



Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

**Pushing  
Access  
Forward**

# Caring for Women Veterans

## The Issue

For decades, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) focused primarily on serving male veterans. But, as more occupational specialties are opened to women wishing to serve in the military, there are dramatically increasing numbers of women joining the Armed Forces.

Currently, women make up 16.2 percent of today's active duty military forces and 19 percent of National Guard and Reserves. More than half a million women veterans are currently using VA health care services and as increasing numbers of women join the individual services, the number of women veterans using VA will continue to rise.

VA needs to be better prepared to meet the gender-specific health care needs of these women veterans. The Department has developed a robust spinal cord injury system to serve the needs of veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D). However, there needs to be a stronger focus on the needs of women veterans with SCI/D.

As Congress develops strategies and policies for VA to follow to improve care for the rising number of women veterans, there needs to be an equal effort to ensure the needs of women veterans with SCI/D are factored into these decisions.

## PVA Position

- VA and Congress must ensure that women veterans have access to comprehensive care in environments sensitive to their needs.
- Women veterans primary care services and gender-sensitive mental health care must be designated as essential, foundational services that VA maintains at every facility.
- The needs of catastrophically disabled women veterans should be factored into all planning discussions—present and future by Congress and VA.
- Congress must pass legislation and provide adequate funding to improve the recognition, accessibility, and treatment of women veterans.