

Editorial: Veterans deserve reproductive health services

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Americans have heard many stories and seen considerable documentation of the brain, spinal and other wartime injuries suffered by America's military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan. Less-known is that the U.S. government callously interferes with these wounded veterans' chance to have children.

A 27-year-old law blocks the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from providing some reproductive health services - such as in vitro fertilization - to veterans even though those same services are available to active-duty military. Congress repeatedly has refused to overturn that law, adding to thousands of veterans' financial and emotional stress.

In recent years, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray and Rep. Rick Larsen, both from Washington, have successfully added veterans' fertility treatments and adoption options to military spending bills, temporarily getting around the VA ban on providing [in vitro fertilization](#). But until Congress permanently lifts the ban, it will create anxiety for wounded veterans striving to start their families.

That's why Murray and Larsen have spent years working for a solution. They are back at it, reintroducing the Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act.

Reproductive health services are so common that the Department of Defense covers many for current [service](#) members. Murray and Larsen's bills would allow coverage of IVF and related services for veterans, include spouses in the coverage, expand the reproductive health options for current military and provide financial assistance in adopting children. They also would solidify and expand the VA's child-care program.

As Murray said in announcing this year's version, "We promise to take care of veterans long after the war is over - and allowing them to fulfill their dream of having a [family](#) is a big part of that promise."

It is both heartless and absurd for the VA not to pay for IVF and other reproductive health services. Severe injuries sustained in combat, training or transport have left some veterans unable to conceive children naturally. In vitro fertilization offers hope for a family. But it can be tremendously expensive - \$12,000 or more for one cycle of IVF,

according to Larsen. That can make IVF out-of-reach without coverage.

It is past time to turn the Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act into law. Our veterans deserve these fundamental health services just as much as other [health](#) care.

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