

California Women Veterans

"Let the generations know that women in uniform also guaranteed their freedom. That our resolve was just as great as the brave men who stood among us. ...That the tears fell just as hard for those we left behind us."

* these words are carved into the ceiling of the [Women In Military Service for America Memorial in Washington D.C.](#)

Women in Service: Women have served in the Armed Forces in some capacity since the American Revolution. Women have been awarded the silver and bronze stars, wounded or killed in combat, and taken as Prisoners of War.

- Women are authorized to serve in 99% of Air Force occupations, 66% for the Army, 68% for the Marines, and 88% for the Navy¹.
- However, women currently serve in 19% of Air Force occupations, 13% of the Army, 7% of the Marine Corps, and 16% of the Navy².
- In 1948, Congress made women a permanent part of the military services³.
- In 1988, the Department of Defense adopted a "risk rule" that excluded women from noncombat units or missions if the risks of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture were equal to or greater than the risks in the combat units they supported⁴.
- In 2013, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta lifted the ban on women in combat, allowing them to *officially* serve on the front lines for the first time in the history of the U.S. Armed Forces.
- In 2013, the first four females in history graduated the 59-day infantry evaluation course at the Marine Corps School of Infantry in Camp Geiger, but are still not currently allowed to join infantry units and sent to non-combat jobs as part of continued research⁵.

Rapid Population Growth: The women veteran population is increasing rapidly throughout the nation, especially in California. Since 2007, the population of women veterans has increased 1.1% , making California the second largest population of women veterans in the nation, behind Texas.

Today *in California*, women comprise approximately:

- 184,257 or 11% of all veterans⁶
- 7% of all National Guard⁷
- 49% are ages 41-60⁸
- From the 2011 California Women Veteran survey, 54% of respondents had, at least, a four-year college degree⁹

Nationwide, women comprise approximately:

- 10% of all veterans¹⁰
- 15% of all active duty military¹¹

¹ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Personnel and Readiness. (2012). Report to Congress on the Review of Laws, Policies and Regulations Restricting the Service of Female Members in the U.S. Armed Forces. Retrieved from http://www.defense.gov/news/wisr_report_to_congress.pdf

² Ibid

³ Burrelli, D. (2013). Women in Combat: Issues for Congress. Retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42075.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Shaughnessy, L. (2013). Women will be first to graduate from Marine Corps infantry training course. Retrieved from <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2013/11/19/women-will-be-first-to-graduate-from-marine-corps-infantry-training-course/>

⁶ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2011). Veteran Population

⁷ California Research Bureau. (2011) California Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Serve.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2011). Veteran Population

¹¹ Defense Manpower and Data Center. (2011). Compiled by the Women's Research & Education Center.

- 18% of all National Guard and Reserve¹²
- 6% are VA health care users¹³

By 2034 in California, women will consist of 15% of the veteran population¹⁴

- While the female veteran population rises, the male veteran population decreases by 4.6%¹⁵

Benefits: Women veterans experience additional barriers to receiving and utilizing standard benefits.

In California, from the 2011 California Women Veteran survey,

- A majority of women do not self-identify as veterans and thus have a higher rate of not utilizing their federal/state benefits or participating in veteran events/organizations
- In 2012-2013, women veterans comprised only 5% of the total customer population served by County Veteran Service Offices

Nationwide,

- 2 out of 3 VA disability claims involving Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST)¹⁶ were rejected¹⁷
- 32% of PTSD claims related to MST were approved compared to 54% PTSD claims approved overall¹⁸
- Women generally given lower VA claim ratings (10-30%) than men (70-100%).¹⁹

Trauma: There are higher rates of physical/mental health problems,(MST, alcohol/drug abuse and relationship difficulties) among female veterans that can be linked to an overall increase in unemployment and high rate of homelessness for this population.

In California, from the 2011 Women Veterans Survey, findings were:

- Approximately 1 in 5 reported MST²⁰
- 56% experienced sexual harassment²¹
- 33% experienced sexual assault²²
- 44% lower enlisted personnel reported MST, 38% non-commissioned officers reported MST, and 22% officers reported MST²³

Nationwide,

- MST has been found to be more traumatic and debilitating than sexual assaults and rapes in the civilian context²⁴
- MST is more likely to lead to PTSD than any other military or civilian traumatic event, including combat exposure²⁵
- Just under 39% of homeless women veterans screened positive for MST²⁶
- Among OEF/OIF women veterans who had PTSD symptoms, 47% screened positive for high risk drinking²⁷

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Definition of Military Sexual Trauma (Title 38 US Code 1720D): Psychological trauma, which in judgment of a VA mental health professional, resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the Veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training

¹⁷ Service Women Action Network. (2012). Rape, Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military Quick Facts. Retrieved from <http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Final-RSASH-10.8.2012.pdf>

¹⁸ Bryant, A. (2012). DAV Takes on MST Claims and Compensation Process. Retrieved from <http://www.dav.org/news/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=637>

¹⁹ United States Department of Veterans. (2012). Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans. Women Veterans Task Force Draft for Public Comment

²⁰ California Research Bureau. (2011) California Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Serve.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Kim, C. (2013). Memorandum: Women Veterans & Housing. Women Veterans Housing Working Group. Empirical Support for Sex-Segregation in Veteran-Only Housing Facilities

²⁵ Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General. (2012). Inpatient and Residential Programs for Female Veterans with Mental Health Conditions Related to Military Sexual Trauma

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Batuman F, Bean-Mayberry B, Goldzweig CL, Huang C, Miake-Lye IM, Washington DL, Yano EM, Zephyrin LC, Shekelle PG. Health Effects of Military Service on Women Veterans. VA-ESP Project # 05-226; 2011

- Deployment related reproductive issues included problems during pregnancy and urinary tract infections²⁸
- More likely to be divorced than non-veteran women. About 23% of all female veterans are currently divorced compared with 13% of non-veteran women²⁹

Health Care: As women continue to use VHA services more, commensurate movement by the VHA delivery systems also needs to reflect their unique needs by providing them appropriate and proper care.

In California, from the 2011 Women Veterans Survey, findings were:

- 46% self-reported a mental health condition; 37% diagnosed with a mental health condition when they returned from Iraq/Afghanistan³⁰
- 1/3 sought mental health services outside of the VA³¹
- 71% of MST veterans used VHA or military healthcare, but 57% felt they did not receive appropriate services (See Figures 1 and 2)³²
- 21% use civilian health care, 59% feel they do receive appropriate services³³
- More likely to have a service-connected disability than male veterans³⁴

Nationwide,

- Higher percentage of female veterans use VA health care only³⁵
- Women are more likely than men to use non-VA care, to have a service-connected disability, and are substantially younger with 42% of women and 12% of men being less than 45 years old³⁶
- Approx. 55% OEF/OIF/OND women veterans nationwide currently use the VA³⁷
- Women are more likely to report depression and general anxiety symptoms and are twice as likely to be diagnosed with personality disorders³⁸
- Effects of deployment among OEF/OIF women included higher rates of moderate to severe pain, higher distress after the first deployment and, when added with combat experiences, high rates of eating disorders and extreme weight loss³⁹

²⁸ Bean-Mayberry B, Yano EM, Washington DL, Goldzweig C, Batuman F, Huang C, Miake-Lye I, Shekelle PG. (2011). Systematic Review of Women Veterans' Health: Update on Successes and Gaps. *Women's Health Issues* 21-4S, S83-S97. Doi:10.1016/j.whi.2011.04.022

²⁹ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). Women Veteran Profile. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Office of Policy and Planning

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid*

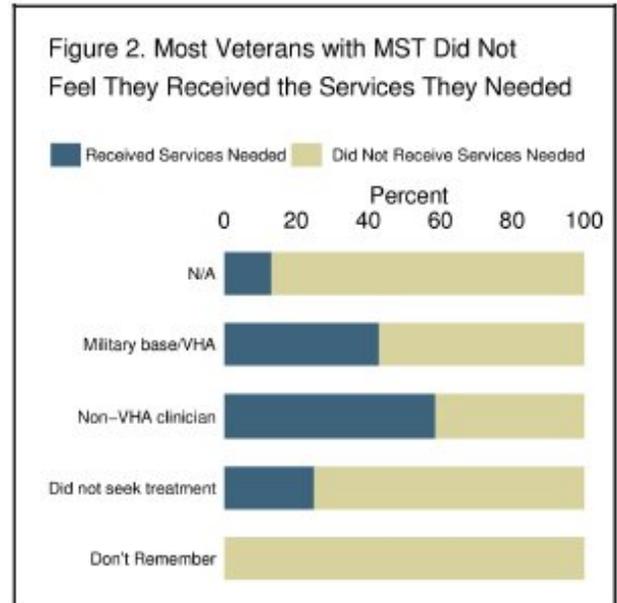
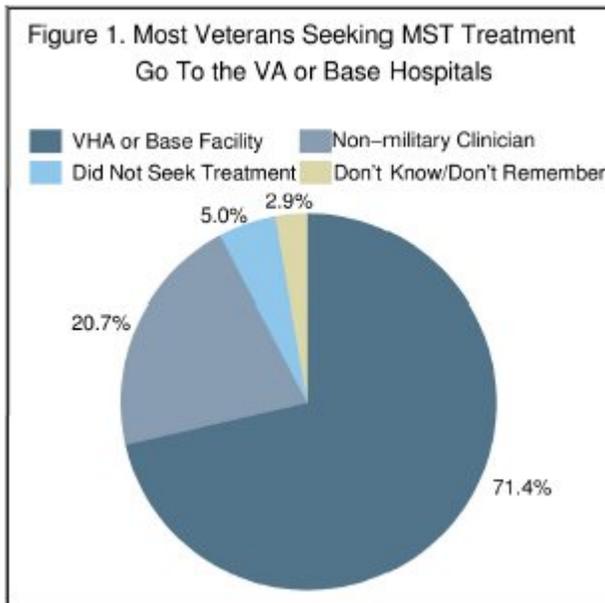
³⁵ United States Department of Veterans. (2012). Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans. Women Veterans Task Force Draft for Public Comment

³⁶ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2012). Sourcebook: Women Veterans in the Veterans Health Administration Volume 2: Sociodemographics and Use of VHA and Non-VA Care (Fee). Washington, DC.

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Society for Women's Health Research. (2009). PTSD in Women Returning From Combat: Future Directions in Research and Service Delivery. Retrieved from http://www.womenshealthresearch.org/site/DocServer/PTSD_in_Women_Returning_From_Combat--reduced_file_size.pdf

³⁹ Batuman F, Bean-Mayberry B, Goldzweig CL, Huang C, Miake-Lye IM, Washington DL, Yano EM, Zephyrin LC, Shekelle PG. Health Effects of Military Service on Women Veterans. VA-ESP Project # 05-226; 2011



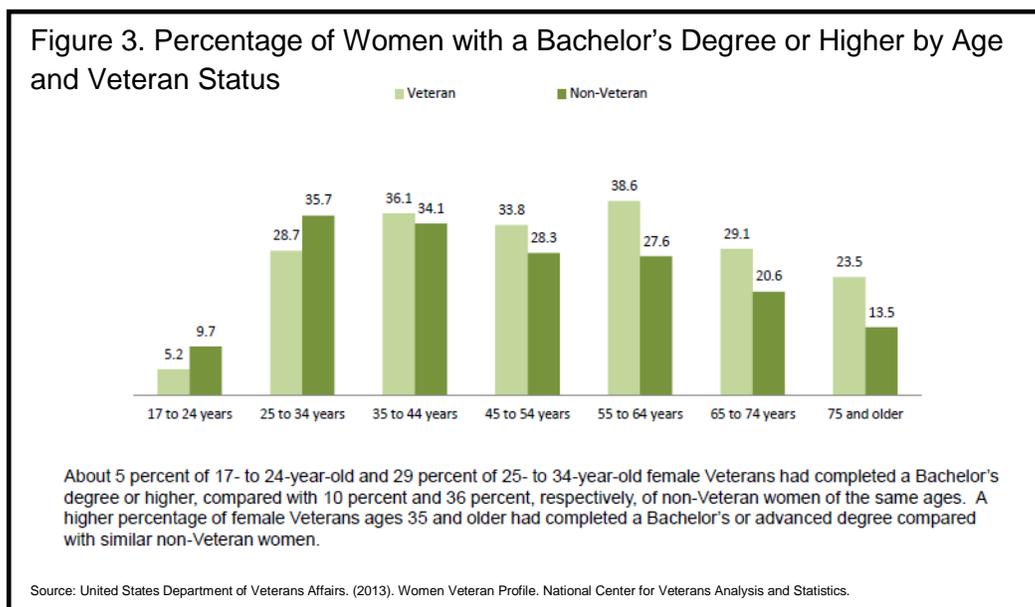
Education: Women veterans are more likely to pursue an education and obtain a degree utilizing their educational benefits.

In California, from the 2011 California Women Veteran survey,

- 55% have a four year college degree⁴⁰
- 23% have a two-year college degree⁴¹
- 25% have a Masters or higher⁴²

Nationwide,

- 50% of OEF/OIF/OND women veterans nationwide were likely to report using educational benefits compared to 37% of their male counterparts⁴³
- Approx 78% of female veterans completed some college, a Bachelor's degree, or an advanced degree, compared with approx 61% of male veterans⁴⁴
- 88% of women veterans were enrolled in college compared to 64% of male veterans⁴⁵



⁴⁰ California Research Bureau. (2011) California Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Serve

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ United States Department of Veterans. (2012). Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans. Women Veterans Task Force Draft for Public Comment

⁴⁴ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Women Veteran Profile.

⁴⁵ United States Department of Veterans. (2012). Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans. Women Veterans Task Force Draft for Public Comment

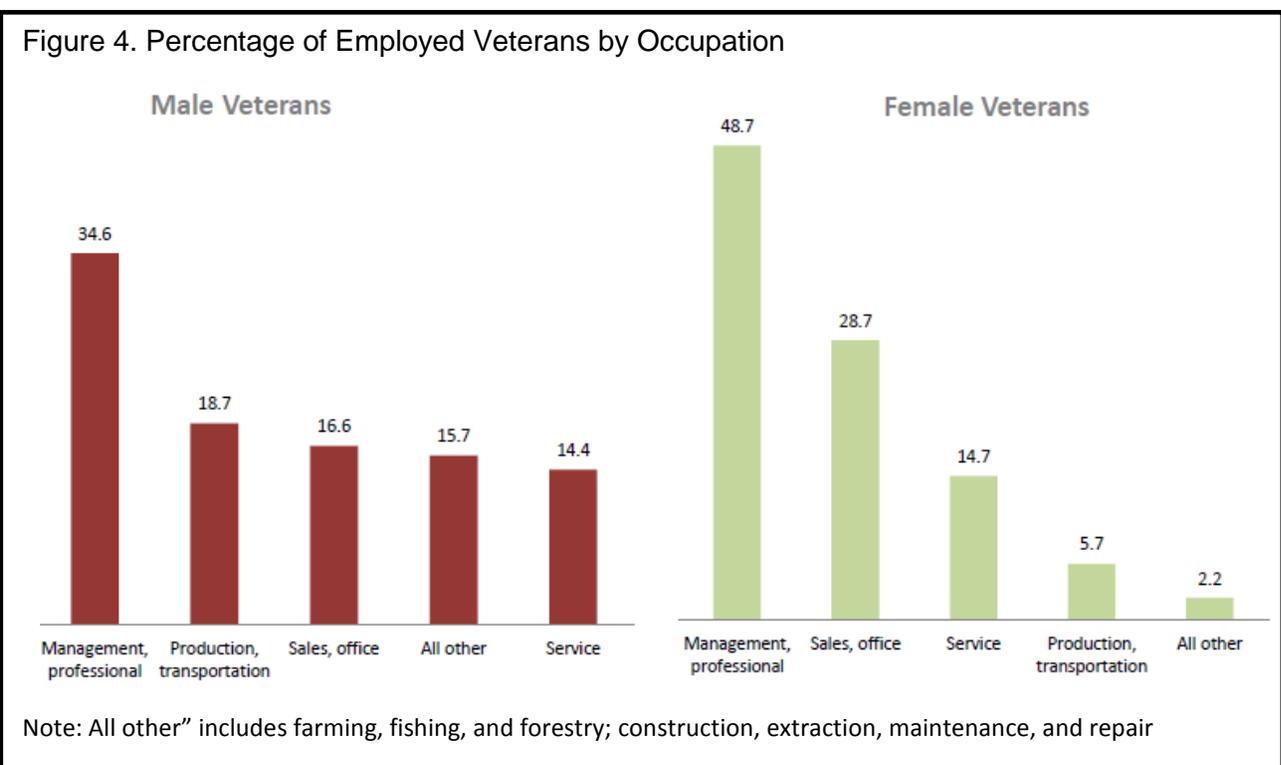
Employment: Although women veterans work in management and professional occupations at a higher rate than non-veteran women, they still do not earn as much as male veterans and continue to struggle to find jobs that pay what their military career did⁴⁶

In California, from the 2011 California Women Veteran survey,

- Approximately 36% of women who separated as officers were unemployed⁴⁷
- Women who served 10 years or more had a full-time employment rate of approx 49%; women who served less than 2 years had a full-time employment rate of approx 22%⁴⁸

Nationwide,

- 36% women veterans age 18-24 nation-wide are unemployed; significantly more likely to be unemployed than male veterans and non-veteran women⁴⁹
- Women veterans working in management and professional occupations is about 8% higher than non-veteran women⁵⁰
- Approx. 38% of women veterans work for local, state, or federal government compared to 18% of non-veteran women⁵¹
- Women veterans on average earn almost \$10,000 less a year than male veterans⁵²



⁴⁶ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Women Veteran Profile.

⁴⁷ California Research Bureau. (2011) California Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Serve

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2012). Strategies for Serving Our Women Veterans. Women Veterans Task Force Draft for Public Comment

⁵⁰ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Women Veteran Profile.

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² Mulhall, E. (2009). Women Warriors Supporting She 'Who Has Borne the Battle'. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Housing/Homelessness: According to a recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Department of Housing and Urban Development and the VA do not collect detailed enough data on homeless women veterans in the general population and lack the knowledge needed from that to “plan service effectively, allocate grants to providers, and track progress toward its overall goal of ending veteran homelessness by 2015.”⁵³

In California, from the 2011 California Women Veteran survey,

- More than 10% were either currently homeless or had been homeless for some period of time (13%)⁵⁴
- More likely to have children/dependents with them⁵⁵
- Women in their 40s were most likely to be homeless, with women in their 30s and 50s following closely⁵⁶
- Women not likely to use the Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program that combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) due to substandard housing conditions and/or a failure to allow dependents⁵⁷
- In 2013, the VA awarded over 35 Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF) grants throughout California which include housing for dependents⁵⁸
- In 2013, the five major city Continuums of Care with the highest rates of unsheltered male/female veterans were all located in California. At 81%, San Jose had the largest percentage of male/female unsheltered veterans. Los Angeles followed, with 77% of male/female veterans living in unsheltered locations⁵⁹
- In 2013, the five major city Continuums of Care with the highest rates of unsheltered male/female veterans were all located in California. At 81 percent, San Jose had the largest percentage of unsheltered male/female veterans. Los Angeles followed, with 77 percent of male/female veterans living in unsheltered locations (Figure 5)⁶⁰

Nationwide,

- 13% of women veterans utilize HUD-VASH; 43% of these women have children⁶¹
- VA identified 33% of homeless women veterans had a minor child living with them, compared to 8% of male veterans⁶²
- Women veterans are two to four times more likely to become homeless, compared to non-veteran women⁶³
- The percentage of women among sheltered veterans increased 2.3 percentage points since 2009⁶⁴

⁵³ Government Accountability Office. (2011). Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-182>

⁵⁴ California Research Bureau. (2011) California Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Serve

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ California Department of Veterans Affairs, Women's Division. (2012).

⁵⁸ Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). 2013 SSVF Awards. Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp>

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013). The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013). The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>

⁶¹ Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. (2013). A National Summit On Women Veteran Homelessness A Leadership Dialogue

⁶² Government Accountability Office. (2011). Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-182>

⁶³ Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. (2013). A National Summit On Women Veteran Homelessness A Leadership Dialogue

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

* Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation New Dawn (OND); Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veteran Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA)

Figure 5 CoCs with the Highest/Lowest Rates of Homeless Veterans Who Were Unsheltered

Major City CoCs			Smaller City, County, and Regional CoCs			Major City CoCs			Smaller City, County, and Regional CoCs		
CoC	Total Homeless Veterans	% Unsheltered	CoC	Total Homeless Veterans	% Unsheltered	CoC	Total Homeless Veterans	% Unsheltered	CoC	Total Homeless Veterans	% Unsheltered
Highest Rates						Lowest Rates					
San Jose/Santa Clara City & County, CA	718	80.6	Fort Pierce/St. Lucie, Indian River, Martin Counties, FL	94	100.0	Raleigh/Wake County, NC	203	0.5	Chester County, PA	259	0.0
Los Angeles City & County, CA	6,291	77.0	San Buenaventura/Ventura County, CA	91	93.4	Detroit, MI	518	2.1	Pittsfield/Berkshire County, MA	244	0.0
Fresno/Madera County, CA	338	76.0	San Luis Obispo County, CA	260	90.8	Omaha/Council Bluffs, NE	91	2.2	Somerset County, NJ	99	0.0
Oakland/Alameda County, CA	492	71.7	Pasco County, CA	368	90.5	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY	171	2.3	Waukegan/North Chicago/Lake County, IL	82	0.0
San Francisco, CA	716	58.9	Morristown/Blount, Sevier, Campbell, Cocke Counties, TN	37	89.2	Boston, MA	458	2.6	Brockton/Plymouth City & County, MA	74	0.0

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. (2013). *The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*. Retrieved from <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>

- *In order to keep informed of legislation, activities/events, and programs that effect women veterans, please ensure you complete and submit the Women Veterans Roster at <http://www.calvet.ca.gov/Files/Women/RosterForm.pdf>*