

SERVICE WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK:

2018 ANNUAL REPORT



**SERVICE
WOMEN'S
ACTION
NETWORK**



YOUR VOICE, AMPLIFIED

INTRODUCTION

The **Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)** is the nation's leading nonprofit organization advocating on behalf of all service women and women veterans. We are a member-driven community network. Our actions are guided by the priorities of our members, regardless of rank and experience. We benefit from the involvement of general officers to junior enlisted, from those who retired 20 years ago, to those whose service to the United States is just beginning. SWAN is the voice of all military women—past, present, and future.

SWAN was founded in 2007 by women veterans and over the past decade, SWAN has established itself as the leading U.S. organization advocating for equal opportunities, equal protections, and equal benefits within the military and the veteran's administration. We work hard to ensure military women get fair and equal treatment and care while in the military and when they leave military service. The founding of SWAN is rooted in the commonly shared experiences of many women in the military: an almost complete lack of recognition and awareness by civilians and members of the military alike that women serve their country alongside their male peers and that they have been impacted differently by their service.

Because service women are frequently overlooked and often mistreated, many service women are reluctant to identify as veterans when they leave military service. This means that many women veterans do not seek Veterans Affairs (VA) services and benefits, which includes medical and mental health care. Since many services for veterans are administered through the VA, as the largest service provider to veterans, many women are not even aware of places to go to for help, assistance, or guidance at any point after separating from the military. Additionally, this lack of awareness and recognition leads many women to feel especially isolated from their communities—both civilian and military—feeling unwelcome and misunderstood by both. This isolation and lack of community often leads to a range of negative impacts on their lives. A 2018 VA report revealed that veteran women are 250% more likely to commit suicide than their civilian counterparts. SWAN's research, published in 2018, shows that more than 60% of military women suffer from depression and over 50% suffer from post-traumatic stress.

To rectify these challenges, SWAN builds up service women, educates policy makers, testifies before Congress, engages military and veteran leadership, works with the legal community, and informs the public. We provide expert research and analysis and help service women and women veterans advocate for their interests.

2018 BY THE NUMBERS



**ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE
WOMEN: 210,695**



**NATIONAL GUARD AND
RESERVE SERVICE
WOMEN: 158,090**



**WOMEN VETERANS:
2,000,000**

MISSION AND GOALS

SWAN's mission is to support, connect, and advocate for military women— past, present, and future. Our work in 2018 focused on three key areas: **Support**, **Unite**, and **Impact**. Individually, these areas represent specific efforts and activities that deliver real and immediate value to our members, and collectively they are a demonstration of our full mission in action.

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS INCLUDE:

01

Advocate

Advocate for the rights of service women and women veterans to promote their personal and professional growth.

02

Connect

Connect service women and women veterans with SWAN, peers, and the broader community.

03

Deliver

Deliver programs and access to resources to meet the needs of service women and women veterans.

04

Develop

Build and sustain an effective, appropriately resourced organization.



Photo: 1st Sgt. Waldemar Rivera

SUPPORT

SWAN supports service women and women veterans through a variety of means. We connect service women to resources and we conduct original research to highlight their unique needs.

In 2018, SWAN assisted over 100 service women and women veterans who reached out to us via phone, emails, and direct messages. We connected them to pro-bono legal support,

referred them to mental wellness retreats, submitted amicus briefs on their behalf, and often just listened when they needed someone to talk to.

We work with existing direct service providers to ensure that their programs are women friendly and can accommodate women's unique needs. Our research has taught us that simply including women in programs that are designed by men, for men is not an acceptable way to meet women's unique needs. For example, in our "Mental Wellness Report" we recommend that military demobilization and transition programs be gender specific and not a one size fits all

approach. Happily, the Air Force in partnership with the VA, is piloting a women specific transition program that SWAN is supporting through a variety of measures.



SUPPORT CONTD.

Since our founding in 2007, SWAN has been the only organization that advocates for and supports the needs of **both** service women **and** women veterans, regardless of rank, military branch or years of experience.

With over 40,000 nonprofits in America working to serve the needs of military personnel, this is an important distinction.

While women service members and veterans have benefited from many support programs, the majority of them are still designed, by default, to meet the needs of men. SWAN focuses on changing that.

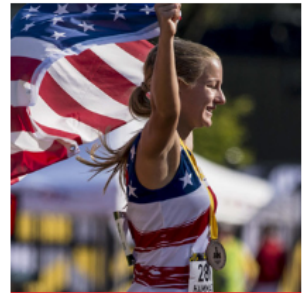
In 2018, SWAN launched an **Online Resource Portal** (pictured right) to provide service women and women veterans with access to women specific resources, services, and support. SWAN is working to vet providers and expand this portal to ensure that all women have access to the critical information and assistance they need, when and where they need it.



Hotlines



Gender Equality



Education and Advancement



Healthcare



Housing and Homelessness



Sexual Assault



Legal Services



Family Services



Alternative Therapies

SWAN ENGAGEMENT IN 2018

MEMBERS:
10,916

FACEBOOK:
13,682

FOLLOWERS
TWITTER:
8,454

INSTAGRAM:
517

UNITE



In 2018, SWAN convened the very first coalition of organizations whose primary mission is to support military women. The Military Women's Coalition (MWC) is a newly formed coalition of formal and informal organizations from across the country whose primary mission is to support military women. We are one of more than 30 organizations committed to engaging in collective action, share resources and knowledge, and promote the activities of military women's organizations to better support service women and women veterans.

The **inaugural meeting** of the Military Women's Coalition was held in Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 7, 2018. The Honorable Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, delivered opening remarks at the meeting, promising to make the VA more responsive to women veterans. The meeting brought together more than 130 women veterans and service women, representing women's military groups from across the country, to join forces in creating an unprecedented national coalition dedicated to advocating for the well-being of women veterans and service women. The service women who attended the coalition meeting worked in three separate working groups and created **a report** of foundational principles for how the Coalition will work.



Jackie Faye is a journalist who supports and partners with SWAN. In 2018 SWAN became Jackie's fiscal sponsor when she established a non-profit that supports women triathletes. In her video, Jackie cites SWAN as being an established resource and vocal advocate for all women service members and veterans.

endeavor I became the first woman to do six IRONMANs on six continents within

IMPACT

SWAN has a formidable track record that has directly led to numerous reforms in the military and at the VA, on such issues as inadequate and discriminatory health care and disability ratings and services, reproductive rights, military sexual harassment and sexual assault, and equal service opportunities being opened to women. SWAN has achieved these successes despite our limited staff and financial resources. In 2018, SWAN made considerable progress on numerous fronts.

SWAN's media advocacy supports service women and women veterans by raising awareness of the issues important to our community. This year, SWAN was quoted or featured in more than 100 articles highlighting the challenges and achievements of service women, including numerous national and international media outlets.

Our report on reproductive care was the front-page story in *The Virginian Pilot*, the paper of the greater Norfolk Virginia military community, on December 29, 2018 (pictured right).



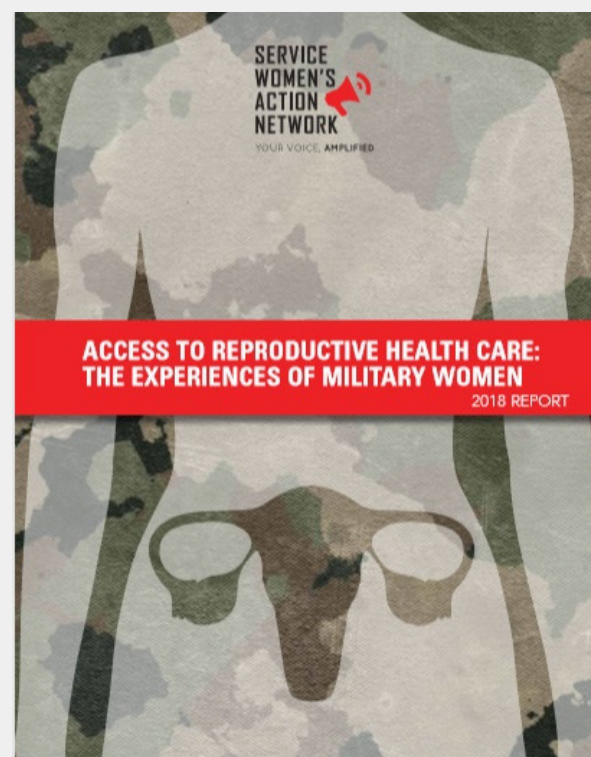
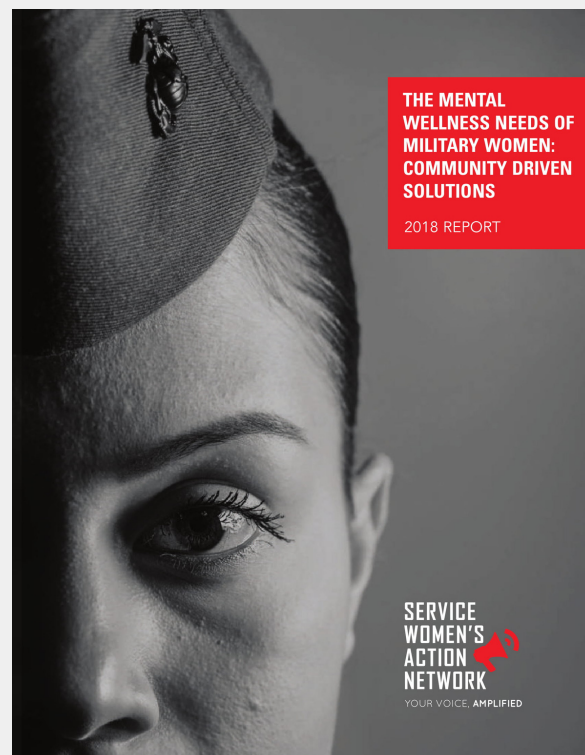
SWAN 2018 MEDIA COVERAGE



IMPACT CONTD.

In 2018, we started the year by publishing our second report, “The Mental Wellness Needs of Military Women: Community Driven Solutions,” and we are ending the year with SWAN’s third report “Access to Reproductive Health Care: The Experiences of Military Women.” SWAN is one of only a few independent advocacy organizations taking a comprehensive look at the challenges service women face, and producing research-driven reports. But we don’t just sit on the data. Throughout the year, we shared our reports with DoD, the VA, lawmakers, and the public. In total, we made over 30 visits to Congressional offices to educate lawmakers on the needs of military women and had multiple meetings with DoD and VA policy makers. We are happy to report that recommendations we made in our mental wellness report have been adopted on several fronts:

- One of our recommendations was that service women who are transitioning out of the military receive women-specific transition services. The Air Force, in partnership with the VA, is now piloting just such a program.
- Another recommendation was that Veteran Service Organization (VSO) retreat programs provide women-only retreats and retreats dedicated to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) survivors. We work closely with other VSOs to provide women-specific services and we are happy to report that Melwood’s Operation Tohidu retreat program is now offering women-only sexual assault survivor retreats.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

In 2018, SWAN's efforts contributed directly to a number of legislative changes made by Congress to help military women and women veterans. Below is a list of the principal changes and some remaining challenges.

01 SWAN Advocated Initiatives Included in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)

The 2019 NDAA includes the following provisions of interest to service women and women veterans, some of which SWAN actively advocated for such as:

- Adding a new punitive article dealing with domestic violence to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).
- Requiring a report of the feasibility of extending Special Victim Counsel availability to victims of domestic violence.
- Establishing a uniform Command Action Form for reporting the final disposition of sexual assault offenses when the perpetrator is subject to the UCMJ and the victim has filed an unrestricted report.
- Standardizing policies across the Services related to expedited transfer in cases of sexual assault or domestic violence.
- Requiring the development of a plan for implementation of oversight of DoD's Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response policy. SWAN representatives emphasized the need for this in Hill visits this year.
- Requiring oversight of the Registered Sexual Offenders' Management Plan. Another issue emphasized by SWAN during this year's Hill visits.
- Requiring the DoD and the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service to update the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to establish new pathways for more individualized counseling. Also, all those departing the military will receive information on resources available to them in the local community where they have chosen to reside, and will include resources for those suffering from Military Sexual Trauma (MST).



02

Recent VA Mission Act Passage Expands Healthcare Options

The recently passed VA Mission Act addresses long standing needs of both men and women veterans—especially with respect to obtaining healthcare from local providers when VA cannot provide needed care in a timely manner. There are still a number of decisions with respect to the funding to support this bill which have not been settled. SWAN will be closely monitoring Congressional decisions about funding the VA Mission Act to ensure programs that support women veterans, homeless veterans, blind veterans, and paralyzed veterans are not unduly tapped to provided funding to support the Act requirements.

03

Military Justice Improvement Act (MJIA) Aims to Restructure Sexual Assault Proceedings S2141

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand reintroduced MJIA for consideration by the Senate during FY 2018, but it failed to pass the Senate; in fact, it never came up for a vote. We will continue to work with her office to re-introduce the bill in the upcoming 116th Congress.

**04**

SWAN Continues to Advocate for Marine Corps Boot Camp Integration

Congress took no action this year to require the USMC to integrate fully its boot camp training. The by-sex segregation of newly enlisted Marines has been a long term concern of SWAN's. Failure to fully integrate boot camp, is an impediment to integration of women into Marine ground combat MOSs and units. It also acts as a ceiling on the number of enlisted women who can enter the Marine Corps each year—keeping the share of enlisted Marines who are women below the 10 percent point as the other services are heading toward 20 percent women.

CALL TO ACTION

SWAN thanks our 2018 supporters. With their help we have:

- United service women and women veterans from across the country into a powerful coalition.
- Fought to ensure women veterans have the mental, reproductive and VA health care they deserve.
- Continued the fight to ensure service women have access to all jobs, based on ability, not gender.
- Fought to ensure service women are able to serve without the threat of assault or harassment.

In recognition of SWAN's longstanding support to service women and women veterans SWAN was nominated for and received the Vetty award for its 2018 work. The Vetty is awarded annually to a non-profit that excels at supporting veterans.

SWAN remains committed and steadfast in pursuit of our mission. Please consider assisting us in 2019 as we advance the rights, care, and opportunities of service women and women veterans.

To continue supporting SWAN this year, please visit our **website** and consider making a tax-deductible donation today! We are always accepting volunteers and collaborators. If interested, please send us an email at info@servicewomen.org

Your help is crucial to allowing SWAN further our work both nationally. From conducting research and educating lawmakers, to developing our resource portal and building the Military Women's coalition, we rely on the generosity of members and supporters like you! Thank you for your support in 2018 and we hope you consider helping us expand our efforts in 2019!

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