

# Diversity@Work

February 2021

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

WWW.VA.GOV/ORMDI

## Upcoming Events

February 2021

### Black History Month

#### Rosa Parks Day

February 4

#### [Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council Quarterly Meeting](#)

February 4; 1-3 PM

#### National Wear Red Day

February 5

#### Valentine's Day

February 14

#### Washington's Birthday/Presidents' Day (Federal Holiday Observed)

February 15

## ORMDI

### Steps Toward Conflict Resolution

You can contact the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) toll-free at 1-888-566-3982 (TTY/TDD at 1-888-626-9008) and speak with a specialist regarding [Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Processing](#), [Alternative Dispute Resolution](#), and the [Harassment Prevention Program](#). You must initiate contact with an EEO counselor within 45 days of the date of the alleged act of discrimination by calling 1-888-566-3982 or visiting your local ORMDI Field Office.

**THE BLACK FAMILY**

*Representation, Identity, and Diversity*

**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY**

## Commemorate Black History Month

This February, VA joins the Nation in observing Black History Month and celebrating the contributions of African Americans to our Nation. Black History Month was established by Public Law 99-244. Established by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, this year's Black History Month theme is, "The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity."

As a provider of health care services to our Nation's Veterans, VA recognizes the immeasurable contributions of African Americans to this field

and commemorates some of the first historical African American figures in medicine.

Dr. James McCune Smith (1813-1865) was the first Black American to receive a medical degree, the first Black American to own and operate a pharmacy in the U.S., and the first Black physician to be published in U.S. medical journals. After years as a nurse, Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler (1831-1895) became the first Black woman in the U.S. to receive an MD degree, earning it from the New England Female Medical College in Boston, Massachusetts where she also was the institution's only Black graduate. ([Association of American Medical Colleges](#))

Section 304 of the MISSION Act authorized VA to provide educational support in exchange for service at VA to two Veteran students enrolled at nine named medical schools for the entering class of 2020. Four of those schools are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) including Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Sciences, Howard University College of Medicine, Meharry Medical College, and Morehouse School of Medicine. The goal is to increase the number of minority Veteran physicians serving at VA facilities.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, African Americans represent 18% of the Federal Government workforce as of September 2020. VA is the top employer of African Americans among Federal agencies and the representation of African American employees in VA continues to grow. [Continued on page 3.](#)

## Message from the DAS

Harvey Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management,  
Diversity and Inclusion



Greetings and Happy New Year! I hope you had a safe and wonderful holiday season. VA's Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) has been busy over the past few months.

We hope you have had an opportunity to visit the [new D&I homepage on the ORMDI website](#). Please take a look at the resources currently available to you in growing a diverse workforce and cultivating an inclusive workplace, bookmark this site and share it widely.

You have a few more weeks to submit a nomination for the [Secretary's D&I Excellence Awards](#) or the [Secretary's Alternative Dispute Resolution \(ADR\) Excellence Awards](#). These awards recognize exemplary contributions by VA employees and teams in the areas of D&I and ADR and I hope you consider nominating an individual or team. Read more below.

The Barrier Analysis Workgroup Inaugural Meeting was held on Tuesday, January 12, 2021. Both Jeff Mayo, then-Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, and I provided opening remarks in support of the important work of this group to identify and eliminate barriers to equal employment opportunities in VA. The workgroup will begin by examining VA's Hispanic workforce and will report their findings to the Diversity and Inclusion in VA Council (DIVAC) and plans to eliminate all identified barriers will be placed in the Fiscal Year 2021 Management Directive 715 report and posted online.

I know many of you are excited as I am to begin this important work and I look forward to partnering with you in ensuring that VA has a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace to deliver outstanding services to our Nation's Veterans. Thank you for your commitment!

## Policy Alerts

**VA Directive 5979**

[VA Directive 5979, Harassment Prevention Policy \[PDF\]](#) was published on December 8, 2020.

**EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement**

On December 18, 2019, VA Secretary Robert L. Wilkie signed the [Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement \[PDF\]](#). This document summarizes VA's EEO, Diversity and Inclusion, Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act (No FEAR), and Whistleblower Rights and Protection policies.

## Secretary's D&I and ADR Excellence Awards

**Nomination Period Now Open**

VA is now accepting nominations for the Ninth Annual Secretary's Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Excellence Awards and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Awards programs.

The D&I Excellence Awards recognize exemplary contributions by VA managers/supervisors, employees, and teams who work to create a diverse VA workforce, cultivate an inclusive and engaged workplace, and provide outstanding customer service. Nominations must be received by February 19, 2021. For award eligibility criteria and additional information, visit the [D&I Excellence Awards webpage](#) or email the [Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion](#).

The ADR Excellence Awards recognize exemplary contributions by VA managers/supervisors, employees, and teams in the area of ADR. Nominations must be received by February 26, 2021. For more information, visit the [ADR website](#) or email the [Workplace ADR Team](#).



## Commemorate

[Continued from Page 1](#)

As of the end of fiscal year 2020, African Americans represent 25% of the VA workforce which is well above the Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) of 12% African Americans. Thirty four percent of African Americans employed at VA are Veterans. (Data pulled on January 6, 2021, provided by the Workforce Analysis Team, ORMDI.)

Colonel Dennis O. May, USAF, Ret. Deputy Director for the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) will be the keynote speaker at this year's VA Central Office (VACO) Black History Month observance. Please join the VACO Blacks In Government Chapter, Federal Employed Women Chapter, and CMV on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, from noon to 1:00 pm. [Join via TEAMS](#) or call in: 1-872-701-0185, code 300586558#.

For more information about VA's Black/African American Special Emphasis Program, visit the [ORMDI website](#) or [contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee](#), VA's Departmental Black/African American Special Emphasis Program Manager, ORMDI.

### Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

The Department of Veterans Affairs joined the Nation in commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 18, 2021. Public Law 98-144 established this federal holiday observed each year on the third Monday in January, around the date of Dr. King's actual birthday on January 15. The recurring theme for this annual observance is "Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On...Not A Day Off."

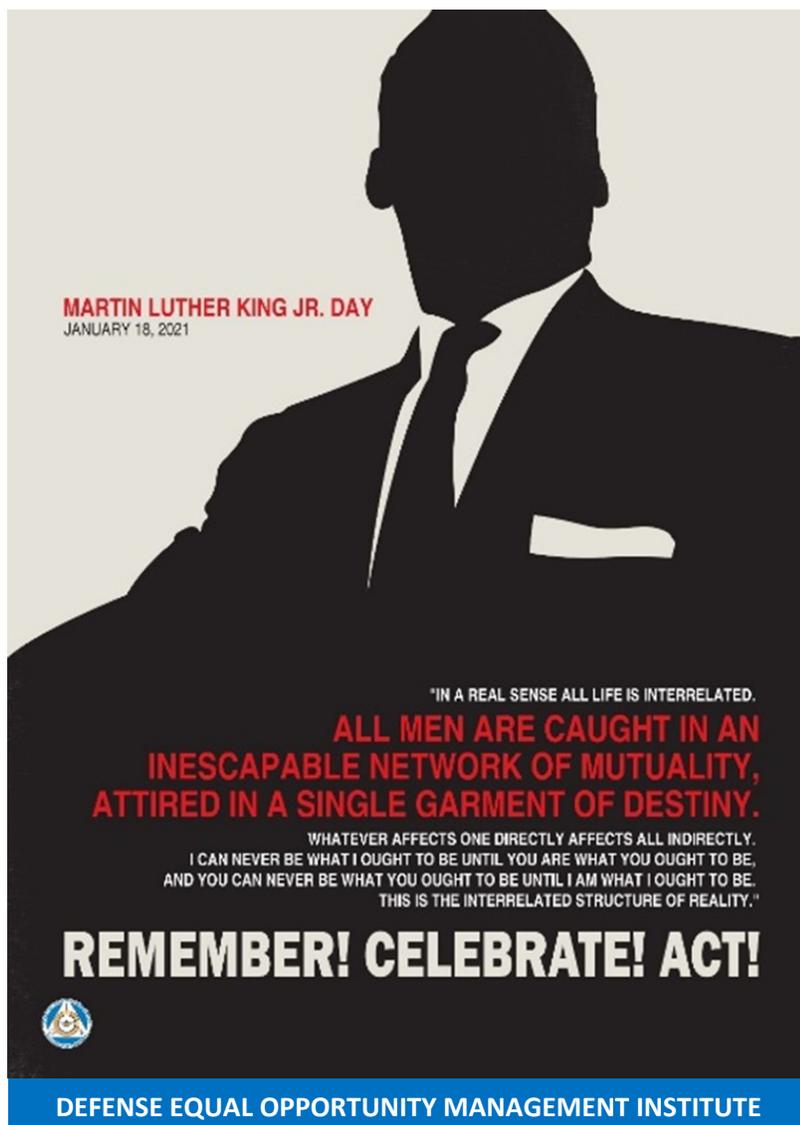
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is referred to as a national day of service. Dr. King said, "Everyone can be great because everybody can serve."

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges this year to how the Nation would typically honor the Civil Rights leader's life and legacy through a day of service in local communities. In the past, volunteers may have provided food assistance by serving meals, taking on clean-up projects in their communities, or by helping out elderly neighbors.

There are other ways to continue to serve safely or even virtually. Donate to food banks and pantries as the demand is great. Honor service men and women by sending a care package to deployed troops, wounded soldiers or Veterans. Care for elderly neighbors by clearing leaves or shoveling walkways while wearing a mask and practicing social distancing. Beautify your community by picking up trash or creating a green space by planting grass, flowers or trees. You can search for local volunteer opportunities using the AmeriCorps search tool.

The VACO Blacks In Government Chapter and the Federal Employed Women Chapter organized the VACO commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The senior host for the event was Mr. Harvey Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for ORMDI. General Jimmy "Mac" McMillian, Assistant Manager for Infrastructure and Environmental Stewardship, Department of Energy-Savannah River was the featured guest speaker.

For more information about VA's Black/African American Special Emphasis Program, visit the [ORMDI website](#) or [contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee](#), VA's Departmental Black/African American Special Emphasis Program Manager, ORMDI.



# Stand Up to Stop Harassment Now! Declaration

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VHA is committed to a harassment-free health care environment for everyone and will not tolerate harassment of any kind. We promise to:

**Create a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment for everyone -**



**Empower everyone to recognize, intervene, and report harassment -**



**Advance a culture where harassment is never tolerated -**



**Provide a seamless, secure, and compassionate system for reporting harassment without fear of retaliation -**



**Assist Veterans, visitors, volunteers, and employees in reporting harassment -**



**Take prompt and appropriate action to respond to reports of harassment -**



**Be accountable by tracking harassment and the actions taken -**



**Partner with Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations to stop harassment -**

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*We, the undersigned, dedicate ourselves to holding our leaders, our employees, and Veterans accountable to these principles.*

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**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Special Emphasis Observances

## 2021 Schedule of Observances Now Available

VA commemorates certain days, weeks, and months designated as “special observances.” Those dates are reflected in the [VA schedule of Special Observances for Calendar Year 2021 \[PDF\]](#). These observances are held each year in compliance with Executive Order 11478, 29 C.F.R Part 1614.102(b)(4), joint congressional resolutions and Presidential proclamations. While COVID-19 will likely continue to affect participation in these special observances and related commemorative events, this VA schedule references all special observances for calendar year 2021.

All managers and supervisors are encouraged to be on the forefront of these invaluable special observances by supporting activities and establishing strategic partnerships focused on addressing identified challenges faced by the group(s) the specific observance is focused on, such as: race, ethnicity, gender, disability status or other special emphasis program (SEP) areas. The Department will benefit through your participation by helping to address specific challenges, to increase participation in groups with historically low participation in VA's workforce, to attain higher retention of talented staff, and to associate positive outcomes for Veterans health and benefits services. As leaders, we model VA's core values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence through participation in special observances and in demonstrating our commitments and belief in the value that each employee brings to the Department. Information about special observances may be found on the [Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion \(ORMDI\) website](#). Each observance has a designated SEP manager who can answer your questions about specific observances and activities. For more information, [email ORMDI](#).

## White Ribbon VA

### Campaign to Prevent and Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

In October 2020, during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, VA launched White Ribbon VA, a national call to action to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence. VA invites everyone to participate in this campaign by pledging to stop violence against others and to wear a white ribbon as a symbol of commitment.

White Ribbon VA was inspired by the White Ribbon organization, a thought-leader in gender-based violence prevention and promoter of gender equity and healthy relationships. VA employees and community partners examine the far-reaching impact and implications of harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence by pledging to never commit, excuse or stay silent about sexual harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence against others.

VA collaborates with community partners to educate and help Veterans, their families, staff and community partners to honor VA health care settings as safe and welcoming environments by:

- Recognizing that touching, comments about appearance or referring to people by condescending derogatory names may make them feel uncomfortable.
- Talking to others in my life about the repercussions of unwanted hugging, touching or flirting.
- Giving everyone extra individual space.
- Understanding some Veterans and others may have invisible wounds and experiences I may not fully understand.
- Leading by example through my thoughts, words and actions.
- Remembering every single person expects courteous treatment or RESPECT.

The campaign also challenges negative, outdated concepts and inspires people to understand and embrace being part of positive change through awareness-raising, capacity-building, partnerships, outreach, technical assistance and other educational opportunities. White Ribbon VA supports the continued implementation of the Stand Up to Stop Harassment Now! Campaign launched in VA health care facilities nationwide in fall 2019. For more information, visit the [White Ribbon VA website](#).



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810 Vermont Avenue, NW (06) | Washington, DC 20420