



RENSSELAER COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

Rensselaer County
Unified Family Services
Veterans Service Agency

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Www.rensco.com

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STEVEN F. McLAUGHLIN
County Executive

Military Sexual Trauma

VA uses the term “military sexual trauma” (MST) to refer to sexual assault or threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service. MST includes any sexual activity during military service in which you are involved against your will or when unable to say no. Examples include:

- Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities, such as with threats of negative treatment if you refuse to cooperate or with promises of better treatment
- Sexual contact or activities without your consent, including when you were asleep or intoxicated
- Being overpowered or physically forced to have sex
- Being touched or grabbed in a sexual way that made you uncomfortable, including during “hazing” experiences
- Comments about your body or sexual activities that you found threatening
- Unwanted sexual advances that you found threatening

IMPACT

People of all genders, ages, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and branches of service have experienced MST. Like other types of trauma, MST can negatively affect a person’s mental and physical health, even many years later. Things you may experience could include:

- Disturbing memories or nightmares
- Difficulty feeling safe
- Feelings of depression or numbness
- Using alcohol or other drugs to numb or escape from negative feelings
- Feeling isolated from other people
- Difficulties with anger, irritability, or other strong emotions
- Self-doubt, self-blame, or decreased self esteem
- Issues with sleep
- Physical health problems

If you are having any current difficulties related to MST, VA is here to support you in whatever way will help you best — from learning more about how MST affects people, to treatment that helps you cope with how MST is impacting your life currently, or treatment that involves discussing your experiences in more depth.

For questions about treatment and health care options related to MST, talk with an **MST Coordinator** at a VA health care facility near you. (**Albany (VISN 2) Samuel S. Stratton Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center: [Amanda Smith, PhD \(518\) 626-5372](tel:5186265372)**).

TREATMENT

Military sexual trauma can be a very difficult life experience, but recovery is possible. VA offers a range of services to meet MST survivors where they are in their recovery.

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Van Transportation...

Don't drive and need to get to the Albany VA Medical Center ?

We offer complimentary van transportation to and from the Albany VAMC for *most morning* medical appointments.

For more details call:
518-270-2760.



VETERANS CRISIS LINE

**DIAL 988
PRESS 1**

Confidential chat at
Veterans CrisisLine.net
or text to **838255**
TTY service 1-800-799-4889

Confidential support 24
hours a day, 7 days a
week, 365 days a year,
for veterans and their
loved ones.

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Treatment for any physical or mental health condition related to MST is provided free of charge, regardless of when the MST occurred.

ELIGIBILITY FOR MST-RELATED CARE

MST-related services are available at any VA health care facility for individuals with Veteran status and most former Service members with an Other Than Honorable or uncharacterized discharge. Standard length of service requirements do not apply to eligibility for MST-related care, and some individuals may be able to receive MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA care. Service connection (that is, a VA disability rating) is not needed.

MST-related care is also available to **former National Guard and Reserve members** with federal active duty service or a service-connected disability who were discharged under honorable conditions or with an Other Than Honorable discharge. The service-connected disability does not need to be related to their experiences of MST.

Current Service members also can receive services related to MST. At VA's community-based Vet Centers, current Service members-including members of the National Guard and Reserves-can receive MST-related mental health counseling regardless of gender or era of service. No Department of Defense (DoD) referral is needed, and services are confidential with respect to DoD. In addition, current Service members can also receive MST-related care at VA medical facilities with a DoD referral and TRICARE authorization. General TRICARE copayment requirements may apply. Current Service members' records from services at VA medical facilities are available to DoD through VA-DoD open health care record sharing.

Individuals are not required to have reported their MST experiences when they happened or have documentation that they occurred in order to receive care.

MST-RELATED SERVICES

- Every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues and who can assist you with accessing care. For questions about treatment and health care options related to MST, contact the MST Coordinator nearest you.
- MST-related outpatient services are available at every VA medical center and many VA community-based outpatient clinics. Services are organized differently at different facilities, and MST-related care is available even if a facility does not have a specific MST treatment team. Mental health services include psychological assessment and evaluation, medication evaluation and treatment, and individual and group psychotherapy. Treatment for physical health conditions related to MST is also available.
- Many VA clinics offer the support of professionally trained and certified Veteran peer specialists who are part of an individual's treatment team. By drawing on their personal experience, peer specialists inspire hope, serve as recovery role models, and help Veterans with healthy coping strategies. MST survivors can receive peer support services after getting a referral from a health care provider at their local VA facility.
- Community-based Vet Centers provide MST-related outpatient counseling and referral services in a nonmedical setting.
- In some cases, VA may cover the costs of health care services with a non-VA community provider if a VA provider determines that receiving care from the community provider is in an individual's best medical interest or if services are unavailable at a VA facility in the individual's area. Talk with your local MST Coordinator to learn more.
- For individuals needing more intensive support, VA also provides MST-related mental health treatment in residential or inpatient settings. Because some individuals who experienced MST do not feel comfortable in mixed-gender treatment settings, some facilities have separate programs for men and women. All residential and inpatient programs have separate sleeping areas for men and women.
- Individuals can request a clinician of a particular gender if it helps them feel more comfortable.
- You don't need to discuss or disclose your MST experience when registering with VA. Just ask to meet with a VA health care professional for a clinical evaluation. The provider can discuss your health concerns and help refer you to the MST-related mental health or medical care you need.

EVIDENCE-BASED THERAPIES

MST is an experience, not a diagnosis. As with other forms of trauma, MST can impact you in different ways. No matter what you are experiencing, treatments and resources are available, and VA supports many paths to healing from the impact of MST.

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For individuals who have mental health diagnoses such as PTSD or depression related to the experience of MST, evidence-based therapies are among the most effective treatments. They can include the following — which are in many cases available at a local VA medical center.

- **Prolonged Exposure (PE)** helps individuals with a diagnosis of PTSD to gradually approach and address traumatic memories, feelings and situations. By confronting these challenges directly, you may see PTSD symptoms begin to decrease.
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)** helps individuals with a diagnosis of PTSD to identify how traumatic experiences have affected their thinking, to evaluate those thoughts, and to change them. Through CPT, you may develop more healthy and balanced beliefs about yourself, others and the world.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** helps individuals with a diagnosis of PTSD process and make sense of their experience of trauma. It involves calling the trauma to mind while paying attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound (like a finger waving side to side, a light, or a tone).
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** is a structured, time-limited therapy that can help individuals who experience depression, anxiety, substance use disorders or other mental health difficulties. This treatment can help you develop balanced and helpful thoughts about yourself, others and the future. CBT can help you modify your thought patterns to change negative moods and behaviors.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)** is a therapy that can help individuals who experience depression focus on identifying and evaluating relationship issues that may contribute to their depression. IPT can also help you build social skills to deal with problems in your relationships and improve your overall quality of life.
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** helps individuals overcome their emotional pain by promoting positive actions and choices that align with their values. Through this therapy, you may improve your ability to recognize and achieve what truly matters most to you in life.
- **Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET)** helps individuals with substance use disorders focus on personal motivations for change. In this therapy, you'll look at the reasons behind your desire to make a change and the potential benefits of that change.
- **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)** helps individuals address stress and strong emotions, learn mindfulness and distress tolerance, and develop and practice new interpersonal skills.

SUPPORTIVE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Beyond evidence-based therapies, VA offers other supportive therapy options tailored to meet each Veteran's needs. VA facilities offer mental health treatment services including talk therapy, supported work settings, residential programs and other therapies, all designed to align with your preferences and lifestyle. Talk to your VA health care provider about the options available in your area.

Upcoming Events:

September 14th...Red, White and Brew Fest at the Albany MVP Arena, Free Admission

September 28th (Rain date September 29th)..Eastern NY Benefit Tractor Pull 2023, benefits DAV Veterans at Schaghticoke Fair Grounds . More info call Ron 518-232-5026 (rartractors@verizon.net), Freddie 518-322-3567 or CJ 518-223-3831

October 14th...*COLUMBUS DAY—OFFICE CLOSED*

October 15th...Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Ceremony in the Legislative Chambers, 8:30 a.m.,

Michael A. DeBonis-USA-SP5-Vietnam

November 5th...*ELECTION DAY—OFFICE CLOSED*

November 10th...25TH Annual Free Rensselaer County Veterans Breakfast at the Melvin Roads American Legion Post 200 Columbia Tpk., Rensselaer, NY. Call 518-270-2760 for more info.

November 11th...*VETERANS DAY—OFFICE CLOSED*

November 15th...Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Ceremony in the Legislative Chambers, 8:30 a.m.— TBD

HONOR-A-DECEASED VETERAN CEREMONY

Every second Monday of the month, Rensselaer County honors a deceased veteran in a very moving and respectful ceremony in the County Legislative Chambers.

If you have a loved one who was a veteran from Rensselaer County and would like to have them honored, please contact the Rensselaer County Veterans Service Agency at 518-270-2760 for an application.

The following criteria applies to the honorees:

- Must have personal tie to Rensselaer County (born, raised, or resided in);
- Must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable; DD-214/Report of Separation/ Report of Casualty must accompany application;
- Copy of obituary must accompany application;
- May only be honored once;
- Submitted applications must be legible and have a family contact (name, address and telephone number);
- List all medals, campaigns, and battles;
- Include civilian history (all community services and organizations);
- Be as detailed as possible, the entire ceremony is dedicated to this one particular veteran and it is their life story;
- Completed applications and supporting info must be turned into:

Rensselaer County Veterans Service Agency, 99 Troy Road, East Greenbush, New York 12061

For an application , please call us at 518-270-2760 or download an application at www.rensco.com



25th ANNUAL VETERANS BREAKFAST
Sunday, November 10, 2024 8:00 am– 10:00 am

Free to all Rensselaer County Veterans & Immediate Family Members
Melvin Roads American Legion Post #1231,
200 Columbia Tpk., Rensselaer, New York

Sponsored by County Executive Steven F. McLaughlin and the Rensselaer County Veterans Service Agency

For more information on how to purchase an ad in our booklet or to donate, please call (518) 270-2760

MILITARY AWARDS & MEDALS

- **NEVER RECEIVED YOUR MILITARY AWARDS & MEDALS?**
- **HAVE YOU MISPLACED OR LOST THEM?**
- **DO YOU HAVE A LOVED ONE WHO IS A VETERAN AND THEY DO NOT HAVE THEIR MEDALS?**
- **WOULD YOU LIKE TO REQUEST THEM?**

CALL THE RENSELAER COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY at (518) 270-2760