

Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 4 Episode 8
Guest:	Sophia Hill-Smith
Title:	Reproductive Health Equity Mini-Series: Maternity Care Coordination Program Expansion

Kelly Nestman	<p>I want to welcome everyone, and thank you all for joining this episode of Veterans Health Equity, Leave No Veteran Behind. My name is Kelly Nestman, and I am a health system specialist and reproductive health equity lead in the Office of Health Equity. The Office of Health Equity was established in 2012, and it champions the advancement of health equity and reduction of health disparities for veterans.</p> <p>Part of my work with OHE allows me to be able to highlight the work VA is doing to help veterans and the data we have about veterans and their health. Recently, I have been leading a special edition of Leave No Veteran Behind podcast series focused on reproductive health equity. For those who are new here, I recommend listening to my past episodes to hear about other important and exciting work happening to improve reproductive health equity for veterans.</p> <p>Today on the podcast, we'll be discussing the recent expansion of the Maternity Care Coordination Program. Joining us today is Sophia Hill-Smith, who is the Maternity Clinical Project Manager with the Office of Women's Health Reproductive Health, where she manages the VA Maternity Care Coordination Program, leads and advocates for maternity care coordinators and veterans across the nation. So thanks again for joining us, Sophia. The work that the Maternity Care Coordination Program does is so important. Let me start by asking about the history of the program and the population of veterans who benefit from the program. How did the MMC program start and how has it improved care for veterans?</p>
Sophia Hill-Smith	<p>Hi. Excellent question Kelly. Veterans who aren't eligible for or enrolled in VA's health care system can certainly benefit from the Maternity Care Coordination Program. This program began in 2012 as a seven-call program for veterans, specifically during pregnancy. It then evolved into a more structured program with screenings and content centered around before trimesters of pregnancy to identify veteran needs and connect them to the appropriate resources.</p> <p>VA maternity care coordination is associated with greater veteran satisfaction and decreased cost, reduce medical errors, positive impacts on veteran outcomes, and also promote evidence based care.</p>
Kelly Nestman	<p>Can you tell me more about the recent expansion of the MCC program? What additional needs were identified and how were those addressed?</p>
Sophia Hill-Smith	<p>Sure. Our most recent Maternity Care Coordination program expansion was implemented in October of 2023. So that's very recent, right? This expansion not only supports veterans throughout pregnancy, but it also provides veteran support for a full 12 months after a pregnancy has ended. We're super proud of this expansion, Kelly, and the positive impact is destined to have on our veterans.</p>

	<p>With this expansion, we've enhanced our focus on social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are non-medical factors that influence health outcomes like food and housing. Not only is our veteran population at increased risk for conditions like depression and anxiety, these particular conditions are in the top 20 frequent conditions among female veterans of childbearing age. So how do we address this?</p> <p>What do we put in place to reduce poor outcomes that are associated with these findings? Well, knowing this, the Maternity Care Coordination and expansion now requires unique needs to screen veterans during pregnancy and postpartum and regularly scheduled three month intervals for depression, anxiety, suicide, intimate partner violence, homelessness and food security, as well as tobacco and alcohol use.</p> <p>The first year postpartum is an especially vulnerable time, Kelly, and we want it to be purposeful with our screenings, our intervention and resources to improve Veterans outcomes. Some other things we've incorporated align with VA home health practices and resources, and referrals to things like yoga, nutrition, and resources like our Healthy Teaching Kitchen and also the VA Move program, which is a weight management program.</p>
Kelly Nestman	<p>Thanks for sharing more about that expansion. I know I myself was really excited to hear about it, especially because of the integration of the whole health practices. And obviously the expansion is really going to help with like the health disparities that women veterans experience. So building on that, how has the program eliminated health disparities and improved equitable health outcomes for veterans?</p>
Sophia Hill-Smith	<p>I'm not sure how familiar our listeners are with the White House Blueprint for addressing the maternal health crisis that was released 2022. This particular publication outlines five priority goals for addressing the maternal health crisis. So, for comparison, the VA maternity Care Coordination Program, just on its own, addresses four out of those five strategies outlined. So currently we're increasing access to comprehensive, high quality reproductive health care services for veterans.</p> <p>And this does include mental health services. We're ensuring that women veterans feel heard and have a decision making voice in an accountable system of care. So for us that accountable system of care is the health care system. We're also advancing data collection standardization for privacy, doing research and analysis as well. And lastly, we are strengthening economic and social support for veterans before, during and after pregnancy, all with the VA maternity Care Coordination Program.</p> <p>So you know that's pretty phenomenal.</p>
Kelly Nestman	<p>This is so exciting. And I'm really glad that you were able to hop on and hear more about this program in the expansion. Finally, can you provide any information for a veteran or veteran caretaker who listens to this episode on how they can find out more about the MCC program at their facility?</p>
Sophia Hill-Smith	<p>Absolutely. One of our best resources is the public facing Women Veterans Health Care website, and that's at www.women'swomenshealth.va.gov.</p>

	<p>So veterans caretakers, brilliance family can all find easily accessible women's health topics, brochures and so many other resources related to the encounter day care, contraception, pre and post pregnancy care, lactation and many other topics that may be of interest.</p> <p>An additional resource would be their local Women Veterans Program Manager, as well as their local Maternity care coordinator.</p>
Kelly Nestman	<p>I want to thank Sophia again for sharing information about the MCC program and everyone for joining and listening to this episode. For more information about the Office of Health Equity, as well as a list of our previous Reproductive Health Equity podcast episodes, please visit www.va.gov/HealthEquity.</p>