

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION SERVICES FOR MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

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VA Administrative Structure

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

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graph TD; VA[Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)] --- VBA[Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)]; VA --- VHA[Veterans Health Administration (VHA)]; VA --- NCA[National Cemetery Administration];
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Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

- Disability compensation
- Educational benefits
- Vocational rehabilitation benefits
- Home loans and life insurance

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

- Medical treatment
- Mental health treatment

National Cemetery Administration

- Burial and memorial benefits

What is Military Sexual Trauma (MST)?

- VA's definition of MST comes from Federal law but in general is **sexual assault** or **repeated, threatening sexual harassment** that occurred during a Veteran's military service
 - Can occur on or off base, while a Veteran was on or off duty
 - Perpetrator identity does not matter
 - The reason for the assault or harassment also does not matter (e.g., hazing)
- MST is an experience, not a diagnosis

What is MST?

- Any sort of sexual activity in which someone is involved against his or her will
- Someone may be:
 - Physically forced into participation
 - Unable to consent to sexual activities (e.g., intoxicated)
 - Pressured into sexual activities (e.g., with threats of consequences or promises of rewards)
- Can involve things such as:
 - Threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities
 - Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
 - Unwanted touching or grabbing, including during hazing experiences
 - Oral sex, anal sex, sexual penetration with an object and/or sexual intercourse
- Compliance does not mean consent

How Common is MST?

- When asked about experiences of MST, about 1 in 3 women and 1 in 50 men tell their VHA health care provider that they experienced MST
 - These data speak only to the rate among Veterans who have chosen to seek VA health care
- Although women experience MST in higher proportions than do men, because of the large number of men in the military there are significant numbers of men and women seen in VA who have experienced MST
- Veterans from all eras of service have reported experiencing MST

Mental Health Diagnoses Associated With MST

- Although Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the diagnosis most commonly associated with MST, it is by no means the only one
- VHA national monitoring data reveals that the most common diagnoses for VA's MST-related mental health care are:
 - PTSD
 - Major Depression
 - Schizophrenia and Psychoses
 - Substance Abuse
 - Mania/Bipolar Disorders

Data provided by the VA Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention's MST Support Team

MST-Related Disability Compensation

- As with other injuries or disabilities incurred during service, Veterans can file a claim to receive compensation for any MST-related injuries or disabilities that began or got worse during their military service
- The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is responsible for handling these claims
 - More information is available at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/serviceconnected/MST.pdf>
- Every VBA Regional Office has an MST Coordinator who can assist Veterans in filing MST-related claims

Overview:

Veterans Health Administration Response to MST

- Universal MST screening
- Free MST-related health care
- MST Coordinators at every VA medical center
- National MST Support Team
- Education and training of staff
- Outreach to Veterans

MST Screening

- Recognizing that many survivors of sexual trauma do not disclose their experiences unless asked directly, it is VHA policy that all Veterans seen for health care are screened for MST
- Universal screening is a key way to:
 - Ensure that Veterans are aware of services available to assist in their recovery from MST
 - Ensure providers are aware of an important aspect of a Veteran's history
 - Convey VA's awareness of and sensitivity to the issue of MST
- Screening is conducted in a private setting, by qualified providers
- Veterans who report having experienced MST are offered a referral to mental health for further assessment and/or treatment

Free MST-Related Health Care

- VHA provides all MST-related care free of charge
 - Treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST
 - Outpatient, inpatient, and residential care
 - Medications

Eligibility for MST-Related Health Care

- Eligibility for MST-related health care is expansive
 - Individuals do not need to have reported their experiences of MST at the time or have other documentation that they occurred
 - Individuals do not need to initiate MST-related care within a certain time period after their experiences of MST
 - Veterans may be able to receive MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA services: Typical length of service and income requirements do not apply
- Veterans do not have to file a claim or be service connected (have a disability rating) to receive MST-related health care
- Former Service members with an Other Than Honorable discharge and current Service members can also receive certain MST-related services

Mental Health Care Services Available

- VHA offers a full continuum of mental health services for Veterans who have experienced MST
- Every VA medical center provides MST-related mental health outpatient services
 - Formal psychological assessment and evaluation, psychiatry, and individual and group psychotherapy
 - General mental health and specialty services to target problems such as PTSD, Substance Use Disorders, Depression, and homelessness
- Outpatient MST-related counseling is also available at community-based Vet Centers

Mental Health Care Services Available

- For Veterans who need more intensive treatment, many VHA facilities have “Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs”
 - Provide treatment/services for mental health issues, addictive disorders, medical conditions, and homelessness
 - Target rehabilitation, recovery, health maintenance, improved quality of life, and community reintegration
- VHA also has inpatient programs available for acute care needs
 - Focus is on addressing psychiatric emergencies, promoting stabilization, or facilitating medication adjustment
- A number of these residential and inpatient programs focus specifically on MST or have specialized MST tracks

Gender-Sensitive Care

- VHA has both single-gender and mixed-gender programming available
 - Some Veterans will benefit from treatment in an environment where all Veterans are of one gender
 - Mixed-gender programs also have advantages
 - The needs of a specific Veteran dictate which model is clinically most appropriate
 - Specific offerings vary from facility to facility, based on local demand and resources

Accessing Care

- To access care, Veterans can:
 - Ask their existing VA health care provider for a referral for MST-related services
 - Contact the MST Coordinator at their local VHA facility
 - Contact their local Vet Center
- More information is also available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp

MST Coordinators

- Every VA health care system has an MST Coordinator
 - Serves as a point person for MST issues at the facility
 - Responsible for ensuring that MST-related monitoring, treatment, and education and training occur
- Most MST Coordinators provide at least some clinical care, but the MST Coordinator is typically not the only clinician at the facility providing mental health treatment to Veterans who experienced MST
- The MST Coordinator is your best point of contact to assist Veterans in accessing MST-related care or answering any questions about local services

VHA's National MST Support Team

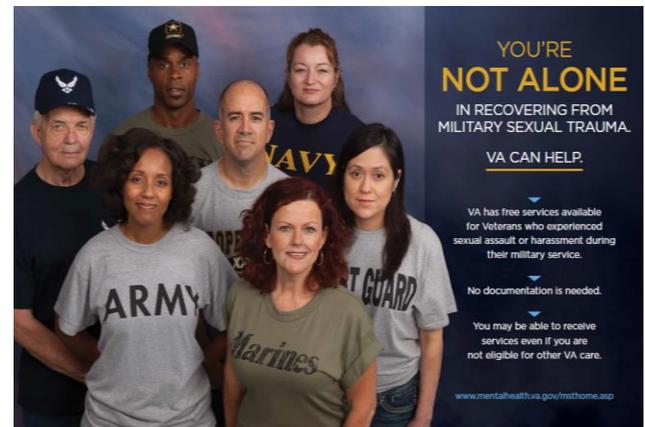
- VHA's national MST Support Team is another core component of VA's response to MST
 - Established in 2006
 - Coordinates and expands national MST-related education and training
 - Promotes best practices in the field through consultation and technical assistance
 - Performs national monitoring
 - Provides consultation to VA Central Office on MST-related policy issues
 - Responds to information requests from VA leadership and other stakeholders

Staff Education and Training

- MST survivors present with a range of health problems and seek care in a variety of clinical settings (e.g., primary care, general mental health, specialty care)
- Because of this, it is essential for a broad range of providers to be well-informed about MST
- VHA offers a range of national MST-related training opportunities for staff, including monthly training calls, an annual conference on treatment program development, online courses, and a community of practice intranet website
- All mental health and primary care providers in VHA must complete mandatory training on MST
- VA's national MST Support Team has established an MST Consultation Program that is available to any VA staff member with a question related to assisting Veterans who experienced MST

Outreach and Access to Care Initiatives

- MST Coordinators engage in local outreach, partnerships, and other efforts to “get the word out”
- MST Support Team engages in national efforts and develops resources for use by the field
 - Outreach posters, handouts, and educational documents
 - Internet website (www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp)
- MST is included in “Make the Connection” and “About Face” websites featuring Veterans’ stories of recovery
 - www.maketheconnection.net
 - www.ptsd.va.gov/aboutface



FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CONTACT YOUR FACILITY'S MST COORDINATOR



Helping VA “Answer the Call”

- Ongoing MST Support Team campaign to support MST Coordinators’ efforts to educate frontline staff in their facility, such as telephone operators and clinic clerks
 - One male and one female secret shopper call each facility
 - Goal is to ensure a positive experience for individuals calling with MST-related questions
 - Helps ensure frontline staff are familiar with the terms “MST” and “military sexual trauma,” are readily able to identify and direct callers to MST Coordinators, and are sensitive to individuals’ privacy concerns

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

- Every April, VHA engages in activities in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- The MST Support Team engages in special national educational and awareness-raising efforts
- MST Coordinators nationwide host events such as:



- **Clothesline Projects:** Veterans decorate t-shirts in ways that reflect their experiences of sexual trauma and recovery; shirts are then hung side-by-side to raise awareness of the impact of sexual trauma
- **Ribbons of Support:** Facilities display messages of support and encouragement for MST survivors that have been written by staff, Veterans, and community members
- **“Wear Teal Days”** or similar theme days

Contact Information

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Dial 1-800-214-1306 or 808-433-0600 and ask for the MST Coordinator



Questions?