

LGBT Veteran Care Post-Orlando

Following the 6/11/16 mass shooting at the Orlando Gay Night Club and arrest of a man headed to the Los Angeles LGBT Pride Parade with explosives and guns, the VA Palo Alto Health Care System LGBT Program offers clinicians the following information to inform culturally responsive LGBT Veteran Care.

Quick Facts:

1. Experiences of LGBT-related discrimination inside and outside of the US Military are associated with **increased mental health and medical problems among LGBT Veterans as compared to their non-LGBT Veteran peers**. Factors associated with higher rates of PTSD among LGBT Veterans include Military Sexual Trauma (MST, surviving MST and/or being a witness to group rape of an LGBT military peer), concealment of LGBT identity, and LGBT-related investigations and discharges (email Heliana.Ramirez@va.gov for LGBT Veteran research articles).
2. The US has a **recent history of violence enacted toward LGBT people** including the assassination of gay Veteran and San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk (1979, see film [Milk](#)), police raids on LGBT people at gay bars and nightclubs like the Stonewall Inn (New York City, 1969, see film [SissyMan](#)) and other gay social spaces like the Compton Cafeteria (San Francisco, 1966- see film [The Screaming Queens](#)). In the US military, high profile murders of LGBT service members at the hands of their military colleagues have resulted in films like "[Soldier's Girl](#)" (2003) about the murder of Private First Class Barry Winchell while asleep on a US Military base. LGBT Veterans' strength and resilience is a powerful tool which can be leveraged for health and healing following traumatic experiences (see [The Camouflage Closet](#)).
3. News headlines like "LGBT Hate Crimes: Following Orlando Shooting, FBI, Activist data Shows its Dangerous to Be Gay, Transgender in the US" and FBI Hate Crimes data citing that **in 2014, 18.6 percent of all hate crimes were motivated by sexual orientation and 1.8 based on gender identity** (In 2013, 20.3 percent were motivated by sexual orientation and 0.5 motivated by gender identity). Such headlines and statistics **can increase LGBT Veterans' sense of being unsafe from an unknown enemy (a particular trigger for some LGBT combat veterans and MST survivors)**.
4. Learning about **the Orlando mass shooting can be uniquely challenging for LGBT Veterans** as the experiences of waiting for lists of the deceased, exposure to video and audio recordings of the mass shooting broadcast on television and radio, and increased anti-LGBT comments in the media and online, can remind LGBT Veterans of experiences of combat and LGBT-related peer-based trauma in the US Military and civilian society.
5. **LGBT bars and clubs may represent a particularly important social space for LGBT Veterans** who sought refuge in such establishments while on leave from military service and following LGBT-related discharges from the US Military. In fact, LGBT Veterans discharged in large numbers to the ports of San Francisco and New York City are credited with having established these cities as America's major gay hubs (Berube, 1990 and Shilts, 1994).
6. For recently discharged LGBT Veterans, **discussions of the Orlando tragedy as an ISIS-related act of terrorism can bring up particular challenges for LGBT Veterans** who want to re-enlist, but for whom age, disability, discharge type, and/or transgender identity prevent them from current military service.
7. For LGBT Veterans who have lost peers to LGBT and/or race-based hate crimes, news of the Orlando shooting which resulted in deaths predominantly among Latino and African American patrons, can bring up **the sense of loss, powerlessness, and fear generated by previous public spectacles of race-related and anti-LGBT violence**.

What Clinicians Can Do:

1. **Ask LGBT Veterans if they have been impacted by the Orlando mass shooting and anti-LGBT statements in the media and among Veteran peers.** Support LGBT Veterans' self-help skills for managing the stress of micro-aggressions and self-monitoring of psychological and medical symptomology (e.g., PTSD flashbacks, over eating or substance use to manage emotional stress, isolation, suicidal thoughts and self-harming behaviors, increased auditory and visual hallucinations) and inquire if LGBT Veterans would like to be assessed for eligibility in the VAPAHCS LGBT Veteran Support Group (for more information, email Gabriel.Lonero@va.gov).
2. Learn about and **share mental health resources tailored to the needs and experiences of LGBT people** such as:
 - a. GLBT National Help Center (www.glbthotline.org, free 24/7 phone and online support) 1-888-843-4564
 - b. To find your local LGBT Resources which may offer LGBT-specific Grief Counseling, visit www.glbtnearme.org and www.lgbtcenters.org
 - c. LGBT Bay Area Community Centers- The Center, San Francisco; Billy DeFrank Center, San Jose; The Pacific Center, Berkeley - See more at: <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/services/lgbt/links.asp#sthash.PYhNMZXq.dpuf>
3. Learn about and **access VA resources for LGBT Veteran Patient Care**
 - a. VA Central Office SharePoint Site for Transgender Veteran Health: <http://go.va.gov/Transgender>
 - b. VA Central Office SharePoint Site for LGB Veteran Health: <http://go.va.gov/LGB>
 - c. VA Palo Alto Health Care System LGBT Program: <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/services/lgbt.asp>
4. **Inquire about LGBT Veterans' plans to attend Pride Events in the community** and encourage them to learn about increased safety and security measures being instated at Pride Parades throughout the nation (this can be done by contacting the local LGBT Pride Parade Planning Committees).
5. **Learn about LGBT Civilian and Military History** to understand the context from which LGBT Veterans experience the Orlando Mass shooting (e.g., from film, books, plays, websites, social science research, news media). **Highlight, reinforce, and help to establish strength and resilience among individual LGBT Veterans** by sharing the proud history of major contributions LGBT people have made to the US Military and LGBT Veterans have made to US civilian LGBT society (e.g. the Rainbow Pride Flag used worldwide was designed by gay Veteran Gilbert Baker and the international Transgender Pride flag was designed by transgender Veteran Monica Helms).
6. **Provide Community-based LGBT Military and Veteran Support Resources** such as:

[AVER](#) American Veterans for Equal Rights AVER is a non-profit association of active, reserve and Veteran servicemembers dedicated to full and equal rights for all present and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

[OUTServe/SLDN](#) is a non-partisan, non-profit, legal services, watchdog and policy organization dedicated to bringing about full LGBT equality to America's military and ending all forms of discrimination and harassment of military personnel on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. SLDN provides free and direct legal assistance to servicemembers and Veterans.

[American Legion Alexander Hamilton Post 448](#), San Francisco, CA is the only American Legion post whose membership is predominantly LGBT Veterans.

For more information about the VAPAHCS LGBT Program for patients and employees, please visit <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/services/lgbt.asp> or email Heliana.Ramirez@va.gov .