

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

*You served, you deserve
★ the best care anywhere.*



Women Veterans: Lesbian Health Care

VA provides high quality, respectful care to lesbian Veterans. In order to tailor health care services to your health care needs, it is important to have a conversation with your provider about your sexual identity. Your provider may discuss these health care concerns with you:

Breast Cancer Care

Lesbian women are more likely to have risk factors for breast cancer, such as not having children or having children later in life, being overweight and excessive alcohol use, yet less likely to get breast screening or perform regular exams. Regular screenings can lead to early diagnosis when the disease is most curable.

Depression

Lesbian women may experience chronic stress from discrimination. This stress is worse for women who need to hide their sexual identity as well as for women who have lost important emotional support because of their sexual orientation. Living with this stress can cause depression and anxiety. Veterans are also at higher risk of depression than people in the general population.

Heart Health

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women. Smoking and obesity are the highest risk factors for heart disease among lesbian women. All lesbian women need yearly medical exams for high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, and diabetes.

Gynecological Care

Lesbian women have higher risks for certain types of gynecological (ovarian and uterine) cancers compared to heterosexual women. The risk factors for these types of cancers are smoking, being overweight, and less use of birth control. Regular pelvic exams and pap tests can find cancers early and offer the best chance of cure.

Fitness

Research shows that lesbian women are 25% more likely to be overweight or obese compared to heterosexual women. Obesity is associated with higher rates of heart disease, cancers, and premature death. It is important to work with your provider to start a regular exercise plan.

Tobacco Use

Research also shows that lesbian women are twice as likely to use tobacco more often than heterosexual women. Smoking has been associated with higher rates of cancers, heart disease, and emphysema. VA has programs to help you quit smoking.

Substance Use/Alcohol

Heavy drinking, binge drinking and substance use are common among lesbian women and tend to be

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Program, Office of Patient Care Services



WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

*You served, you deserve
★ the best care anywhere.*



related to stress. Such habits can raise your risk of cancer, liver disease and other health problems. Your provider can help you find healthy ways to cope and reduce stress.

Trauma Exposure

Some lesbian Veterans may experience violence in their intimate relationships. Others may experience trauma during their military service or in their lives generally. VA offers access to counseling and other mental health services.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Lesbian women can get the same sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as heterosexual women. Some lesbian women have male partners, which increases the risk for STIs. It is important for sexually active lesbian women to be screened for STIs by a health care provider.

Women Veterans Program Managers: All VA medical centers and many Vet Centers have a designated Women Veterans Program Manager to help women Veterans access VA benefits and health care services. To find the VA medical center or Vet Center nearest you, call 1-877-222-8387 or visit www.va.gov/directory.

Women Veteran Call Center: Women Veterans can call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) to ask questions about available VA services and resources.

LGBT Program Office: The Office of Patient Care Services has an LGBT program designed to assist LGBT Veterans in accessing quality health care. For more information visit our website at http://www.patientcare.va.gov/Lesbian_Gay_Bisexual_and_Transgender_LGBT_Veteran_Care.asp

Additional Resources:

Resource	Link
Gay and Lesbian Medical Association	http://www.glna.org
The Fenway Institute – The National LGBT Health Education Center	http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – LGBT Health	http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth
VA's Office of Patient Care Services LGBT Program	http://www.patientcare.va.gov/Lesbian_Gay_Bisexual_and_Transgender_LGBT_Veteran_Care.asp
Women's Health Services	www.womenshealth.va.gov

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Program, Office of Patient Care Services

