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*The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) newsletter contains news and information about VA's ongoing effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.*



## **Executive Director's Message | Around HPO**

### **Health Update | Staff Spotlight | Fact of the Month**

*Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for assistance.*

## **Message From Monica Diaz, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs Office**



Each year, June marks the beginning of summer. School is out, families are going on vacations, and people are enjoying the good weather. But since 1970, it has also represented something far more significant in the LGBTQ+ community: [Pride Month](#).

The concept of Pride Month began with the Stonewall riots, a series of riots for gay liberation that took place in June 1969. Although pride marches were held in several cities the following year, it wouldn't be officially recognized by the federal government until 1999, when [President Bill Clinton declared the anniversary of the Stonewall riots](#)

every June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month.

In 2011, [President Barack Obama expanded the officially recognized Pride Month](#) to include the whole of the LGBT community: “I... proclaim June 2011 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month. I call upon the people of the United States to eliminate prejudice everywhere it exists, and to celebrate the great diversity of the American people.”

We celebrate the many contributions LGBTQ+ individuals have made to American society — from the arts and education to healthcare and national security.

We stand alongside the LGBTQ+ community and show them our support. We recognize the work that still needs to be done to achieve equality.

[Read Monica's full message.](#)

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## Around HPO

### [Ending Veteran Homelessness Podcast: Improving Homeless Services for LGBTQ+ Veterans](#)

We are joined by Dr. Jillian Shipherd, Deputy Director of VHA's National LGBTQ+ Health Program, and Lindsay Church, Executive Director and Founder of Minority Veterans of America, to learn about how VA homeless programs can improve services to be more accessible to, and effective for, LGBTQ+ Veterans. Our guests talk about the unique risk factors facing LGBTQ+ Veterans, VA policies and services, and how VA homeless programs can strive to do better. [Listen to the episode.](#)



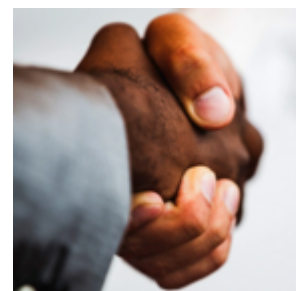
### [Juneteenth](#)

This month, we celebrate Juneteenth, a historic milestone that marks when the last enslaved Black Americans were freed. This long overdue emancipation renewed hope for a better future. Today, we are continuing to work to remove the barriers to care that still exist for many Black Veterans.

Listen to the [Conversations about Racial Equity](#) podcast episode to learn why issues of race, diversity, and bias must be considered within our Veterans programs to ensure we're providing equal care for all.

### [VA Homeless Programs There for Army Veteran](#)

When Army Veteran Robert Wooding found himself with just \$200 in his pocket and nowhere to stay, he reached out to his local VA for help accessing transitional housing. Today, he works for VA as a program support clerk, his experience with homelessness behind him. [Read his story.](#)





### [Sergeant First Class \(SFC\) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics \(PACT\) Act of 2022](#)

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 era.

Toxic exposures include substances such as Agent Orange, burn pits, pesticides, and other toxic substances. The PACT Act adds more than 20 presumptive health conditions based on exposures that expands benefits for eligible Veterans.

If a Veteran has a presumptive condition established by the PACT Act, they do not need to prove their service caused the condition, only meet the service requirements for the presumption. The PACT Act also requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening (TES) to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care to determine potential exposure to toxic substances while serving.

Screenings are available at VA health facilities across the country. For additional resources and to learn about how to get benefits and file a claim online, [click here](#) or call 800-698-2411.

### [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) Awareness Month](#)

Seven percent of Veterans will have PTSD, placing them at greater risk of homelessness. PTSD is more common among female Veterans (13%) than male Veterans (6%), and the likelihood [varies by service era](#).



During PTSD Awareness Month, learn about the [mental health and case management services](#) available to Veterans through VA, or take our five-question [PTSD Self-Screen](#) to see if your feelings and behaviors may be related to PTSD.



### [VA Helps Homeless Army Veteran Find a Home](#)

Army Veteran Teresa White was hesitant to ask for housing assistance from VA, believing that the services were meant for older Veterans. It just took one conversation to get her in touch with a VA social worker and on the path to stable housing and meaningful employment. [Read the full story](#).

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## **Health Update**

Calling all Post-9/11 Veterans! There are four months left to enroll in the PACT Act one-year special enrollment period for VA health care that began October 1, 2022. To enroll, a Veteran must have:

- Served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or

- after the Persian Gulf war, or
- Served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998

And the Veteran must have:

- Been discharged or released between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, and
- Not previously enrolled in VA health care

If you aren't currently enrolled in VA health care, we encourage you to apply so we can provide you with any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free. And your care may be free as well.

[Apply online](#), or call the toll-free hotline for assistance at 877-222-8387. Visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) to learn more about PACT Act eligibility.

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## HPO Staff Spotlight: Marzena Guzik



Marzena Guzik has spent the last decade working for VA, currently serving as a National Contracted Residential Services (CRS) Coordinator. She oversees contracts with community providers for residential services, which allow outreach workers to engage with homeless Veterans and offer them emergency services and transitional housing.

[Read her full spotlight](#) to learn why her work is important, and how focusing on accessibility for LGBTQ+ Veterans has made an impact.

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## HPO Fact of the Month

Homelessness, bias in the military, and employment instability are all factors that can increase suicide risk for LGBTQ+ Veterans.

Many LGBTQ+ Veterans avoid seeking care because of historic attitudes toward their sexual orientation or gender identity. During Pride Month, [learn more about the unique challenges LGBTQ+ Veterans face](#).



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## Quick List