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
Questions

Submit questions and comments via the Questions panel

[Image of a computer interface showing the Questions panel with a text box for entering questions and a button labeled 'Send'.]
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
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
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http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT
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
• VHA has its own policies. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” not in VHA.
  o But research shows LGBT Veterans anticipate discrimination from VHA providers.\textsuperscript{1-2}
  
  

\textsuperscript{1}Sherman, Kauth, Ridener, Shipherd, Bratkovich & Beaulieu, 2014; \textsuperscript{2}Sherman, Kauth, Shipherd, & Street, 2014
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.

Mental and Behavioral Health Disparities for Transgender People

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide ideation / attempts
- Trauma and violence against them
- Homelessness
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Smoking
- Low social support
- HIV

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.\(^6\)

\(^1\)Blosnich, Brown, Shipherd, Kauth, Peigari & Bossarte, 2013; \(^2\)Brown & Jones, 2016; \(^3\)Brown & Jones, 2014; \(^4\)Lindsay et al., 2016; \(^5\)Beckman, Shipherd, Simpson & Lehavot, 2018 \(^6\)Blosnich et al, 2019
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.
What VA is Doing for LGBT Veterans

Three strategic approaches to addressing LGBT health disparities:

1. **Develop national policies**
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• **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."

  o Veterans are treated based upon self identified gender identity.
  o Bathrooms, inpatient/residential room assignment based on gender identity.
  o VHA employees must create a welcoming environment.
What VA is Doing for LGBT Veterans

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3. Inform and engage LGBT Veterans
   - e.g., LGBT Veteran Care Coordinators, welcoming signage / posters, fact sheets, etc.
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/](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


• 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/
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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.
  o Develop clinical services for LGBT Veterans (e.g., support groups, couple’s therapy, hormone evaluations, etc.).
  o Provide education / training to local VHA staff.
  o Publicize community LGBT resources in VHA. Outreach to LGBT community organizations and providers outside VHA.
  o 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
LGBT Veteran Health Fact Sheets

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 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