
CHAPTER 15:
HONORING OUR VETERANS



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Despite a continuing ban on open military service by transgender people, many have made extraordinary personal sacrifices to serve their country. Estimates put the number of transgender veterans in the hundreds of thousands, and the National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 20% of transgender adults are veterans compared to 10% of the US population.¹ Unfortunately, many of these veterans have been denied access to medical care and other services guaranteed through the Veterans Administration (VA) and have faced discrimination and harassment at VA facilities.

The VA has taken important steps to address these discriminatory practices and improve treatment of trans veterans, but there is still more to be done to ensure that transgender veterans receive equal access to benefits. In particular, the VA has so far maintained arbitrary and outdated regulations prohibiting coverage for transition-related surgeries.

Policy Advances

- The Department of Defense began issuing updated military service records reflecting transgender veterans' current names. (2014)*
- VA updated gender change record policy, strengthened directive. (2013)
- VA directive called for nondiscriminatory treatment for transgender vets. (2011)

Needed Policy Changes

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should eliminate outdated regulations prohibiting coverage for medically necessary, transition-related surgeries for eligible veterans and dependents.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should continue to develop and implement training and other resources on LGBT competence for VA staff, including clinicians.
- The Department of Defense (DoD) should adopt a uniform policy for updating gender in DoD personnel and benefit systems, comparable to existing policies for U.S. passports and federal civilian personnel records.
- The Department of Defense should adopt a uniform policy allowing transgender veterans and retirees to obtain documentation of military service that does not disclose a former name.

See Open Military Service for more on military service.

¹ Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, at 30.