

Date: June 29, 2021

From: Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) (006)

Subj: Establishment of the PrideVA Employee Resource Group

To: All VA Employees

1. During this year's Pride Month, I have the distinct honor of recognizing PrideVA as the Department of Veterans Affairs' first official Employee Resource Group (ERG) for gender and sexual minorities, including, but not limited to, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) and related identities, as well as allies. PrideVA membership is open to all VA employees, contractors, volunteers and retirees. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge our many LGBTQ+ employees, contractors and retirees who faithfully served in our armed forces despite the threat of service discharge based solely on homosexual status or conduct during the era of "don't ask, don't tell", the ban on transgender service and other discriminatory policies.
2. The PrideVA ERG is organized to empower members, improve access and strengthen outcomes for VA employees. PrideVA is a gateway for LGBTQ+ employees and allies to advance mentorship, professional development and community service opportunities. A core tenet of PrideVA is the principle of inclusion, which ensures that all VA employees, Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors, feel a sense of belonging in VA environments across the nation and abroad.
3. VA's LGBTQ+ personnel contribute immeasurably to our mission here at VA and provide support and expertise across the Department to create better outcomes for our Veterans and VA personnel. Over the past year, LGBTQ+ personnel and allies joined from every corner of our approximately 400,000 person workforce to organize an unprecedented month-long National VA Virtual Pride observance and celebration.

Why have an ERG?

- Improves access and outcomes for VA employees and Veterans;

Subj: Establishment of PrideVA Employee Resource Group

- Functions as a crowd-sourcing mechanism to channel employee feedback and concerns to the Department and to capture Veteran experiences;
  - Allows VA to keep, empower and advance the goals of employees;
  - Cultivates workplace inclusion and coworker collaboration, as well as develops an inclusive organizational culture that gives a voice to LGBTQ+ employees;
  - Increases VA institutional connectiveness, employee support, and employee retention through professional mentorship;
  - Provides a forum for employees to directly petition the Department for redress of concerns;
  - Reassures Veterans that they are coming into a safe and welcoming environment where they will be treated with dignity and respect;
  - Increases employee engagement and empowerment, as well as overall employee satisfaction by allowing LGBTQ+ employees to share their sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace;
  - Reduces covert sexual harassment of LGBTQ+ employees through organizational support.
4. In upholding VA Values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence, VA's policies and programs must serve an incredibly diverse population of VA employees, contractors, Veterans, families, caregivers, volunteers and survivors. Above all, and for our success as a team, it is a strategic imperative that we leverage our workforce's tremendous diversity to cultivate a collaborative and inclusive organizational culture that not only dismantles barriers but builds bridges. It is my hope that PrideVA will be the first of many ERGs advancing inclusion, diversity, equity and access across VA while also increasing employee cohesion and connectivity.
5. If you have any questions, please contact Steven A. Johnston, President of PrideVA at [prideVA@va.gov](mailto:prideVA@va.gov), or Sterling Akins, Program Analyst, Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion at [Sterling.Akins@va.gov](mailto: Sterling.Akins@va.gov).

Gina M. Grosso