

women & non-binary Veterans have

# MORE THAN ONE STORY

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## **More Than One Story Program for Military Women and Non-Binary Veterans Led by Veteran Artist Valerie Acosta**

There are almost 2 million women Veterans living in the United States today, and over 400,000 currently serving in the military. Military women are less likely than their male peers to self-identify as Veterans or use the VA services they've earned. There's less information about non-binary Veterans and military members, but research suggests that they too, are less likely to access services.

Partially funded by VA's SSG Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, CBAW's More Than One Story Program aims to reverse that trend for military women and non-binary servicemembers from all eras. Using live, interactive online art and poetry workshops that build on a 2021 event with the Military Women's Memorial, the program will create a "Virtual Community Center" where women and non-binary military members can gather and experience belonging in a healthy, safe, and connected environment, welcoming women and non-binary military members and Veterans with diverse backgrounds and service. The accessibility and convenience of virtual programs have the potential to serve as a bridge to more substantial clinical opportunities.

CBAW will hold orientation sessions online on January 17th at 12 p.m. and 7 p.m. ET, and again on Saturday January 21st at 12 p.m. ET. February dates are February 7 and February 11, with dates being added every month. All women and Non-Binary Veterans service members interested in participating should register for an orientation session via Eventbrite [here](#).

Valerie Acosta, a professional artist who retired from the United States Air Force after a 20-year career as a Russian Linguist, will oversee More Than One Story for CBAW. Through the process of creating art or writing in a group, Acosta and talented professional artists and writers will help participants connect across shared experiences of service as women and non-binary people. They'll also address issues of isolation, stigma, and loss of identity around transitioning into and out of the military. There is no experience with art making or poetry necessary, and participants can attend from the safety of their own homes, camera on or off.

Acosta says that making herself vulnerable with other Veterans has been a big part of her own healing journey. "Helping people helps me. If I share [my story] in the right setting, I can help a lot of people."



For more information about CBAW and the full schedule of events (including events for caregivers, all Veterans, and civilians) please visit:

[www.cbaw.org/events/](http://www.cbaw.org/events/)

contact: [info@cbaw.org](mailto:info@cbaw.org)

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According to 2019 Department of Labor data there are nearly 2 million living women Veterans in the United States. Women Veterans are less likely to self-identify and less likely to utilize transition and VA services. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the George W. Bush Institute in 2019, women Veterans report challenges with identity, transition, reintegration, and loss of purpose post-military service. Women currently make up approximately 10% of the overall veteran population. Veterans make up 14% of the men in America, but among women in America, only 1.5% are veterans. This presents a particularly challenging transition into civilian life.

Very little research centers specifically on women Veterans, but there is a further disparity in outcomes for minority women Veterans (CNAS). A 2017 report by the Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Statistics reports the population of women veterans is expected to increase at an average rate of about 18,000 women per year for the next 10 years, and while unemployment rates in women Veterans are lower than those in their non-Veteran peers, in 2015, 23.4 percent of all women veterans were currently divorced compared with 12.6 percent of non-veteran women. Further, while suicide rates among women Veterans is lower than those of their male counterparts, recent data point to concerning trends in Veteran suicide rates among women as compared to men, and research shows that there has been an increase in the proportion of suicides by firearms among women.

The 2017 study, "Substance use disorders and the risk of suicide mortality among men and women in the US Veterans Health Administration" reveals that women with substance abuse disorders are at higher risk for suicide than their male peers. This program will target women Veterans, and in particular BIPOC and LGBTQ women Veterans living in rural and urban areas across the United States. Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to suicidality, depression, obesity, and substance misuse, and can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. In 2019, the American Heart Association deemed mental illness a "workforce crisis" in the United States, a situation exacerbated by the increased social isolation required to curb the spread of COVID-19. Social ties are generally accepted as a key component of wellness and mental health, and a key factor in substance misuse. By addressing the social connection needs of women veterans, with a focus on healthy coping and emotional literacy, we intend to impact the overall health of this vulnerable population.



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## About Community Building Art Works:

Community Building Art Works (CBAW) is a Veteran service organization that builds healthy and connected communities through FREE ONLINE workshops led by professional artists. Veterans and civilians share creative expression, mutual understanding and support. Their mission is to make sure that no Veteran bears the burden of service alone.

CBAW's innovative methodology and programs have been tested and refined over twelve years and have been demonstrated to be an effective creative arts intervention for those struggling with the symptoms of PTSD to include substance misuse and suicidal behaviors. Designed in partnership with volunteers, military clinical personnel, community organizations, and VSOs, these workshops and community events are effective for Veterans wherever they are along their healing journey.

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