centre of excellence for women's health

Resources for Women Veterans with Chronic Pain

An Environmental Scan

The purpose of this scan was to identify and review existing English-language, non-academic resources available for women Veterans living with chronic pain in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The scan maps existing support tools, identifies gaps, and informs the development of targeted resources and interventions.

The scan was conducted in three phases to ensure both breadth and depth. First, we conducted a broad search to map the overall landscape of resources related to chronic pain among Veterans. This phase provided a foundational understanding of the types and formats of materials available, regardless of sex and/or gender specificity. Second, we conducted a focused search to identify resources explicitly developed for women Veterans with chronic pain. This involved using targeted keywords and filters to locate materials that address sex- and gender-specific needs and experiences. Finally, to ensure comprehensive coverage, we conducted an in-depth resource-specific search tailored to each of the five countries, including websites, multimedia tools, educational and outreach materials, resource hubs and media toolkits, non-academic reports, programs, services, and interventions.

Key Findings

Resource Landscape

- **Resources by Target Demographics:** Thirty-nine resources designed for women Veterans with chronic pain were identified across the five countries included in the environmental scan. Due to the limited availability of sex- and gender-specific resources, we expanded our inclusion criteria to capture two additional categories: 1) resources for women Veterans that may address chronic pain indirectly, and 2) general resources for Veterans with chronic pain (all genders). Through this broader approach, 77 additional resources were identified, some of which were also intended for health professionals working with Veterans, as well as for Veterans' partners and family members. Nine resources not focused on women or chronic pain but potentially relevant were also noted. Altogether, a total of 125 resources were identified. These findings offer an overview of existing supports while highlighting the need for more targeted resources for women Veterans with chronic pain.

- **Resource Types:** A wide variety of resources were found. These included online resources and virtual supports (e.g., websites, call centres, podcasts, mobile apps, phone-based interventions, portals, and helplines), educational and outreach materials (e.g., workshops, webinars, courses, handbooks, handouts, flyers, posters, infographics, fact and tip sheets, brochures, pamphlets), resources for health providers (e.g., pain scales and patient assessment tools, guidelines and manuals, pocket cards) and for patients (e.g., pain management strategies, support groups), research summaries and reports, resource hubs and media kits, and a broad range of programs and services.

- **Geographic Reach:** Most resources originated from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. A few were from Australia, and even fewer from New Zealand.

- **Focus:** While most resources addressed chronic pain in general, some specifically targeted particular chronic pain concerns such as musculoskeletal conditions, pelvic pain, migraine, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Recurring Themes

- **Gender gaps:** Some resources highlighted sex and gender differences in chronic pain experiences among Veterans, emphasizing the need for women-specific resources, services, programs, and interventions.

- **Chronic pain, PTSD, trauma, mental health:** Several resources highlighted a strong association between chronic pain and PTSD, trauma, and mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety), which are common among Veterans. They also articulated that these concerns may be more prevalent and severe among women Veterans due to higher rates of traumatic experiences, such as sexual assault while in service. To address chronic pain alongside these mental health challenges, interdisciplinary care, as well as holistic, complementary, and integrative approaches and interventions, were often recommended.

- **Social Factors:** Some resources identified social factors, such as isolation, employment, finance, access to services, and experiences of bullying and discrimination, as closely linked to Veterans' health, including their experiences with chronic pain.

- **Barriers to care:** While some resources specific to women Veterans with chronic pain were found, several identified common barriers women face when accessing care. These includedlimited awareness of available servicesand resources, challenges in accessing services,stigma and discrimination, and male-dominated organizational structures that may discourage women Veterans from seeking support.

- **Pain Management and Treatment Options:** Most resources recommended a multimodal approach to treating chronic pain among women Veterans. Identified treatment options included:

    - **Medications and medical procedures:** opioids, over-the-counter and prescription medications, injections, and surgery
    - **Physical and movement-based therapies:** exercise, kinesiology, physical and occupational therapy, massage, chiropractic care
    - **Mind-body approaches:** relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices such as yoga, Pilates, meditation, tai chi, visualization, body scanning, and breathing exercises
    - **Complementary and alternative therapies:** cannabis, medical hypnosis, acupuncture, biofeedback, light-based therapy, naturopathy, hydrotherapy, cold water therapy
    - **Psychological and behavioural therapies:** counseling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)
    - **Self-management tools and strategies:** pain and mood diaries, virtual tracking tools, pacing, and other coping strategies
    - **Lifestyle modifications:** improving diet, sleep habits, and overall well-being
    - **Animal-assisted therapies:** including the use of service dogs and horses
    - **Nature- and art-based interventions:** such as community gardening, agricultural programs, outdoor retreats, and art therapy
    - **Peer support:** including group-based support and shared lived experience initiatives

Highlighted Resources

Chronic Pain Specific Resources for Women Veterans

The following table outlines resources specifically tailored to women Veterans with chronic pain.

Resource	Description
US Department of Veterans Affairs	This website provides information on health services tailored to women Veterans, educational and outreach materials and resources, primary care and comprehensive women's health services, tools for providers, and access to a dedicated women Veterans call center. The site also features a podcast for women Veterans, and support for specific health concerns. Notably, there is a webpage specifically focused on women Veterans with chronic pain.
Pelvic Pain Education Program (PPEP) for Veterans	PPEP is a pain education program for people experiencing complex pelvic pain conditions. Its website offers informational infographics, educational videos, pain management tools, and a range of additional resources tailored to support Veterans with pelvic pain.
McMaster Health Forum Report	The report titled "Exploring female-dominant conditions among military personnel and Veterans in each of the 'Five Eyes'", created by the McMaster Health Forum, identifies health conditions disproportionately affecting female individuals in the military. It also lists some women-Veteran-specific healthcare services and programs across these countries.
The Most Painful Podcast	Produced by the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans (CPCoE), this podcast explores issues related to chronic pain among Veterans. Some episodes focus specifically on women Veterans (e.g., February 19, 2025, January 24, 2024, September 4, 2024). In the episodes, different treatment options and tools are discussed, including cannabis, psychedelics, intentional breathing, nutrition, sleep, physiotherapy, safe movement, mindfulness, yoga, opioids, strength training, occupational therapy, medical hypnosis, peer support, high-intensity interval training, cold water therapy.

Resource	Description
The Impact of Service on Women Veterans: A Look at Chronic Pain and Transition	Hosted by the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans (CPCoE), this webinar delves into the complex challenges faced by women Veterans, highlighting current research on chronic pain's prevalence, potential contributing factors, and the physical and mental health impacts that often accompany these conditions. The webinar was designed for Veterans, healthcare professionals, and others interested in supporting women Veterans' well-being.
Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home	This report explores the challenges women face when they leave the military service. It highlights the prevalence of chronic pain among women Veterans, alongside other common conditions such as PTSD and depression.
Statement of Need: What the evidence tells us are the needs of female veterans	This document provides a concise, visual overview of the unique needs of women Veterans, addressing topics such as employment, finance, access to services, and experiences of bullying and discrimination. The report notes that women often underutilize Veteran health services, while also revealing that women in the British Army are seven times more likely than men to suffer from musculoskeletal injuries and ten times more likely to experience hip and pelvic stress fractures. Yet, it points out that only 2% of Veteran research focuses on women.
What does the research in the UK tell us about the specific needs of female veterans?	This evidence review by the Female Veterans Transformation Programme in the U.K. consolidates existing research on women Veterans, highlighting their unique experiences and needs. While it does not focus exclusively on chronic pain, it includes a section on physical health that highlights that female Veterans often experience chronic pain linked to various factors such as military service-related injuries and trauma. The review emphasizes the need for integrated support addressing both physical and mental health.
Health.mil/ Women's Health	This webpage from the U.S. Military Health System provides comprehensive women-specific care recommendations for cardiovascular health, mental health, musculoskeletal injuries, and reproductive health. Health.mil also provides a range of resources for Veterans of all genders, including a resource hub with educational materials designed to promote psychological resilience and reduce stigma around mental health care for service members, Veterans, and their families. It also offers handouts for Veterans with chronic pain, as well as educational and outreach materials for providers, patients, and caregivers.

Resource	Description
The Centre for Military Women's Research (CMWR)	Based in the U.K., CMWR provides information, projects, reports, and publications focused on women Veterans and the issues affecting them. It addresses chronic pain across several sections of its website, highlighting its impact on women Veterans' health and well-being. Their report, Where are all the women?' Recognition and representation – UK female veterans' experiences of support in civilian life, acknowledges the limited research on, and recognition of, U.K. women Veterans and their unique experiences and needs. The report mentions: physical health problems resulting from injury, training, and exercise; mental health problems resulting from physical health conditions; and lived experiences of women Veterans with chronic pain. The report also identifies barriers women Veterans face when accessing support services, such as limited awareness of Veteran services, difficulties in accessing care, and male-dominated organizational structures that may deter women veterans from seeking help.
Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families	This Canadian institute works with Veterans, families, service providers, and researchers to bridge the gap between research and practice so Veterans and their families receive the best possible mental health care and supports. Although the scope of the institute extends beyond chronic pain, it does have several programs and resources on chronic pain among women Veterans, including the Athena Project, an initiative dedicated to conducting responsive research and building connections in support of women Veterans' well-being. The website offers information about research on the mental health of women Veterans in Canada, military sexual trauma, and intimate partner violence among military and Veteran populations. Additionally, it maintains a knowledge hub with information, websites, and reports, some of which focus on women Veterans specifically. Covered issues include suicide prevention, IPV, recovery from sexual trauma, the Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans, and military sexual trauma.
Well Within Coach App	Developed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Well Within Coach is a free mobile app specifically designed to support Women Veterans in healing and thriving. The app was created by VA's National Center for PTSD with input from Women Veterans and experts in women's mental health. The app aims to support women at every stage of life, addressing topics such as sexual and reproductive health, parenting and caregiving, pain, menopause, and recovery after traumatic events.

Non-Chronic Pain Specific Resources for Women Veterans

The following resources were created for women Veterans, but they do not specifically address chronic pain.

Resource	Description
Women Veteran Resources - Portland State University	A U.S. - based website with information of resources, programs, initiatives and campaigns for women Veterans. Some of the listed resources address pain-related issues as part of broader health and well-being support.
Women Warriors' Healing Garden (WWHG)	This Canadian organization provides research-informed peer support and mental health programs for Canadian women Veterans. Programs include community gardening, art therapy, and animal-assisted therapy. All programs are facilitated by volunteers and funded by community and government partners. They are provided at no cost to eligible Canadian Armed Forces service members and Veterans.
The Pepper Pod	The Pepper Pod is a retreat centre that serves, supports, and inspires women in the Canadian Veteran community, including women Veterans, soon-to-be Veterans, and spouses of Veterans. Based in Quebec, the centre offers virtual and hybrid programs and events specifically designed to provide opportunities for women Veterans to connect and support one another as they navigate life after service and the distinct challenges they commonly face, such as homelessness, sexual trauma, and the transition to civilian life.
True Patriot Love Foundation	Canada's foundation for the military community, working to support military members, Veterans, and their families at every stage of their journey. The foundation offers resources and services in areas such as family health and support, mental health and well-being, physical health and rehabilitation, and community engagement. The website features a Women's Mentoring Network, which provides mentorship and support amongst women Veterans. It also hosts a podcast series that profiles inspirational women leaders in the Canadian military. Additionally, the foundation has a Veteran Hub, which connects Veterans, and active military members and their families with services and volunteering opportunities in their communities. The hub includes a map of Canada with services available across the country, some of which reference women and chronic pain.

Resource	Description
Three Sisters Women's Veteran Camp	The Three Sisters Women's Veteran Camp is a specialized program co-developed by Can Praxis and the Canadian Legacy Project, to support Canadian Armed Forces women, both serving and retired, who have been diagnosed with an Operational Stress Injury (OSI), such as PTSD. The program addresses the multifaceted challenges women Veterans face, including trauma from sexual assault, harassment, and combat experiences. Facilitated by an all-women team, the program offers equine-assisted therapy, trauma - informed facilitation, holistic activities (yoga, mindfulness exercises, group discussions), and peer support.

Key Resources for Veterans with Chronic Pain

The following resources are designed for Veterans with chronic pain and are not sex/gender-specific.

Resource	Description
Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans (CPCoE)	This website offers extensive resources on chronic pain among Canadian Veterans, featuring accessible and relevant content such as research outputs, educational materials, knowledge mobilization and outreach tools (e.g., infographics), provider guides, measurement and decision-making tools, information on different treatment options such as yoga, reports, video summaries, podcasts, and webinars.
Power Over Pain Portal	This pan-Canadian platform supports individuals, including Veterans, managing chronic pain. It offers a variety of resources such as courses, peer support, informational materials, workshops, counselling, crisis help, and user stories. The portal also has a communication toolkit with bilingual (English/French) materials, including brochures, infographics, information cards, posters, and social media content.
Open Arms - Veterans & Families	An Australian initiative focusing on addressing chronic pain among Veterans. It offers a range of resources such as videos, pain management tools and recommendations, apps, and links to additional organizations and resources. It also features a dedicated program to help Veterans learn about effective pain management strategies, alongside a comprehensive list of resources for Veterans and families, including those living with chronic pain.

Resource	Description
Help for Heroes	Free online pain management group course in the U.K. for Veterans with chronic. Sessions are co-delivered by peer trainers and recovery staff. Participants learn about the science behind pain, discuss the connection between the body and the mind, identify own responses to pain and different coping strategies, and explore how to talk about pain and access sources of support.
Pain Management: Human Performance Resources by CHAMP (HPRC)	A U.S.-based hub offering pain management articles, videos, information, and resources for Veterans with chronic pain. Topics include mind-body strategies for pain relief, tai chi for pain management, fitness and holistic health strategies, back and knee pain, brain injuries, coping with pain and illness as military couples, and information about pain management tools such as acupuncture, exercise, epidural steroid injections, spinal cord stimulators, mirror therapy, among others.
Changepain	Health services specifically designed to support Canadian Veterans suffering from chronic pain and their families. A key service available is the Core Pain Program, a comprehensive 12-month outpatient program focused on diagnosing the root cause of pain, providing pain options, making referral recommendations, and empowering patients to transition to rehabilitation services or community care. To address the range can of needs often associated with chronic pain (e.g., mental health concerns, sleep difficulties, lifestyle habits), Veterans also have access to interdisciplinary services, including physiotherapy, chiropractic care, acupuncture, and counselling.
Function & Pain Program - Sinai Health System	A three-page information sheet detailing the Function and Pain Program. Designed for Veterans with complex chronic pain issues, depression, PTSD, and substance use concerns, this program offers a comprehensive approach that integrates both the physical and psychological components of chronic pain, helping patients to learning to address and effectively manage the multifactorial nature of their symptoms.

This resource was prepared by the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (CEWH). The CEWH is a research centre focused on improving girls' and women's health and increasing gender equity. We have engaged in research with women in over 500 projects since 1997.

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The Centre of Excellence for Women's Health respectfully acknowledges the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as the first inhabitants and traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn, and work.

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