

LGBTSA Newsletter

LGBT Staff and Allies Newsletter

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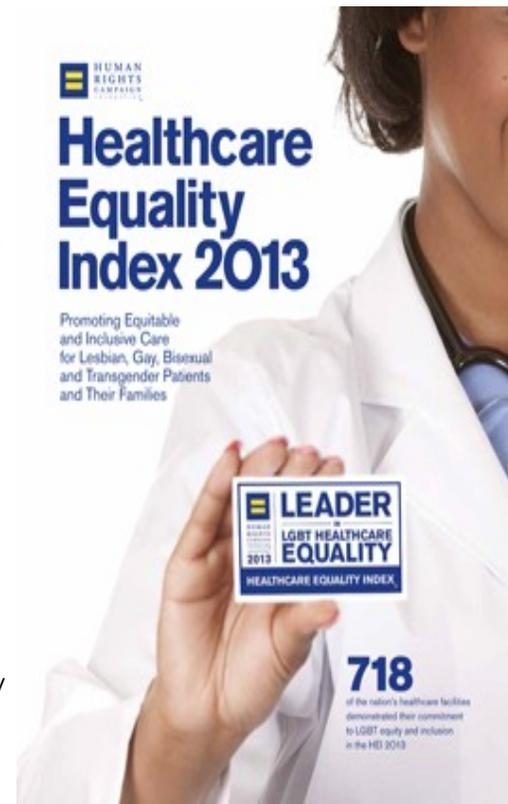
VAPAHCS Achieves Leadership Status in the HEI 2013!

The Human Rights Campaign's [Healthcare Equality Index 2013](#) survey rated respondents from 719 healthcare facilities including 120 VA Medical Centers. Leadership Status was achieved by demonstrating competence in the HEI's [Core Four Leader Criteria](#) which represent "foundational elements of LGBT patient-centered care" of anti-discrimination policies for LGBT patients and staff, an LGBT-inclusive hospital visitation policy, and staff training in LGBT patient centered care. HRC awarded [HEI 2013 Leadership Status](#) to 464 healthcare facilities including 91 VA Medical Centers.

VAPAHCS achieved Leadership Status for our [LGBT-Inclusive Hospital Visitation Policy](#), [Patient Anti-discrimination](#) and [Staff Anti-discrimination](#) policies protecting both sexual orientation and gender identity and training over 30 staff on LGBT patient-centered care. In addition to achieving Leadership Status, VAPAHCS also reported numerous items on the following HEI Additional Best Practices Checklist: 1) LGBT Patient Services & Support, 2) Transgender Patient Services & Support, 3) Patient Self-Identification, 4) Medical Decision-Making, 5) Employment Benefits & Policies, and 6) Community Engagement.

Some of VAPAHCS' Best Practices generated such interest by HEI that they are listed on the [HEI Resources Webpage!](#) Additionally, photos of VAPAHCS staff and the LGBT Veteran Support Group are also featured in the HEI Report.

Many thanks to the LGBTSA members who assisted in preparing the VAPAHCS HEI application: Dave Leo, Tiffany Rideaux and Shannon Healer. Additional thanks also to the dozens of LGBTSA members who participated in the HEI online trainings. Special thanks to EEO staff Beth Stovall, Jennifer Flagg and Bryan Ford who revised the staff anti-discrimination policy to include gender identity, Public Affairs Staff Andrea Ritz for her excellent work as our webmaster and Michael Hill-Jackson and Jonathan Friedman for their expert roles in our HEI Public Relations campaign. What a terrific group effort on behalf of VAPAHCS!!



"The HEI application was a significant commitment with huge returns for our healthcare system, but even larger returns for the Veterans we serve! We received outstanding training from one of the country's top experts on LGBT healthcare issues plus support from HEI staff, who helped us through the entire survey process from beginning to end."

Heliana Ramirez
Social Worker
VA Palo Alto Health Care System,
Veterans Health Administration,
Department of Veterans Affairs



Special points of interest:

- VAPAHCS' HEI Leadership Status
- VAPAHCS highlighted in HEI
- DOMA Training
- Pride Outreach

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VA Medical Centers Stand Out in HEI 2013

VA Medical Centers Stand Out in HEI 2013

In the wake of the 2011 repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the U.S. Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the largest integrated healthcare system in the United States, created a work group to identify ways to optimize care for the nation's LGBT veterans. One of the group's key recommendations was that the country's 152 VA medical centers be encouraged to participate in the HEI. In close partnership with Lisa Red and Carlos Rodriguez of the VHA Office of Health Equity, HEI staff reached out to the VA medical centers, only one of which had previously participated in the HEI.

This intensive outreach was successful: 120 of the VA medical centers, or nearly 80%, voluntarily participated in the HEI. And an impressive 91 of them, or 76%, were awarded HEI 2013 Equality Leader status—a higher percentage of Leaders than for HEI 2013 respondents as a whole.

To achieve HEI Leader status, the VA medical centers documented that they publicize to their patients and visitors the VHA's systemwide policies giving equal visitation to LGBT people and prohibiting LGBT patient and employment discrimination. The medical centers also registered well over 500 senior managers for HEI training, which they praised.

The HEI looks forward to continued close collaboration with the VHA system—and extends hearty thanks to the staff members within it who are working hard to welcome and support the nation's LGBT veterans.



VA Palo Alto
LGBTQ Veterans Group

VA Medical Centers Stand Out in HEI 2013



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VAPAHCS LGBT Programs are online!
Visit us at
<http://www.paloalto.va.gov/lgbtsa.asp>

The VAPAHCS LGBT Staff and Allies is a group of over 30 VA employees who began meeting in April, 2012. The purpose of LGBTSA is to raise awareness about LGBT Veteran and employee experiences at VAPAHCS through a public relations campaign, staff training and resource development for the hospital system. Through community outreach, LGBTSA strives to increase VA enrollment among LGBT Veteran Patients and encourage employment applications from LGBT civilians and Veterans.

LGBTSA members work in a variety of departments across the VA Palo Alto Healthcare System including Social Work, Psychology, Medicine, Recreation Therapy, Engineering, and Housekeeping to name a few. Members identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and as allies to the LGBT community. LGBTSA welcomes anyone who is interested in making VAPAHCS the choice for LGBT Veterans seeking care and LGBT people seeking employment.

LGBTSA Provides Historic Training to Human Resources Staff on DOMA Repeal!

On July 17, 2013, VAPAHCS Human Resources Staff received training from LGBTSA members Shannon Healer LCSW, Dave Leo and Heliana Ramirez LISW on the impacts of DOMA repeal to federal employee benefits. Entitled "DOMA Repeal: The New Civil Rights Issue in Federal Employment," the approximate 30 staff in attendance from frontline HR Specialists to HR Management learned about changes to federal benefits post-DOMA for the goals of 1) making their jobs easier, 2) increasing accessibility of HR to LGBT employees and 3) providing cultural competence training and answering questions relating to LGBT employees. Presenters explained "No one is being asked to change belief systems, DOMA's repeal means this is about being stewards of fairness according to the law."

The training included a review of the Office of Personnel Management's DOMA-related letter which is posted on the [VAPAHCS Human Resources SharePoint](#) stating that VA employees in same sex legal marriages have 30 days prior to and 60 days following a state recognized marriage to apply for employee benefits (this does not apply to Civil Unions or Domestic Partnerships). In addition, the OPM's encouragement for HR staff to use leniency with the 8/26/13 deadline for same sex spouses married prior to DOMA-repeal on 6/26/13, was also highlighted in this presentation. For more information on the impacts of DOMA Repeal to LGBT federal employees, Veterans and Service members, [click here](#).

Finally, the LGBTSA presentation to HR staff concluded with a review of the [No Fear Act](#) which prohibits discrimination toward federal employees based on sexual orientation and gender identity and recommendations of ways to respond to staff coming out to HR staff and suggestions of how to help LGBT employees feel most comfortable in HR. LGBTSA is interested in hearing about your experiences accessing HR services, please share them by emailing Heliana.Ramirez@va.gov.

VAPAHCS Conducts Outreach at San Francisco and San Jose Pride Events!



On June 30, 2013 over 30 VAPAHCS Veterans, staff and their families marched in the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade (photo above). Decked out in American flags and rainbow Pride gear, the contingent carried our VAPAHCS LGBTQ Veterans Living Out & Proud banner and displayed amazing home made signs with slogans like "Do Ask, Do Tell, Its Good for Your Health" and "Families Connected by Love, Cared for by the VA." The Pride Parade judges were so moved by our contingent that VAPAHCS is one of 5 groups awarded a ribbon for the "Absolutely Fabulous Award Contingent who best incorporate the (2013 SF Pride Parade's) themes of 'Embrace, Encourage, Empower.'" To see more photos of VAPAHCS' 2nd SF Pride Parade, [click here](#) and [here](#).

Please join us for the [San Jose Pride Festival](#) at the Discovery Museum Meadow Park (between Woz Way and San Carlos) on Saturday 8/17 and Sunday 8/18, noon to 5pm. If you would like to conduct outreach at the VAPAHCS Pride Booth (B011), please email Heliana to be added to the schedule. This is our 2nd year hosting a booth and learned last year that it is great fun, accessible for people with mobility challenges (we sit at the booth) and its helpful to bring bottled water and food as the festival options are rather expensive. Happy Pride 2013!!