
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 81 (Ta) - Veterans: mental health

Version: December 19, 2024

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: M.&V.A. 5 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill requires the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to establish a program to fund, upon appropriation, an academic study of mental health among women veterans in California and submit a report on the study's findings to the Legislature by June 30, 2029.

Fiscal Impact: CalVet estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$500,000 to contract with an academic entity since it lacks in-house expertise to perform the study. CalVet also estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$240,000 in the first year, \$220,000 in the second year, and \$100,000 in the third year for two limited-term staff to create, award, and oversee the contract and submit the legislative report. The bill's provisions would be subject to an appropriation.

Background: According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as of 2019, there were approximately 142,000 women veterans living in California. The number of women veterans is growing rapidly. Between 2005 and 2017, the population of women veterans increased by 6.5%. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, women are the fastest-growing population of service members and veterans and, according to the Veterans Health Administration, they account for 30 percent of new patients.

Women who served in the U.S. Armed Forces have unique needs. They are more likely to be primary caregivers for spouses, children, and parents. They are more likely to have gender specific health needs. They are younger and more diverse than their male counterparts. Women veterans also experience additional barriers to receiving and utilizing benefits and services. In California, many women do not self-identify as veterans and thus do not utilize benefits or participate in veterans events, comprising only 5% of the customer population served by County Veteran Services Offices in 2013, according to CalVet, despite making up 11 percent of the overall population of California veterans. Additionally, women veterans have higher rates of physical/mental health problems, such as Military Sexual Trauma, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse, than male veterans, and are more likely to die by suicide.

Proposed Law: This bill requires CalVet to establish a program to fund, upon appropriation, an academic study of mental health among women veterans in California. Requires the study to include demographics and an analysis of the stressors, risk factors, treatment modalities, barriers to access, suicide rate, and other information deemed relevant.

This bill requires CalVet to prepare and submit a summary report of the findings and recommendations of the study to the Legislature by June 30, 2029.

Related Legislation: AB 718 (Ta, 2023) was substantially similar to this bill and vetoed by the Governor with the following message:

“This bill would require, upon appropriation, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to establish a program to fund an academic study of mental health among women veterans in California and to submit a report summarizing the findings and recommendations of the study to the Legislature no later than July 31, 2025.

While I am supportive of the author's goal of advancing research on mental health among women veterans in the state, approving this measure would presume funding in next year's budget cycle, and the timeline established by this bill would not provide CalVet adequate time to provide a substantive report. I encourage the author to work to secure the necessary funding for this study within the annual budget process.

In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that avoids deep program cuts to vital services and protected investments in education, health care, climate, public safety, housing, and social service programs that millions of Californians rely on. It is important to remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.”

AB 1692 (Voepel, 2022) was substantially similar to this bill and would have required CalVet to establish a program to fund an academic study of mental health among women veterans in California and prepare and submit a report on the study to the Legislature. AB 1692 was vetoed by the Governor.

Staff Comments: Women comprise the fastest-growing population in both the military and the veteran community. However, women veterans experience unique challenges and gaps in transition, care, and employment, particularly during their transition to civilian life and employment. According to the author, “AB 81 would provide a much-needed picture of the mental health challenges facing California’s women veterans. This important and uncontroversial legislation would direct the California Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct an academic study of mental health among women veterans in California. This study would include an analysis of mental health stressors, risk factors, suicide rates, treatment modalities, barriers to care, and other relevant information. Given California’s rapidly growing population of women veterans, this legislation would ensure that, instead of only identifying concerning statistics, the state is researching and remedying the root causes driving mental health challenges facing women veterans.”

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