



LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER (LGBT) VETERAN HEALTH CARE FACT SHEET

The Veterans Health Administration is committed to addressing the special health needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Veterans and reducing health disparities for them and members of other vulnerable communities.

VHA's commitment to LGBT Veterans includes:

- Promoting a welcoming health and work environment that is inclusive of LGBT Veterans and employees.
- Providing information, guidance and education to VHA providers about LGBT health issues.

1) ABOUT LGBT HEALTH CARE

LGBT Veterans require the same time and attention by health care professionals as any other Veteran. Studies have shown that LGBT people are at increased risk for high levels of stress, due to being a member of a minority group. This stress can result in increased risks for certain mental and physical health conditions. In addition, they might encounter a lack of awareness, and insensitivity to their unique needs. Some challenges LGBT Veterans might face include the following:

- Lower overall health status
- Lower rates of routine and preventive care
- Higher rates of smoking, alcohol, and substance abuse
- Higher rates of discrimination, stigma, and trauma experiences
- Higher risk for mental health illnesses, such as anxiety and depression
- Higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection
- Increased incidence of some cancers

2) POLICIES THAT PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY LGBT HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Consistent with VA's commitment to patient-centered care and The Joint Commission standards on non-discrimination, VHA's patient and family members rights and responsibilities include a statement that Veterans and their family members will not be subject to discrimination for any reason, including for reasons of age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. The documents also provide a more inclusive definition of "family."

Rights and Responsibilities of VA Patients and Residents of Community Living Centers:
www.va.gov/health/rights/patientrights.asp

Rights and Responsibilities of Family Members of VA Patients and Residents of Community Living Centers:
www.va.gov/health/rights/familyrights.asp

PROVIDING HEALTH CARE FOR TRANSGENDER & INTERSEX VETERANS VHA DIRECTIVE

VHA Directive 2013-003: *Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans* details access to care for transgender and intersex Veterans including a Frequently Asked Questions section. Topics include prevalence, definition of terms, and clarification about services that are covered under the Directive. Visit www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2863



INFORMATION LETTER ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL VETERANS

In July 2014, an Information Letter about the specific health needs of LGB Veterans was released to assure nationwide continuity in welcoming LGBT Veterans into VHA facilities. The Information Letter underscored the importance of quality, and respectful care. This information letter provides the foundation of a LGB Veteran health care directive which is currently being drafted.

VA HEALTH CARE FACILITIES PARTICIPATE IN HEALTHCARE EQUALITY INDEX

Starting in 2013, VA health care facilities throughout the country were encouraged to participate in the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index (HEI). Participation in the HEI is voluntary and consists of reporting health care systems' policies and trainings related to LGBT patients and families; it is known as an indicator of an LGBT-positive health care environment. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation designed the HEI to allow U.S. health care organizations to assess the degree to which they provide LGBT patient-centered care, to identify and remedy any gaps and to make public their commitment to LGBT patients and their families. Each year, a report is published identifying participating facilities and those that achieved "Leader" status in LGBT care. <http://www.hrc.org/hei>

3) PROVIDING INFORMATION, GUIDANCE, & EDUCATION TO VHA PROVIDERS ABOUT LGBT HEALTH ISSUES.

NATIONAL LGBT PROGRAM TO ENHANCE CARE

VHA developed the LGBT Program at the headquarters level to advise on LGBT-related national policy and procedures and to coordinate national initiatives across clinical program offices. In addition, the LGBT Program develops and delivers training to clinical staff in the Veterans Health Administration on LGBT health care and maintains LGBT staff resource websites. An overview of LGBT programs supported by the Office of Patient Care Services can be found at: [http://www.patientcare.va.gov/Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender LGBT Veteran Care.asp](http://www.patientcare.va.gov/Lesbian_Gay_Bisexual_and_Transgender_LGBT_Veteran_Care.asp)

INCREASED LGBT INFORMATION & TRAINING AVAILABLE TO VHA PROVIDERS

- Each year, several trainings for VHA staff have been promoted on topics related to LGBT health. The training materials are then available online for VHA staff who were not able to attend the live trainings. These trainings focus on the unique needs and reducing barriers to care for LGBT Veterans.
- In addition to training about the specific needs of LGBT Veterans, other trainings that are being developed for staff on more general topics, such as sexual health, now include LGBT-inclusive language. In this way, all Veterans have access to top quality care.
- Due to the complexity of transgender health, there are clinical consultation programs that are available to VHA providers who may be less experienced in transgender health. One program teaches interdisciplinary teams of providers how to provide quality care in a series of trainings that occur over several months. The second program allows VHA providers to ask experts in transgender treatment specific questions through the electronic medical record on specific questions that arise in a Veteran's care.
- Developed in collaboration with the Office of Academic Affiliations, there are 9 postdoctoral psychology fellowship training positions with an emphasis on LGBT Veteran health care. The goal for these fellowships is to train psychologists who have specialized expertise in LGBT Veteran health care for potential future employment in VA and other settings that serve Veterans. The Fellowships are located at Bedford, MA; Boston, MA; Hines, IL; Honolulu, HI; Houston, TX; Milwaukee, WI; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; and West Haven, CT.

