



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Supportive Services for Veteran Families & Patient Care Services LGBT Health

Coordination of Treating Veterans with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Related Identities in VHA

[Link to Audio Recording](#)

August 8, 2019

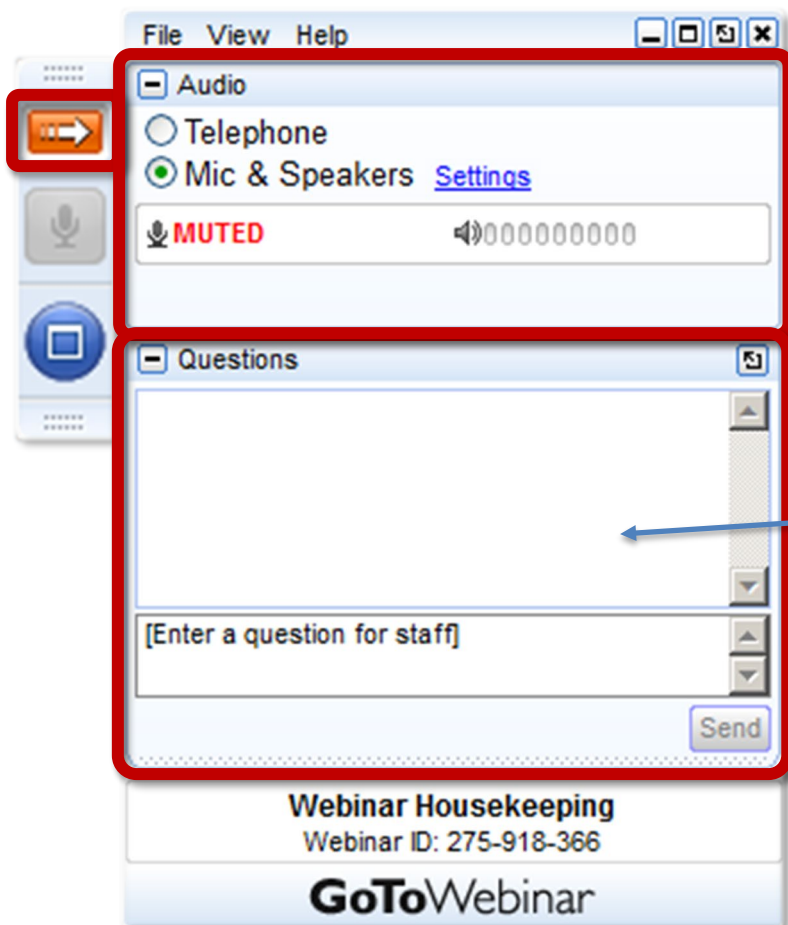


WEBINAR FORMAT

- Webinar will last approximately 80 minutes
- Participants' phone connections are “muted” due to the high number of callers
- Questions can be submitted during the webinar using the Q&A function
- Questions can also be submitted anytime to [SSVF@va.gov](mailto:ssvf@va.gov)



Questions



Your Questions

Submit questions and comments via the Questions panel



SSVF 2019 LGBT Survey Results

- 75% were unaware of LGBT services
- 60% were unaware of directive 1340
- 63% were unaware of directive 1341
- 75% were working with Veterans who had identified
- 70% stated Veterans had not accessed VA LGBT services

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Treating Veterans with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Related Identities in VHA

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Presented August 8, 2019 to Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
National Grantee Webinar



VHA LGBT Health Program



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Director, LGBT Health Program

<http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT>



What LGBT Means

LGBT = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender and related identities*

- Acronym for diverse groups of **sexual** and **gender minorities**, with similar experiences of social stigma, victimization, and discrimination.
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual groups related by **sexual orientation**.
- Transgender groups related by **gender identity**; only a subset meet criteria for a DSM-5 **Gender Dysphoria** diagnosis.

*VA uses LGBT in an inclusive way

4.5% of American adults (15M)
identify as LGBT.

Gallup Poll, 2018



Sex, Gender, and Gender Identity

Sex

- Classification based on anatomy
- “Sex at birth” - male or female (intersex)

Gender identity

the internal sense of self as a man, woman, transman or transwoman, or some other non-binary gender identity: e.g., genderqueer, gender fluid, etc.

Gender

- Behavioral, cultural, and psychological traits socially associated with one's sex
- Man, woman, transman, transwoman, genderqueer, etc.

Cisgender



How Many LGBT Veterans?

- ~20 million Veterans. Estimated **1 million** gay and lesbian Veterans (appx. 3%) with 65,000 gay and lesbian active duty service members.¹
- At least **134,000** transgender Veterans (~0.6%),² with 15,000 on active duty.³
- VHA does not routinely collect sexual orientation and gender identity data. Self-Identified Gender Identity field is in early phase.
- Using diagnostic codes, **9700** transgender Veterans in VHA.
- If LGB Veterans came to VHA at same rate as other Veterans, potentially **400,000+** LGB Veterans in VHA.



¹Gates & Newport, 2012; ²Gates & Herman, 2014; ³Elders & Steinman, 2014



Unique Context of LGBT Veterans – VA Policy

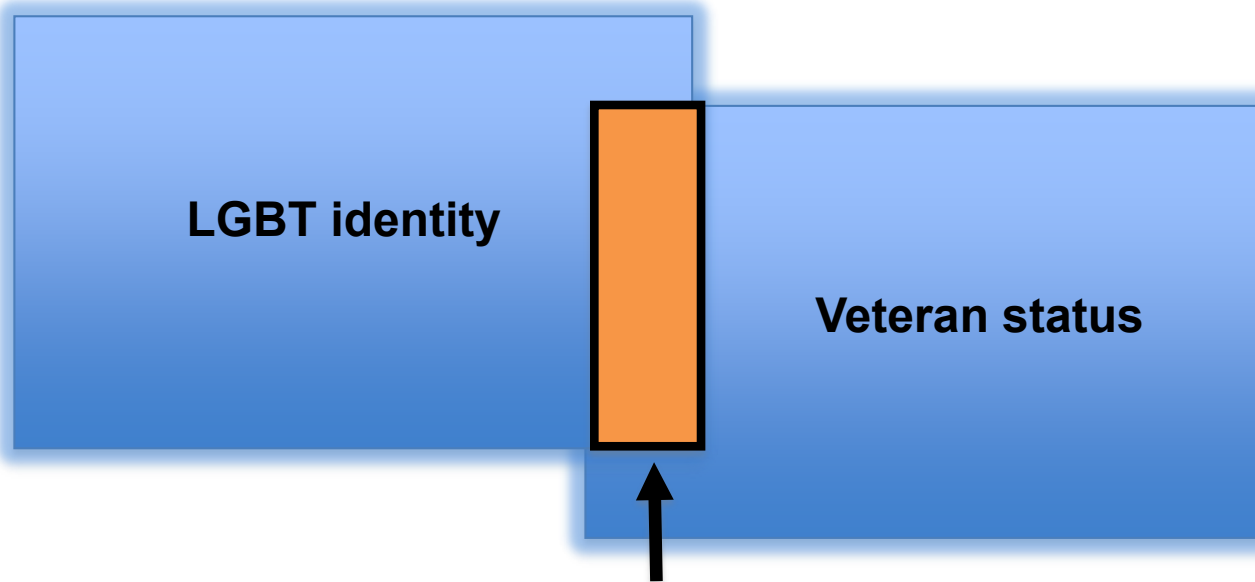
- **VHA has its own policies. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” not in VHA.**
 - But research shows LGBT Veterans anticipate discrimination from VHA providers.¹⁻²
 - 2011 – national transgender Directive issued guaranteeing care (now *VHA Directive 1341(1): Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans*).
 - 2017 – national LGB Directive issued (*VHA Directive 1340(1): Provision of Health Care for Veterans Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual*).



¹Sherman, Kauth, Ridener, Shipherd, Bratkovich & Beaulieu, 2014; ²Sherman, Kauth, Shipherd, & Street, 2014



LGBT Veteran Health Disparities



Higher prevalence of **trauma (including MST for LB women and transgender Veterans), PTSD, substance abuse (including smoking), poorer mental and physical health outcomes, increased suicidal ideation, and homelessness**. VHA users are older, more ethnically diverse, more health conditions than nonusers.

Blosnich, Farmer, Lee, Silenzio & Bowen, 2014; Blosnich & Silenzio, 2013; Brown & Jones, 2014; Brown & Jones, 2016; Cochran, Balsam, Flentje, Malte & Simpson, 2013; Kauth, Barrera, Denton & Latini, 2017; Kauth, Barrera & Latini, 2018; Lehavot & Simpson, 2014; Mattocks et al., 2013; Monin, Mota, Levy, Pachankis, & Pietrzak, 2017; Ray-Sannerud, Bryan, Perry, & Bryan, 2015; Shipherd, Mizock, Maguen & Green, 2012



Mental and Behavioral Health Disparities for Transgender People

Depression

Suicide ideation / attempts

Homelessness

Smoking

HIV

Anxiety

Trauma and violence against them

Alcohol and substance abuse

Low social support

Higher risk for ethnic minorities

2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (N=27,715):

- **40%** attempted suicide [rate in U.S. population is 4.6%]; **7%** in past year
- **30% experienced homelessness**
- **58%** experienced mistreated by police
- **54%** experienced partner violence
- **31%** had been harassed in public (e.g., store, hotel, office)

Daniel, Butkus for Health and Public Policy Committee of the ACP, 2015; Institute of Medicine, 2011; James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet & Anafi, 2016 Makadon, Mayer, Goldhammer & Potter, 2007; Valentine & Shipherd, 2018; James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet & Anafi, 2016



Transgender Veterans

Veterans in VHA with Gender Identity code have **20x** higher rate of suicidal behavior than Veterans generally.¹

5,135 Veterans in VHA with transgender diagnostic codes had worse mental and physical health outcomes on *nearly every* measure than control sample of veterans.²

- Ethnic minority transgender veterans worse outcomes.³

High rates of military sexual trauma.^{4,5}

Transgender Veterans using HUD-VASH report lack of legal protection against discrimination in many states as unique barrier to housing. Case managers were helpful in securing housing. Sex-specific shelters that do not respect identity were stressors.⁶

¹Blosnich, Brown, Shipherd, Kauth, Peigari & Bossarte, 2013; ²Brown & Jones, 2016; ³Brown & Jones, 2014; ⁴Lindsay et al., 2016; ⁵Beckman, Shipherd, Simpson & Lehavot, 2018 ⁶Blosnich et al, 2019



What VA is Doing for LGBT Veterans

Three strategic approaches to addressing LGBT health disparities:

1. Develop national policies
 - e.g., nondiscrimination policies; healthcare policies
2. Educate staff and promote assessment
 - e.g., trainings and clinical support resources
3. Inform and engage LGBT Veterans
 - e.g., LGBT Veteran Care Coordinators, welcoming signage / posters, fact sheets, etc.



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National Policies

- *VHA Directive 1019: Nondiscrimination in Federally-Conducted and Federally-Assisted (External) Programs*

https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2885

“It is VHA policy to prohibit discrimination in any and all VHA programs, programs receiving VA funding or any VA jurisdictions on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, **sex (includes gender identity, transgender status), sexual orientation**, pregnancy, marital and parental status, political affiliation, age, disability, genetic information, and LEP. Federal law and VHA policy also prohibit harassment of any person or retaliation against any person who filed a charge of discrimination based on any of these criteria.”



National Policies (cont'd)

- *VHA Directive 1340(1): Provision of Health Care for Veterans Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual:*

https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=5438

“It is VHA policy that all staff members provide clinically appropriate, comprehensive, Veteran-centered care with respect and dignity to LGB Veterans. Clinically appropriate care includes assessment of sexual health as indicated with all patients, and attention to health disparities experienced by LGB people. **It is VHA policy that any attempts (formal or informal) by VA staff to convert or change a Veteran’s sexual orientation are prohibited.**”



National Policies (cont'd)

- *VHA Directive 1341(1): Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans:*

https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=6431

“It is VHA policy that staff provide clinically appropriate, comprehensive, Veteran-centered care with respect and dignity to enrolled or otherwise eligible transgender and intersex Veterans, including but not limited to **hormonal therapy, mental health care, preoperative evaluation, and medically necessary post-operative and long-term care** following gender confirming/affirming surgery. It is VHA policy that Veterans must be addressed based upon their self-identified gender identity; the **use of Veteran’s preferred name and pronoun is required**. . . .VA does not provide or fund gender confirming/affirming surgeries because VA regulation excludes them from the medical benefits package.”

- Veterans are treated based upon self identified gender identity.
- Bathrooms, inpatient/residential room assignment based on gender identity.
- VHA employees must create a welcoming environment.



What VA is Doing for LGBT Veterans

Three strategic approaches to addressing LGBT health disparities:

1. Develop national policies
 - e.g., nondiscrimination policies; healthcare policies
2. **Educate staff and promote assessment**
 - **e.g., trainings and clinical support resources**
3. Inform and engage LGBT Veterans
 - e.g., LGBT Veteran Care Coordinators, welcoming signage / posters, fact sheets, etc.



24/7 Online Education Resources

Transgender Veteran online trainings

1. An Introduction to Transgender Care
2. Transgender Mental Health Services
3. Transgender Health: Prescribing Cross-Sex Hormones

- *Includes transgender Veterans speaking about their experiences and preferences for health care.*



LGB Veteran care online trainings

1. Do Ask, Do Tell: 5 Awkward Minutes to Better Patient Care
2. Do Ask, Do Tell: Assessing Sexual Health of LGBT Veterans (and Everyone Else)
3. Do Ask, Do Tell: LGB Veteran Health Care

VHA TRAIN Education System: <https://vha.train.org/>

- Free! Public Health Foundation - continuing education credits



Resources - Homelessness

- National Coalition for the Homeless:
<https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/lgbtq.pdf>
- Transitioning Our Shelters – A Guide for Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People: <https://srlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/TransitioningOurShelters.pdf>
- Getting Down to Basics: Tools to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/getting-down-to-basics>



Additional Education Resources

Training

- GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality: www.glma.org
- National LGBT Health Education Center: <https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/>
- [VHA TRAIN](#): (Search for “Transgender Care” and “Do Ask, Do Tell”)

Resources

- American Psychological Association: www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health: www.wpath.org
- CDC: www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/
- VHA LGBT Health Program: www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/
- Kauth & Shipherd. 2018. *Adult transgender care: An interdisciplinary approach for training mental health professionals*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Makadon, Mayer, Potter & Goldhammer. 2015. *Fenway Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health*, 2nd edition. Philadelphia. ACP.



What VA is Doing for LGBT Veterans

Three strategic approaches to addressing LGBT health disparities:

1. Develop national policies
 - e.g., nondiscrimination policies; healthcare policies
2. Educate staff and promote assessment
 - e.g., trainings and clinical support resources
3. **Inform and engage LGBT Veterans**
 - **e.g., LGBT Veteran Care Coordinators, welcoming signage / posters, fact sheets, etc.**



LGBT Point of Contact Program

- Since mid-2016, every facility has at least one **LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator**; every VA region has an **LGBT VISN Lead**.
 - Develop clinical services for LGBT Veterans (e.g., support groups, couple's therapy, hormone evaluations, etc.).
 - Provide education / training to local VHA staff.
 - Publicize community LGBT resources in VHA. Outreach to LGBT community organizations and providers outside VHA.
 - Support development of a welcoming environment.

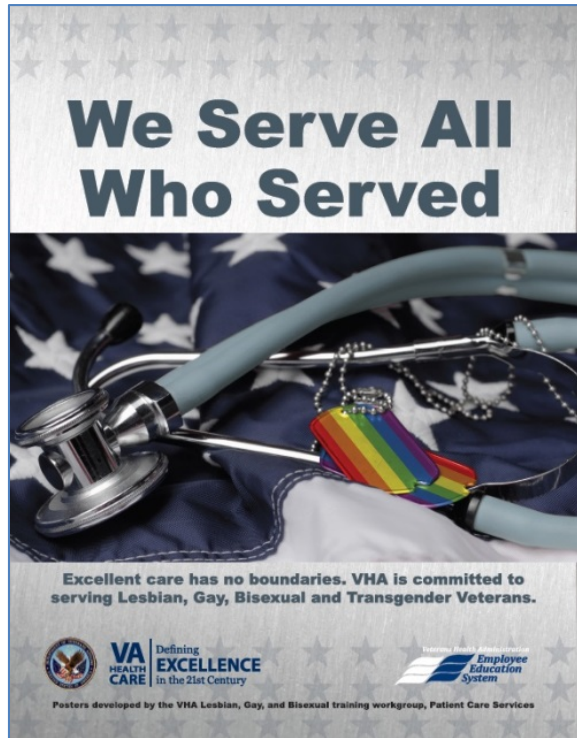
To find an LGBT VCC: <http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT>

Or contact us by email: VALGBTProgram@va.gov



LGBT Veterans Are Welcome at VHA

LGBT Awareness



Sexual Health



Transgender E-Consultation



LGBT Veterans Are Welcome at VHA



Pride month poster with Women's Health

LGBT Health Awareness week poster with Primary Care





Suicide Prevention and LGBT Veterans



Connect.
It can save a life.

#BeThere for your peers
with lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender, or related identities.

[Bit.ly/ConnectToVA](https://bit.ly/ConnectToVA)

#BeThere VA U.S. Department
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LGBT Veteran Health Fact Sheets

Get the Facts...

LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE Male Veterans: Gay and Bisexual Health Care

Gay and bisexual Veterans face increased health risks and unique challenges in accessing quality health care. There is an estimated 1 million lesbian, gay, and bisexual Veterans in the United States. Many of these Veterans may receive care at the VA. We are working to be a national leader in health care for LGBT Veterans and ensure that high-quality care is provided in a sensitive, respectful environment at VA's nationwide. The following is a list of the top things gay and bisexual male Veterans should discuss at their VA's health provider.

1. JOIN LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE PROGRAM
In order to provide you with the best care possible, your VA doctor should know you are gay or bisexual. In health care, your doctor should know your sexual orientation and gender identity. If you provide this information, your doctor can better understand your health needs and provide you with the best care possible. Your doctor can help you with questions about your health. For more information, see page 5.

2. JOIN THE VA LGBT COMMUNITY
Depression and anxiety affect gay and bisexual Veterans at higher rates than heterosexual Veterans. Veterans are also at higher risk of suicide. These problems can be worse if you are not connected to your community. The VA has programs to help you connect to your community. For more information, see page 5.

WWW.VETERANSHEALTHCARE.GOV

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Get the Facts...

LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE Female Veterans: Lesbian and Bisexual Health Care

Lesbian and bisexual Veterans face increased health risks and unique challenges in accessing quality health care. There is an estimated 1 million lesbian, gay, and bisexual Veterans in the United States. Many of these Veterans may receive care at the VA. We are working to be a national leader in health care for LGBT Veterans and ensure that high-quality care is provided in a sensitive, respectful environment at VA's nationwide. The following is a list of the top things lesbian and bisexual women Veterans should discuss during their VA's visit.

1. JOIN LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE PROGRAM
In order to provide you with the best care possible, your VA doctor should know you are lesbian or bisexual. In health care, your doctor should know your sexual orientation and gender identity. If you provide this information, your doctor can better understand your health needs and provide you with the best care possible. Your doctor can help you with questions about your health. For more information, see page 5.

2. JOIN THE VA LGBT COMMUNITY
Depression and anxiety affect lesbian and bisexual Veterans at higher rates than heterosexual Veterans. Veterans are also at higher risk of suicide. These problems can be worse if you are not connected to your community. The VA has programs to help you connect to your community. For more information, see page 5.

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Get the Facts...

LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE Male Veterans: Transgender Male Health Care

Transgender Veterans who identify as male face increased health risks and unique challenges in accessing quality health care. VA strives to be a national leader in the provision of LGBT health care and ensure that high-quality care is provided in a sensitive, respectful environment. Research shows that transgender identity is about 3 times more common among Veterans than non-Veterans. Many transgender Veterans receive care at VA. The following is a list of the top things transgender male Veterans should discuss with their VA's health care provider.

1. JOIN LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE PROGRAM
In order to provide you with the best care possible, your VA doctor should know you are transgender. In health care, your doctor should know your gender identity and sex assigned at birth. If you provide this information, your doctor can better understand your health needs and provide you with the best care possible. Your doctor can help you with questions about your health. For more information, see page 5.

2. JOIN THE VA LGBT COMMUNITY
Depression and anxiety affect transgender Veterans at higher rates than heterosexual Veterans. Veterans are also at higher risk of suicide. These problems can be worse if you are not connected to your community. The VA has programs to help you connect to your community. For more information, see page 5.

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Get the Facts...

LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE Female Veterans: Transgender Female Health Care

Transgender Veterans who identify as female face increased health risks and unique challenges in accessing quality health care. VA strives to be a national leader in the provision of LGBT health care and ensure that high-quality care is provided in a sensitive, respectful environment. Research shows that transgender identity is about 3 times more common among Veterans than non-Veterans. Many transgender Veterans receive care at VA. The following is a list of the top things transgender female Veterans should discuss at their VA's health care provider.

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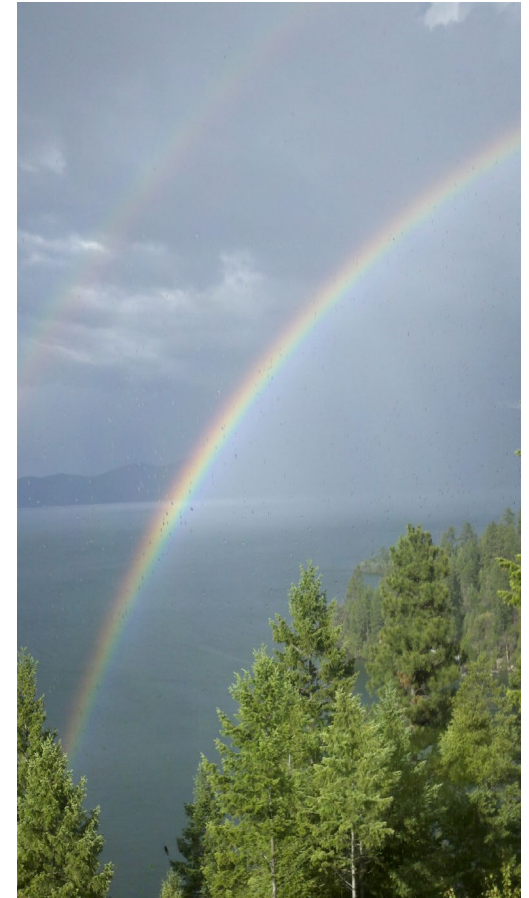
WWW.VETERANSHEALTHCARE.GOV

<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT>



Conclusion: A Few Do's

- **DO:** Create a welcoming / supportive environment (debunk the expectation of discrimination).
 - ✓ Add your preferred pronouns to your email signature block.
 - “My pronouns are She/her/hers”
 - “My pronouns are He/him/his”
 - “My pronouns are They/them/theirs”
 - ✓ Add LGBT-friendly signs to the environment (especially bathrooms).
 - ✓ Review forms / paperwork for inclusivity.
 - ✓ Do not tolerate anti-LGBT comments. Speak up!





Inclusive Language

Inclusive language around gender and sexuality communicates the expectation of diversity as well as welcome-ness and respect.

- Instead of he or she, try they.
 - *"Someone left their phone... I hope they come back for it."*
- Instead of guys or ladies try Veterans or everyone.
 - *"Good morning, Veterans!"*
 - *"Good morning, everyone!"*
- Instead of woman or man, try person.
 - *"Did you see a person in the red shirt just walk through the lobby?"*



Take Home Messages

- LGBT Veterans and non-Veterans have unique health care needs.
- LGBT people deserve respectful, culturally appropriate health care.
- VHA wants to be the provider of choice for all Veterans, including LGBT Veterans.
- Non-discrimination policies help to support LGBT patients and staff.
- Staff / provider education and assessment of sexual orientation identity and gender identity are critical.
- Resource materials and signage help to inform and engage LGBT patients.
- There is more to do!



Questions and comments

VALGBTProgram@va.gov

<http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT>

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LGBT Health

