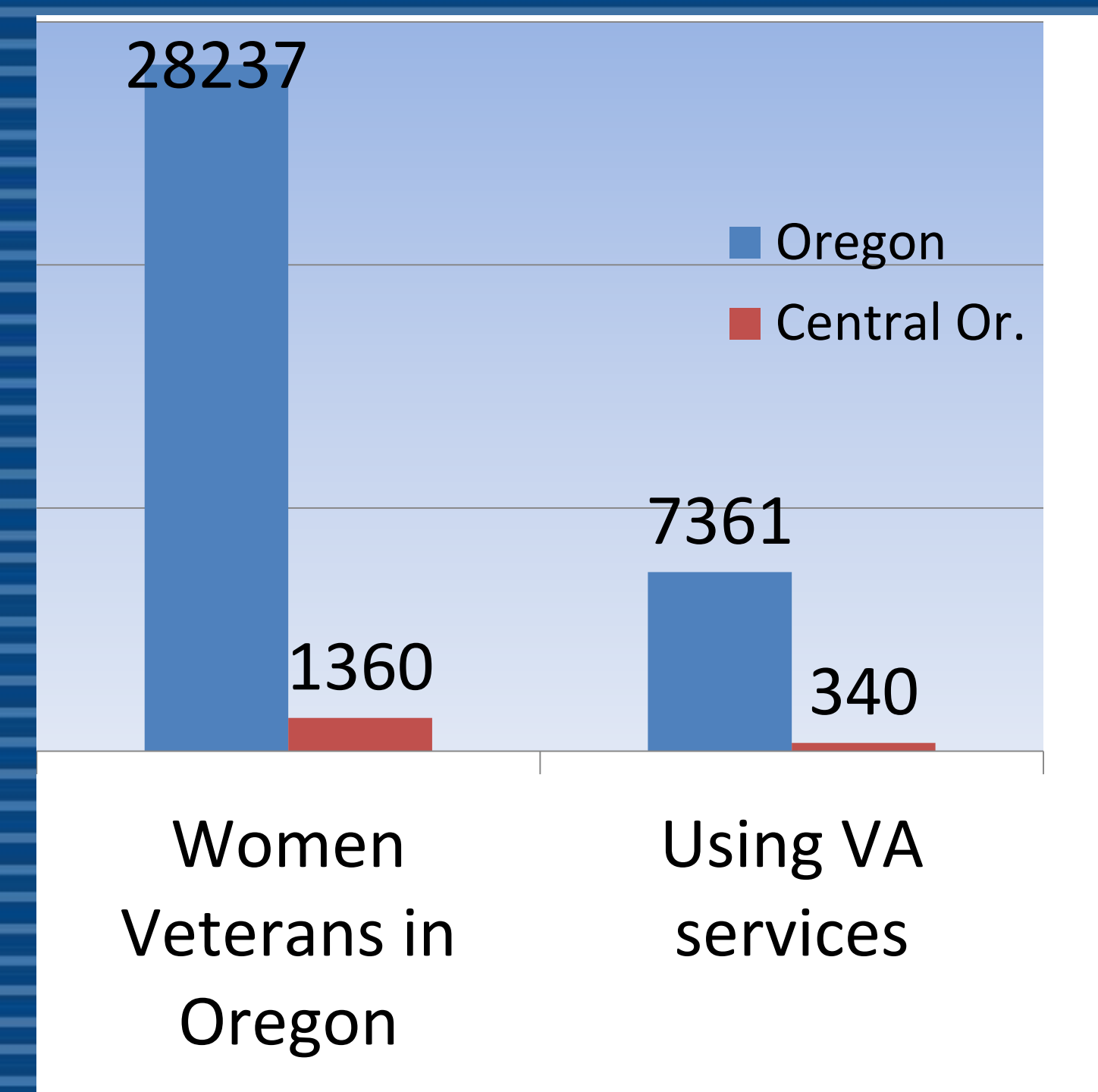


# Women Veteran Health in Rural Oregon

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## Women Veterans – Overlooked and Underserved



### Women Veteran Facts

Women Veterans = 10% of Veteran Population in the US.

Average Age : Women Veterans = 43 : Male Veterans = 63.

ONE in FIVE women enlisted are in combat support roles.

Top three health care issues for women veterans in VHA care are PTSD, Depression and Hypertension

Of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, women make up 11.6 % of that population.

57.4 % of these women receive care from VHA and 51% are under the age of 43

ONE in FIVE women respond "YES" when screened for MST.

#### Participants

- Participants included both women veterans and community providers living in Central Oregon.
- A total of 12 participants, 6 women veterans and 6 community providers participated in individual interviews.
- A small group of participants created rich in-depth interview data was obtained from subjects purposefully selected to provide a wide variety of views on the same subject.

Approximately 320 women veterans living in Central Oregon use the VA outpatient clinic, out of a total of 1360 women veterans who qualify.

### Women Veteran Health Care in Rural Areas

For many veterans, community providers in rural and less populated areas may be the only access to health care.  
Health providers should be well prepared to care for veterans in their communities.

Starting a conversation about military experience will help to build trust between community providers and women veterans, improving health outcomes.

### Women Veterans in Oregon:

- The number of women veterans in the US is approximately 2.2 million. Oregon has 25,226.
- There are 1360 women veterans within a 3 county area in Central Oregon. Of these, it is estimated that 320 use the Bend VA-CBOC.
- Many of these women live in rural areas where it is very challenging to connect them to resources.
- Women may choose to see a community provider for their health needs.
- MST and military experience screening by community providers can make a significant impact in improving health of women veterans.

### Women Veterans using VA services:

Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson County (Central Oregon) = 1360 women veterans

Women Veterans receiving care at the Bend VHA-Community Based Outpatient Clinic = 340

### Screening

Community providers did not routinely screen for military experience and were not familiar with VA benefits.

### Military Culture in Community Health Settings

Women veterans felt that their military experience was not understood.  
"They looked at me like I was crazy when I told them about them that I had been in the military"  
• Women Veterans have a high incidence of undiagnosed depression related to PTSD

Women veterans use VA for specialty care and community providers for OB/GYN, primary and episodic health needs.

Some women reported feeling misunderstood at the VA. They would go to the VA for specialty resources and service-related care and use community providers for primary care.

### Community Providers didn't ask about military experience (n=6)

"If it was important, wouldn't they bring it up?"

Women veterans think it is important to be asked about their military experience.

Yes (n=4) , No (n=2)

### Recommendations for Improving the Health of Women Veterans in Rural Areas:

- Military Culture: Raising awareness**  
Acknowledging Veterans and establishing trust to promote discussion of health concerns and referrals as necessary to VA resources.
- Use Screening tools for consistency**  
Questions specific to military experience can identify veterans at high risk for specific health problems for women veterans such as PTSD, MST, depression, substance abuse, obesity and hypertension.
- Community Providers should seek continuous training for best practice when caring for veterans**  
The VA offers free online training modules for PTSD and other health care issues for veterans. Community providers can access these and other valuable training tools.

### Conclusions

- The number of women veterans will continue to increase over the next 5-10 years.
- Community providers need to be prepared to collaborate with VA to promote optimal health.
- A large proportion of women veterans continue to seek care in the community they live in, outside of VA services.