



# TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

*"Helping Veterans Starts Here"*

## WOMEN VETERANS REPORT

STATUS OF TEXAS WOMEN VETERANS 2020

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NOVEMBER 1, 2020  
Women Veterans Program

# TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

## Women Veterans Report

*Submitted to*

*Governor Greg Abbott, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, and Texas Legislature*

*Prepared by*

*Dr. Krystle Matthews, Women Veterans Program Manager*

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Dear State Leaders,

It is an honor to present to you the Women Veterans Report on behalf of the Texas Veterans Commission's Women Veterans Program.

Texas has the largest population of women veterans of any state. It is important that we stay connected with them, understand their unique needs and ensure they claim the benefits and services they have earned.

In this report, we review the program's ongoing successful efforts to assist women veterans, and we suggest new strategies to meet women veterans' growing and diverse needs.

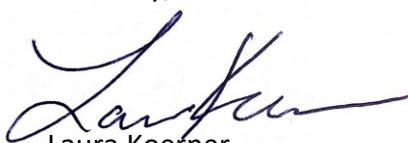
The Women Veterans Program has recently expanded by implementing "Women Veteran Program Coordinators," who address women veterans' unique needs in every region of the state. Our coordinators identify and coordinate with women veterans and connect those veterans to earned entitlements from state and federal agencies. These coordinators also create networking and support opportunities within the women-veteran community for much needed peer-based local support.

Further, we have made significant strides in our statewide outreach efforts to listen and learn from the women veterans of Texas by use of social media platforms, various data-driven surveys, and website information geared specifically toward women veterans' needs. You will also learn about our collaboration with other state agencies, the development of a professional network for women veterans and peer groups, and our partnering strategies in community-level events.

It is through these programs, collaborations, and consistent outreach efforts that have given us the ability to identify the unique needs of women veterans, and to craft recommend policy proposals, initiatives, and funding levels to address those identified needs in this report. We appreciate your serious attention to the issues, successes, and recommendations outlined in this report.

I thank you for your continued support of women veterans and I thank you for giving the members of Texas Veterans Commission's Women Veterans Program the opportunity to engage in this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Koerner", written in a cursive style.

Laura Koerner  
Chairwoman  
Texas Veterans Commission

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## Executive Summary

The Women Veterans Program was established as an initiative during the 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislative session (2011). It was formally established in the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative session (2015) by HB 867, which appropriated a woman veteran coordinator and outlined the goals and responsibilities of the program. During the 85<sup>th</sup> Legislative session (2017), Senate Bill (SB) 805 further expanded the scope of responsibilities of the Women Veterans Program. SB 805 also established June 12<sup>th</sup> as Women Veterans Day to recognize the role of women in the military forces and to commemorate their sacrifices.

The mission of the Women Veterans Program is to ensure that the women veterans of Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services. The program was established to perform these general program duties:

1. Provide assistance to the women veterans of this state;
2. Perform outreach functions to improve the awareness of women veterans of their eligibility for federal and state veterans' benefits and services;
3. Assess the needs of women veterans with respect to benefits and services;
4. Review programs, research projects, and other initiatives designed to address the needs of the women veterans of this state;
5. Make recommendations to the executive director regarding the improvement of benefits and services to women veterans;
6. Incorporate issues concerning women veterans in commission planning regarding veterans' benefits and services; and
7. In collaboration with appropriate state agencies, provide information to women veterans about services and resources provided by state and federal agencies and organizations to women veterans.

The woman veteran coordinator manages the program with the responsibility to:

1. Advocate for women veterans;
2. Increase public awareness;
3. Collaborate with federal, state, county, municipal, and private agencies that provide services to women veterans;
4. Research and disseminate information on issues relating to women veterans;
5. Educate women veterans about their benefits and available services;
6. Honor and recognize women veterans; and
7. Serve as the liaison between state and federal agencies.

Statistics reflect that as of September 30, 2020, Texas has the largest population of women veterans in the United States and its territories. Texas women veteran's population is currently estimated at 190,366; that number is expected to increase by 7.6% in the next 5 years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). Retrieved from [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran\\_population.asp](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp)

This report provides information on the number of women veterans receiving assistance from the Texas Veterans Commission. The unique problems faced by women veterans along with recommended policy proposals, initiatives, and funding levels required to address the problems will also be incorporated into the report. With the increasing number of women veterans exiting military service, more research has been conducted on women veterans' transition to civilian life, health, and general needs following the military. The information in this report was collected through multiple sources including but not limited to, current research, TVC assistance requests, TVC statewide women veterans community outreach campaign, and a TVC women veterans town hall survey.

### **Underlying Issues**

Two underlying issues present themselves in attempting to accurately determine the number of women veterans in the state and the unique problems they may face. Identification of these realities is crucial to understanding where extended efforts are needed by state agencies and policymakers to effectively address the needs presented. The two realities described below are expanded upon in the pages that follow and accompanied by recommendations to state leaders and legislators for addressing the issues.

#### **1. Veteran Identity**

As identified in the November 2018 Women Veterans Report (WVR), many women veterans do not self-identify as a "veteran." The reasons vary from a woman veteran being told by someone she encountered that she was not a veteran to the woman veteran's assumption that she is not a veteran because she did not serve in combat or retire from the military. Additionally, when a woman veteran applies for any veteran benefits and is told that she does not qualify, the veteran assumes that she does not qualify for the service because she is not considered a veteran.

#### **2. Communication and Outreach**

As previously stated, many women veterans do not self-identify as a "veteran," therefore, communication and outreach efforts must continuously go beyond state-wide benefit and resource fairs. The WVP's current outreach efforts consist of the use of social media as well as participation in various TVC and veteran community partner-hosted events such as resource and benefits fairs, job fairs, conferences, seminars, workshops, and non-veteran community events.

# NUMBER OF TEXAS WOMEN VETERANS

## Number of Texas Women Veterans

### **Texas Veterans Commission**

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) consists of 9 programs: Veteran Employment Services Department (VES), Claims Department, Veterans Education Department (VetsED), Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD), Health Care Advocacy Department (HCAD), Veteran Entrepreneur Program (VEP), Women Veterans Program (WVP), Fund for Veterans Assistance (FVA), and Communications and Outreach. Each program gathers data based on specific program requirements, ensuring both quantitative and qualitative measurements of veterans served, and veteran support activity is captured.

The data below reflects the estimated number of women veterans in Texas based on the most recent report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics Veteran Population Report for fiscal year (FY) 2018.<sup>2</sup> Information provided by the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Lead Women Veterans Program Manager for VISN (Veterans Integrated Services Network) 17, identifies **81,101\*** Texas women veterans as an "enrollee" of the VA Health Care System.

An "enrollee" is a veteran who has applied for VA medical services under 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1710 and 38 CFR 17.36, has been accepted for such care, and who has received confirmation of enrollment in the VA health care system. Furthermore, enrollment is the process used by VA to accept an eligible veteran into the VA Health Care System including the assignment of a priority group. It is important to note that enrollment connotes a "health care system" enrollment, not enrollment to a specific site of care as veterans are free to use the entire system of care as their health care needs require and as such, a veteran enrollee cannot be associated with a specific enrolled site of care. It is also important to note that a VA enrollee may never seek care. Enrollment is simply a request to become part of the VA Health Care System and receive benefits from the system as the veteran so desires and is eligible.

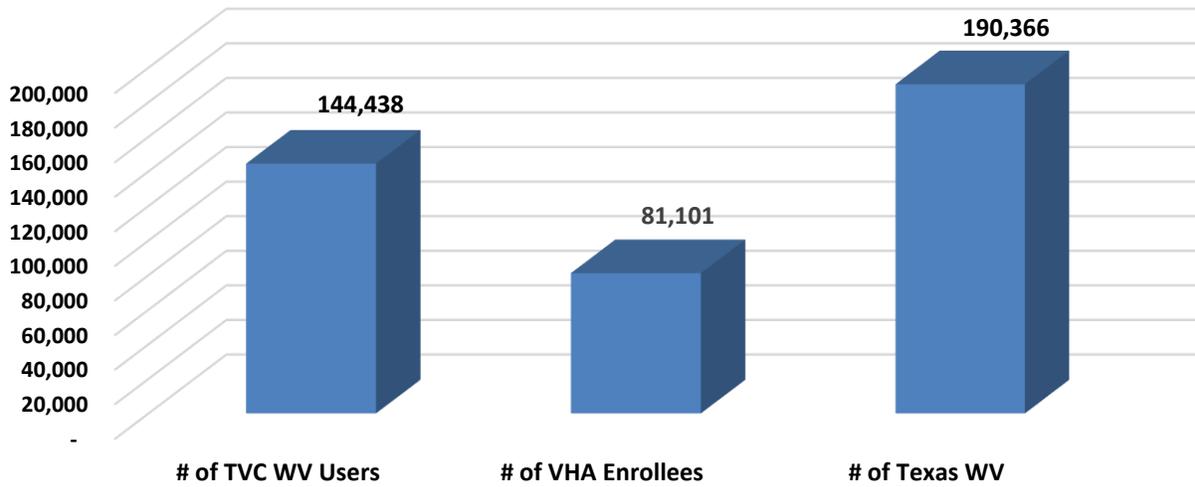
The VHA's Lead Women Veterans Program Manager for VISN 17 also provided additional information that further identified **78,793** "unique" patients as women veterans for FY2019. A "unique" patient is an individual social security number recorded in Austin, TX in any of the workload files selected (unique outpatient, unique inpatient, etc.). For a unique patient report, the patient is only counted once as a unique patient, regardless of whether the patient was seen as both an inpatient and an outpatient.

TVC, in comparison, had **144,438** women veteran users of TVC services for FY2019 (September 1, 2018 - August 31, 2019) and FY2020 (September 1, 2019 - August 31, 2020). A "user" is a woman veteran that utilized any services provided by TVC's nine programs. The charts below display a combined total number of users per organization and program for FY2019 and FY2020.

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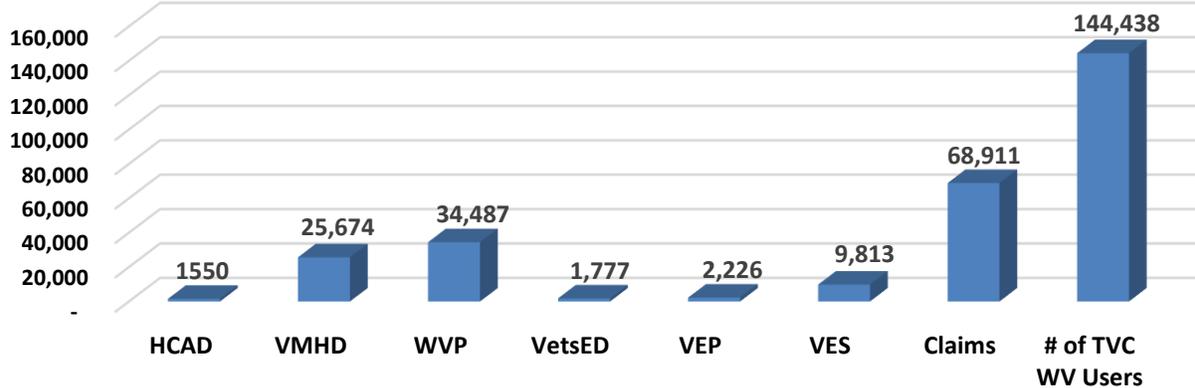
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). Retrieved from [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran\\_population.asp](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp)

### Number of Texas Women Veterans, VHA Texas Women Veteran Enrollees, and Women Veteran Users of TVC Services



\*VHA VISN 17 TX numbers as of September 2019 (FY2019)

### Number of Women Veteran Users of TVC Services



\*TVC's combined number of women veteran users for FY2019 and FY2020

## Texas Workforce Commission

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the state agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers of Texas. TWC is part of Texas Workforce Solutions, a local and statewide network comprised of the agency, 28 workforce development boards, and their contracted service providers and community partners. This network gives customers local access to workforce solutions and statewide services at numerous Workforce Solutions offices.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, employees of the Workforce Solutions assist veterans with various services that a TVC Veterans Career Advisor (VCA) may not be able to assist with because the VCA's primary function is to assist veterans with significant barriers to employment. For FY2019 and FY2020, TWC provided **29,614** services to women veterans through multiple TWC programs. For this report, TWC programs include Wagner Peyser (WP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), Noncustodial Parent Choices (NCP), Choices Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Adult Education & Literacy (AEL), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Childcare, and other unduplicated services.

## Department of State Health Services

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) promotes and protects the health of people, and the communities where they live, learn, work, worship, and play. The organization understands that no single entity working alone can improve the health of all Texans.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Texas Health and Human Services, which includes DSHS and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission provide hundreds of programs and services to more than seven million Texans a month.<sup>5</sup> Although Texas Health and Human Services provide many programs and services, all applications for services do not ask for the applicant's veteran status therefore, the number of services provided to women veterans could not be accurately verified.

## Other State Agencies

State agencies of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services (TCCVS) were asked to provide data, if available, on the number of women veterans served by their respective agencies. SB 1796 passed by the 82nd Texas Legislature established the TCCVS. The Council was established to: (1) coordinate the activities of state agencies that assist veterans, service members, and their families; (2) coordinate outreach efforts that ensure that veterans, service members, and their families are made aware of services; and (3) facilitate collaborative relationships among state, federal, and local agencies and private organizations to identify and address issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families.<sup>6</sup> The Council consists of twenty-two state agencies including TVC. The agencies that responded to the request to participate was not able to provide information on the number of women veterans served because their programs are not client-based.

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<sup>3</sup> Texas Workforce Commission. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.twc.texas.gov/about-texas-workforce>

<sup>4</sup> Texas Department of State Health Services. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/about-DSHS.shtm>

<sup>5</sup> Texas Health and Human Services. (2020). Retrieved from <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/vision-mission>

<sup>6</sup> Government Code, Chapter 434. (2020). Retrieved from <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/docs/GV/htm/GV.434.htm>

# CURRENT STATUS OF TEXAS WOMEN VETERANS

# Current Status of Texas Women Veterans

## Summary

Research on women veterans is relatively new. Data obtained for this report comes from various resources including the Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, TVC outreach campaigns, surveys and assistance requests, and other sources. Information about women veterans is presented at the category level to give insight into how women veterans are faring in those categories. An emphasis is placed on categories where the largest needs occur: claims, communication and outreach, education, employment, entrepreneurship, health care, housing, peer groups, and rural women veterans.

## Claims

The TVC Claims Department assisted 68,911 women veterans during FY2019 and FY2020. Most women veterans that requested assistance from the WVP also requested information about filing a VA claim. The WVP is the first contact for a lot of women veterans that contact TVC for assistance, so the program educates the veteran on the services of the Claims Department and then makes the referral. The WVP refers all inquiries about filing a new claim, filing an appeal, checking on the status of a claim, etc. to the Claims Department. The VA also provides Women Veteran Coordinators (WVCs) in every regional office that functions as the primary contact for women veterans. WVCs provide specific information and comprehensive assistance to women veterans, their dependents, and beneficiaries concerning VA benefits and related non-VA benefits. They may assist in the claims intake, development, and processing of military sexual and personal trauma claims.<sup>7</sup>

## Communication and Outreach

As previously mentioned in the report, due to the lack of women veterans self-identifying as a “veteran,” it is harder to reach the women veteran population. Despite the many communication and outreach efforts of the WVP, women veterans often report that they are unaware of their benefits, do not know how to locate resources, and request to be added to a mass email distribution list to stay updated on upcoming events and new information.

The TVC's WVP has tremendously increased its outreach to Texas women veterans by hosting, co-hosting, and participating in various TVC and veteran community partner-hosted events. The program's outreach and engagement has also increased due to the addition of three full-time employees. Communication and outreach efforts are further expanded by the following:

1. Women Veterans Community Outreach Campaign
  - a. 2019 Campaign - In January 2019, TVC enlisted 30 women veterans from across Texas to participate in an "I Am Not Invisible" photo campaign. The campaign was created to increase public awareness and highlight women veterans that served in the military. The campaign is displayed on the TVC website and is

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.benefits.va.gov/PERSONA/veteran-women.asp>

available in print for organizations to host a portion of or the entire exhibit on location. The campaign officially launched in March 2019 and is ongoing.

- b. 2020 Campaign - Completed a 3-week social media campaign via Facebook that reached 825 women veterans. Each woman veteran completed a contact form to receive more information about the benefits and services available to them. Each woman veteran was initially contacted by email and provided a Quick Guide to State and Federal Women Veterans Resources and a VA Benefits by Percentage document from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Additionally, the initial email asked, "Do you currently have a need I can assist you with? If so, how would you like me to follow-up with you? By phone or email?" The campaign served to connect women veterans with the WVP and provided information that increased awareness of benefits and services available to them. The campaign ran from March 8<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>.
2. Women Veterans Day (WVD)
    - a. WVD 2019 - On WVD, June 12, 2020, the WVP hosted an event in Houston, TX that was live-streamed via Facebook Live. The event included a panel discussion, resource fair, and networking. TVC employees of the Women Veterans Collaborative hosted watch parties across the state.
    - b. WVD 2020 - On WVD, June 12, 2020, the WVP launched the Texas Women Veterans Registry Launch, a Texas Women Veterans Tribute Slideshow, and cohosted a Dallas Community Partner Virtual Event.
      - i. The Texas Women Veterans Tribute Slideshow included 173 submissions from Texas women veterans, the WVP Team, Chairwoman Koerner, Commissioner Shaneyfelt, and a special tribute to Ms. Marion Senteno, who, unfortunately, passed on Memorial Day, were also included for a total of 180 women veterans honored through the tribute.
      - ii. The Dallas Community Partner Virtual Event was a collaboration of TVC's WVP and eight Dallas community partners to include State Representative Victoria Neave and Toni Rose's offices. The WVP led and moderated the Resource Session which included Veteran Resource and Service Organizations, Employers, and Workforce Commission Panels.
  3. Texas Women Veterans Registry - The Texas Women Veterans Registry is a database of information voluntarily provided by Texas women veterans that have served in the armed forces of the United States. The registry serves to continuously honor and recognize Texas women veterans.
  4. TX Women Veterans Professional Network (WVPN) - The WVPN is a closed social media network hosted by TVC's WVP. The WVPN provides a safe environment for women veterans to connect on topics ranging from Employment to Healthcare.

## Education

Women veterans frequently sought assistance with education grants and benefits. The WVP referred all women veterans seeking education assistance to Veterans Education Services

(VetsED) to verify education benefits before referring them out to additional resources. It was reported in the most recent VA Women Veterans Report, that 44 percent of women veterans had some college as their highest level of education compared to 32 percent of non-veteran women.<sup>8</sup> Women veterans continue to seek higher education as they transition from the military. In 2019, 84 percent of post 9/11 women veterans had some college degree or higher.<sup>9</sup> Most inquiries were from women veterans that had exhausted their Montgomery GI Bill or Post-9/11 GI Bill and did not qualify for the Hazlewood Act. Some had obtained a degree and wanted to further their education while others were looking to complete a degree they were working toward when they exhausted their benefits.

## Employment

According to the Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for women veterans, 18 years and over in September 2020 was 6.5 percent which is up compared to 4 percent in September 2019.<sup>10</sup> Understandably, the unemployment rate would increase during the last year due to a global pandemic that has left so many Americans unemployed. Since March 14, 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission has helped over 1 million Texans file unemployment claims which are equivalent to around 75 weeks of claims in a month.<sup>11</sup>

In 2019, the top five industries for women veterans included Health Care and Social Assistance, Public Administration, Educational Services, Retail Trade, and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services. The top five occupations included Office and Administrative Support; Management, Business, and Financial; Service; Healthcare Practitioners and Technical; and Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts, and Media.<sup>12</sup> As the economy reopens, TVC's Veteran Employment Services (VES) will be able to assist women veterans with significant barriers to employment in their job search. The aforementioned information along with current labor market information may improve the job search process as well as expedite it for women veterans.

Additionally, the following statistics should be considered moving forward to ensure the delivery of appropriate employment assistance. Only 1 woman in every 69 women in the civilian labor force—defined as those working and those unemployed, but available to work and actively seeking work—is a veteran. Comparatively, 1 in 7 men in the civilian workforce is a veteran. Women veterans are 1 percent of women under 35 in the civilian labor force meaning that 1 in 102 women under 35 are veterans. On the other hand, male veterans make up 4 percent of the civilian labor force under 35, or 1 in 25 men under 35 are male veterans.<sup>13</sup> These

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<sup>8</sup> VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2017). The Past, Present, and Future of Women Veterans. Retrieved from [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Women\\_Veterans\\_2015\\_Final.pdf](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Women_Veterans_2015_Final.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> IVMF/Syracuse University. (2020). Women in the Military Transition, Employment, and Higher Education After Service. Retrieved from [https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020\\_WomensHistory\\_3.11.20\\_final-1.pdf](https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020_WomensHistory_3.11.20_final-1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Economic News Release. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Texas Workforce Commission. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.twc.texas.gov/news/frequently-asked-questions-about-unemployment-insurance-benefits-related-covid-19>

<sup>12</sup> IVMF/Syracuse University. (2020). Women in the Military Transition, Employment, and Higher Education After Service. Retrieved from [https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020\\_WomensHistory\\_3.11.20\\_final-1.pdf](https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020_WomensHistory_3.11.20_final-1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> US Department of Labor. (2020). 2019 Gender and Veteran Demographics. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/VETS/files/2019-Gender-and-Veteran-Demographics-Transcript.pdf>

statistics also demonstrate that most people have not had a personal interaction with a woman veteran due to their absence in the workforce or their lack of self-identification as a veteran.

## Entrepreneurship

The TVC Veteran Entrepreneur Program (VEP) continues to see a steady increase of interest in entrepreneurship from women veterans. The program assisted 2,226 women veterans during FY2019 and FY2020 and more than 2000 during FY2018. An article published in Entrepreneur Magazine stated women veterans are “increasingly starting and growing businesses, even in the previously male-dominated STEM (science, technology, engineer, mathematics) fields.”<sup>14</sup> The article also references an IVMF/Syracuse University study where "over 83 percent of the women veterans surveyed cited obstacles in starting businesses, some unique to their status as veterans." Additionally, the National Women's Business Council (NWBC) has conducted research that shows access to capital remains a barrier to business ownership for women.

The VEP is aware of the interest and is partnering with internal programs and external organizations to assist women veterans in their entrepreneurship efforts. VEP will be partnering with the WVP in December 2020 to host a webinar about the different phases of business development and how the program can further assist women veterans.

## Health Care

Women veterans frequently sought assistance to navigate VA health care. The WVP generally refers women veterans seeking VA health care navigation assistance to the TVC Health Care Advocacy Department. The VHA’s Lead Women Veterans Program Manager for VISN 17 provided detailed information on the status of Texas women veterans’ health care and available services.

VISN 17 is comprised of seven VA Health Care Systems (HCSs) with three large 1A facilities, a Center of Excellence, and four additional HCSs with complex needs. This large geographic area ranges from urban areas to largely rural areas to the rapidly expanding Lower Rio Grande Valley. There are several of the largest military installations in Texas in El Paso (Ft. Bliss), Central (Ft. Hood), and South Texas as well as many other bases that cover the VISN 17 catchment area. Each of the seven HCSs in VISN 17 has a Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM), a Women's Health Medical Director (WHMD), and Women's Health Care Coordinators (WH CCs) that focus on maternity care, and breast and cervical cancer prevention.

Data Review:

1. FY2013 to FY2019, “unique” women veteran increased 36%
  - a. enrollees increased to 41% (VSSC)

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<sup>14</sup> Entrepreneur Magazine. (2019). Women Veterans Are Starting More and More STEM Businesses: Here Are the Resources They Need. Retrieved from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/332103>

2. VISN 17 has the top four largest VA HCSs in the nation with the highest number of unique women veterans (VA North Texas HCS, South Texas Veterans HCS, and Central Texas Veterans HCSs). Atlanta is the largest.
3. Enrolled women veterans in Texas are projected to increase by
  - a. 18% in FY2025
  - b. 40% in FY2030 and
  - c. 55% in FY2035
4. Nationwide data shows women veterans' growth rate has outpaced that of male veterans.
5. Per WHS Sourcebook 4, women veteran outpatient visits increased three-fold. VISN 17 was in the top five in the nation tied to this increase.
6. Additionally, women's health services/benefits, and needs have grown; the growth is expected to continue. VISN 17 women veterans of childbearing age have increased and are the largest age group of women veterans.
7. Nationwide data - women's mental health/substance use disorders (MH/SUD) have shown five times increase (43% of women compared to 26% of men).

Each VA Health Care System offers a variety of services for all veterans. Some services may require a referral to another VA or a referral in the community. VA also offers some services through TeleHealth (TH)/VA Video Connect (VVC). Services offered for women veterans include but are not limited to:

Comprehensive Primary Care for Women Veterans: This may be in a regular primary care setting or a women's clinic setting, depending on the VA facility. It includes care for acute and chronic illness, gender-specific primary care (screening for breast and cervical cancer, contraception counseling and basic contraceptive care; management of menopause-related concerns; initial evaluation and treatment of conditions such as pelvic and abdominal pain, abnormal vaginal bleeding, infections, urinary incontinence, breast masses, etc.); preventative services (age-appropriate cancer screenings, nutritional services, intimate partner violence, immunizations, etc.); mental health (initial assessment and treatment, and appropriate referral to mental health as indicated); coordination of care (includes working across care settings, accessing health care providers and community programs, and communicating with patients and providers both within and outside of VA to ensure continuity of care).

Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) are the primary care hub for Veterans. The team includes a health care provider, registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse, and clerk as well as support staff (Social Workers, Mental Health, Pharmacists, etc.). This team can assist in referring you to other services, as needed.

A Variety of Specialty Care, some include: Audiology, Cardiology, Dermatology, Geriatric Care (Long-Term Care, Community Living Centers, respite, etc.), Gynecology, Homeless Programs, Infertility and In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Maternity Care Coverage and Coordination for eligible Veterans, Mammography, Mental Health and Substance Use Care, Suicide Prevention, Neurology, Nutrition and Weight Loss, Oncology, Orthopedics, Pain Management,

Pulmonology, Polytrauma (Traumatic Brain Injury, etc.), Social Work Services, Spinal Cord Injury, Transition Care Management Program Staff (formerly known as the OEF/OIF/OND), Therapy and Rehabilitation staff (physical, occupational, speech), Urology, and many more.

## Housing

The WVP consistently receives financial assistance requests for rent and utilities from women veterans; due to COVID-19, the requests have increased. In a survey conducted at a TVC WVP town hall, 31 percent of women veteran respondents stated they have been homeless or without permanent housing. The WVP generally refers all requests for rent, mortgage, and utilities to an organization that has received a general assistance grant from TVC's FVA. General Assistance grants include seven service categories that collectively provide employment support, financial assistance, homeless veteran support, pro bono legal services, referral services, supportive services, and transportation programs and services to veterans, dependents, and surviving spouses who live in Texas.<sup>15</sup> The WVP also refers women veterans to community partners that have received grants and funding from other sources to assist with such requests.

To further assist during times of housing uncertainty, the WVP connects women veterans to programs such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), and Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program. SSVF is for very low-income veterans and provides case management and supportive services to prevent the imminent loss of a veteran's home or identify a new, more suitable housing situation for the individual and his or her family; or to rapidly re-house veterans and their families who are homeless and might remain homeless without this assistance.<sup>16</sup> HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA that combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans who are homeless and their families find and sustain permanent housing. As of Sept. 30, 2015, HUD had allocated more than 78,000 vouchers to help house veterans across the country.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, in the GPD Program, state, local and tribal governments, and nonprofits receive capital grants and per diem payments to develop and operate transitional housing—including short-stay bridge housing—and/or service centers for veterans who are homeless. The program provides over 14,500 beds for eligible veterans. Grantees also collaborate with community-based organizations to connect veterans with employment, housing, and additional social services to promote housing stability. The maximum stay in the housing is up to 24 months, with the goal of moving veterans into permanent housing.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Texas Veterans Commission. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.tvc.texas.gov/grants/general-assistance-grants/>

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/housing.asp>

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/housing.asp>

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/housing.asp>

## Peer Groups

Many women veterans lose their sense of community, camaraderie, and belonging when they exit the military; consequently, there is an ongoing need to connect with other women veterans. In 2019, the loss of connection with the military community (59%) and loss of sense of purpose/camaraderie (56%) was reported by women veteran respondents who had recently separated as key transition challenges.<sup>19</sup> As of September 30, 2019, women veterans were 10% of the overall projected veteran population of 19,209,704 so geographical location contributes to the disconnection that women veterans experience.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in a survey conducted at a TVC WVP town hall, 63 percent of women veteran respondents stated they would join a peer group if it was easily accessible to them; 23 percent stated they may join.

The WVP recently launched an ongoing virtual series where multiple topics of interest to women veterans are discussed. Six months after the President of the United States of America proclaimed that the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States constituted a national emergency<sup>21</sup>, voluntary reports of feeling isolated, depressed, and disconnected had considerably increased. The first topic in the Engaging Minds, Empowering Success Series was Peer Groups - Get Connected. The topic was of interest to women veterans and it allowed the WVP to instantly connect women veterans to available peer groups. The organizations present at the virtual event have recently moved their services online to continue serving women veterans. The following organizations participated: Grace After Fire's mission became centered on helping the woman Veteran help herself by connecting her with the resources and the tools she needs to be a productive citizen in her community, her work, and her home after transitioning from the military.<sup>22</sup> The Pink Beret's mission is to address, educate, coordinate, and provide aid and relief to active duty women of the United States Armed Forces and Veterans seeking assistance with invisible injuries such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, and Combat Trauma Stress on a local and national level. The organization provides multiple types of therapy to assist women veterans with PTSD, MST, and combat trauma.<sup>23</sup> WoVeN - The Women Veterans Network is a nationwide organization, a network of women veterans that fosters connections and builds relationships in communities across the nation.<sup>24</sup>

## Rural Women Veterans

Through multiple outreach efforts, the WVP has identified a need to implement a rural women veterans outreach plan. The outreach plan will begin in early 2021. Although the WVP as well as other TVC programs have consistently reached out to rural veterans, there are still unmet

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<sup>19</sup> IVMF/Syracuse University. (2020). Women in the Military Transition, Employment, and Higher Education After Service. Retrieved from [https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020\\_WomensHistory\\_3.11.20\\_final-1.pdf](https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020_WomensHistory_3.11.20_final-1.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2020). Department of Veterans Affairs Statistics at a Glance. Retrieved from [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/Homepage\\_slideshow\\_4\\_6\\_20.PDF](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/Homepage_slideshow_4_6_20.PDF)

<sup>21</sup> The White House. (2020). Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak/>

<sup>22</sup> Grace After Fire. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.graceafterfire.org/about-us>

<sup>23</sup> The Pink Berets. (2020). Retrieved from <https://thepinkberets.org/>

<sup>24</sup> WoVeN. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.wovenwomenvets.org/>

needs in rural areas. The purpose of the rural women veterans outreach plan is to take a methodical approach in effectively engaging rural women veterans and local organizations that can assist them in their times of need. There are limited resources in rural areas so the WVP will spotlight those organizations in the local area that can assist and organizations that have funds to assist statewide.

Due to COVID-19, the rural outreach is currently planned to occur in a virtual meeting space with a dial-in option for veterans that may not have internet access. The WVP team normally visits rural areas in person to meet and partner with local organizations on outreach efforts but will need to network in a virtual environment due to the current climate. The goal is to partner with nonprofits, rural veteran advocates, coalitions, veteran groups, veteran service organizations, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, etc. to educate women veterans on the resources that are available in the local community.

## **Conclusion**

Texas has the largest women veteran population in the country with an estimated 190,366 women veterans and growing. Women veterans are the fastest growing population in the veteran community. As the population of women veterans in Texas increases, the resources specifically for women veterans should also increase. Additional resources should also be easily accessible to women veterans.

Equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services is still a need for the women veterans of Texas. There is still a consistent need for education, connection, coordination of referrals, and advocacy for women veterans. Being able to connect with and meet women veterans wherever they are in their transition and journey, is essential to ensuring the women veterans of Texas receive the benefits and services they have rightfully earned.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations

As demonstrated by the facts and data provided in this report, more resources are needed to educate women veterans about the benefits they have rightfully earned, connect women veterans to services, and to advocate on their behalf. The Texas Veterans Commission requested funding in the Legislative Appropriations Request for fiscal years 2020-2021 and in the Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services, Fourth Report, 2018 for the WVP to meet the needs of the growing women veterans population. The initial request was to fund four additional staff to further the goal of connecting women veterans to federal, state, and local services within four different regions of the state. The WVP received funding for three additional staff which has significantly increased the reach of the WVP and assisted in connecting more women veterans to benefits and services they earned through their military service.

TVC recommends:

1. Legislative support for TVC to fund one additional staff to further the goal of connecting women veterans to federal, state, and local services within the five districts of the state. The WVP districts are broken down by counties and the veteran population. With 254 counties to cover, the work of the four staff, the program manager, and three women veteran coordinators, still has limitations.

Collecting veteran population data to establish the correct level of services provided by the state should be a priority. It is recommended that:

2. State agencies and public institutions of higher learning that provide services to veterans should be required to track veteran status and veteran gender for analysis and strategic planning purposes.
3. State agencies and public institutions of higher learning that provide services to veterans should be required to change the language used to identify veterans on all forms from “Are you a veteran?” to “Did you serve in the military?”

Additionally, the Texas Veterans Commission made the following recommendations to support housing and peer groups in the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services Report:

### **Housing**

4. Entities of the state which provide services to women veterans seeking housing should be required to ask during intake, “Did you serve in the armed forces?” to better identify available options.
5. State agencies providing housing services to veterans should provide ADA-compliant and eligibility criteria to women veterans and their families.

6. All homeless veterans' information available should be offered in a manner that empowers veterans to oversee their situations.

### **Peer Groups**

7. Recommend further funding support for additional nonprofits and veterans service organizations that currently operate or are capable of creating effective women veteran peer groups that will expand services by the number of peer groups available and increase the connection among women veterans.