



TOP 10 THINGS ALL HEALTHCARE AND SERVICE PROFESSIONALS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VA SERVICES FOR VETERANS WHO EXPERIENCED MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

1 Military sexual trauma (MST) is the term used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to refer to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred during a Veteran's military service.

MST can occur on or off base and while a Veteran is on or off duty. Perpetrators can be anyone — men or women, military personnel or civilians, commanding officers or subordinates, strangers, friends, or intimate partners. Veterans from all eras of service — from World War II to those who served more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan — have reported experiencing MST.

2 A significant number of men and women report having experienced MST.

About one in three women and one in 50 men have told their VA healthcare provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military. Although women are more likely to experience MST than men, because of the larger number of men in the military there are actually significant numbers of both men and women seen in VA that have experienced MST.

3 MST affects both mental and physical health.

Sexual assault is more likely to result in symptoms of PTSD than are most other types of trauma, including combat. Symptoms of depression and substance abuse are also common. Even survivors without formal diagnoses may still struggle with emotional reactions, memories related to their experiences of MST, or interpersonal issues. Sexual trauma can also have a strong impact on physical health and is associated with higher rates of headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, sexual dysfunction, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue. Recovery is possible, however, and VA has services to help Veterans with this.

4 VA has responded to the issue of MST in a variety of ways.

Since 1992, VA has been developing programs and policies to ensure MST survivors have access to resources to help them in their recovery. For example, all Veterans seen for VA health care are asked if they experienced MST; this is an important way to ensure providers are aware of their experience and can connect them with additional care as needed. All treatment for physical and mental health conditions related to MST is free. VA engages in outreach to Veterans about services available and ensures that staff receive training on MST-related issues. As with disabilities due to other experiences during military service, Veterans can receive compensation for disabilities or injuries resulting from MST.

5 VA provides all treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST free of charge.

Veterans do not need to have a disability rating (that is, be “service-connected”), to have reported the incident(s) at the time, or to have other evidence that MST occurred in order to receive free MST-related care. There are no time limits on eligibility for this care, meaning that Veterans can seek out treatment even many years after discharge.

7 VA has a full continuum of MST-related services available.

MST-related outpatient care is available at all VA medical centers and many community-based outpatient clinics. Outpatient MST-related counseling is also available at VA’s Vet Centers. For Veterans who need more intensive treatment and support, there are programs nationwide that offer specialized sexual trauma treatment in residential and inpatient settings.

9 Every VA medical center has an MST Coordinator who serves as a point person for MST-related issues.

He or she can tell you about treatment and other resources available in your area. For more information, contact your local VA healthcare facility and ask to speak with the MST Coordinator.

6 Veterans may be eligible for free MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA services.

There are special eligibility rules for MST-related care and length of service and some other requirements for receiving other VA care do not apply. Although this handout refers to “Veterans”, former Service members with an Other Than Honorable discharge and current Service members can also receive certain MST-related services.

8 VA knows that MST survivors may have special treatment needs and concerns.

For example, a Veteran can ask to meet with a clinician of a particular gender if it would make him or her feel more comfortable. Similarly, to accommodate Veterans who do not feel comfortable in mixed-gender treatment settings, many facilities throughout VA have separate programs for men and women.

10 There are several ways Veterans can get help.

For more information, Veterans can speak with their existing VA healthcare provider, contact the MST Coordinator at their nearest VA medical center, or contact their local Vet Center. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at <https://www.va.gov> and <https://www.vetcenter.va.gov>. More information about MST and VA services is available at <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp>.