

MVAA's first Women Veterans Conference stresses advocacy

LANSING, Mich. – About 150 women military veterans from across Michigan will gather at the Lansing Center June 10-11 for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency's inaugural Women Veterans Conference.

The theme for the conference is advocacy. That includes how women veterans can advocate for their mental and physical health and career advancement, as well as advocating for others by learning how to run for local offices, commissions and boards.

Women veterans are the fastest growing group in the veteran population. Michigan is home to more than 43,000 women veterans, which represents about 8% of the state's veteran population. That is projected to grow to 16% by 2045.

Women veterans face many challenges, including substance abuse, homelessness, lack of adequate health care and the widespread issues of not identifying as veterans and being overlooked as veterans.

"Women veterans represent the best of us, and the state of Michigan is committed to providing them the resources and support they need to thrive in all facets of their lives," said Governor Gretchen Whitmer. "The inaugural Women Veterans Conference is centered on advocacy. Michigan's 43,000 women veterans face a range of challenges and this conference presents a unique opportunity to foster a sense of belonging and create lasting bonds. We will continue working together to support those who have answered the call of duty."

Under the Whitmer administration, the first-ever conference is the latest milestone within the MVAA's strategic goal of supporting underserved Michigan veterans of all eras and backgrounds. The agency also played a role in getting June 12 established as Women Veterans Recognition Day in Michigan and works diligently to connect women veterans to the benefits they earned for their service.

"This conference has been a long-time coming for women in Michigan," said MVAA Director Zaneta Adams, an Army veteran. "It's exciting because this is a major event for women to get together in a safe space and learn about whole health, advocacy and how to grow community leadership."

Conference sessions include "Fierce Advocacy," "Go for the promotion, ask for the raise!" "Sexual health," "Running for office" and more. There will be a keynote address by Rhoda Daniel, a retired Army colonel and Iraqi war veteran, as well as networking, evening activities and a panel from the MVAA's influential [She is A Veteran](#) awareness campaign.

"People are really excited for the content at the conference, but I think they are mostly excited to be in community with other women who served in the military and who have shared experiences," said Erika Hoover, MVAA's women veterans and special

populations coordinator and a Navy veteran. “It’s going to be a fun and engaging conference. My hope is that the attendees walk away with friendships, a sense of belonging and the confidence to continue their service through advocacy.”

Registration for the \$60 conference is available at [Eventbrite](#).

Vendors will include the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, VFW National Home for Children, Michigan Honor Flight and the National Veteran Legal Services Program.

Sponsors include Consumers Energy, Dr. Sylvia Rafels, Izzo Legacy Race and LiveWell. Individuals or organizations interested in becoming a sponsor can contact Katy Golden at goldenk1@michigan.gov.

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About the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency: Created by Executive Order in 2013, MVAA’s mission is to be the central coordinating agency, providing support, care, advocacy and service to veterans and their families. The agency works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, state departments, county agencies, and community and veterans service organizations throughout the state. The agency operates the Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center, a 24/7/365 call center in partnership with Michigan 211. By calling 1-800-MICH-VET (1-800-642-4838) veterans, family members and service providers can get information and access a comprehensive network of resources and services. Learn more at Michigan.gov/MVAA.