

## **WOMEN VETERANS AND OTHER HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 2013** *IMPROVING CARE AND SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES*

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### **The Problem – VA’s fertility treatment services do not meet the complex needs of severely wounded veterans.**

After a decade at war, many women servicemembers are still at risk for reproductive and urinary tract issues due to deployment conditions and a lack of predeployment women’s health information, compounded by privacy and safety concerns. Moreover, the nature of the current conflict and increasing use of improvised explosive devices leaves all servicemembers far more susceptible to blast injuries including spinal cord injury and trauma to the reproductive and urinary tracts. Department of Defense (DOD) data show that between 2003 and 2012 nearly 2000 women and men suffered these life-changing battle injuries while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

As these injured servicemembers return home, they work to move forward with their lives and pursue their goals and dreams. For many this includes starting their own family. DOD and Tricare are already able to provide [fertility treatment](#) to servicemembers with these injuries. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers fertility treatments but these services don’t always meet the complex needs of severely injured veterans. Little is known about the impact that these issues and injuries have on the long-term health care needs of veterans.

### **The Problem – VA is slowly adapting to the needs of women veterans.**

As the population of women veterans continues to grow, VA must continue to adapt to meet the needs of women veterans and their families. Through the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act enacted in 2010, Congress enhanced care for women veterans but more work remains to make VA a friendly environment for women veterans and veterans with families.

### **The Solution – The Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act of 2013.**

**The Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act of 2013** complements VA’s programs for women veterans and families of veterans by enhancing VA’s fertility treatment services, along with other programs.

- *Enhanced treatment and care:* The Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act enhances the reproductive treatment and care options available to veterans, to include assisted reproductive technology<sup>1</sup>. For example, a female veteran might experience an infection that causes scarring in her fallopian tubes. Enhancing VA’s services would help her to conceive by having one of her fertilized embryos implanted into her womb.
- *Fertility treatment for spouses:* The Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act makes an eligible family member or surrogate of a severely wounded veteran eligible for the same fertility treatment and associated reproductive health care services for which a veteran would be eligible. For example, a male veteran may suffer spinal cord injuries that make it challenging to naturally fertilize an egg. Allowing spouses to be eligible for treatment would allow VA to provide comprehensive fertility care for the veteran and his family.
- *Adoption assistance:* The Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act increases the family-building options available to veterans by allowing VA to provide limited financial assistance to severely wounded veteran to adopt one or more children.

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<sup>1</sup> IVF is specifically excluded from VA’s medical benefits package by regulation (38 CFR 17.38 (c)(2)).