR EXPERIENCES & RESPONSES TO EVENTS ARE VAST. MANY DIFFERENCES, BEYOND RACE AND SEX, INCLUDING GENDER IDENTITY, ARE CURRENTLY NOT IDENTIFIED OR INCLUDED IN WORKING WITH WOMEN VETERANS.

## MENTAL HEALTH BY THE %



SOURCE: GAFFEY ET AL., 2021

## OVERLAPPING VULNERABILITIES



Women veterans tend to be... *younger* in age and are *overrepresented* by both racial/ethnic minorities and sexual minorities. Alone, and in combination, minority race/ethnicity and sexual orientation may influence mental health symptoms and social factors. In fact, female veterans are at an **increased risk for homelessness and underemployment** after experiencing military sexual trauma and associated mental health illnesses. Further, the suicide rate among female veterans is growing **2X faster** than the rate of suicide among civilian women. Female veterans who have mental health conditions and those who feel like their military service is misunderstood by others are more likely to be **unemployed**.

## WOMEN VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH CARE USE



41% received care from the VA (Veterans Affairs)



50% sought treatment for depression, anxiety or emotional disorders



49% reported care met their needs "very well" or "completely"

SOURCES: GAFFEY ET AL., 2021 & KOBLINSKY ET AL., 2017

## NEXT STEPS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS...



- Adapt programming to support women veteran's needs during reintegration.
- Create safe spaces that enable women to openly share their unique experiences.
- Develop an understanding of military cultural competence to help women develop their new identity as they transition to civilian life.
- Educate women veterans about their VA eligibility status & provide information for receiving care.
- Engage in professional development opportunities that acknowledge the overlapping vulnerabilities experienced by women veterans.
- Incorporate a family-centered approach by allowing family members to share their perspectives of the reintegration process.
- Promote physical & mental wellness as a premise for women veteran's overall wellbeing.
- Support women physically & emotionally through various decisions & transitions.

