



# LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER (LGBT) VETERANS INTERNAL 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:

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

## 1) ABOUT LGBT HEALTH CARE

According to The Joint Commission, “Like many other populations identified as at-risk or disadvantaged, research has demonstrated that LGBT individuals experience disparities not only in the prevalence of certain physical and mental health concerns, but also in care due to a variety of factors, including experiences of stigma, lack of awareness, and insensitivity to their unique needs. These disparities include the following:

- Less access to insurance and health care services, including preventive care (such as cancer screenings)
- Lower overall health status
- Higher rates of smoking, alcohol, and substance abuse
- 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

In addition, LGBT patients face other barriers to equitable care, such as refusals of care, delayed or substandard care, mistreatment, inequitable policies and practices, little or no inclusion in health outreach or education, and inappropriate restrictions or limits on visitation. These inequalities may be even more pronounced for LGBT people from racial/ethnic minorities or due to other characteristics such as education level, income, geographic location, language, immigration status and cultural beliefs. Experiences of discrimination and mistreatment have, in many cases, contributed to a long-standing distrust of the health care system by many in the LGBT community and have affected their health in profound ways.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Commission: Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide. Oak Brook, IL, Oct. 2011. LGBTFieldGuide.pdf.



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

### NEW NATIONAL LGBT PROGRAM COORDINATOR ROLE TO ENHANCE CARE

VHA developed the role of LGBT Program Coordinator at the headquarters level to advise on LGBT-related national policy and procedures and to coordinate national initiatives across various clinical program offices. In addition, the LGBT Program Coordinators develop and deliver training to clinical staff on LGBT health care, and maintain the LGBT employee resource websites.

### INCREASED LGBT INFORMATION & TRAINING AVAILABLE TO VHA PROVIDERS

- The Transgender Education Resources SharePoint ([vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/pcscclipro/trer/default.aspx](http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/pcscclipro/trer/default.aspx)) and soon-to-be launched LGB Education SharePoint are centralized repositories for LGBT health care related resources for VA staff. Since its launch in April 2012, the Transgender SharePoint site has had more than 3,000 unique users and averages 44 distinct users per day. These sites also host links to VA directives, pharmacy guidelines, and practice recommendations, as well as to fact sheets and training materials for clinical and non-clinical VA staff.
- The Transgender Training and LGB Training Workgroups under VHA Patient Care Services Office produced several trainings for staff to promote culturally and clinically appropriate care for LGBT Veterans and facilitate a more welcoming health care environment. Training topics include an overview of the VHA Directive on transgender care and its application, the role of Mental Health in transgender care, providing cross-sex hormone therapy, a Primary Care perspective on transgender care, assessing sexual health and sexualities, and treating LGB Veterans.
- A training program is also under development in TMS ([www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/login.jsp](http://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/login.jsp)), VA's online training platform that is available to VA staff at any time. The program includes a general overview of transgender care and the VHA Directive 2013-003: *Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans*. Two specialty programs focus on the role of Mental Health in providing assessment and diagnosis and on the VA Pharmacy guidelines for prescribing cross-sex hormones.

### PROVIDING HEALTH CARE FOR TRANSGENDER & INTERSEX VETERANS VHA DIRECTIVE UPDATED

VHA re-issued its Directive on transgender and intersex care (VHA Directive 2011-024) assuring access to care for these Veterans. VHA Directive 2013-003: *Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans* now also includes a Frequently Asked Questions section that provides additional information. In this section, topics such as prevalence, definition of terms, and clarification about services that are covered under the Directive are discussed.

VHA Directive 2013-003: *Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans*:

[www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=2863](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2863)

### NEW POSTDOCTORAL PSYCHOLOGY FELLOWSHIP ON LGBT HEALTH CARE

For the first time, the VA Office of Academic Affiliations and Mental Health Services funded 7 postdoctoral psychology fellowship training positions with an emphasis on LGBT Veteran health care. The objective of this fellowship is to increase VA's capacity to provide culturally and clinically appropriate care to LGBT Veterans. The seven sites include Bedford, Boston, Honolulu, Houston, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and West Haven. The fellows will receive specialty clinical training with LGBT Veterans in diverse clinics and will complete a research or scholarly project during their academic year (2013-2014).



### 3) PROMOTING A WELCOMING HEALTH AND WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT IS INCLUSIVE OF LGBT VETERANS AND EMPLOYEES.

#### 120 VA HEALTH CARE FACILITIES PARTICIPATING IN HEALTHCARE EQUALITY INDEX

120 VA health care facilities throughout the Nation are participating in the Human Rights Campaign's 2013 Healthcare Equality Index (HEI). Participation in the HEI 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 skillfully 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.

#### MORE THAN 500 LGBT INCLUSION INITIATIVES UNDERWAY ACROSS VA HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Each VA health care facility has committed to undertake at least three specific initiatives promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT Veterans within their facility. VA employees can view all of the initiatives submitted to the Office of Health Equity (OHE) on the OHE SharePoint site here:

[vaww.vha.vaco.portal.va.gov/sites/OHE/Pages/LGBT.aspx](http://vaww.vha.vaco.portal.va.gov/sites/OHE/Pages/LGBT.aspx) .

#### EXISTING RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES PUBLICATIONS UPDATED WITH ENHANCED INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Consistent with VA's commitment to patient-centered care and Joint Commission standards on non-discrimination, VHA updated two fundamental publications on patient and family members rights and responsibilities to 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](http://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](http://www.va.gov/health/rights/familyrights.asp)

#### NEW LGBT SPECIAL EMPHASIS GROUPS & DESIGNATED LGBT SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM MANAGERS

Many VA medical centers now have a LGBT Special Emphasis Group and a designated LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager to assist in increasing LGBT awareness, cultural competency, community outreach, and recruitment and retention efforts. Ensuring that LGBT veterans and employees feel welcomed, respected, and connected is essential to achieving VA's goals of providing patient centric care, and fostering a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment.

#### OPEN EMPLOYEE FORUM FOSTERING A DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

Community of Practice is an open forum for employees supported by VHA's Diversity and Inclusion Office that provides employees the opportunity to share best practices and information and submit questions and concerns related to diversity and inclusion issues. In addition to the Community of Practice, VHA's Diversity and Inclusion Office supports a national committee currently developing strategies to increase inclusiveness and promote advancement opportunities.

