

Women Veteran Menopause Research

Menopause is a normal change in a woman's life when the ovaries stop producing estrogen and progesterone, causing her periods to stop, often occurring around age 51.¹ The biological and hormonal changes during menopause can cause symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, and mood swings. Nearly half (46%) of women Veterans using VA are between 45 and 64² years old, making a focus on VA menopause research increasingly important. Compared to their non-Veteran civilian counterparts, women Veterans also experience more chronic physical and mental health conditions, which may exacerbate their menopause symptoms.^{3,4}

National Women Veteran Menopause Research Workgroup Launched

The VA Women's Health Research Network (WHRN) launched a national Work Group (April 2024) to accelerate the development and use of VA menopause-related research to better understand women Veterans' menopause-related symptoms and their impacts, their access to and use of appropriate menopause-related health services, and the quality of menopause-related care. WHRN goals are to meet the needs of this rapidly growing research community by helping them design and obtain funding for new research, increase dissemination of their research findings, and accelerate the trajectory of research to interventions and implementation of effective services and improved health outcomes. The VA Menopause Research Work Group is currently comprised of over 30 researchers across the U.S., with expertise in clinical and health systems research, all in partnership with the VA Office of Women's Health.

Key Findings:

Menopause symptoms among women Veterans may exacerbate their chronic pain experiences

- Women Veterans with menopause symptoms and/or prescribed menopausal hormone therapy were twice as likely to report chronic pain, including more than one chronic pain diagnosis (e.g., chronic low back, migraine).⁵
- Women Veterans aged 45-64 experiencing both menopause symptoms and chronic pain were more likely to receive high-risk (e.g., long term or high dose) opioid prescriptions compared to those of the same age with chronic pain and no menopausal symptoms.⁶

Traumatic experiences may increase risk for worse menopause symptoms among women Veterans

- Women Veterans with lifetime histories of sexual assault, military sexual trauma, or intimate partner violence may experience worse menopause symptoms, including difficulty sleeping, vasomotor symptoms (e.g., hot flashes), and vaginal symptoms, compared to women Veterans without these traumatic experiences.⁷

Healthcare providers at VA medical centers need more resources to treat the growing number of midlife women Veterans requiring menopause-related care

- VA women's health providers across 73 medical centers, identified a need for additional resources to care for the growing number of Women Veterans with menopause symptoms. These included needs for menopause-specific training, educational materials for Veterans, and clinical resources to treat common menopause symptoms including, sexual function, difficulty sleeping, mood swings, urinary incontinence, and hot flashes.⁸

Funded VA Menopause Research Projects

NEW: Evaluation of an Acupuncture Therapy Clinic for Peri/Post-Menopausal Women Veterans with Chronic Pain. (A-MVP). Felice Indindoli, DAc., LAc, dipl Ac (NCCAOM); VA Pain/Opioid COnsortium and Office of Patient-Centered Care & Cultural Transformation-funded, Apr 2023-Mar 2025). This evaluation of a VA Women's Acupuncture Pain Clinic will assess treatment needs for peri/postmenopausal women Veterans with chronic pain. *For more information:* Felice.Indindoli@va.gov

ONGOING: Development and Feasibility of a Telehealth Mind-Body Menopause Program. (Francesca Nicosia, PhD; VA Office of Rural Health-funded, Oct 2023-Sep 2024). This project is developing and testing a virtual program to support rural women Veterans' physical and mental health through the menopause transition. *For more information:* Francesca.Nicosia@va.gov

COMPLETED: Practice Scan of Menopause-related Services and Resources in VA Medical Centers. (Susan Diem, MD & Carolyn Gibson, PhD, MPH; Office of Women's Health-funded; Feb 2023). This practice scan of VA clinics was conducted to understand the scope current menopause-related services available to Women Veterans and identify clinician needs (e.g., provider training, Veteran-facing educational materials). *For more information:* Susan.Diem@va.gov

COMPLETED: Improving Health Care for Women Veterans: Addressing Menopause and Mental Health. (Carolyn Gibson, PhD, MPH; VA Health Systems Research-funded, Jun 2018-May 2023). This VA Health Systems Research Career Development Award project examined experiences of menopause and menopause-related care from perspectives of midlife women Veterans and VA primary care providers using electronic health records, survey data collection, and interviews. *For more information:* Carolyn.Gibson2@va.gov

COMPLETED: Assessing the Usability of a Veteran-Focused Mobile Application for Menopause Symptom Tracking and Psychoeducation. Carolyn Gibson, PhD, MPH; VA Health Systems Research local pilot-funded Apr 2022-Mar 2023). This project refined and assessed the usability, acceptability, and relative validity of a menopause-focused mobile application with evidence-based psychoeducation and symptom tracking for research and clinical applications. *For more information:* Carolyn.Gibson2@va.gov

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Recommended citation: Friedman JK, Gibson CJ, Diem S, Fenwick K, Yano EM. Women Veteran Menopause Research. *VA Women's Health Research Network (VA HSR SDR 10-012).* 2024.

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