

## **Recommendations to the Governor and the Nevada Legislature prepared by the Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC)**

### **1. Executive Summary**

a. This report fulfills the requirement of Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 417.330 that the WVAC submit a report to the Governor, the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs, and the Director of the Legislative Counsel by February 15 of each even-numbered year. The report:

- (1) Provides data on the demographics of Women Veterans within Nevada,
- (2) Discusses the contributions that Women Veterans have made on behalf of the United States and the state of Nevada,
- (3) Summarizes the activities of the Committee during the preceding two calendar years (January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023), and
- (4) Makes recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Director of the Nevada Department of Veteran Services (NDVS) regarding issues relating to Women Veterans.

b. Attached to this report are the past two years' WVAC meeting agendas and minutes so recipients may make a more detailed review of the Committee's activities if they wish (see Enclosure A).

c. Calendar years 2022 and 2023 were distinguished by recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic. While some events were cancelled or moved to an on-line platform, there were still opportunities for in-person interaction for Women Veterans, including the resumption of the Nevada Women Veterans Conferences in March of 2022 and 2023.

d. The WVAC considers the most important aspect of this report to be our recommendations. These cover a wide range of topics, to include recommendations addressing the unique needs of Women Veterans, and how to improve support for programs for Women Veterans. Some of these recommendations require legislative action.

## 2. Demographics

As of Fiscal Year 2022, the Veterans Administration estimated Nevada has a total of 24,000 Women Veterans, approximately ten percent of the total Nevada Veteran population. These numbers indicate that there is still work to be done on identifying Women Veterans throughout the state of Nevada.

The VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System has approximately 2,851 verified Enrolled women Veterans which account for just over 40% of the women Veterans reported to be living in the catchment area of northern Nevada and parts of northern California (according to statistics provided by VetPop).

Women's health services encompass gender-specific primary care, specialty gynecology care and surgery, women's only mental health groups, and growth into other services through staffing positions funded by the Women's Health Innovation and Staffing Enhancements (WHISE) provided by VHA Women's Health Services.

During 2022 and 2023, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System hosted several events, both in-person and virtually:

- Annual Women Veterans Baby Shower for approximately thirty-five pregnant Veterans and National Guard members to provide needed baby items and supplies.
- Annual Outreach at Fallon Naval Air Station to inform women service members about VA Women's Health services.
- Women Veteran hiking, team-building and indoor climbing events.
- Quarterly Women Veterans Focus Groups with the VA Women Veterans Program Manager.
- VA Women Veterans Town Hall via Facebook.
- PACT Act Town Halls
- Women Veterans Socials

Through Our Eyes: The Women Veterans' Experience debuted as part of the *Reno is Artown* activities that occur throughout the month of July 2018. The exhibit brought members of the community to the Reno VA to view the photos and attend readings of the Veterans *My Life, My Story*, a first-person narrative life history publication. The exhibit remains in the Primary Care Waiting Room here at the Reno VA for employee and patient viewing.

The exhibit currently features portraits of sixteen Veterans from the Sierra Nevada Health Care System's catchment along with the veteran's *My Life My Story* and features a variety of women representing various backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and the five military branches of service.



The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System in Las Vegas reports 9,435 Women Veterans enrolled. The VA Southern Nevada Health Care System will break ground in 2022 on a new Women Veterans Health Clinic.

The VA Southern Nevada Health Care System has started several new initiatives to support Women Veterans. They have been utilizing the Women's Health Incentive in Support of Staffing Enhancement (WHISE) and have funded 12 positions since 2021 to enhance care to women at the facility. This has provided approximately \$3,360,000 in funding for salaries in addition to equipment and education. Part of this WHISE funding has supported the development and creation of a new Cancer Care Rehabilitation program for new and existing diagnosis of cancer.

This program began in June of 2023 and was made available to women with breast and cervical cancers first. This rehabilitation program is the only service of its kind in Las Vegas and provides a multidisciplinary approach to providing care from beginning of diagnosis until end of life. This program helps women navigate all services needed while dealing with cancer.

This program also allows VA to utilize multiple services to engage with the Veteran for Rehabilitative Cancer Care. A hybrid cancer support group was also established in the center last fall which is available in-person and via video. A Hope Kit that has specialty items women need while going through chemo or radiation for their cancer has also been made available.

Several other exciting things also took place:

- Installation of 7 new lactation pods throughout multiple healthcare facilities to include the Community Based Outpatient clinics with WHISE funding received.
- A quarterly focus group for Women Veterans was implemented focusing on several different topics, including how they wish their healthcare to grow over time.
- 2 Women only Public Forums take place each year.
- The WH implemented the National Reproductive Care act that was mandated in August of 2022.
- Previously, the WHC struggled with staffing, which impacted enrollment, but several doctors have recently been onboarded and added PACT Act support staff has improved enrollment capabilities.
- WHC hosted 10 outreach events last year at VAMC; CBOC's also hosted several WH events at their sites.

The Southern Nevada VA Medical Center is hoping for 5 additional new positions under the WHISE initiative. Additionally, they are hopeful to break ground on the stand-alone women's health clinic by end of year and to also create several post-partum pregnancy groups for women this year. They plan to expand additional services within their clinic as women have requested, such as pain management, pelvic floor physical therapy, and chiropractic care, and to initiate childcare services this year enabling women to attend all their health care appointments. In 2024, several major events are anticipated such as a heart healthy month, Women's Health Month, Equality Day Events, and Breast Cancer Awareness Events.

Some of Nevada's Women Veterans living in eastern Nevada receive their health care from the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System. Approximately 247 of Nevada's Women Veterans are enrolled in the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System.

### **3. Contributions of Military Women and Women Veterans**

a. Today over 231,741 women serve on active duty in the military services of the Department of Defense (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force), and another 5,955 serve in the Active Coast Guard—part of the Department of Homeland Security. According to the Defense Department, women now make up 21.5 percent of the Air Force and Space Force, 20.7 percent of the Navy, 15.6 percent of the Army and 9.4 percent of the Marine Corps. The newest Military Service, The US Space Force, is the only branch of the military in which all jobs have been open to women since its inception. National Guard components have dual state and federal roles. Like most of the active forces, the Reserve and Guard components have an increasing percentage of women in their ranks. At the end of 2022, women constituted 166,957—or 21.6 percent—of all personnel serving in the six DoD Reserve and Guard forces. Women number 1,089—or 17.6 percent—of all personnel serving in the Coast Guard Reserve.

b. Although 2023 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Women’s Armed Service Integration Act that enabled women to serve as regular, permanent members of the Armed Forces, it took until 2016 for all military specialties to be open to women. Currently, women have the right to choose any military specialty, including ground combat units. It has taken time, however, for women to rise through the ranks. There have been only ten women that have achieved the highest ranks in the Armed Forces and four of them are currently serving in the rank of four-star General or Admiral. Admiral Linda Fagan became the Commandant of the Coast Guard in June of 2022, making her the first woman in US history to lead a military service. General Jaqueline Van Ost is currently the Commander of United States Transportation Command, General Laura Richardson Commands United States Southern Command and Admiral Lisa Franchetti is the newly appointed Chief of Naval Operations.

c. The Utah National Guard recently promoted the first female, Charlene Dalto, to the rank of Brigadier General. The West Virginia National Guard also promoted their first female Brigadier General, Michaelle Munger. In another milestone, the Alabama Air National Guard promoted Tara McKennie to Brigadier General, the first female to hold that rank. One of the first female and Filipino-American divers and graduate from the US Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Bette Bolivar, retired last year after over 30 years of service. When 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Maria Eggers earned the Expert

Infantryman's Badge at Fort Hood, she became the first Latina woman to do so and qualified at the highest level-True Blue.

d. Women have been moving up the enlisted ranks as well. Lisa Erikson was promoted to Air Force Command Chief Master Sergeant, becoming the first female State Command Chief. Iowa recently gained its first woman to join the National Guard, Taylor Patterson. She was the first female to enlist and complete boot camp and infantry training. Although unidentified, the first woman graduated from Navy Seal training, the first of eighteen women to succeed. Another unidentified woman from the Montana National Guard successfully completed sniper training, considered the most grueling, individually focused training in the Army. Finally, for the first time in its 84-year history, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was guarded by an all-woman team of three sentinels.

e. In the civilian capacity, four women have served as Secretary of the Air Force: Sheila Widnall served in the position from 1993-1997. Debrah Roche Lee James served from 2013-2017 and she was followed by two more women; Heather Wilson, who served from 2017-2019 and Barbara Barrett, 2019-2021. Christine Wormuth was the first woman appointed to the position of Secretary of the Army on May 28, 2021.


f. There are now about two million Women Veterans, approximately 11 percent of the current Veteran population, the fastest-growing demographic. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) continues to strive to improve health care for Women Veterans. VA's Women's Health Services (WHS) provides unique clinical training opportunities to equip VA providers and nurses to better support Women Veterans' long-term health and well-being. This Women's Health Mini-Residency training is one offering that bolsters the expertise of VA's primary care and emergency care providers and nurses to address the full range of Women Veterans' medical needs.

#### **4. 2022-2023 WVAC Activities**

a. The Women Veterans Advisory Committee continues to work on behalf of Nevada's Women Veterans. We are grateful for your support of the Women's Military History Month Proclamation for March 2022 and again in March 2023.

b. At our March 9th, 2023, meeting, the WVAC made a recommendation to NDVS to hold the Annual Women Veterans Conference on the second Saturday of March going forward. Additionally, the committee recommended that the conference be held in Las Vegas in the even numbered years and in the Reno/Carson City area in the odd numbered years. This is to better align with the Legislative session in the North, as well as participate in the Veteran and Military Day at the Legislature (VAMDL).

c. NDVS hosted two Women Veterans Conferences during this report period. The first one was held in Reno on March 12, 2022, with the theme "Emergence: A way forward." Since this was the first conference held after the pandemic, women were offered a virtual option and there were approximately 115 Women Veterans (50 virtual versus 65 in-person numbers). Our keynote speaker at this conference was Lourdes Tiglao, Director, Center for Women Veterans. Breakout sessions included Preparing for the Future: Things You Should Know About Medicare and Social Security, Climbing the Ladder: Thinking of Starting Your Own Business, And Krav Maga Self-Defense. Feedback indicated that this was a highly successful conference.



**NDVS**


**WOMEN  
VETERANS  
CONFERENCE**

March 12th, 2022  
8:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m.

**Join us for a day of fun, learning, and comradeship.  
Participate virtually or in-person in Reno!**

To register scan the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/3tbBq4w>

For more information or questions, please contact Savannah Aseoche at [aseoches@veterans.nv.gov](mailto:aseoches@veterans.nv.gov) or call 702-830-2000



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d. In 2023, NDVS partnered with the Nevada National Guard to hold the annual Women Veterans Conference in Las Vegas with the theme “Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories.” Keynote speakers included COL ® Kat Miller, CSM ® Tabitha Gavia and Mrs. Cynthia Kiser-Murphy from the Palms Casino. This event was well attended by approximately 300 Women Veterans and Nevada National Guard members from throughout the state.

2023 Nevada Women Veterans & Military Conference



Join us for the 2023 Nevada Women Veterans and Military Conference!

This year we are “Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories!” Along with a day of networking, renewal, and comradery.

Friday, March 10, 2023  
7:30 AM – 5:00 PM  
Santa Fe Station Hotel & Casino  
4949 North Rancho Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130

The program runs from 9:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m. Registration will be available at the door beginning at 7:30 a.m.

This conference will feature several inspirational women speakers including CSM Tabitha Gavia and more!

SAVE YOUR SEAT by registering here!  
[bit.ly/23WVC](https://bit.ly/23WVC)



This Women Veterans and Military Conference is being held in partnership with the Nevada Department of Veterans Services, Nevada National Guard and VA.Gov Women Vet.





- e. As part of our mission to identify Women Veterans, the WVAC continues its pin project to better identify Women Veterans. Since there were some difficulties mailing the pins, committee members previously decided to switch to stickers since they are easier to include in correspondence sent to recently transitioning Women Veterans. Members of the WVAC as well as NDVS have stickers to distribute at outreach events. Our hope is that these stickers and pins will encourage more women to talk about their military service.



- f. NDVS again partnered with the Perry Foundation to conduct Military Sexual Trauma training in March 2023. The first session was particularly impactful as several survivors of MST told their stories and shared resources that had been helpful to them. Holding MST sessions virtually seemed particularly effective as some people are hesitant to speak publicly about their experiences. Some survivors have said discussing their experiences can retraumatize them. Many of the attendees had their cameras turned off during the event so they were able to participate anonymously. Based on the positive response, MST events/training should be continued in a virtual environment.
- g. The WVAC has encouraged the increased use of social media as an outreach medium to Nevada's Women Veterans. During the past two years, NDVS has stepped up their use of various social media platforms to include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. Since many of our younger Veterans are comfortable with social media, this has been a great way to reach a greater number of Women Veterans throughout the state.

## **5. WVAC Recommendations**

The recommendations below were discussed and approved by the WVAC. There are a total of 14 recommendations. While some pertain to Women Veterans specifically, others pertain to the entire Veteran community.

Recommendation 1: Make the recognition of Women’s Military History Month a permanent annual recognition in March of each year. Thank you for signing the proclamation for Women’s Military History Month for March 2023. In the next legislation session, we will pursue making this a recurring event each year.

Recommendation 2: Fund travel for the WVAC members for one in-person committee meeting and for one member to attend a national conference to better serve Nevada’s Women Veterans. Having the Women Veterans Advisory Committee meet in person a minimum of one time per year is essential since we are better able to get to know one another and form a cohesive team in support of Nevada’s Women Veterans. Additionally, recommend one member of the WVAC be authorized to attend one national conference on Women Veterans issues per year.

Recommendation 3: NRS 417.320 be revised to reimburse WVAC members for this travel to include a subsistence allowance at the going rate for commissions and committees, as fixed by the Director, Nevada Department of Veteran Services, as well as actual expenses for transportation, while traveling on business of the Women Veterans Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 4: Support and promote Veteran-owned businesses. WVAC recommends support of Veteran-owned businesses by having the Secretary of State waive the annual fee for a state business license for newly created Veteran-owned businesses.

Recommendation 5: Create and support Military Spouse Employment and Reciprocity Programs. Military spouse unemployment and underemployment continue to persist despite legislative and community efforts.

Recommendation 6: The WVAC recommends NDVS continue their implementation plans for its VIS database, continue looking for partners to increase the data available to better identify Veterans, and continue to seek budgetary or grant funding to fund the continued administration of the VIS. Additionally, WVAC recommends that NDVS promote the use of the database.

Recommendation 7: Continue funding the 2-1-1 Nevada line. The mission of 2-1-1 Nevada is to empower all Nevadans to achieve optimal self-sufficiency, health, and well-being. 2-1-1 Nevada connects all individuals, families, and providers to essential health and human services information and resources.

Recommendation 8: Continue to support incarcerated Veterans' initiatives to include the Veterans Unit of the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) Re-entry Department. The mission of the NDOC Re-Entry is to enhance public safety by providing offenders effective program services to prepare them for established re-entry into the community. This program has demonstrated success and should continue.

Recommendation 9: Continue support to Missing in Nevada missions at both the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery and the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

Recommendation 10: Continue to expand outreach to rural Veterans. NDVS should continue to expand video outreach to rural Veterans. Due to the difficulty in reaching out to Veterans in rural areas, NDVS should take advantage of technology to reach out to these Veterans. NDVS has successfully used video outreach to discuss benefits. The new Women Veteran Service Officer must be able to reach out to Women Veterans throughout the state. Ensure NDVS is resourced and equipped to perform videoconferencing to reach Veterans throughout the state.

Recommendation 11: Support efforts to register Nevada's Women Veterans at the Military Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. This memorial is the only major national memorial honoring all women who have defended America throughout history.

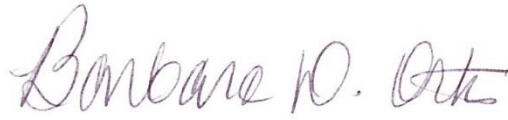
Recommendation 12: Fully fund a weekend burial option at Nevada State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries. Currently, interments at the Southern and Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemeteries are only offered on weekdays. Many local families and families traveling from other locations are unable to take time off during the week for burial services. Offering a weekend option would help support families wishing to inter their loved ones at the state cemeteries.

Recommendation 13: The WVAC supports efforts to change the Nevada Open Meeting Law to include a virtual option for all public meetings when feasible. NDVS did an excellent job of adapting to the pandemic and quickly became proficient at conducting virtual meetings. In many cases, to include the Women Veterans Advisory Committee meetings, participation increased due to the ease of virtual attendance.

Recommendation 14: Advocate for a space dedicated to a Comprehensive Women’s Health Center at the replacement medical facility in Reno. Although still in the planning process, the committee plans to remain engaged as the project moves forward to support the inclusion of women veteran’s health needs in the new facility.

## 6. Conclusion

This report and its recommendations align with the WVAC's duty to advise the Governor, Nevada Legislature, and the NDVS Director. The WVAC believes that through reports such as this, it can continue to make important contributions to improving service to Nevada's Women Veterans and their families. It is in the pursuit of this goal that the WVAC submits this report for consideration ahead of the next Legislative Session.



Barbara D. Ortiz  
Chair, Women Veterans Advisory Committee

January 22, 2024

Date

