- The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2008 -

A bill to expand and improve health care services to women veterans, particularly those brave women who have served our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. This bill aims to equip the VA for the long-term needs that will be associated with a greater women veteran population.

A Fast Growing Population with Unique Needs

Women veterans have unique mental and physical health care needs that the VA is currently underprepared to handle.

- Women make up 14 percent of our current active duty, guard and reserves.
- Today, there are approximately 1.7 million total women veterans, or 7 percent of the nearly 25 million total veteran population.
- It is projected that the number of female veterans who use the VA system will double in the next five years, assuming current enrollment rates stay the same, making female veterans one of the fastest growing subgroups of veterans.
- Among the issues women disproportionally face upon returning home are the effects of Military Sexual Trauma, the difficulties of being thrust into a care-giving role, child birth, and the difficulties of being less likely to have military service recognized or appreciated.

A Look at What the VA is Doing and What More Needs to be Done

This bill authorizes several new assessments of the care we are and should be providing to women veterans.

- Authorizes two studies of women that have served in Iraq and Afghanistan to asses the effects of those conflicts on their physical, mental, and reproductive health. One study would be performed by the VA in cooperation with the DoD and a separate study would be performed by the Institute of Medicine. The results of both reports would then be reported to Congress.
- Requires the Secretary of the VA to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the barriers women currently face in accessing care through the VA. Among the many factors the Secretary is required to consider are the availability of child care and the personal safety and comfort of women.
- Requires the Secretary to study the effectiveness of the specialized programs the VA currently offers to women.

New Programs that Will Prepare the VA for Today and Tomorrow

This bill authorizes new programs aimed at improving the VA's capacity to care for women veterans' mental and physical health care needs.

- Provides the VA with authority to care to a newborn child of a woman veteran who is receiving maternity care from the VA.
- Requires that the VA implement a program to train, educate, and certify VA mental health professionals to care for women with Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) using evidence-based treatments.
- Requires the VA to begin a pilot program that provides child care to women veterans that seek mental health care or other intensive healthcare services at the VA.
- Requires that the VA begin a pilot program that provides readjustment counseling to women veterans in group retreat settings.
- Requires a full-time women veterans program manager at all VA medical centers.
- Requires the inclusion of women that are recently separated from service on VA advisory boards.