**FAQ: MST, VA Services and SAAPM**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to increasing public awareness of military sexual trauma (MST), MST’s impact on survivors and VA’s free MST-related services and support. Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month (SAAPM) in April provides an opportunity for VA to underscore that it is ready year-round to help survivors — on their terms and in a way that supports every Veteran on their individualized path to healing.

Find answers to some of the most frequently asked questions below. For more information or to explore VA’s services for MST survivors, visit [MentalHealth.va.gov/MST](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MST).

**What is SAAPM?**

Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, or SAAPM, is observed every April to raise awareness about sexual violence and educate communities about preventing sexual harassment and assault. Its origins are in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, heightened social activism related to the issue of sexual assault helped the observance gain momentum. Previously known as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the name of the observance has been expanded in recent years to call attention to the importance of prevention.

**What is MST?**

VA uses the term “military sexual trauma,” or MST, to refer to sexual assault or threatening sexual harassment that occurs during military service. Anyone in the military can experience MST, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities or branch of service. MST can occur at any time or place during military service — while a Service member is on or off duty, or on or off base. The perpetrator or perpetrators may or may not be known to the survivor and may be fellow Service members or civilians.

MST can include:

* Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities, such as with threats of negative treatment for refusing to cooperate or with promises of better treatment in exchange for sex.
* Being physically forced to have sex.
* Being touched in a sexual way that makes you uncomfortable, including during “hazing.”
* Being subjected to comments about your body or sexual activities that you found threatening.
* Sexual contact without your consent, such as when you are asleep or intoxicated.
* Having intimate images or videos taken or shared without your permission.

**How does MST affect survivors?**

It’s important to understand that MST is an experience, not a diagnosis. As with other types of trauma, people can react to MST in many different ways. Although MST can be a life-changing experience, survivors are remarkably resilient. Some recover on their own. For many, however, the experience of MST continues to affect their mental and physical health, work, relationships or everyday life — sometimes years after the experience. More information on the effects of MST can be found at [MentalHealth.va.gov/MST](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MST).

**How many Veterans and former Service members have experienced MST?**

When asked by their VA health care provider whether they experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault during military service, about 1 in 3 women and 1 in 50 men respond “yes.” This means that there are significant numbers of both men and women who have experienced MST.

**What VA services are available for MST survivors?**

Every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator: a professional who specializes in connecting survivors with the care and services that are right for them. Outpatient MST-related services are available at every VA health care system, and MST-related counseling services are also available at VA’s community-based [Vet Centers](https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/). For individuals who need more intensive support, VA offers treatment in residential and inpatient settings. Treatment for physical health conditions related to MST is also available. Individuals can ask to meet with a clinician of a particular gender if that would help them feel more comfortable.

**Who is eligible for VA’s MST-related services?**

Eligibility for MST-related care is expansive, and survivors may be eligible for MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA services. VA provides free treatment for any physical or mental health condition related to MST. To [learn more about eligibility for MST-related care](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/treatment.asp), call your [local VA facility](https://www.va.gov/find-locations/?facilityType=health) and ask for the [MST Coordinator](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/vha-mst-coordinators.asp).

**How can I help share information about these services with MST survivors?**

Year-round, you can encourage MST survivors and others to visit the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention’s [MST](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp) page. VA also provides shareable resources, including social media posts, on its [SAAPM](mentalhealth.va.gov/SAAPM) page.

**What can I do next?**

* Learn about MST and MST-related services at [MentalHealth.va.gov/MST.](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MST)
* Let survivors know VA believes them, we understand that every healing journey is unique and personal, and we are here to support their healing when they’re ready.
* If you experienced MST and want to learn more or are ready to seek support:
	+ Contact your [local VA facility](https://www.va.gov/find-locations/?facilityType=health)’s [MST Coordinator](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/vha-mst-coordinators.asp) or talk to your VA health care provider. You also may contact a local [Vet Center](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/).
	+ Download [Beyond MST](https://mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst), a free, secure, self-help mobile app created specifically to support MST survivors’ health and well-being. The app has over 30 specialized tools and other features to help MST survivors cope with challenges, manage symptoms, improve their quality of life and find hope. You do not need to create an account or be in treatment to use the app. Personal information entered in the app is not shared with anyone, including VA. You can get Beyond MSTfrom Google Play or the Apple App Store.

***If you are in crisis and need immediate assistance***, connect with the 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line by calling 988 and pressing 1, texting to 838255 or chatting online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat). You will reach one of VA’s caring, qualified responders — many of whom are Veterans themselves.