

# Getting Started with Services for LGBTQ+ Veterans



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) welcomes all Veteran, family, caregiver and survivor beneficiaries and employees, inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation(s). VA is committed to providing a safe, welcoming and equitable environment for all the Veterans we serve.

Choose VA

## What is LGBTQ+? Why does the VA offer specific health care services for these Veterans?

All Veterans are welcome at VA, including those who identify as LGBTQ+. LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities. The '+' sign captures identities beyond LGBTQ, including pansexual, asexual, agender, gender diverse, nonbinary, gender neutral and other identities. Veterans with sexual and/or gender minority identities have faced stigma and discrimination, which can affect health. As a health care institution, VA works to make sure that LGBTQ+ Veterans know that they are welcome and we are trained to meet their health care needs.

## Does my sexual orientation or gender identity matter to my health care?

As a result of stigma, stress, and discrimination, LGBTQ+ Veterans face increased health risks and unique challenges in health care. We want you to be comfortable talking with your VA providers about all aspects of your life, so we can offer you the best care possible.

## Why is it important to come out to my health care provider?

Coming out to your health care provider is an important step in maintaining your health. To see that you receive the best care possible, your health care provider needs to know who you are. Information about your sexual orientation and gender identity will prompt your provider to ask specific questions about potential risks to your health and offer appropriate health screens.

If you do not feel comfortable opening up to your provider about your sexual orientation or gender identity, ask for another VHA provider. It's important for you to be able to trust your health care provider. Tell your provider about the medicines you have taken and the surgeries you have had. Information about your full health history will enable your provider to determine the best treatment for you. For answers to more questions, visit <https://www.maketheconnection.net/events/coming-out-health-care-provider>.

## If I come out to my provider, will this information be shared?

No. Your conversations and the information you share with your VA provider are confidential. You can also ask that this information not be entered into your medical record. However, medically necessary information, such as diagnosis or medications, must be included in your medical record to ensure that your providers have a complete picture of your health and that you are receiving the best care possible. Finding a provider you are comfortable with is essential to your health and wellness.

If you are not comfortable with your VA provider or do not feel you are being provided compassionate care, please contact your facility's Patient Advocate or <https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/VAFacilities.asp>.

## WHAT HEALTH ISSUES SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT AS A VETERAN WITH AN LGBTQ+ OR RELATED IDENTITY?

*Studies have shown that LGBTQ+ Veterans are at an increased risk for elevated levels of stress. This stress can increase the risk for certain mental and physical health conditions.*

*As a group, LGBTQ+ Veterans have elevated rates of the following behaviors and conditions that can affect their health:*

- Smoking, problem drinking, and substance use
- Anxiety, trauma exposure, and depression
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection
- Some cancers

*LGBTQ+ Veterans can also face forms of bigotry and discrimination that can cause the loss of employment, housing, child custody, or physical or sexual assault. These challenges and events can also lead to stress and anxiety, as well as social withdrawal and low self-esteem.*

*View VA's health fact sheets for LGBTQ+ Veterans.*

**GAY, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER MEN**  
<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/va-pcs-lgbt-factsheet-gay-bisexual.pdf#>

**LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER WOMEN**  
<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/va-pcs-lgbt-factsheet-lesbian-bisexual.pdf#>

**TRANSGENDER MEN AND GENDER DIVERSE VETERANS**  
<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/va-pcs-lgbt-factsheet-transgender-male.pdf#>

**TRANSGENDER WOMEN AND GENDER DIVERSE VETERANS**  
<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/va-pcs-lgbt-factsheet-transgender-female.pdf#>

**NONBINARY VETERANS**  
<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/LGBTQ-factsheet-nonbinary-Veterans.pdf#>

## If I have additional questions, who else can I speak to at the VA Medical Center regarding my concerns?

There is an LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator (VCC) at every facility to help you get the care you need. To reach the VCC at your nearest facility visit: <https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/VAFacilities.asp>.

VA health care includes, among other services:

- Hormone treatment
- Substance use/alcohol treatment
- Tobacco use treatment
- Treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted infections/PrEP
- Intimate partner violence reduction and treatment of after effects
- Heart health
- Cancer screening, prevention and treatment

## What are the Birth Sex fields in my medical record?

VA understands that Veterans with transgender and related gender identities face increased health risks and unique challenges in health care, and is committed to promoting a welcoming environment that is inclusive of all Veterans. Previously, your medical record had only one place for your sex and gender. Now, you can have both your Birth Sex and your Self-Identified Gender Identity in your medical record. For more information, see:

Birth Sex and Self-Identified Gender Identity Fact Sheet

<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/docs/FAQ-BirthSex-SelfIdentifiedGenderIdentityFactSheet.pdf>

## Are there any providers specializing in transgender Veteran care in my area?

All VA facilities are required to provide care to transgender Veterans or pay for services in the community. The LGBTQ+ VCC at your facility will be the most knowledgeable about local resources.

## How do I change my legal name on file with VA?

If you're a Veteran, spouse, dependent, or caregiver and you get VA health care or direct benefit payments, you'll need to tell us if you have a legal name change so we can change your name on file with VA. You must contact your VA medical center, each VA program office that you receive direct benefit payments from, and the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) support office. Keep reading to find out how to change your name with each of these offices.

For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/resources/how-to-change-your-legal-name-on-file-with-va>.

## OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

### How do I enroll in VA health care?

Veterans can apply for VA health care enrollment by completing VA Form 10-10EZ.

Apply online at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply>, or visit, call or write to any VA health care facility or Veterans' benefits office. You can also call the VA Health Benefits Call Center toll free at 877-222-VETS (877-222-8387)

### How do I apply for a military discharge upgrade?

All branches of the military consider you to have a strong case for a discharge upgrade if you can show your discharge was connected to any of these categories:

- Mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Sexual assault or harassment during military service (at VA, we refer to this as military sexual trauma or MST)
- Sexual orientation (including under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy)

For more information, visit: <https://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions>

### Are there any benefit updates for LGBT Service Members and Veterans?

The Department of Defense (DoD), in their ongoing review of military benefits in connection with the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," identified some VA benefits for which Service members, regardless of sexual orientation, may designate beneficiaries of their choosing, such as the following:

- Service members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI)
- Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI)
- Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty
- Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserves
- Post-9/11 GI Bill

In addition, there are other benefits for Service members provided by DoD for which LGBTQ+ Service members may designate a beneficiary regardless of sexual orientation. Learn about those DoD programs on the Defense Department's DADT (Don't Ask, Don't Tell) website.

For more information, visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/persona/lgbt.asp>.