



Happy Friday, Colleagues.

My patients who are Marine Corps Veterans are generally delighted to learn that my brother was a Marine (or should I say, once a Marine, always a Marine). Veteran camaraderie is a very special thing. One of my favorite things to do when I meet my next patient in the waiting room is to pause, take in the joy of Veterans sharing common experiences, and bear witness to their moment of feeling understood by another person who has walked the same mile. As we learned from the show, *Cheers*:

*You wanna go where people know,
people are all the same,
You wanna go where everybody knows
your name.*

VVC groups offers the opportunity for our Veterans to go where everyone knows their name. This week is lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Health Awareness Week, and today's strong practice highlights the positive clinical outcomes associated with feeling understood and of belonging via VVC groups. Kudos to the **PRIDE team** and **VISN 6 Clinical Resource Hub** whose TelePride program exemplifies Secretary McDonough's priority to promote equity and inclusion of LGBT Veterans, families, caregivers, survivors, or employees at VA.

VVC Strong Practice: TelePRIDE

TelePRIDE

Technology and innovation to serve LGBT+ Veterans in a pandemic!

"PRIDE In All Who Served" is a ten-week health education group focused on reducing healthcare disparities among LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and related identities) Veterans. Session

content focuses on overall wellness, increasing social connectedness, and empowering LGBT Veterans to engage in VHA services relevant to their personal healthcare needs.

In recognition of the exacerbation of healthcare disparities for LGBT Veterans during the COVID-19 Pandemic, a partnership was developed between PRIDE and the VISN 6 Clinical Resource Hub (CRH) to launch the first affirmative care group to be offered across states lines within VHA. The virtual offering became known as “TelePRIDE”, serving LGBT Veterans throughout Virginia and North Carolina.

Benefits

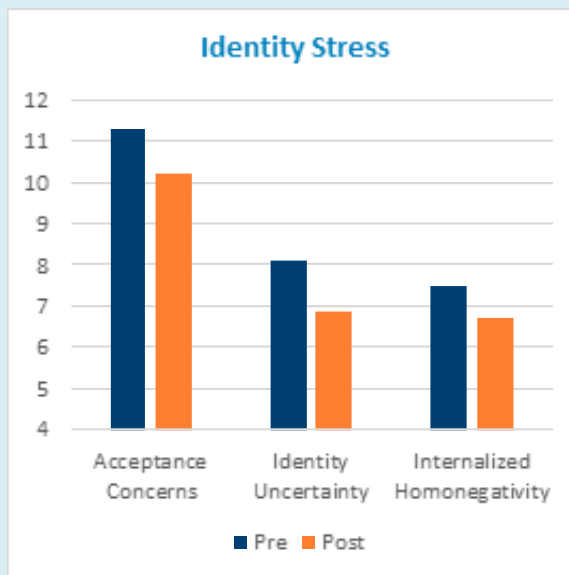
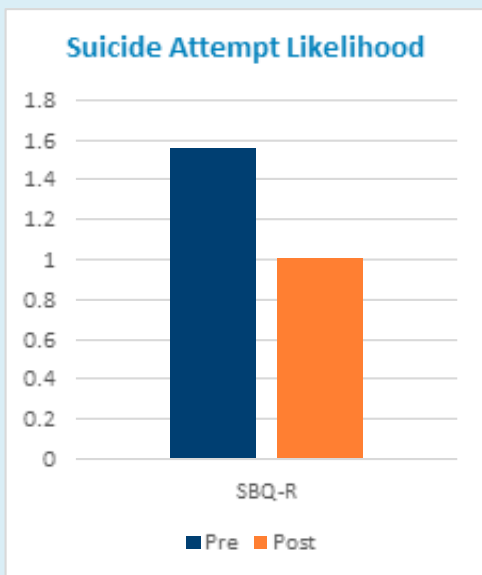
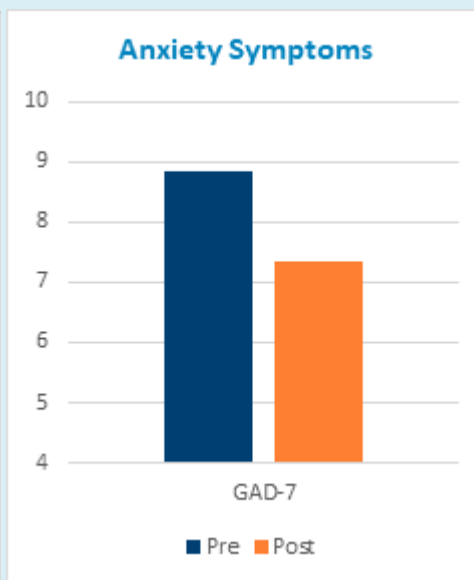
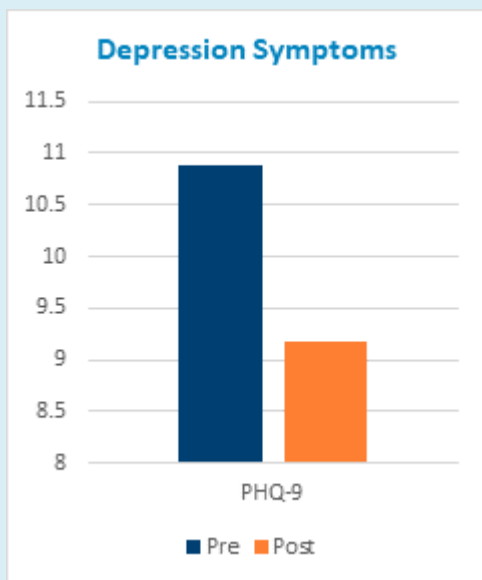
- ✚ Veterans to build and enhance their social support system, avoiding potential social isolation and reducing Covid exposure
- ✚ Veterans join a 10-week virtual group, offering continuity with the same peers.
- ✚ Prior to their first VVC group session, PRIDE staff offer digital skills support and share handouts/YouTube video links to promote comfort with VVC.

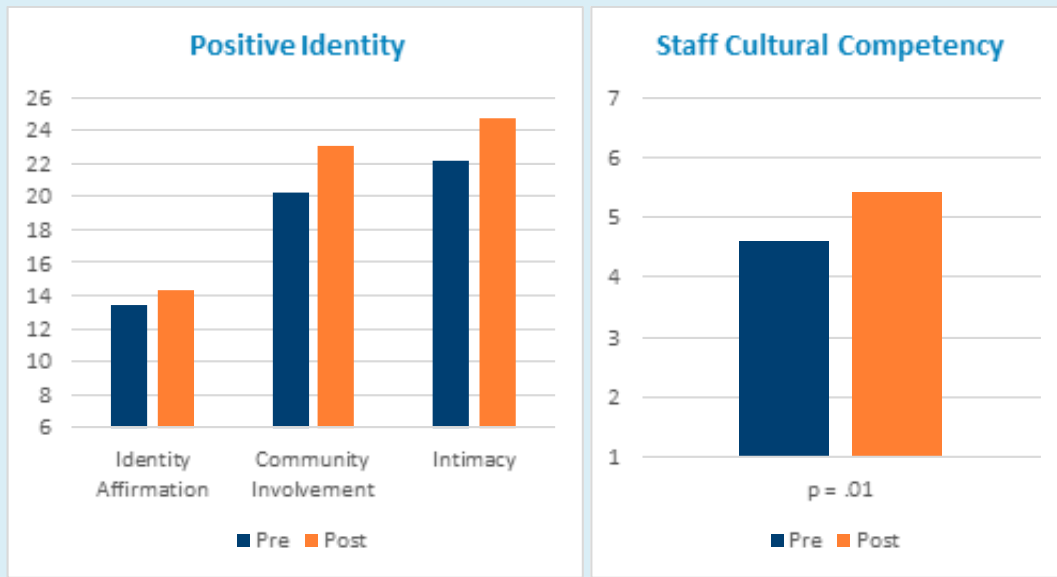
Implementation

- ✚ At the onset of the pandemic, PRIDE partnered with the VISN 6 Clinical Resource Hub to proactively and purposefully offered PRIDE groups by VVC.
- ✚ Active outreach to Veterans to let them know that VVC for PRIDE groups is an option, as many Veterans assumed that groups stopped due to the pandemic.
- ✚ LGBT Veterans were asked how a welcoming environment could be created for the new virtual setting, with a focus on Veterans feeling safe and comfortable.
- ✚ Currently, all PRIDE groups are offered virtually. When it is safe, “blended model” of in-person and virtual attendance is planned. We’ve had so much success with PRIDE groups by VVC!

Outcomes

Results are impressive, demonstrating Veteran-reported outcomes indicate reduction in suicide risk, depression, anxiety, as well as an increase in identity certainty, acceptance, community involvement, and perception of VHA care.





n=64 participant responses



“If you're LGBT and a Veteran, I'd recommend it to everybody. It's great to learn about yourself and others, and to also learn about the VA--they're doing more than you know.”

— PRIDE Group Member

Veteran Spotlight



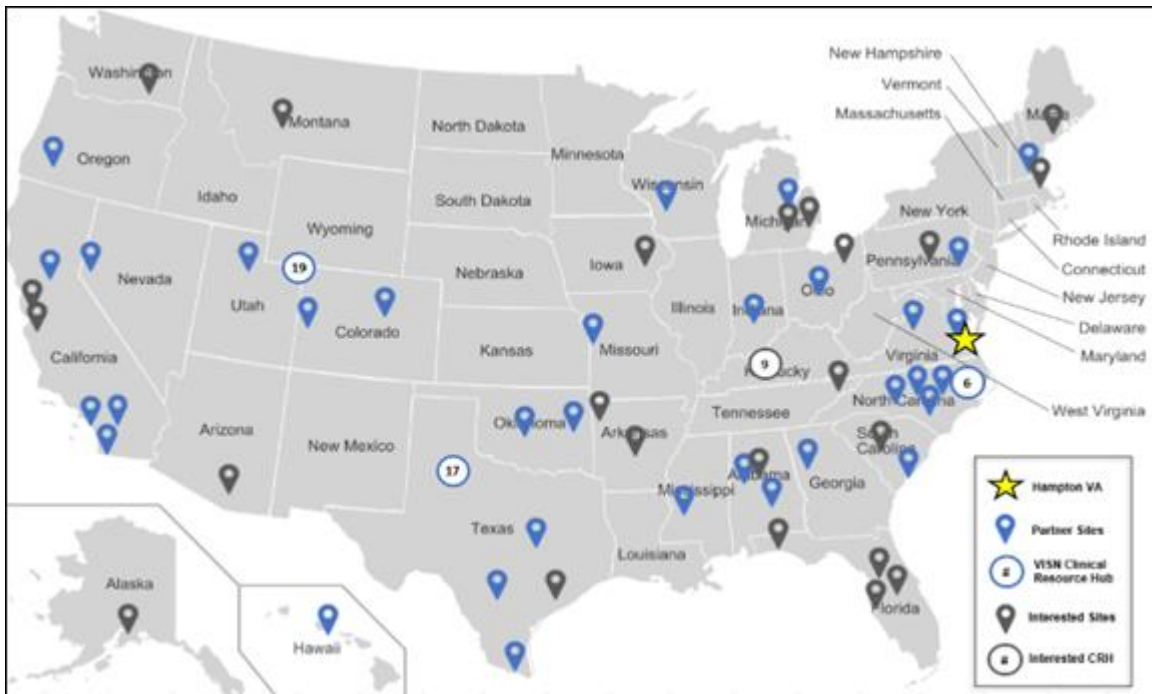
Daniela has participated in both face-to-face and virtual offerings of the PRIDE Group. At the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, she helped TelePRIDE Group facilitators “test” the virtual platform before the launch in VISN 6. Her feedback was used to enhance the virtual group experience. She is active in the community and has encouraged several LGBT Veterans to engage in VA care.

“To not have these sessions at all will leave many in the community to feel abandoned. For the LGBT community, it is very important that the PRIDE Group continues. The ability to attend through both computer and smart phone has allowed many to join through any location. Meeting other Veterans in the community is important and we’re still able to do that.”

— Daniela
Air Force & Navy Veteran

PRIDE Across VA

As a Diffusion of Excellence (DoE) National Practice, PRIDE has spread to 30+ VHA facilities across the country. You can learn more about the project and how to join at the [Diffusion Marketplace](#).



Addressing a Need Through Partnership



Dr. Tiffany Lange (she/her), PRIDE Clinical Implementation Lead

Dr. Lange is the LGBT Veteran Program Manager at the Hampton VA Medical Center. With input from LGBT Veterans, she developed the PRIDE Group and has spread the affirmative care service across the country with support from VHA Innovators Network and Diffusion of Excellence.



Dr. Monica Thompson (she/her), PRIDE Telehealth Lead Trainer

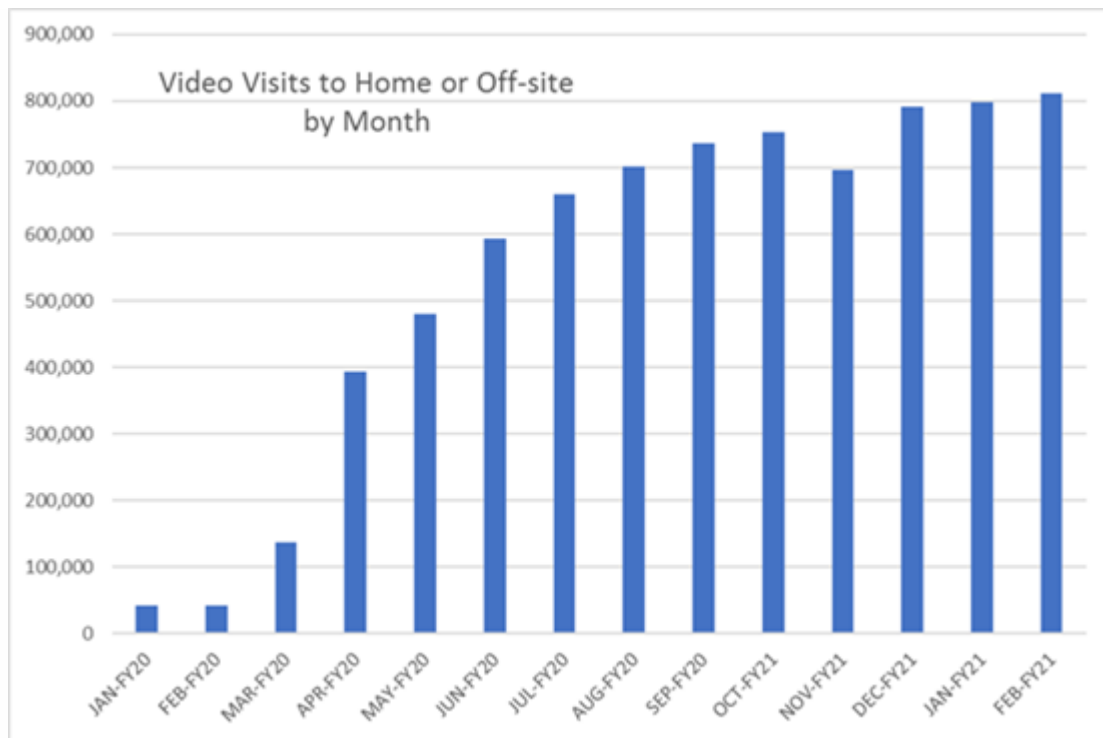
Dr. Thompson is the VISN6 Clinical Resource Hub BHIP Aspire Team Champion and LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator. She is passionate about expanding Virtual Telehealth options and an advocate for the LGBT community.

LGBT Health Awareness Week (March 22-26, 2021)

LGBT Health Awareness Week is an opportunity to learn more about the unique healthcare needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT and related identities) Veterans.

Estimates suggest that there are over 1 million LGBT Military Veterans in the United States. LGBT individuals are at a disproportionate risk for suicide and other poor health outcomes, due in part to discrimination and barriers in accessing services. Barriers to receiving culturally competent healthcare can contribute to worse health outcomes for LGBT individuals. A provider's knowledge of a patient's LGBT status is essential to providing appropriate prevention screening and care.

Provider-focused education and inclusive facility policies are beginning to raise awareness about the unique needs and healthcare disparities facing LGBT Veterans. There is growing support that these systemic methods have contributed to improved LGBT Veteran experience with VHA services (Kauth, Barrera, Latini, 2018). To learn more about LGBT Veterans, consider taking an [online training](#) or reaching out to your local [LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator](#).



Thank you for all your hard work as we extend telehealth services to our Veterans during this pandemic. Please share your new applications and experiences!

Leonie

Leonie Heyworth, MD, MPH
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