

**FACT SHEET**  
**PTSD due to Military Sexual Trauma (MST)**  
**Veterans Benefits Administration**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to serving our Nation's Veterans by accurately adjudicating claims based on MST in a thoughtful and caring manner, fully recognizing the unique evidentiary considerations involved in such an event. Because service records for these claims may lack corroborating evidence that a stressful event occurred, VA regulations make clear that evidence from sources other than a Veteran's service records may corroborate the Veteran's account of the stressor incident.

Through enhanced training programs, updated policies, and specially trained coordinators deployed throughout the country, VA has improved the way it handles and processes disability claims for PTSD due to military sexual trauma (MST). As a result, the approval rates for these claims have increased and are now close to approval rates for other PTSD claims.

- o VA developed training curricula for claims specialists to help them distinguish indicators of PTSD stressors that result from sexual trauma such as deterioration in duty performance, requests for transfer, or substance abuse.
- o Training was extended to VA healthcare providers who conduct evaluations for MST-related claims.
- o VA trained Women Veterans Coordinators, who are now located in each of VA's 56 regional offices, to assist both female and male Veterans with their MST-related PTSD claims.
- o VA created dedicated claims processing teams within each VA regional office for exclusive handling of MST-related PTSD claims, which are processed in the "special operations" lane.

Prior to this training initiative, the grant rate for PTSD claims based on MST was about 34 percent. Following the training, the grant rate rose month by month. **For FY 2013, VA data shows that grant rates for PTSD based on MST are within 6 percentage points of the overall grant rates for all PTSD claims.** The grant rate for male Veterans claiming PTSD based on MST is now within 7 percentage points of the grant rate for female Veterans filing the same claim. The gender difference on the grant rate for all PTSD claims was only 2 percentage points in FY 2013.

**Important Actions Taken by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Resources for Veterans:**

- **Veterans who previously filed disability claims for PTSD due to MST and were denied prior to the 2011 training initiative may ask their regional office to review their PTSD claims to determine if additional development is warranted to support the claim. Veterans can find the contact information for their local Veterans Benefits Administration office by calling 1-800-827-1000 or by visiting the VA's website at: <http://www.va.gov/directory>**
- **VA regulations allow for more liberal evidentiary standards for PTSD due to MST.**
  - o A typical characteristic of MST is a Servicemember's reluctance to formally report an incident for fear of reprisal or perception of an unresponsive military chain of command, which makes VA's requirement for evidence of the in-service trauma difficult to obtain.

- o VA accepts evidence from sources other than the Veteran's service record to corroborate the Veteran's account of the stressor. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - o Law enforcement authorities
  - o Rape crisis center
  - o Pregnancy tests
  - o Tests for sexually transmitted disease
  - o Statements from: family members, roommates and clergy
- o Evidence of behavior changes, called "markers," is also used. Examples are:
  - o Requests for transfer
  - o Deterioration/Hyper work performance
  - o Substance abuse
- **VA offers free healthcare for conditions resulting from MST to individuals regardless of service connection.**
  - o Any Veteran may enroll in VA healthcare and receive counseling and treatment for any emotional or physical condition experienced as a result of MST occurring while on active duty or active duty for training.
  - o Counseling and treatment are available at any VA healthcare facility or Vet Center in the United States without regard for a VA service-connected rating or the length of the Veteran's military service.
  - o Veterans do not need a VA service-connected disability rating to be eligible for free MST-related treatment through VA Medical Centers and Clinics. No documentation is required to receive MST-related treatment. Since 1992, VA has been providing FREE healthcare to Veterans for conditions deemed to result 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. A disability compensation rating is not required to receive this healthcare.

*To learn more about what VA is doing to care for our Nation's Veterans living with PTSD, visit [www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp). To learn more about free counseling for victims of in-service sexual assault and sexual harassment and regarding MST-related treatment visit [www.vetcenter.va.gov/Military\\_Sexual\\_Trauma.asp](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Military_Sexual_Trauma.asp) and [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp)*

More information about VBA's MST work can be found here:  
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/serviceconnected/MST.pdf>.