

PRIDE and TelePride

Second, I want to welcome everybody and thank you all for joining. My name is Lauren Korshak and I leave translation activities for the VA's office of HealthEquity, the Office of HealthEquity champions, the advancement of HealthEquity, and the reduction in health disparities. Veterans, my job means that I get to tell stories about all the data we have about veterans and their health today on the HealthEquity and Veterans Podcast series will be discussing how the VA is creating opportunities for more LGBT veterans to be connected with each other. But before we begin, I want to introduce our speakers. Doctor Tiffany Lang is a clinical psychologist in LGBT veteran program manager at the Hampton VA Medical Center in Virginia. She developed and refined the Pride in all who served. Health education group, in collaboration with LGBT veterans and stakeholders. With support from the VA Innovation Network and Hampton VA leadership, she is trained and consulted with more than 24 VA medical centers and counting to launch the group to at their sites. Dr Lang has been published in several peer reviewed journals, provides national trainings about affirmative care, has assisted her facility in earning and maintaining the coveted status of leader in LGBT Q Healthcare. Equality by the Human Rights Campaign and has been awarded 3 National I Care awards for her efforts in addition to Doctor Lang, we have Terry came here. Terry King is a combat veteran of 28 years active duty service in EU S Army. She retired in 2016, having served her entire career as a chaplain, providing ministry to soldiers and their families in assignments all around the world. She's with us today to share how the VA helped her to understand her transgender identity and improve her. Overall well being, so I want to start Doctor Lang by asking you to tell us about the Pride program. Thank you for having us here today, so the prior to now who serve program is focused on addressing health care disparities by directly providing health information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender veterans. The ten week Health Education Group was developed at the Hampton VA Medical Center and was primarily based upon veteran feedback for what they needed out of their health care services. So I like to think that it was. Designed by our LGBT veterans for LGBT veterans and through providing this health education and a supportive peer environment, we hope to empower LGBT veterans to navigate the VA system and thus reduce healthcare disparities. And I like to make it clear that this is not a mental health group because LGBT identity is not a mental health disorder, sexual orientation and gender identity matter in healthcare. The PRIDE program provides an opportunity for veterans to learn more about what. That specifically means and how to navigate their overall well being so fabulous, so I know I mentioned in your introduction that it was developed at the Hampton VA Medical Center in Virginia. But it's not only offered at Hampton, VA. Can you tell us where it's offered and how that works? We've been involved with the VA innovators network and diffusion of excellence for several years now. And so I got connected with my project partner Doctor Michelle Hilgeman at the Tuscaloosa, VA. And through that partnership we were able to not only manual eyes. What was happening at Hampton, but find that Ave for helping other sites get that started. And so I've had facilities and site leads reach out to me over the years saying that, you know, they wanted to do more to help their LGBT veterans. They wanted to kind of find connection to services within the VA and helping veterans to understand more about their identity and so through that. Process we've been able to help other facilities replicate the health education group at their facility and a lot of the a lot of the spread has actually been word of mouth, from group facilitators. Finding the service to be meaningful, LGBT veterans, finding interest and value in the service, and sharing that with other people are our greatest referral sources. Actually, our veterans, who have already completed the group so. And just about two years we went from just having the service at the Hampton and Tuscalusa VS two as you mentioned. Well over 20 and continuously growing from the interest in the outreach that we're getting from sites so fabulous. So is it just offered in person? Do people have to travel because I know you know

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a lot of times people are nervous about traveling and being in public these days. Is it offered through Tele health? It is actually offered for Tele Health. We're actually titling it Tele pride. A spin on the pride and all who served, title of it. And you know, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we've had to be really creative and thinking about how are we going to meet the needs, how we're going to fill the gap and continue providing this service to our LGBT veterans. And so since I'm at the Hampton VA Medical Center, I partnered with the Vision Six clinical resource hub so that we could offer the. The group service, virtually to all veterans across Virginia and North Carolina, so we're able to have that reach across facilities, and we're working with other sites to also offer the group virtually as well. The initial feedback that we're getting from veterans is overwhelmingly positive. Talking about what it means to still be able to to learn about their identity, learn about their health care needs, while also connecting with peers virtually during a time where. You know we're finding those those connections changing, and a little bit more difficult with not being able to be in person for health reasons. That's awesome, Terry. You are a pride participant. Can you tell me what your experience has been like? Yes and thank you for letting me participate as well. My experience has been phenomenal when I first came into the program, I didn't understand my own identity and I was trying to sort it out and I didn't even have the words. To to describe it to myself and so part of the program is just very basic educational providing concepts and terminology and it makes me feel like I'm OK because there's an answer for it. And once I had that then I had a framework that I could understand myself and begin to understand other people as well. When I first came into the program. I had recently retired and. I've really was having a lot of challenge struggling with my identity and how to express it and what was right. What was wrong, what was acceptable and because of that I was even having difficulties continuing to stay alive and the program provided for me a group of people with whom I could relate and it provided me content that helped me to understand what was happening. And to normalize it so that I not only could live I I could have a life that I could enjoy. So Terry, what do you think is important for other veterans to know about? Pride one is that they matter. That they served, and they have a right to to receive the care that's appropriate for their medical needs and they matter. And and my sense is that the VA really believes that they matter, and so that's one piece of it. Another thing is for them to know that there's no embarrassment. There's confidentiality, their safety. They will not be put in any compromising position. Nobody will out them. And they will be able to continue to progress through their experience at a pace that works for them. And each of us works at a different pace, and each of us is that at a different place. But I found that the the staff and the other veterans alike. We are all understanding and we're all encouraging and we all accept one another where we are and what that did for me is I was able to see where others were maybe a little further down the journey than I am, and I could start to see how I could take a few more steps. So what has been your favorite part of this experience? Can I have 10 favorites? It's sure you know, no, I I think the relationship with other veterans. Has been very important to me because I don't feel like I'm alone and I don't feel like I'm a strange oddity. I feel like I'm a real person with legitimate real desires to live life in a way that's fulfilling. And and that reflects who I am and I can do it in the context of a group of people that really responds in respect and even love with one another. Uhm, what are my other favorites? Is the program provides a lot of information and a lot of education and so from week to week we look at things from various perspectives and we were introduced to other subject matter experts that are brought in to tell us about their area and we meet them and so we're able then to see what other services and what other care the VA can provide. That helps us, and so that enables us to reach out and make other appointments and and gain additional help that I personally didn't even know was there. And I I hear people say oh, the VA does that. And it's need to be able to say yes. the VA

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does that and I guess two other favorites. One favorite is that I have seen the leadership embraced the program and with my own experience in the military and organizational leadership. I know how important it is. For leadership. To take a hold of something that's different and let it be innovative and let it reach out and connect to other sources beyond their purview and gain and and share. And so the leadership embracing it is, is so obvious and meaningful, but I think my favorite is part would be the chair that's been provided by the immediate staff, leadership Doctor Lang, and for me a couple of others. Dr Richardson. And who's in India chronologist and some of the ones that have provided specialty care. Those staff members I've gotten to know better because I've had more interaction with them and I've discovered delightful people that really care about veterans and really are helpful. One more favorite. Is that I have gotten to become myself and to love myself as I am, and to continue to grow authentically in who I am. And before I wasn't able to do that, but with the program, I'm finally me. That's amazing. That just brightened my day. Thank you, Doctor Lang. I have hopefully my last question for you. If anyone is looking For more information about the PRIDE program. Or they're looking to enroll? How can they get more information? What are what are their their first steps to to enrolling anyone who's interested in the PRIDE program can find the project through the VA diffusion marketplace? You can locate that through a simple Google search or through kind of the internal VA SharePoint and anyone who's interested in learning more about LGBT services as a whole within the VA can look up the national LGBT health program or contact their local. Facility LGBT veteran care coordinator. One of the amazing things about the VA system as a whole is every facility has at least one LGBT veteran care coordinator who's a point of contact for LGBT veterans. And so you can find more about services and policies and directives that are related to LGBT care. But for the PRIDE program specifically, we can be we can be contacted through VA diffusion marketplace. Or directly, to me, that's fabulous in a veterans have questions. They can always contact their primary provider or the LGBT care coordinator at their VA Medical Center, correct? To get more information. Absolutely perfect. Thank you so much for sharing this information about this really important program and Terry, thank you. Thank you for sharing your story and your experience. I am forever grateful that you all were able to join us on this episode. For everyone listening, I want to thank you for joining and I hope you will join us next time. Take care.