

Shinseki Addresses Importance of Care for Women Veterans

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WASHINGTON, July 29, 2010 – Women in today’s military serve closer to the front lines of combat than ever before, and as they become veterans the Veterans Affairs Department will be ready to handle their care, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said yesterday.

Speaking at a forum on women veterans at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Arlington, Va., Shinseki underscored the need to improve care for women veterans, citing their military contributions and the complexity of issues women may return with from battle.

“Over time, changes in warfighting doctrine dictate changes about where women serve within the battle space and the kinds of missions they are handed,” he said. “These doctrinal changes will continue to have an impact on women. So, it becomes [VA’s] responsibility to anticipate those changes and prepare for women veterans who will have shaped and lived those changes.”

The community of women veterans is growing, Shinseki said. Women represent almost 8 percent of the veteran population, he said, as well as 6 percent of veterans who use VA health care services. VA officials expect that number to double within 10 years, Shinseki said.

“We marvel at the courage of women soldiers,” he said. “[Women], like their male counterparts, have long dealt with the after-effects of battle.”

The secretary explained that VA experienced a 20 percent spike in women using the department’s health care system in 2009. In the previous six years, Shinseki said, VA saw a 17-percent increase.

“We are VA, [and] our goal is 100 percent accessibility to veterans who need us,” he said. “We must anticipate and address the challenge faced by women.”

Shinseki said VA’s benefits administration’s regional offices now have women veterans’ coordinators to provide assistance. Also, each of the 144 VA medical centers has full-time women veterans’ program managers, he said.

Also, he noted, VA is streamlining the process for both men and women veterans to receive treatment and benefits for post-traumatic stress.

Shinseki also pointed to research initiatives the VA is undertaking to improve overall care for women. He noted that VA published more articles on the impacts of women serving in the military from 2004 to 2008 than in the previous 26 years combined.

The topics of such research and related conferences include impacts of trauma and combat exposure among women, women veterans’ preferences and health care needs, gender differences in health care for deployed women and women veterans and post-deployment care focused on trauma, mental health and reintegration, he noted.

Women veterans now are more visible in VA publications, marketing materials, posters and messages, Shinseki added.

“We need your insights and your energy to help prepare the way for where we need to be 25 years from now,” he told the group. “This forum should establish a critical agenda for an annual dialogue on women, not only to update us, ... but more importantly to provide us the necessary vectors for women’s programs in the years ahead.”

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[Eric K. Shinseki](#)

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