

VA



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VA Expands Eligibility for VA Health Care Related to Military Sexual Trauma *Expansion closes a gap in health care eligibility*

Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), under authority from the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (“VACAA”), today announced expanded eligibility for Veterans in need of mental health care due to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during their military service. This trauma is commonly known as military sexual trauma (MST).

This expansion, which primarily pertains to Reservists and National Guard members participating in weekend drill, gives the authority to offer Veterans the appropriate care and services needed to treat conditions resulting from MST that occurred during a period of inactive duty training.

“VA simply must be an organization that provides comprehensive care for all Veterans dealing with the effects of military sexual trauma,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “Our range of services for MST-related experiences are constantly being reexamined to best meet the needs of our Veterans.”

Secretary McDonald met this week with Ruth Moore, a Navy Veteran and MST survivor for whom the Ruth Moore Act of 2013 is named. Ms. Moore will be working with VA to ensure that survivors are treated fairly and compassionately, and that Veterans with MST can access fair compensation exams and access healthcare practitioners who are trained in understanding and working with MST issues.

VA works closely with trauma survivors to ensure a full continuum of health care services are provided to assist Veterans recovering from experiences of MST. Recognizing that MST survivors may have special needs and concerns, every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. Every VA medical center and Community-based Vet Center offers MST-related outpatient counseling.

Currently, all VA health care for mental and physical health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge. Veterans do not need to have a service-connected disability or seeking disability compensation to be eligible for MST-related counseling and care. Veterans also do not need to have reported such incidents to the Department of Defense or possess documentation or records to support their assertion of having experienced such trauma. The determination of

whether a Veteran's condition is MST-related is strictly a clinical determination made by the responsible VA mental health provider. Finally, Veterans need not be enrolled in VA's health care system to qualify for MST-related treatment, as it is independent of VA's general treatment authority.

In addition to treatment programs, VA also provides training to staff on issues related to MST, including a mandatory training on MST for all mental health and primary care providers. VA also engages in a range of outreach activities to Veterans and conducts monitoring of MST-related screening and treatment, in order to ensure that adequate services are available.

Veterans can learn more about VA's MST-related services online at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp and see video clips with the recovery stories of Veterans who have experienced MST at <http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/military-sexual-trauma>.

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