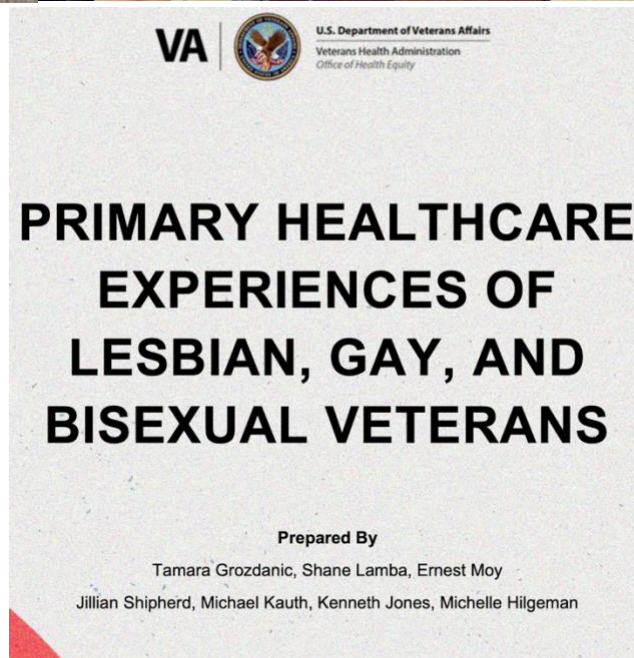


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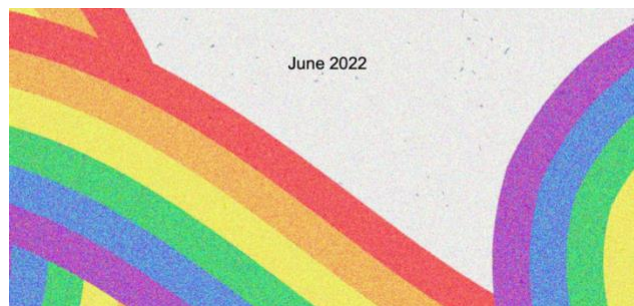
PACT Act Signed into Law



Women's Equality Day



<https://va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/>



June 2022

New Legislation for Veteran Healthcare

The bipartisan bill, known as the PACT (Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics) Act, was passed and signed by **President Joe Biden** in August. It expands healthcare benefits for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits. Speaking at a White House ceremony on August 10, Biden said that “veterans of the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan not only faced dangers in battle—they were breathing toxic smoke from burn pits.” Biden traveled to Iraq dozens of times as a Senator and later as Vice President and recalls seeing the toxic fumes in the air. “Burn pits the size of football fields, an incinerated waste of war such as tires, poisonous chemicals, jet fuel, and so much I won’t even mention,” he said. “A lot of places where our soldiers were sleeping were literally a quarter or half mile away from it.” Biden noted that “Less than 1% of you risk everything to defend 99% of the population. We owe you. You’re the backbone. You’re the steel. You’re the sinew. You’re the very fiber that makes this country what it is, and that’s not hyperbole, that’s a fact. As a nation, we have many obligations—and I’ve been saying this for a long time. We have many obligations but only one true sacred obligation: to equip those we send into harm’s way and to care for them and their families when they come home.” Danielle and Brielle Robinson, the wife and daughter of Sgt. 1st Class Heath Robinson, upon whom the PACT Act is named, introduced Biden at the signing ceremony. On a personal level, Biden’s son Beau was deployed to Iraq in 2008 and diagnosed with brain cancer in 2013; he died two years later at the age of 46. Cancers, as well as 20 other *presumptive* conditions, have been linked to exposure from the fumes of burn pits. **Jon Stewart** was recognized at the WH ceremony for his pressure to Congress to pass the bill.

Passage and implementation of the PACT Act is one step in a series of efforts by the Biden-Harris Administration to address the harmful effects of environmental exposures affecting service men and women. In April 2022, the VA defined *presumptive service connection* for several rare respiratory cancers for certain veterans, and was able to complete more claims for veterans and survivors involving a possible presumption of rare respiratory cancer. In August 2021, the VA began processing disability claims for asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis based on presumed exposure to particulate matter. Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations and other areas, and who developed these conditions within 10 years of military service, are now eligible to apply for disability benefits and access to VA healthcare. Since August, the VA has completed 33,276 claims, granting over 25,000 veterans and their survivors benefits for one or more conditions, leading to over \$93M in retroactive benefit payments. The VA encourages veterans to file claims related to military environmental exposures. The VA has also improved training for VA and non-VA healthcare providers, and compensation and pension examiners, on assessing deployment related to environmental exposures through the TRAIN Learning Network and use of the Exposure Ed App (<https://mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed>). In addition, veterans with concerns about inconsistent healthcare treatment in relation to outcomes from military environmental exposures should be aware of VET-HOME, the Veterans Exposure Team-Health Outcomes of Military Exposures, launched earlier this year. By January 2023, the VA expects to have a fully operational call center and network of experts to help veterans concerned about environmental exposure and provide consultative services in primary clinics. For more information, check out <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/>.

Out & Equal Workplace Summit

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates will host its annual Workplace Summit on October 17-20, 2022, in Las Vegas. Each year more than 5000 executives, employee resource group leaders and members, human resources, diversity, and inclusion professionals, and other experts convene at the Out & Equal Workplace Summit—the largest LGBTQ-focused conference in the world. The Summit has grown to become the preferred place to network and share strategies and best practices that help to create workplaces which are more inclusive of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions—workplaces where everyone belongs, and where LGBTQ employees can be out and thrive. Following supervisory and budget approval, VA attendees must then register on the Out & Equal website (<https://outandequal.org/workplace-summit-2022/>), and can contact Sterling Akins, VA’s Departmental LGBTQ+ Program Manager, ORMDI, for more information.

**>>>> Join Us For Chapter Elections on Thursday, September 1 <<<<
The Chicago Chapter will elect Officers and Board members at our next Board meeting.**

Monthly In-person AVER Meetings for the Chicago Chapter Started Up!

We now meet up every month on *First Thursdays* at 7pm (Chicago, Central time zone) at the **Center on Halsted**. **Everyone** is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings *in-person* or via Zoom!! For Zoom, *check the averchicago.org website for the active link (click on the highlighted "Zoom" link near the bottom of the webpage) to get into the Zoom meeting. To join via audio: call 312-626-6799 with ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.*

Women's Equality Day

The VA joins the nation in observing Women's Equality Day on August 26. The theme is "Celebrating Women's Right to Vote." Though Women's Equality Day commemorates the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment securing women's right to vote, it also highlights women's continuing efforts to gain full equality. In some states, women—particularly those of color—were blocked from voting even after 1920. Women's Equality Day is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning and benefits of equality, and on the responsibility of cultivating inclusive communities that promote an equal voice for all, regardless of gender. VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to promote events and activities that recognize women and their many contributions to American society including military service. For more information, visit the VA's Federal Women's Program (FWP) website (<https://www.va.gov/ORMDI/DiversityInclusion/FWP.asp>) or contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, VA's FWP Manager. For information on healthcare, benefits, services, and programs for women Veterans, visit the Center for Women Veterans website at <https://www.va.gov/womenvet/>.

Public Health Updates

COVID-19. The White House continues to ensure that all Americans have easy and convenient access to the vaccines, treatments, tests, and other tools (e.g., masks) that protect against and treat COVID-19. These tools, even with the BA.5 variant, work to prevent serious illness, keep people out of the hospital, and save lives. BA.4 and BA.5—subvariants of the Omicron variant—now make up 80% of the COVID-19 cases in the U.S., with BA.5 accounting for a majority of cases. Early indications signal that BA.5 may have some increased ability to escape immunity, including from prior infections, meaning it has the potential to cause the numbers of infections to rise. More than 222M Americans are fully vaccinated, and over 106M people have at least their first booster shot, and virtually every American of every age is eligible for vaccination. Adults who are up-to-date with their vaccinations are 3.5 times less likely to be hospitalized than unvaccinated adults, and among those who are 50 and older, people who have received two booster shots are 42 times less likely to die from COVID-19 compared to those who are unvaccinated. Over 530M at-home test kits have been delivered to over 75M households for free, and are still available through [COVIDtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov). Use of the Defense Production Act continues to provide an ample supply of high-quality masks, and 400M non-surgical N95 masks were released from the Strategic National Stockpile for free. As BA.5 cases rise, individuals are encouraged to wear masks in indoor public spaces. For immunocompromised individuals, pre-exposure prophylactics, such as Evusheld, are widely available.

Monkeypox. Over 9000 cases have been reported since the first case on May 18. Within two days from that initial outbreak, the government made the vaccine available, and over 670,000 vaccine doses have been distributed to date. Another 441,000 vials were released in August from the Strategic National Stockpile, and with alternate (intradermal) dosing will provide immunization for 2.2M Americans. (Intradermal dosing uses one-fifth the dose of subcutaneous dosing and provides a similar immune response. Intradermal administration is like a tuberculosis skin test.) Another 150,000 vials of the Jynneos vaccine—now totaling 750,000 doses—will arrive in the U.S. in September, and 5.5M vials (over 25M doses) have been ordered from Bavarian Nordic. Note that the treatment regimen requires a second dose after 28 days to get a complete, higher-level response.

LGBTQ Retreat for Veterans and Active Military

Project New Hope provides a weekend retreat for veterans and active military servicemembers. The program will help you to manage stress, build resiliency, cope with suicidal idealization and self-harm, and respond to rejection or bullying due to your LGBTQ identity. Relaxing activities include indoor rock climbing, hiking, yoga, reflexology, massage, reiki, etc. The program was founded by Bill Moore, a USAF disabled veteran. The registration fee is \$50/person or \$100/couple, and includes lodging, meals, and activities at no additional cost but you must provide your own transportation to Groton, Massachusetts. For more information, contact Sue at smwilder@projectnewhopema.org, 508-762-9738, or their website at <https://www.projectnewhopema.org/>.

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association Annual Conference

The 40th Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) Annual Conference on LGBTQ Health will be held at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square on October 19-22, 2022. The theme is "Local Action, Global Impact." GLMA aims to highlight speakers (including community leaders, researchers, policy makers and clinicians, particularly those in the SF Bay Area) who are acting locally, but with a global impact, both by setting the tone for innovative and forward-thinking approaches to care, and by creating models that are replicable beyond the Bay's footprint. The conference is open to healthcare providers of all disciplines, researchers, academics, health administrators, policy experts, advocates, and all LGBTQ+ health supporters. Following supervisory and budget approval, VA attendees must then register on the GLMA website (<https://www.glma.org>), and can contact Sterling Akins for more information.

World War II

World War II ended 77 years ago, officially on September 2, 1945. An estimated 50M people died during the war, with more than 100M combatants involved in the six-year conflict. Three million U.S. troops served in the Pacific and another two million served in Europe. Reflect on their service as we honor our heroes from that war, and from all wars. We will place a wreath at the AVER Halsted/Addison Memorial on that day.

Please mark your calendars for a return to Ann Sather on Veterans Day, Friday evening, November 11, with your AVER friends. We hope to return in person after a two-year hiatus due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic. *We will also try to broadcast or record the event for those who can't make it.* We look forward to all of you joining us as we honor those military veterans who have served in both wartime and peacetime. It is a major fundraising event for our group, and a wonderful opportunity to see each other together again.

= Chicago Chapter =

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American Veterans for Equal Rights, Chicago Chapter, P.O. Box 29317, Chicago, IL 60629, Telephone: 773-752-0058, www.aver.us and www.averchicago.org. You can email any of the Chicago Chapter officers with the following address: president@averchicago.org, secretary@averchicago.org, or treasurer@averchicago.org.

Please help us reduce publication costs!

A **digital** version of *VetPride* is also now available. If you wish to receive a **PDF file of the newsletter by email**, instead of a printed copy by U.S. postal mail, **please send an email message to avernewsletter@gmail.com**.

Thanks! You get less postal mail and it *helps to reduce our newsletter printing and postage costs*.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Presents:

DRAG BRUNCH!

Sunday, September 4th

Noon to 4:00pm

Performance by 4 Queens @ 1:00pm

Mimosa Pitchers on Special!!

DJ Lou @ NOON

at DIAMOND JIM'S

325 Meier St, East Dundee, IL 60118

\$20 Entry fee

Proceeds benefit **AVER** Chicago & **Battle Betties!**

(American Veterans for Equal Rights)



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