

## WOMEN VETERANS

As of September 2012, women were estimated to comprise more than 1.8 million, or 8.6 percent, of all living veterans. This represents a 33 percent increase since 2002, when women represented 6.4 percent of all living veterans, and this percentage is expected to increase in future years. By 2035, women are projected to make up 15 percent of all veterans—similar to the current proportion of active duty military personnel that are female.<sup>85</sup>

The largest group of living women veterans today are from the Gulf War Era and the most recent conflicts: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND). The continually changing military roles of women, multiple deployments, and the blurring of combat and non-combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan

suggest that the needs of these women veterans may differ greatly from the needs of women veterans from previous eras.

Due to the more recent increase in military enrollment and opportunities for women, female veterans are much younger than their male counterparts. In 2010, 21.6 percent of female veterans were aged 18–34 compared to only 6.9 percent of male veterans. Conversely, 44.0 percent of male veterans were aged 65 and older compared to only 15.8 percent of female veterans. Expressed differently, women comprised 19.6 percent of all veterans aged 18–34 years but only 2.7 percent of veterans aged 65 and older (data not shown).

In addition to being younger, women veterans are also more racially diverse and more highly educated than their male counterparts. In 2010, 31.8 percent of women veterans were of minor-

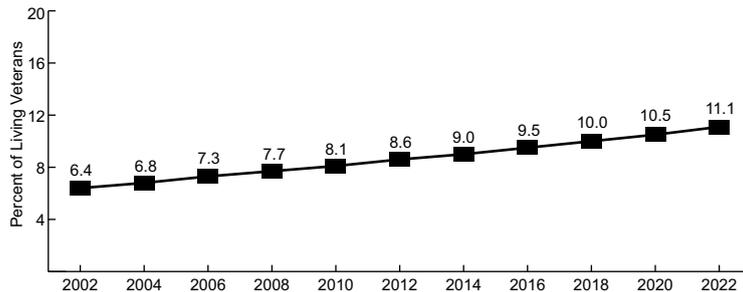
ity race or ethnicity compared to 18.5 percent of male veterans. Female veterans were particularly more likely to be non-Hispanic Black than male veterans (19.3 versus 10.2 percent, respectively). Nearly 80 percent of women veterans had obtained post-secondary education beyond high school (78.1 percent) compared to 60.9 percent of male veterans (data not shown).

Relative to civilian non-veteran women, female veterans tend to be slightly older, more likely to be non-Hispanic Black, more educated, and less likely to be in poverty.<sup>86</sup>

Overall, in 2010, a higher proportion of female than male veterans reported having a service-connected disability (18.0 versus 15.4 percent, respectively)—determined by the Veterans Benefits Administration as injuries or illnesses incurred or aggravated during military service. Regardless of sex, the prevalence of service-con-

### Living Women Veteran Population, 2002–2022\*

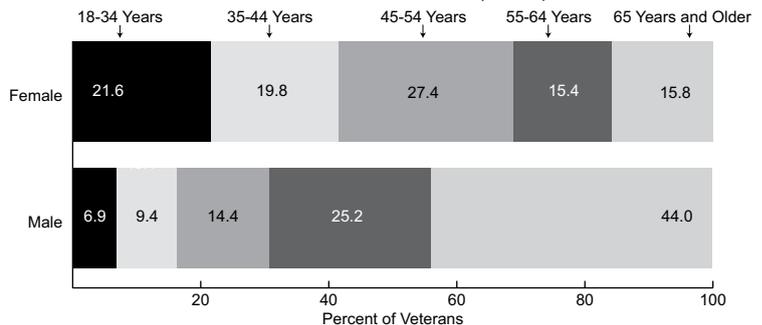
Source II.30: Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Policy & Planning



\*Historical data from 2000–2005; projected data from 2008 onward.

### Veteran Population, by Sex and Age, 2010

Source II.31: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



nected disability declined with age. At older ages, male veterans are more likely to have a service-connected disability than women veterans. For example, for those aged 65 and older, 12.0 percent of male veterans had a service-connected disability compared to 9.0 percent of women veterans. The most prevalent service-connected disabilities for women veterans in 2009 were post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), lower back pain, and migraines, accounting for 15 percent of service-connected disabilities (data not shown).<sup>86</sup> Among users of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care, a link between PTSD and military sexual trauma—defined as sexual assault and/or severe and threatening sexual harassment that occurred during military service—may be stronger for women than men.<sup>87</sup>

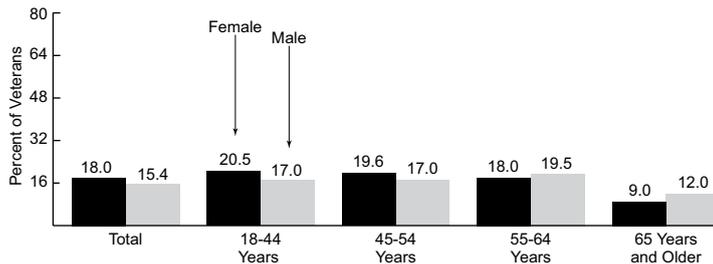
For the above reasons and despite higher educational attainment and income,<sup>86</sup> women veterans may face greater health challenges compared to civilian women.<sup>88</sup> In 2010, women veterans were more likely than their civilian counterparts to report smoking (18.5 versus 15.5 percent, respectively), being overweight or obese (61.2 versus 55.9 percent, respectively), and having limitations in activity due to physical, mental, or emotional problems (29.3 versus 20.7 percent, respectively). Women veterans were also more likely than civilian women to report having poor mental health on 14 or more days in the past month (18.1 versus 12.5 percent, respectively). Levels of activity limitations and frequent mental distress were also higher than

those reported by male veterans (23.3 and 11.1 percent of male veterans, respectively; data not shown). However, women veterans were more likely than civilian women to have received a past-year preventive visit (76.2 versus 72.0 percent, respectively).

Today, more than 337,000 women veterans or 19 percent of all women veterans use VA health care, double the number from a decade ago.<sup>89</sup> The VA is improving services to make sure women who are eligible for VA care can access services tailored to their needs and has expanded research on the impacts of trauma and combat exposure for women, mental health outcomes of civilian reintegration, and overall health care needs of women veterans.

### Service-Connected Disability\* Among Veterans, by Age and Sex, 2010

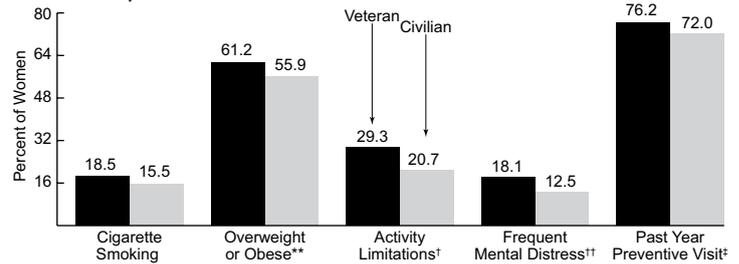
Source II.31: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



\*Report of injuries or illnesses incurred or aggravated during military service as determined by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

### Selected Health Indicators\* Among Women Aged 18 and Older, by Veteran Status, 2010

Source II.7: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System



\*All estimates are age-adjusted. \*\*Body mass index  $\geq 25$ . †Report of limitations to activity due to physical, mental, or emotional problems. ††Report of having poor mental health  $\geq 14$  days in past month. ‡Report of a routine checkup in the past year, defined as a general physical exam that was not for a specific injury, illness, or condition.