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Veterans Affairs

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2008

VA Reaches Out to Women Veterans
Women Vets Have Earned “Benefits, Respect, Thanks” – Peake
Fourth National Summit on Women Veterans Issues Begins June 20

WASHINGTON -- Recognizing the valor, service and sacrifice of America's 1.7 million women veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a comprehensive array of benefits and programs.

“Women who served this country in uniform -- whether veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the current Global War on Terror or peacetime service -- have earned our respect and thanks,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “They have also earned the full range of VA programs offered by a grateful nation.”

Secretary Peake also announced the Fourth National Summit on Women Veterans Issues to be held from June 20 – 22 in Washington D.C. The Summit will offer attendees an opportunity to enhance future progress on women veterans issues, with sessions specifically for the Reserve and National Guard, information on military sexual trauma and readjustment issues, after the military veteran resources and many more programs and exhibits.

Women veterans are entitled to the same benefits and medical care as their male counterparts, including health care, disability compensation, education assistance, work-study allowance, vocational rehabilitation, employment and counseling services, insurance, home loan benefits, nursing home care, survivor benefits, and various burial benefits.

VA also has a multitude of services and programs to respond to the unique needs of women veterans. VA offers comprehensive, high-quality primary health care services for women, including Pap smears, mammography, and general reproductive health care. Along with these services, VA's mental health care for women includes substance abuse counseling, evaluation and treatment of military sexual trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

VA has several specific initiatives for 2008 including:

- enhancing skills of primary care providers who treat women veterans;
- examining other women's health issues, including cardiac care, breast cancer, and colorectal cancer in women;
- focusing on family issues and avoiding birth defects through enhanced pharmacy practices for women veterans of child bearing age.

Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population second only to elderly veterans. Approximately 1.7 million women veterans comprise 7 percent of the total veteran population. Approximately 255,000 women use VA health care services. Today, over

200,000 women are serving in the Armed Forces. With the increasing number of women, VA estimates by 2020 women veterans will comprise 10 percent of the veteran population.

There is a women veterans program manager at every VA medical center, a women's liaison at every community based outpatient clinic and a women veterans coordinator at every VA regional office.

VA is reaching out to women veterans who are experiencing problems related to sexual trauma or harassment while in the military. All veterans, men and women, may receive free counseling, disability compensation, and related services for sexual trauma incurred in the military. In addition, there are programs for women veterans who are homeless or are victims of domestic violence.

There is a Military Sexual Trauma (MST) point of contact for psychotherapy at every VA medical center. Extensive enhancements of the MST program have taken place over the past two years, including training of providers in the most current effective treatments for PTSD and sexual trauma. In addition, VA has sites for combat PTSD in women and is examining how best to address complex combat and MST issues.

In addition to the services provided at each VA medical center, the Department also operates fifty Women's Health Centers, within medical centers, that serve as specific locations for women veterans to receive care. These centers develop new and enhanced programs for women; some also conduct research on medical and psychosocial issues.

Secretary Peake recently visited the largest women's center in the VA, located at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, Florida. With more than 20,000 women veterans enrolled for care, the center is able to provide a variety of women specific services in one location.

Through its Center for Women Veterans and the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, VA is continually looking into new and innovative ways to provide improved benefits and services to women veterans.

More information on the Fourth National Summit on Women Veterans Issues can be found at www.va.gov/womenvet. For more information about VA benefits and services, veterans may contact their local VA regional office, medical center, or vet center. For questions concerning VA benefits call 1-800-827-1000, for questions concerning VA health care call 1-877-222-8387 or go to our website at <http://www.va.gov>.

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