FOR VETERAN EMPLOYMENT THE FUTURE IS FEMALE:

HOW WOMEN VETERANS CAN GET THE CIVILIAN JOBS THEY DESERVE

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Women are more than twice as likely to be unemployed 6 months after completing their service than male veterans. This stands in stark contrast to their growing importance for national defense.\(^1\) While the size of our nation’s military has remained steady, the significance of active duty and veteran women is growing and should not be underestimated. According to the Department of Defense,\(^2\) in 2021 women represented 17.3% of active duty military and 21% of the National Guard and Reserves, totaling 402,741 women. No longer are women banned from combat fields and are now fully integrated into almost all aspects of service. This progress has led to more women choosing to serve their country.

The increasing impact of women on our nation’s ability to defend itself translates to women representing the fastest growing population within the veteran community — one that is expected to nearly double over the next seventeen years. Thirty years ago, women represented just 3% of our veterans population. The VA details that about 10% of veterans today are women and further projects that number to double to 20% by 2045.

As stated by Senator Tammy Duckworth, an Army National Guard officer who served as a combat vet in Iraq, women now serve in every aspect of the military, are indispensable in protecting our country’s freedom, and are rapidly becoming a significant part of our veteran population. Yet their impact and value in service is not translating to commensurate value in the civilian economy: too many women veterans struggle to find meaningful employment. They face many barriers that are shared by their male counterparts and even more that are unique to their gender, including pay discrimination, childcare, and gender stereotypes.

The challenges our women veterans face upon returning to civilian life are both complex and interrelated. Yet it is clear that if a veteran finds high-quality employment upon re-entry into civilian life, the other challenges she faces become much more surmountable. A good job means a roof, the ability to raise children in a healthy environment, access to healthcare, social interaction, and, perhaps most importantly, purpose.

“Women veterans have been a priority to us for a long time. We’re so proud that our grantees place women veterans into high-quality jobs at almost twice their representation in the veteran population. That’s no accident, it takes deliberate focus and effort.”

– Captain Dan Goldenberg, U.S. Navy (Ret.), Executive Director, The Call of Duty Endowment
As the largest private funder of veteran employment, the Call of Duty Endowment\(^3\) believes each and every veteran, female or male, out of work or underemployed represents a lost opportunity for our society. For fourteen years we’ve been dedicated to bridging this divide by finding and funding the most effective nonprofit organizations that connect veterans with high-quality jobs – and increasingly those who are prioritizing the placement of women veterans. Thankfully we know the solutions that decision makers can pursue to help women veterans successfully transition from service into meaningful employment in their home communities.

The organizations we work with place women veterans into careers at almost twice their representation in the veteran population\(^4\) (19% vs 10%, respectively). They do so through:

- Customized transition support for women veterans.
- Fostering a community for women veterans.
- Educating employers of the unique value women veterans have in the workforce.
- Advocating for a reallocation in federal funding to prioritize employment service.

The success of the initiatives we have supported is proof that America’s fastest-growing veteran population segment can become one of its most valued. The increasing impact that women have each day in the military should be more than matched by the support they receive when their time in uniform is complete.

"Female service members are so integrated into the military, so critical and vital to all functions of the military, from combat service support to combat support, to direct combat, that we could not go to war as a nation - we could not defend America - without our women.

Our military men and women are our greatest national treasure. They should be safeguarded as such upon their return."

– U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, Army National Guard Lieutenant Colonel
WOMEN VETERANS: AN UNDERVALUED RESOURCE

Veterans, especially women and people of color, are a chronically underappreciated talent source in America’s civilian workforce. Despite their unparalleled training, expertise, and experience, far too many have trouble securing a rewarding job, even now, when the U.S. labor market is in dire need of talent. According to Penn State’s Transitioning Veterans Metrics Initiative (TVMI), an invaluable source of data for this report, 61% are either unemployed or underemployed.

The data is clear that women veterans have a much harder time finding a civilian job than their male counterparts and are underrepresented in the workforce.

“Getting this job has had a major impact on my life, as leaving the only thing I’ve ever known in my adult life was extremely stressful. Having secure employment has eased that burden.”
– Jennifer H.
U.S. Air Force Veteran

THE CALL OF DUTY ENDOWMENT
HAS FUNDED THE PLACEMENT OF MORE THAN
17K WOMEN VETERANS INTO HIGH-QUALITY JOBS
Women veterans tend to be more educated (with 46% having associate degrees or higher compared to 24% of male veterans*). Despite this advantage, according to TVMI, women are more than twice as likely to be unemployed 6 months after their service than male veterans are.

- The reality for women veterans of color is far worse—they are three times more likely to be unemployed than men.

- 14% of women veterans are not employed and looking for work, compared to 6% of male veterans – another 24% of women vets are working but dissatisfied with their civilian work.

- 22% of women veterans of color are not employed and looking for work.
Research from Syracuse University finds that women veterans rank securing a job as their second highest challenge in transitioning to civilian life, just behind navigating VA benefits.

- 67% of women veterans characterized their financial transition as difficult or very difficult, compared with 47% of male veterans.
- 37% of women veterans selected “loss of income” as a key transition challenge, compared with 23% of male veterans.
Research demonstrates that female veterans also face barriers that are unique to their gender, from the cost of childcare to pay discrimination and negative stereotypes about their service. "...the result is doubly disempowering," writes Malar Hirudayaraj, Rochester Institute of Technology in a qualitative study that was published in Human Resources Development Quarterly in 2019.

Hirudayaraj also stated women vets reported, "...feeling unprepared for civilian life occurred upon discharge and included cultural shock of having difficulties meeting the necessities of life, establishing financial stability, finding employment, and navigating the civilian systems (e.g., health care services, social systems)," writes Lisa Burkhart, PhD, RN and Nancy Hogan, PhD,RN, FAAN, in their study entitled, Being a Female Veteran: A Grounded Theory of Coping With Transitions.
BELOW ARE THE SIX COMMONLY EXPERIENCED BARRIERS THAT WOMEN VETERANS FACE IN EMPLOYMENT:

1. STARTING OVER – OFTEN NEAR THE BOTTOM
2. ASKING FOR HELP
3. CHILD CARE
4. WAGE DISCRIMINATION
5. NOT SELF-IDENTIFYING AS VETERANS
6. MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

#1 - STARTING OVER – OFTEN NEAR THE BOTTOM
Underemployment is a real issue among all veterans, but hits females even harder. Too many women veterans are sidelined from meaningful employment because employers don’t understand the value they offer their company or organization. Despite their extensive skills and unparalleled experience in difficult operating environments, they are a chronically underappreciated talent source.

According to data from TVMI, the quality among veterans that is most often overlooked is the leadership experience they bring to a civilian job. Hire Heroes USA, a leading organization in the placement of veterans in civilian employment, recently surveyed their female clients and found that the most commonly experienced challenge was having to start from the bottom of the workforce ladder.
#2 - ASKING FOR HELP
Almost every veteran can benefit from help transitioning to the civilian workforce. Major General Paulette Risher, USA(Ret.), President/CEO of Still Serving Veterans, relays her experience of women being less likely to ask for this assistance. “To be successful in the military, women have to be resourceful and self-sufficient. They don’t want to be seen as needy and are reluctant to reach out for help. That mindset tends to carry over to the job search.”

#3 - CHILD CARE
A top barrier to meaningful employment cited by the female clients of Hire Heroes USA and Still Serving Veterans, as well as in other research, is the need for childcare and the associated costs. Still Serving Veterans reports that women veterans are more likely to accept a lower-paying job if it allows them to fulfill their childcare responsibilities. Younger women veterans (age 17-24) are more than twice as likely to have children (29%) than non-veteran women their age (13%). Similar to non-veterans, the burden of childcare generally falls more heavily on mothers.

#4 - WAGE DISCRIMINATION
“No matter how you slice it, female veterans get paid less than their male counterparts,” reports Hannah Hyde, Associate Director, Data Operations of Hire Heroes USA. According to a Hire Heroes USA report in 2021, starting salaries for female veterans and military spouses were lower than compared to men. In 2021, male military members earned 13.76% more on average in the civilian workforce compared to women military members. To address wage discrimination facing all women in the workforce, HHUSA and other Endowment partners have placed an emphasis on salary negotiations, as described in further detail below.

“I had to ‘get over the ask,’ and reach out to my community, to find out about those resources that were truly available to me, to assist me in my next great adventure.”

– Amber K.
U.S. Air Force Veteran

“CALL OF DUTY ENDOWMENT”

9
#5 - NOT SELF-IDENTIFYING AS VETERANS
One barrier that is often cited is the reluctance of women to claim their veteran status, thus missing out on the services to which they are entitled. This factor was prevalent in Malar Hirudayaraj’s aforementioned women veterans study in Human Resources Dev Quarterly: “As participants were cognizant of prevalent stereotypes about veterans, they were hesitant to reveal their military identity or refer to their experiences and felt compelled to navigate professional spaces with caution to the extent of ‘hiding in plain sight.’ While lack of recognition of their military service and the indifference of their civilian colleagues were the main reasons for female veterans not disclosing their veteran status, some women veterans chose not to do so because of their lack of combat experience.” To be clear, combat status has no bearing on veteran status.

#6 - MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA
According to the Veteran Affairs screening program, 1 in 3 women in the military report experiencing military sexual trauma. Organizations that work with female veterans understand how this trauma can exacerbate the barriers to finding civilian employment, including the willingness to seek help.

"The tough thing about women is that a lot of them don’t self-identify as veterans. There’s some confusion of the definition of what is considered a veteran, even within the military community. Women had not been doing so much combat stuff, mostly support roles, so they didn’t think they could claim the title ‘veteran.’"  

– Monique Brown  
U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Founding Executive Director  
FOB Hope, Seattle
SOLUTIONS

As daunting as these barriers are, The Call of Duty Endowment’s grantees’ years of concerted effort have shown us how to best support women veterans in overcoming them. Our partners have internalized these learnings and provide women veterans focused solutions, placing them into careers at almost twice their representation in the veteran community. As one example, Hire Heroes USA has made a concerted effort and now 21% of their clients are women. Similarly, of the clients Still Serving Veterans works with, 23% are women. Every day, these leading organizations are helping women overcome unique barriers and achieve meaningful employment outcomes. Years of experience has demonstrated that there are keys to success for veterans organizations, employers and policymakers to follow in helping women veterans obtain better employment outcomes.

1. PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL AND INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES FOR WOMEN

The most powerful way women veterans can succeed in the civilian workforce is by receiving personalized help in their transition. TVMI data reveals that even modest efforts to assist veterans in transitioning to the civilian workforce have a dramatic impact, especially with women and people of color. Two services drive enormous value for veterans: resume writing assistance and interview coaching. Veterans should never pay for these services, as high-quality, free assistance is provided by our grantees.

• Veterans are twice as likely to find a job if they used a mentor or coach to help write their resume.

• Veterans are nearly three times more likely to find a job if they used a mentor or coach to practice interview.
INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES DELIVER RESULTS
It’s no surprise therefore that help with employment is the form of assistance most requested by transitioning service members, according to TVMI. A successful transition into a high-quality career reduces the governmental costs to help veterans with many other needs including housing and healthcare.

The organizations that the Call of Duty Endowment supports offer these kinds of individualized services. As just one example, the Still Serving Veterans model of job placement assistance is veterans-to-veteran service and their guiding philosophy is: “No cost, candid, and caring. We define our mission as helping our clients build a meaningful life, not just find a job. We have tools we use to help them gain clarity about what they are seeking. For example, with our “Six C’s” model, we help them clarify the content, context, culture, and colleagues they want and don’t want to pursue as well as the constraints of their lives and ultimately compensation - what they want and what they need,” says Paulette Risher, CEO/President of Still Serving Veterans.

As another example of tailored support, Hire Heroes USA has augmented their current suite of services for female veterans by creating partnerships with external resources that provide expertise in dealing with military sexual trauma and domestic violence.

“Still Serving Veterans helped me learn how to write better resumes and present the best experience I had from the military and translated into what that meant for civilian industry.”

– Lesley, U.S. Army Veteran
2. FOSTER A COMMUNITY FOR FEMALE VETERANS

Women veterans deserve a holistic support system to help them transition into civilian employment and subsequently do well in their new job. The more that veteran organizations and employers provide support groups or points of connection that are tailored to meet their needs, the more they will succeed in job placements. As outlined in the aforementioned study by Burkhart and Hogan, *Being a Female Veteran: A Grounded Theory of Coping With Transitions*, "participants consistently found belonging to a veteran civilian community helpful to regain a sense of connection." Malar Hirudayaraj’s study similarly found that creating a support group yields positive results:

"... CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR NEWLY HIRED WOMEN VETERANS TO RAISE THEIR CONCERNS AND FOR SENIOR VETERANS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES THEY EMPLOYED TO INTEGRATE INTO CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS. CREATING VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION WILL GIVE FEMALE VETERANS A SENSE OF BEING VALUED AND SUPPORTED, WHICH IN TURN COULD LEAD TO HIGHER ENGAGEMENT LEVELS. ENHANCING VISIBILITY OF WOMEN VETERANS WILL CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COWORKERS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR EXPERIENCES, CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUNTRY, AND POTENTIAL TO ADD VALUE TO THEIR TEAMS. THESE COULD MITIGATE STEREOTYPING AND FOSTER ACCEPTANCE OF WOMEN VETERANS AND INCREASE THEIR RETENTION."

Over half of the Still Serving Veterans career counselors are female, which is intentional. Some women clients are more comfortable relying on the advice of those who have forged the path they are just beginning.
3. **BOOST AND PROPERLY CHANNEL FEDERAL VETERAN SPENDING**

It is clear that women veterans and veterans of color benefit most from individualized assistance in job placement. Since almost every transitioning service member needs a civilian job, prioritizing and properly channeling the government’s veteran employment spend will drive the most overall benefits for the most veterans, especially women.

Currently, the federal government is vastly underfunding the employment of veterans; it’s the lowest funded of any major veteran program area at less than 1/10 of 1 percent of the U.S. Government’s approximately $300 billion veteran spend. A doubling of this amount—deployed to proven organizations in the nonprofit sector—would have a transformative impact on the lives of veteran women - as well as all veterans – and still represent a pittance of the overall veteran budget.

We know how to solve the problem of female veteran unemployment and underemployment— it takes funding the programs that are working. TVMI data demonstrates that lack of career development (27.0%), inadequate compensation (22.9%), and mismatch between job and skills/education (14.8%) were notable reasons for veterans, male or female, leaving a job. Each of these issues is proactively addressed by the programs our grantees provide. With more funding, we could reach more veterans and improve their outcomes.

4. **PROVIDE SALARY NEGOTIATION TRAINING TO MITIGATE THE PAY GAP**

Given the persistent wage gap that affects all women in the workforce, especially those of color, women veterans will benefit from assistance with salary negotiations as they navigate finding their civilian career. As an example, Hire Heroes USA is launching their Women Veterans Program to leverage their myriad of resources and training to break down barriers to employment, create opportunities through transition career services, and career coaching for women veterans to obtain meaningful employment. Salary negotiations will be key to this customized training.
5. EDUCATE EMPLOYERS ON THE VALUE OF WOMEN VETERANS

Women veterans will become more valued in the workplace the more that employers and policymakers recognize their worth. It is incumbent upon employers, hiring managers and recruiters to have a frame of reference for the level of responsibility and leadership roles women have filled during their service. For employers, we recommend a hiring target for veterans – with a specific target for women - as a crucial step. Companies respond well to specific quantifiable targets. And by making it known throughout the organization, help will surface from many directions.

It’s critical for employers to understand the specific points within their hiring pipeline where they are not succeeding at bringing in enough qualified veterans, especially women and veterans of color. This calls for greater advocacy from and training of recruiters.
THE SITUATION FOR UK WOMEN VETERANS

No longer are women banned from combat fields and are now fully integrated into all aspects of service. According to the British Government, women now represent over 11% of the United Kingdom Regular Forces, with the Royal Air Force (RAF) having the greatest proportion of female personnel in the UK Regular Forces. The increasing impact of women on the UK’s military, translates to women representing the fastest growing population within the veteran community - currently, nearly 14% of all British veterans are female. According to the UK Ministry of Defence the percentage of female veterans is projected to increase from 10% in 2016 to 13% by 2028.

Female veterans face complex challenges when they transition into civilian life, according to Forces Employment Charity, the UK’s leading nonprofit organization providing job placement services and training to veterans and their families, including:

- Child Care: Lack of adequate child care in the workforce.
- Invisibility: A reluctance to self-identify as a veteran and access the related support available.
- Underemployment: Not receiving credit in the job market for their earned qualifications and experience.
“FEMALE VETERANS, IN THE SAME WAY AS MANY WOMEN, UNDERSELL THEMSELVES,” SAYS FORMER BRITISH ARMY NURSE AND MILITARY WOMEN EMPLOYMENT ADVISOR TO TECH VETS ANNETTE BERRY. “THEY DON’T SEE THEIR VALUE. THEY DON’T RECOGNISE THAT THEY ARE USUALLY OVER-SKILLED AND OVERQUALIFIED AND POTENTIALLY UNDERPAID. ONE OF THE BIGGEST PROCESSES WE GO THROUGH AT FORCES EMPLOYMENT CHARITY IS TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO THINK BEYOND A BLACK AND WHITE JOB DESCRIPTION AND THINK ABOUT THE OTHER SKILLS THEY HAVE THAT ARE TRANSFERABLE.”

The Forces Employment Charity ensures female veterans have the skills to search for appropriate job roles in today’s workforce through their Military Women Programme, funded by the Call of Duty Endowment.

The Military Women Programme supports female veterans in writing their resumes, sharpening their interview skills, building confidence, and connecting them with a mentor. Every year they convene an in-person Women Into Employment event to connect national employers with women veterans and military spouses.

There is a growing awareness in the UK around the need to look at the particular challenges that women veterans face in comparison to that of their male counterparts.

On March 6th 2023 the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) announced its intention to publish a Women Veterans’ Strategy, which will look at the specific needs and challenges faced by women veterans, and celebrate their successes. The OVA plans to publish the Women Veterans’ Strategy later this year. The OVA at the Cabinet Office is also funding ongoing projects to improve charity and statutory provision for women veterans.
SUMMING UP

In closing, it is clear that while the barriers for women veterans entering the workforce are many, the solutions to each challenge are proven. As more and more women enter the military and subsequently complete their service, it’s our duty to value their unique military contributions in civilian life. May is designated as Military Appreciation Month -- the ideal time to not just thank a veteran for their service but allow her to keep serving her community in the ways she is uniquely trained and experienced to do.
THANK YOU

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ENDNOTES

1. https://veteranetwork.psu.edu/projects/tvmi-study/
3. https://www.callofdutyendowment.org
5. https://veteranetwork.psu.edu/projects/tvmi-study/

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