

**Responses to Questions Not Addressed Live During  
MST Support Team Presentation on  
Center for Women Veterans Partners Call on April 6, 2022**

**Question: How do I find my local MST Coordinator? Are there MST Coordinators for CBOCs too?**

**Response:** Every VA health care system has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues and who can assist MST survivors with accessing Veterans Health Administration (VHA) care. The MST Coordinator provides coverage for all sites affiliated with that health care system, including the main medical center and all community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). A list of the names and contact information for all VHA MST Coordinators is available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/vha-mst-coordinators.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/vha-mst-coordinators.asp). Individuals can also call their VA medical center or clinic directly and ask to be transferred to the MST Coordinator. Note that the MST Coordinator is a point of contact position, and each VA site has multiple providers who provide care for mental health and physical health conditions related to the experience of MST.

In addition to VHA MST Coordinators who assist with access to VHA care, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has designated VBA Outreach Coordinators in each state to assist Veterans with disability benefits related to the experience of MST. A list of VBA MST Outreach Coordinators is available at [www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp).

**Question: Does the VA conduct training for MST for organizations or businesses?**

**Response:** VHA agrees that it is valuable for organizations, businesses, and employers who interact with former Service members to be aware of experiences, including MST, that may impact their health and wellbeing. VHA offers MST-related training resources to the community, including our public MST website at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mst](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mst), the *Beyond MST* mobile app available for download from any app store, and trainings for community providers available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/healthcare-providers/mst.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/healthcare-providers/mst.asp). Additionally, at the local level, VHA's MST Coordinators work with community organizations to provide trainings as requested.

**Question: Would an MST Coordinator do outreach to health centers and such to reach Veterans who are not VA affiliated, such as a university health center that see students who may have had military service but do not currently utilize VHA services?**

**Response:** Yes, local MST Coordinators and/or various VHA outreach teams can connect with local organizations and institutions like universities to share information on health care options and resources, including those for survivors of MST. The national Sexual Assault Awareness Month campaign and the VA web resources provided in the previous response additionally help to reach MST survivors who have not yet connected with VA.

**Question: Do you do MST training for Veteran Service Officers?**

**Response:** VHA regularly provides training on VHA's MST-related services to non-VA stakeholders, such as this training we provided to Center for Women Veteran partners, and on an ongoing basis, makes available the additional trainings and resources noted in earlier responses. VHA also reaches out to Veterans Service Organizations in particular in April, to provide information about the impact of MST and VHA's MST-related services during our extensive outreach campaign in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) may also engage in training activities with Veteran Service Officers, but VHA is not the best source to speak to that.

**Question: Is there a strategic plan for information dissemination for those not using the VA and not connected to social media? Like our 55+ women veterans.**

**Response:** As with its other outreach efforts throughout the year, VHA's MST-related outreach campaign during Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) has a goal of reaching as many MST survivors as possible. For this reason, the SAAM campaign includes not only social media, but also advertisements on traditional TV, on streaming services like Hulu, and in digital out of home environments (for example, screens at gas stations, wellness kiosks, and waiting rooms). Additionally, our paid Internet advertising includes materials targeted to Veterans who may not otherwise see our materials – such as keyword ads that are directed for certain populations. We also provide materials on VHA's MST-related services to Veterans Service Organizations and Veteran advocacy groups that serve diverse groups of Veterans to help reach their audiences as well.

**Question: Many Veterans live overseas and are in rural area. The access to a lot of these platforms are limited. What else are you doing to reach them?**

**Response:** The multiple outreach methods listed above aim to reach as many MST survivors as possible including those overseas and in rural areas. Additionally, advances in telehealth have allowed survivors to access VHA's free MST-related care from any location within the U.S. More information is available at [telehealth.va.gov/](https://telehealth.va.gov/). Also of note, the *Beyond MST* mobile app was designed to be a free, convenient, and private self-help tool that Veterans in any location, whether in or out of treatment, could use to develop skills, learn more about MST, and find hope, and broadband access is not required to use it.

**Question: What does MST screening look like at the VA? When are they asked about MST? At eligibility or when they are already in care?**

**Response:** All former Service members seen for care at VA are screened for experiences of MST using screening questions in the electronic health record. The requirement and reminder to conduct this screening activates at the individual's first VHA appointment and stays active until the screening is completed. For many former Service members, this screening takes place at their first VA visit with a primary care or mental health provider. To ensure that screening is completed sensitively, accurately, and for all former Service members who receive care at VHA, local MST Coordinators regularly monitor screening data, including missed opportunities for screening, and

reach out directly to providers and others with education on the importance of MST screening and sensitive screening practices.

**Question: In the Fargo VHA area, we have an amazing MST Coordinator, but she covers a huge geographical area and is grossly over worked. Thus, we have very poor coverage. Is there any effort to improve staffing?**

**Response:** We are so glad to hear your positive feelings about the MST Coordinator at the Fargo VA Medical Center! We also agree that ensuring MST Coordinators at all facilities have sufficient time assigned to fulfill their responsibilities is of paramount importance, and this continues to be evaluated by the MST Support Team and VHA leadership. It is VHA policy that MST Coordinators be given adequate time for the administrative responsibilities of the role. Also, as noted earlier, the MST Coordinator is a point of contact position, and each VA site has multiple providers who provide care for mental health and physical health conditions related to the experience of MST. A mandatory training requirement for all mental health and primary care providers and other initiatives help ensure they are well-prepared to do this work.

**Question: What if the local MST Coordinator tells Veterans that they have a job so they are fine and don't need any help?**

**Response:** Providing Veteran-centric care that is sensitive to each individual's needs is important to VA. The experience of MST can impact people in many different ways. Some MST survivors are remarkably resilient, and many survivors function well in their occupations. However, even resilient survivors, including survivors who are employed, may experience increased distress at certain times or in response to certain situations, and may benefit from VHA's MST-related care. Additionally, some survivors struggle with mental health, physical health, and/or functioning difficulties related to MST, even many years later. VHA understands that each MST survivor is unique and supports all survivors accessing the care they need to heal from the impact of MST. Survivors who feel they are not receiving the care they need or have had a challenging or discouraging interaction with a VHA staff member are encouraged to reach out to their Veterans Experience Office by calling their local VA.

**Question: Is there specific training on guidelines related to MST treatment at VA for those in Guard and Reserve Components? I have had veterans reach out to an MST Coordinator and denied care and/or told to they would have to be rated for a disability first. Even though they reported the event happened while on active duty orders.**

**Response:** Unfortunately, there are some former National Guard and Reserve personnel who VA is unable to provide MST-related care to, even though they have experienced MST. VA is aware of the difficulties this eligibility gap creates, but it is due to how the law providing VA with the authority to provide MST-related care is written and it would need to be changed by new legislation. Currently, 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 can receive MST-related care; the service-connected disability does not need to be related to their experiences of MST. To ensure they are up-to-date on the latest

information about eligibility, MST Coordinators are offered trainings, support materials, and access to free, ongoing consultation on all aspects of eligibility, including those relating to former National Guard/Reserve members.

**Question: What does VHA do to ensure that OTH veterans are not turned away if they are eligible under the MST provision?**

**Response:** The MST Support Team is not the best group to speak comprehensively about efforts in this area, particularly those specific to Eligibility and Enrollment staff, but as noted above, MST Coordinators are provided with trainings, support materials, and consultation to understand these eligibility policies, including recent expansions to eligibility.

**Question: There are many dishonorable and general discharges that are directly related to the MST situations while in the military (substance abuse, behavior issues, conduct and more). What is being done to reverse this on their record?**

**Response:** Unfortunately, the MST Support Team is not the best group to speak comprehensively about efforts in this area and would defer to others to speak more authoritatively. Information on applying for a discharge upgrade is available at [www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions](http://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions).

**Question: These programs sounds great if use them however many people who have experienced MST don't trust anything VA or government related. How to you address the trust issues?**

**Response:** VHA understands that many MST survivors have had experiences that impact their trust, and that can extend to their feelings about VA. VHA's Sexual Assault Awareness Month message, "We believe you, and we believe in you" speaks directly to the trusting, affirming support we strive to provide to MST survivors. Gaining their trust starts with our first contact with them, and we make sure there are multiple channels where MST survivors can learn more about MST and VA's MST-related services on their own – for example, the resources section of our public Internet page ([www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/resources.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/resources.asp)), the *Beyond MST* mobile app ([mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst](http://mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst)), and websites such as About Face ([www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/aboutface/learn/mst.html](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/aboutface/learn/mst.html)) and Make the Connection ([www.maketheconnection.net/conditions/military-sexual-trauma/](http://www.maketheconnection.net/conditions/military-sexual-trauma/)) with videos of other Veterans. These resources highlight the compassionate care MST survivors can receive at VHA.

We also try to ensure that when individuals reach out to VHA, they receive trauma-sensitive care that helps build trust in VHA's services. For example, as noted in a response to an earlier question, all VHA mental health and primary care providers receive mandatory training on the impact of MST and on providing sensitive care to MST survivors. Additional trainings are available for other professionals who frequently work with MST survivors, such as Chaplains, Veterans Crisis Line staff, and other medical professionals. Ensuring frontline staff such as clerks and telephone operators are prepared to help is crucial as well, and there are training initiatives focused on these groups too.

**Question: Does VA track MST Coordinator demographics and can survivors request one who understand their unique racial, ethnic or gender identity intersectionalities?**

**Response:** VHA understands that the experience of MST is often impacted by intersecting personal and cultural variables which include, but are not limited to, gender identity, prior trauma history, age, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability status. Although there are some similarities in how people of all backgrounds respond to the experience of MST, one's identity can also powerfully shape responses in unique ways. Many MST survivors feel more comfortable with providers who share or understand important components of their identity. Multiple clinicians at each VHA facility are available to provide MST-related care, and survivors may request a clinician of a particular gender if it would help them feel more comfortable. Additionally, education is provided to VA clinicians to help them understand how the experience of MST intersects with unique individual and cultural variables.

**Question: For MST disability, what if it was reported to the chain of command and no formal investigation was done or documented?**

**Response:** VHA would defer to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) on issues related to receiving disability for conditions related to the experience of MST. More information is also available at [www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/serviceconnected/MST.pdf](http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/serviceconnected/MST.pdf). As a reminder, no documentation of an MST experience is needed to receive VHA's free MST-related treatment services. MST experiences do not need to have been reported at the time or for there to have been an investigation to receive this care.