

Key considerations

Based on our research findings, there are several key factor to consider when commissioning mental health services for women veterans.



Inclusive branding

Male and combat-focused service branding/language gave the impression veteran mental health services were not for women, and were not for non-combat related challenges e.g., gender-based discrimination, bullying, and sexual violence, in service.



Well-informed services

Women veterans benefitted from mental healthcare professionals who had a good understanding of women's experiences in service, which may include gender-based discrimination, bullying, and sexual violence. Mental healthcare professionals should receive training around women veterans' mental health needs.



Women-only spaces

Due to the nature of their trauma or previous negative experiences in the male-dominated military environment, some women veterans felt uncomfortable accessing support in mixed gender spaces. It is important to offer opportunities to engage in women-only spaces and groups.



Maximising choice

Some women veterans were not comfortable receiving support from male or veteran clinicians and preferred a civilian and/or female clinician. Services should offer the option to request clinician gender and military background. Information about whether this is available should be clearly advertised on services' web pages and materials.



Trauma-informed care

The importance of trauma-informed care was key for our participants. Women veterans discussed the importance of a welcoming environment, having sufficient time to build rapport when discussing emotional topics, and having a clear sense of purpose for sharing their stories. Services should support staff to undertake career professional development related to trauma-informed care.



Consultation with women veterans

Women cautioned that services do not need to be made "pink and fluffy" to meet their needs. Consultation with women veterans and the inclusion of women veterans in decision-making groups will be an important step for mental health services looking to adapt their support and branding.

