



Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series
FEB 2023 CCSS: Exploring Evidence-Based Practices in Women's and Infants' Health

**S05: Providing Women's Health in the Veterans Health Administration: Reproductive Health Initiatives
Within the Largest Integrated Health Care System**

Resource List

A growing number of veterans are having children, and pregnancy is an opportunity to engage with health care. Within the Veterans Health Administration (VA), the VA maternity care coordination program supports veterans before, during, and after pregnancy, which are periods that inherently involve transitions between clinicians and risk care fragmentation. Postpartum transitions in care are known to be especially tenuous, with low rates of primary care reengagement. The objective of the study, [Veteran postpartum health: VA care team perspectives on care coordination, health equity, and trauma-informed care](#) (2022) is to better understand this transition from the perspectives of the VA care teams.

[The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) (2018) released four Healthy Pregnancy: Opioids in Pregnancy fact sheets that offer treatment guidance for women who have opioid use disorders and who also are pregnant and/or are mothers of infants. Statistics show that the number of pregnant women with opioid use disorder (OUD) at the time of delivery quadrupled from 1.5 per 1,000 delivery hospitalizations in 1999 to 6.5 per 1,000 in 2014. Babies exposed to opioids and other substances before birth may develop neonatal abstinence syndrome (a group of withdrawal signs) after birth. The Healthy Pregnancy, Healthy Baby: Opioids in Pregnancy fact sheets explain the processes for treating opioid use disorder and neonatal abstinence syndrome. They give women the information they need to seek care and to successfully manage both pregnancy and opioid use disorder treatment.

In a sharp and historic policy shift, the [US Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) (2022) announced that it now will offer abortion counseling and care to veterans in cases of rape, incest, and life or health endangerment, even in states where abortion is illegal. The proliferation of abortion restrictions following the Dobbs v Jackson Supreme Court decision has created a medical crisis for many individuals in the US, including the nearly half of reproductive-aged women veterans who reside in states with current or pending abortion bans and restrictions. The VA's decision, which acknowledges abortion as a lifesaving and health-preserving medical treatment, will thus have profound implications for the safety and health of veterans nationally.

High-quality contraceptive counseling is critical to support Veterans' reproductive autonomy and promote healthy outcomes. In the study, [Perceived contraceptive counseling quality among veterans using VA primary care](#) (2022) A cross-sectional study using data from the Examining Contraceptive Use and Unmet Need in women Veterans (ECUUN) national telephone survey was used to describe perceived quality of contraceptive counseling in Veterans Health Administration (VA) primary care and assess factors associated with perceived high- and low-quality contraceptive counseling. Conclusively, most participants strongly agreed that their providers listened carefully (74%), explained things clearly (77%), and spent enough time discussing things (71%). Lower proportions strongly agreed that their provider discussed more than one option (54%), discussed pros/cons of various methods (44%), or asked which choice they thought was best for them (62%).



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References

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