

VAPIHCS Employees March at Honolulu Pride 2022



On Saturday, October 15, 2022, there was a Pride parade in Honolulu. This was the first year that the parade had taken place since 2019. The last two years, it had been canceled due to COVID-19 and the ongoing infections in Hawaii. VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) Psychologist Lisa Kau organized employee's participation in the parade, and VA also hosted a booth at the after party.

"I am proud to represent both the VA as an employee and as a former Air Force member," said Chief of Prosthetics Raymond Madrid. "I never thought I would be walking with PRIDE in myself or the organization I work for. I look forward to having a float and incorporate our LGBTQ supports as well as our LGBTQ members next year."

The first Pride parade was held on June 28, 1970. At that time, it was very controversial for

people to be openly Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer, Asexual or other variations of sexuality and gender (LGBTQA+). Over the decades since the first Pride parade, it has become more accepted.

“I remember when I first joined the military,” said Air Force Veteran Whitely Corrin. “At that time, I was still unable to be honest about my sexuality. It made things hard when I needed to ask for help from my command while also having to hide who I was.”

Many Veterans are still nervous about admitting being LGBTQA+ because it wasn't acceptable to do so while they served. Some were even dishonorably discharged when their command was made aware of their orientation. Part of the VA's ongoing work involves helping these Veterans to have their DD214 changed now that being LGBTQA+ is no longer grounds for a dishonorable discharge.

“I get my care through the VA,” Corrin said. “They've been good, and I feel safe going there and being who I am. That means a lot to me, since I couldn't be open about who I was for much of the time that I served.”

VAPIHCS offers Veterans the opportunity to request an LGBTQA+ friendly provider, and there are support groups available for anyone struggling with gender, sexuality, or other identity issues. Gender affirming care is also available through VA. These services are vital, as they help prevent Veteran suicide, and allow Veterans to get medical care with dignity, regardless of how they identify.

For employees, VAPIHCS offers a variety of opportunities as well. One great way to express yourself as a member of the LGBTQA+ community is to join the Diversity and Inclusion Committee and help work to ensure that we are an inclusive workplace. If you would like to join, you can contact Rena Mae Takushi at renamae.takushi@va.gov. There is also a monthly

mixer specifically for LGBTQA+ employees, and you can contact Lisa Kau for an invite at: Lisa.Kau@va.gov.

This year's Pride parade was well-attended. The route went from Magic Island to the Waikiki Shell. Most of the attendees were there to participate or be supportive, with only a few protesters at the end of the parade route near the Honolulu Zoo. However, the fact that protesters still show up at Pride parades is an indication of how important these parades still are, and how important it is that we practice inclusivity in our work.

Many Veterans were unable to openly be who they were when they served their country. Some still feel afraid to “come out” to friends and family. However, it's important that VAPIHCS employees work to ensure that Veterans can feel safe when they visit us. People in the LGBTQA+ community can have different medical needs and requirements, and so VAPIHCS needs to work to be as inclusive as possible, so that no one who walks through our doors feels unwelcome.

Pictures:



VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) employees marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) employees marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



Disney employees marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



The Hawaii Bank parade float at the staging area on Magic Island before the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



Hawaii teachers marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



Hotel Association ACCOR employees marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



Oahu roller derby girls marching in the Honolulu Pride Parade on October 15, 2022.



American Savings Bank Employees riding on a trolley in the Honolulu Pride parade on October 15, 2022.

Video Links:

B-roll of the parade going by: <https://youtu.be/saNLnzn8rpY>

VAPIHCS Employees marching by: <https://youtu.be/6vM2PN7bNQ4>