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Services & Advocacy
for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
& Transgender Elders

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on LGBT Aging
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Resources for LGBT Veterans

This article outlines some of the many resources for LGBT Veterans

As of the June 26, 2015, Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Veterans Administration now recognizes all legal marriages for purpose of VA benefits. Same-sex spouses and surviving spouses are recognized and eligible for veteran's spousal benefits. A list of veterans and spouse benefits can be found online at www.benefits.va.gov/benefits. If a spouse or surviving spouse faces difficulty in gaining eligibility for benefits, contact one of the following organizations for guidance.

- **ACLU:** aclu.org
- **NCTE:** transequality.org
- **Lambda Legal:** lambdalegal.org
- **TLC:** transgenderlawcenter.org
- **NCLR:** nclrights.org

VA Patients and Residents of Community Living Centers

VA hospital patients, residents of community living centers and their families have the right to equal access as stated by the VA: "You will be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect as an individual. Consistent with Federal law, VA policy, and accreditation standards of The Joint



Commission, you 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." Additional information can be found here: www.va.gov/health/rights.

The VA Office of Diversity and Inclusion provides an extensive list of resources related to LGBT veteran care.

Don't Ask Don't Tell and Prior Policy Discharges

Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) a 1993 law, which banned gay and lesbian military personnel from serving openly was repealed in 2011. In certain circumstances, LGBT veterans

discharged under DADT and previous policies can amend their discharge and/or the narrative component of their discharge. Making these changes is difficult, time-consuming, and often expensive. A good first step is to read the information provided at OutServe: Service Members Legal Defense Network (www.sldn.org). The “Restore Honor to Service Members Act” would streamline and standardize this process. This Act was first introduced in 2013 and reintroduced in 2015. Read more about this Act here: www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/s1766/text.

New York residents can seek assistance through the SAGEVets program at sageusa.org. Lifting of the DADT ban did not include transgender veterans who remained at risk for discharge. In July of 2015, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter released a statement on the Department of Defense Transgender Policy, announcing the formation of a six-month working group to study the policy and readiness of welcoming transgender military personnel to serve openly.

LGBT veterans may be interested in starting a veteran run support group through Vet-to-Vet. Vet-to-Vet groups are peer run groups, where VA staff attends only when invited.

FOR MORE INFO

Department of Defense Safe Helpline for Sexual Assault: www.safehelpline.org

Veteran Crisis Line (Confidential Help for Veterans and Their Families): www.veteranscrisisline.net or by phone at: 1-800-273-8255 press 1 or Text at: 838255.

Transgender Veterans

The DD-214 form issued upon discharge includes the service member’s legal name but not a gender marker. Amending the legal name listing may be possible by using form DD-215. Additional information and resources can be found at OutServe: www.outserve-sldn.org.

A 2011 directive from the Veteran’s Health Administration reiterated that with the exclusion of sex reassignment surgery, all medically necessary healthcare for transgender veterans will be covered by the VA. This includes hormone therapy, mental healthcare, preoperative evaluation, post-operative long-term care, and any routine health screenings including sex-specific care such as pap smears, prostate exams, and mammograms.

Additional information and resources for transgender veterans is available through the Transgender American Veterans Association: tavausa.org

Crisis Lines

Care providers working with veterans should be aware of the tremendous emotional and physical toll taken by keeping one’s LGBT identity a secret (or living “in the closet”). Years of hiding one’s LGBT identity for fear of dismissal, harassment, or violence, have

To learn more visit www.sldn.org.

left many LGBT older adults fearful or unwilling to be open about being LGBT.

Experiences with sexual assault, PTSD, suicide and other health and mental health concerns should not be overlooked. LGBT veterans may have increased trauma related to under-reporting due to policy such as DADT and fear of retaliation and discharge. Resources are available for veterans experiencing a life crisis.

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A VA LGBT Workgroup has established an email to address questions or concerns related to LGBT issues within the VA. VA employees, LGBT veterans, dependent(s) or support person can email [LGBT Workgroup@va.gov](mailto:LGBTWorkgroup@va.gov) with questions and concerns.

Vet to Vet Peer Run Groups

LGBT veterans may be interested in starting a veteran run support group through Vet-to-Vet. Vet-to-Vet groups are peer run groups, where VA staff attends only when invited. The veteran leader of the group will need to connect with the national organization and become a certified peer specialist. For more information, contact [Vet to Vet](#).

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