

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Creating Cultural Change: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Social Work (SW) Approach to Social Justice Advocacy

Society for Social Work Leadership in
Healthcare Annual Conference
October 18, 2022

Presenters



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Acknowledgement

Special acknowledgement to the following Care Management and Social Work Services team members for their significant contributions in the development of this presentation



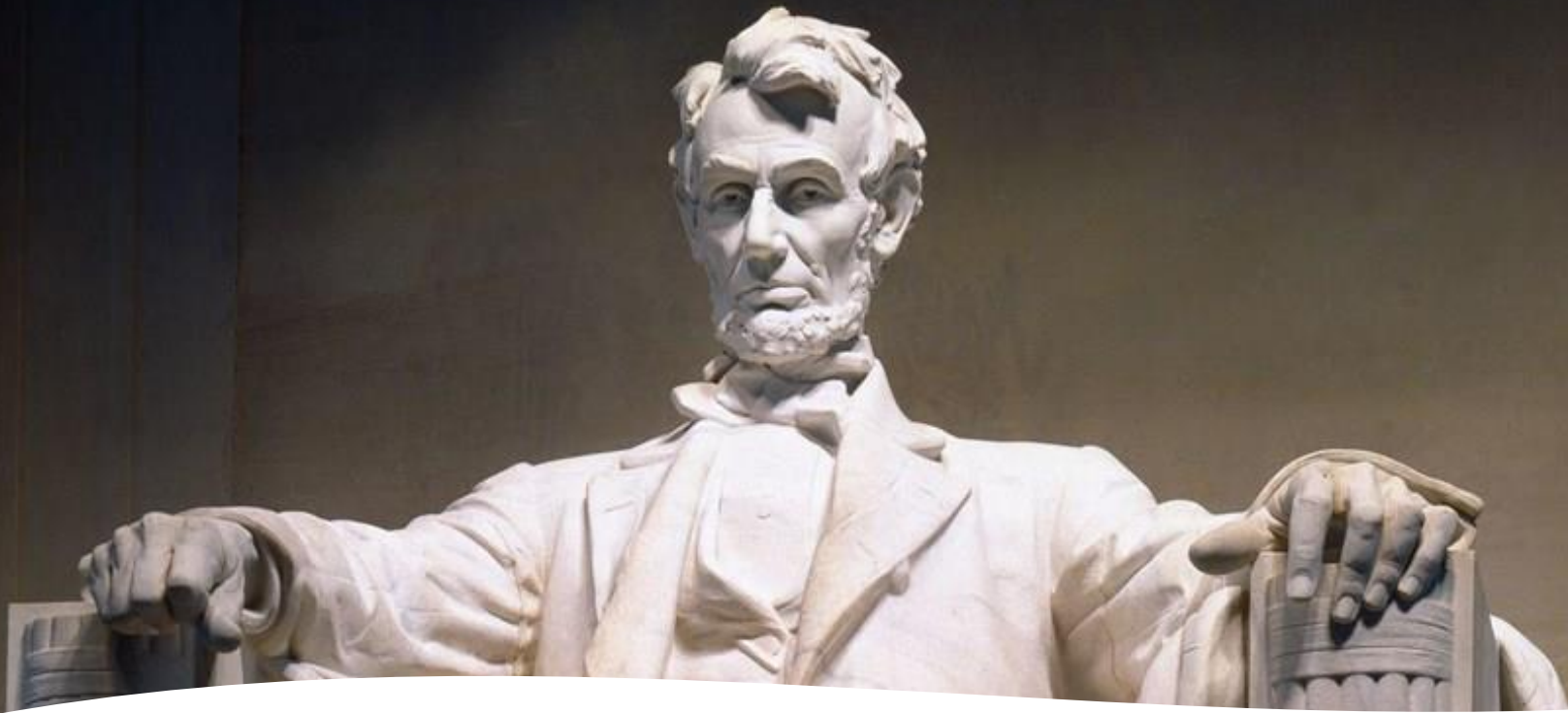
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Executive Assistant
Care Management and Social Work Services

Learning Objectives

- Identify the social, political and health equity needs which led to cultural and organizational change after social unrest in the U.S. in June 2020.
- Identify the Social Work ethical, moral and morale reasons for change and the barriers and opportunities faced at all levels of the health care organization.
- Identify the strategic opportunities and partnerships necessary to attain organization and cultural change within a workforce.



Department of Veterans Affairs

Mission is to fulfill President Lincoln's promise ***"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan"*** by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans



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- Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA): provides a range of benefits that help Veterans transition back to civilian life.
- National Cemetery Administration (NCA): provides dignified burial services for Veterans and eligible family members.
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA): largest integrated health care network in the United States with 1,297 health care facilities, including 171 medical centers, serving 9 million enrolled Veterans each year.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

*VHA operates the **nation's largest** integrated health care system and is one of the largest health care employers in the world.*

371,000+ Total VHA Employees

100,000+

**Veteran
Employees**



232,000+

**Clinical
Employees**



Four Statutory Missions:

- Care Delivery
- Education
- Research
- Emergency Response

17,300+
**VA Social
Workers**



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The National VA Social Work Program

CARE MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

VISION: To be a leader in interventions that impact Social Determinants of Health, embrace the values of social justice and promote the wellness and enhanced quality of life for all Veterans, Service members, their caregivers and loved ones.

VA NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK (SW) PROGRAM

17,388 VA Social Workers • 1,500 Graduate SW Trainees

VISION: To assist Veterans, their families, and caregivers in resolving Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) challenges to health and well-being, using a person in environment perspective



Leadership Council

Best Practices, Knowledge & Data Management, Leadership Development, Professional Development, Standards & Clinical Practice, Strategic Communications, Quality, Safety & Value, Social Work Graduate Education



National Programs

Social Work, Fisher House, Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP), Advance Care Planning Via Group Visits (ACP-GV), Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) Social Work



Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access (IDEA)

Consultation Team, Community & Program Office Partners



Tiger Teams

Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM), Elder Abuse, Human Trafficking, National Emergency, SW Qualification Standard

CORE RESPONSIBILITIES: Providing timely world-class healthcare; ensuring Veterans and their families have access to earned benefits and honoring Veterans with a final resting place

VA | MODERNIZATION: Technology; improving care for our Veterans; Providing world-class customer service; Increasing access and transparency; Operating more effectively

April 6, 2022



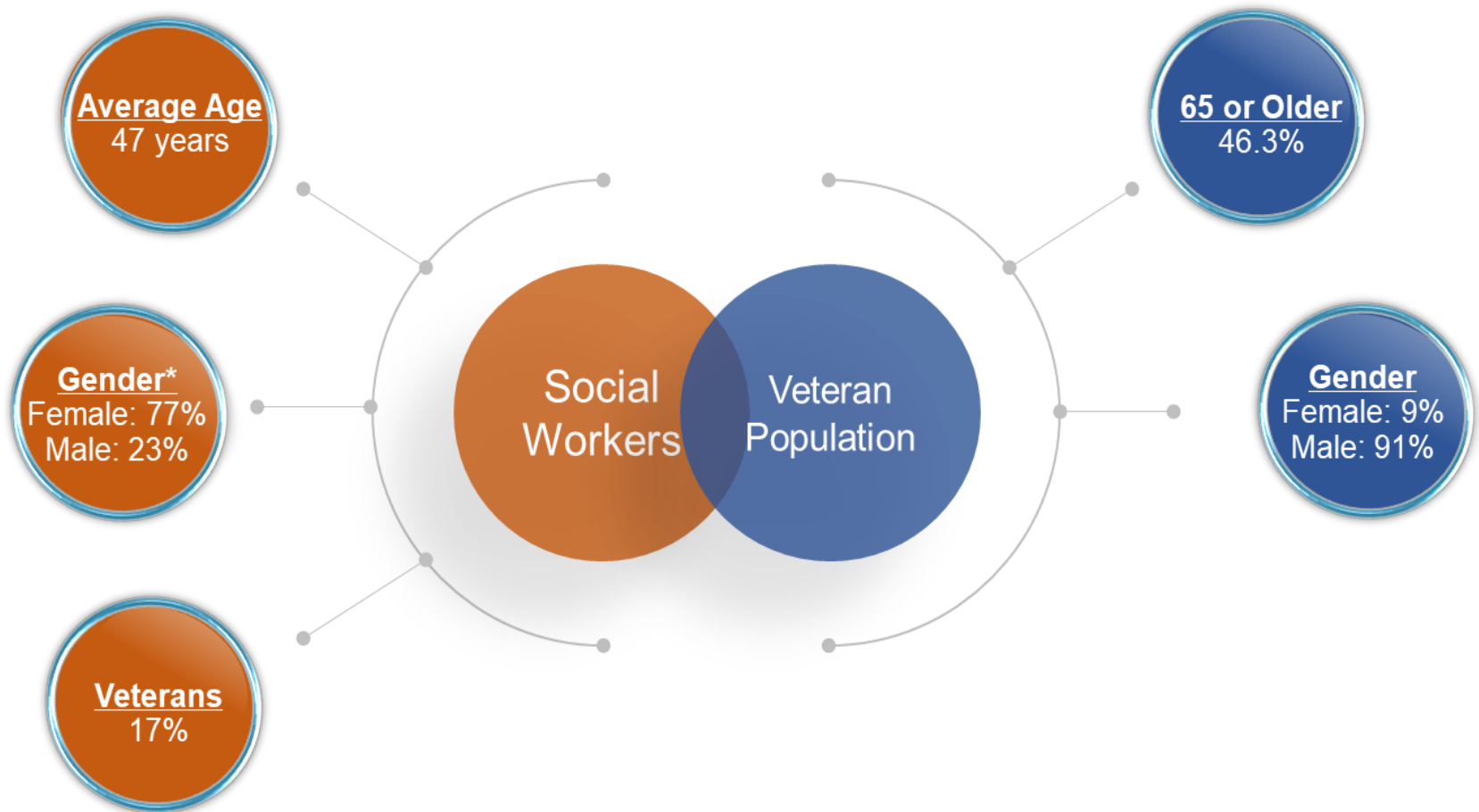
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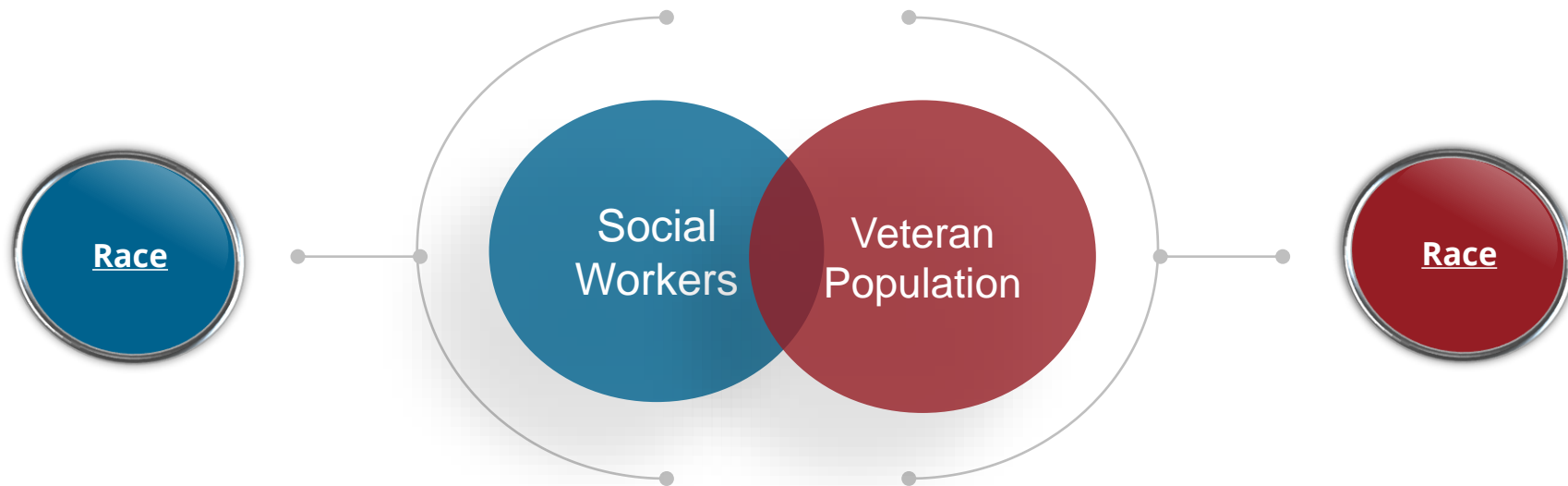
VA SW Workforce and Veteran Population Profile



*VA recognizes non-binary gender but is not available in this data set.

Sources: Social Work Data: VSSC Human Resources Employee Cube 2/2022; Veteran Population Data: [VA Benefits & Health Care Utilization](#)

SW Workforce and Veteran Population Profile



White	68.3%	78.6%
African American/Black	19.8%	12.6%
Hispanic	6.4%	8.2%
American Indian/Alaska Natives	1.2%	0.8%
Other	0.6%	4.0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island	0.3%	2.1%

Accenture Inclusion- The Power of Diversity



[Accenture Inclusion & The Power of Diversity](#)

What is Social Justice?

Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice.

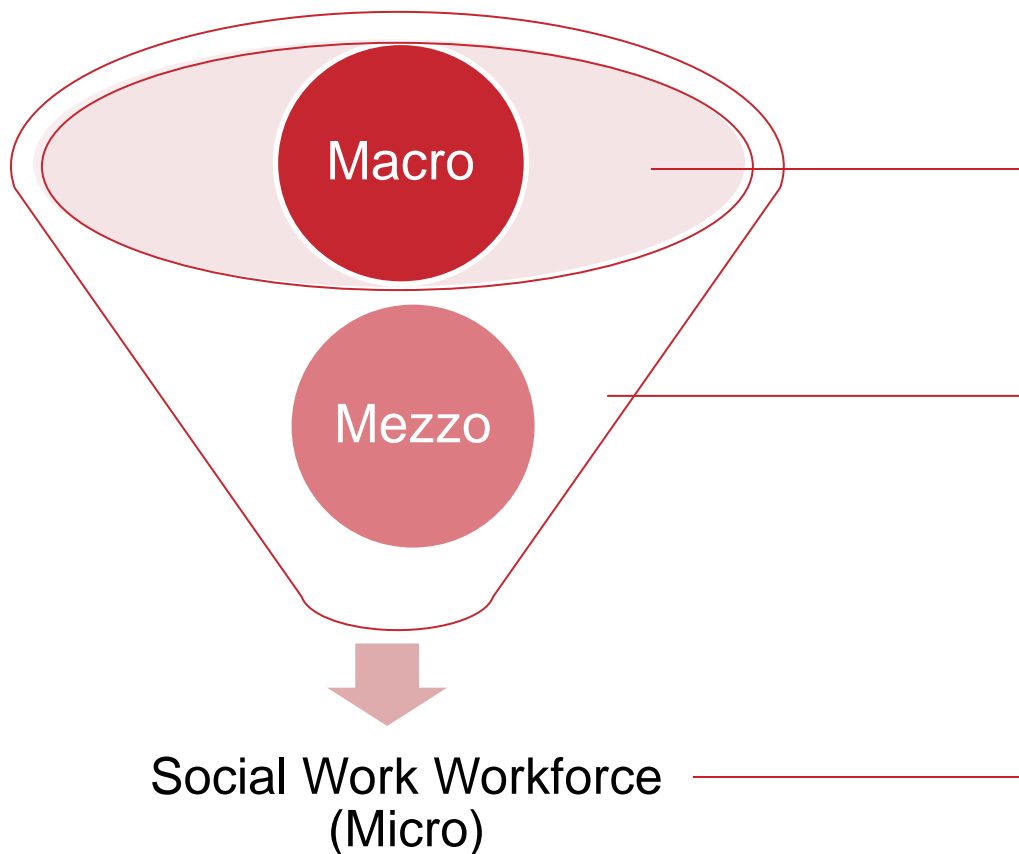
- Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.

Source: [NASW Code of Ethics](#)

National Social Work Action Plan to Address Racism

- In June 2020, the National SW Program initiated a call to action, after the death of Mr. George Floyd, to spark conversation and action around social justice issues affecting the VHA's social work workforce.
- The National SW Program developed an action plan to increase diversity, equity and inclusion within the social work workforce.

National SW Action Plan- Development



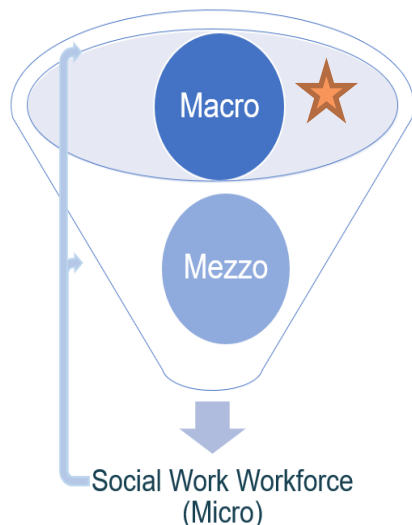
- National SW Program
- Social Work Leadership Councils
- Tiger Teams
- Regional Leadership
- Local Medical Center Social Work Leadership and Staff

National SW Action Plan (MACRO)

The National SW Program supports and advocates for VA social workers on a national level, reaffirming a commitment to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in the social work workforce.

Commitment to Action:

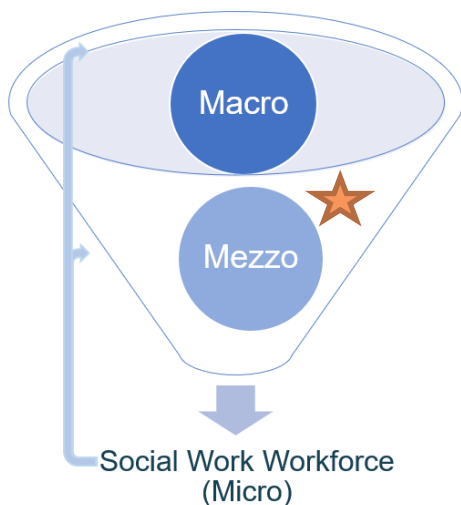
- Participate in listening session(s) and dialog about racism, current events and discrimination.
- Complete a report from the Social Work Leadership Council's (SW-LC) *Best Practice Sub-Committee* on listening session recommendations to strategic planning.
- Monitor trends for recruitment and retention diversity in the social work workforce and provide consultation as appropriate.
- Establish mentoring programs for Social Work Chiefs, Executives and front-line staff.
- Review national social work policy, as well as other VA policy, with a keen sensitivity to racial bias and/or discrimination.



National SW Action Plan (MEZZO)

SW-LC and Tiger Team Chairs

- Recognize opportunities for diversity, equity and inclusion in council membership.
- Promote inclusivity in providing opportunities for coaching and mentoring.
- Develop competencies that define the responsibilities of Social Work Chiefs and Executives to address racism in all its forms.

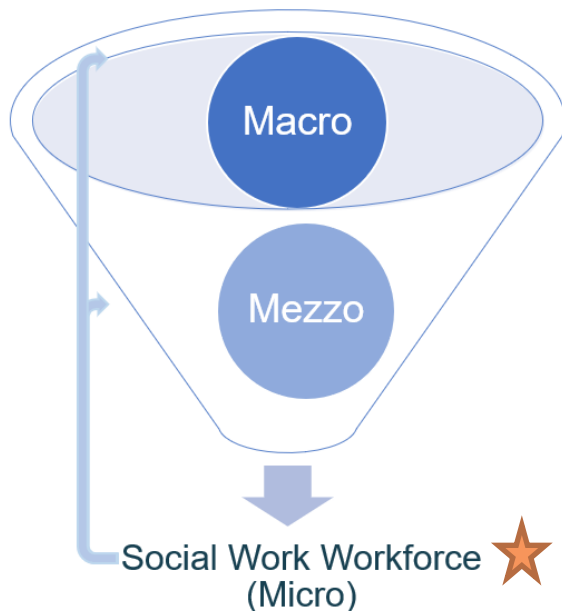


SW-LC Best Practice Committee

- Social Work Chiefs' and Executives' and front-line social workers' voluntary and confidential participation in listening sessions to better understand the experience of VA social workers who are members of minority groups.
- Review and analyze workforce data for VA Social Work nationwide for trends related to racial diversity by level and any other patterns learned through listening sessions.

National SW Action Plan (MICRO)

VA Medical Center Social Work Leadership and Staff:



- Be intentional in getting to know the cultural composition of social workers on staff.
- Host listening sessions with staff on the topic of racism and discrimination.
- Ensure all social workers within sphere of influence, including those staff who are in minority groups, are aware of opportunities (professional development, special assignment, leadership, etc.) available within VA.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA)

Related Executive Orders

Effect of Executive Orders (EO) at VA

- Moratorium on diversity training
- Wide-ranging leadership perspectives

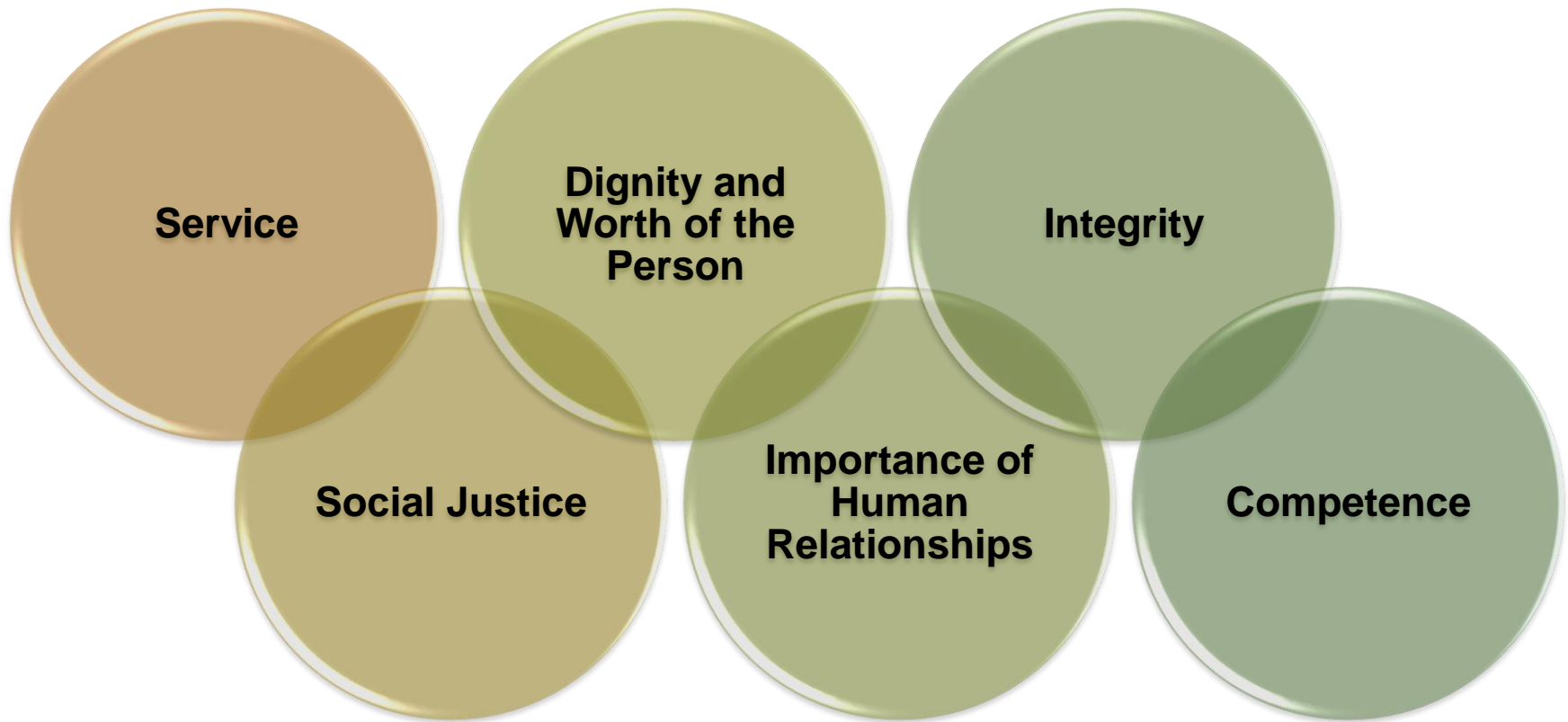
EO 13950: Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping, September 22, 2020

- Barred Federal agencies from conducting diversity and inclusion training
- Established phone hotlines and email addresses to report alleged noncompliance.

EO 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, January 20, 2021

- Calls on agencies to advance equity through identifying and addressing barriers to equal opportunity that underserved communities may face due to government policies and programs.

Professional Values vs Work Expectations



Source: [NASW Code of Ethics](#)

CMSW IDEA Structure

2021

CMSW Committee
(Grassroots)

2022

CMSW Executive Leadership

CMSW IDEA Council
(newly formed)

CMSW
Leadership Councils

CMSW IDEA Committee
(under development)



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Transtheoretical Model of Change

A TOOL FOR SOCIAL WORK LEADERS

Addressing Systemic Racism Using the Transtheoretical Model of Change

The resources found here can help your facility get started with the historical background and information about how systemic racism impacts the delivery of Social Work services to Veterans.

**Please note that inclusion of resources in this tool does not equal an endorsement by VA or the National Social Work Program Office. The resources within this tool are provided to assist Social Work leaders with engaging teams in conversations around race, equity, inclusion, social justice and the core values upheld by those serving in the social work profession.

Getting Started

[Learn more](#)

Pre-Contemplation

[Learn more](#)

Contemplation

[Learn more](#)

Preparation

[Learn more](#)

Action

[Learn more](#)

Maintenance

[Learn more](#)



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Helping SW Address Implicit Bias in Health Care



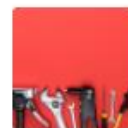
Implicit Bias: Glossary



Implicit Bias: Cross Cultural Knowledge and Sensitivity



Implicit Bias: Veteran Stories



Implicit Bias: Tools for Social Workers



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CMSW IDEA Strategies

Promote an equitable and inclusive work environment that fosters a culture which values and leverages human differences, opinions and perspectives, to empower CMSW employees and the social work workforce to achieve their fullest potential.

- Align actions with VHA's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) on training, programming, assessment and sustainability.
- Use of VHA Workforce Strategies and initiatives to expand current efforts through the Social Work National Action Plan to Address Racism in the VA Social Work Workforce.
- Collaborate with the ODEI, Workforce Management Consulting, Employee Education System and Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to create national trainings for staff at all levels of the organization focusing on recruitment, retention and advancement of a diverse workforce.

Areas of Interest:

- Communication
- Awareness, education and training
- Language and crucial conversations

IDEA Strategy Communication

Social Workers
Advocating for
IDEA Microsoft
Teams Channel

A platform to start conversations, exchange information and share resources and information related to IDEA.

IDEA Moment

A meeting agenda item to provide education and awareness regarding IDEA related topics.

VA SW IDEA
Update

A weekly update on IDEA related holidays and observances, educational opportunities, events, resources and information.

VA SW IDEA
Monthly Update

Provides a monthly update on IDEA related actions and/or activities to the VA social work community throughout the nation.



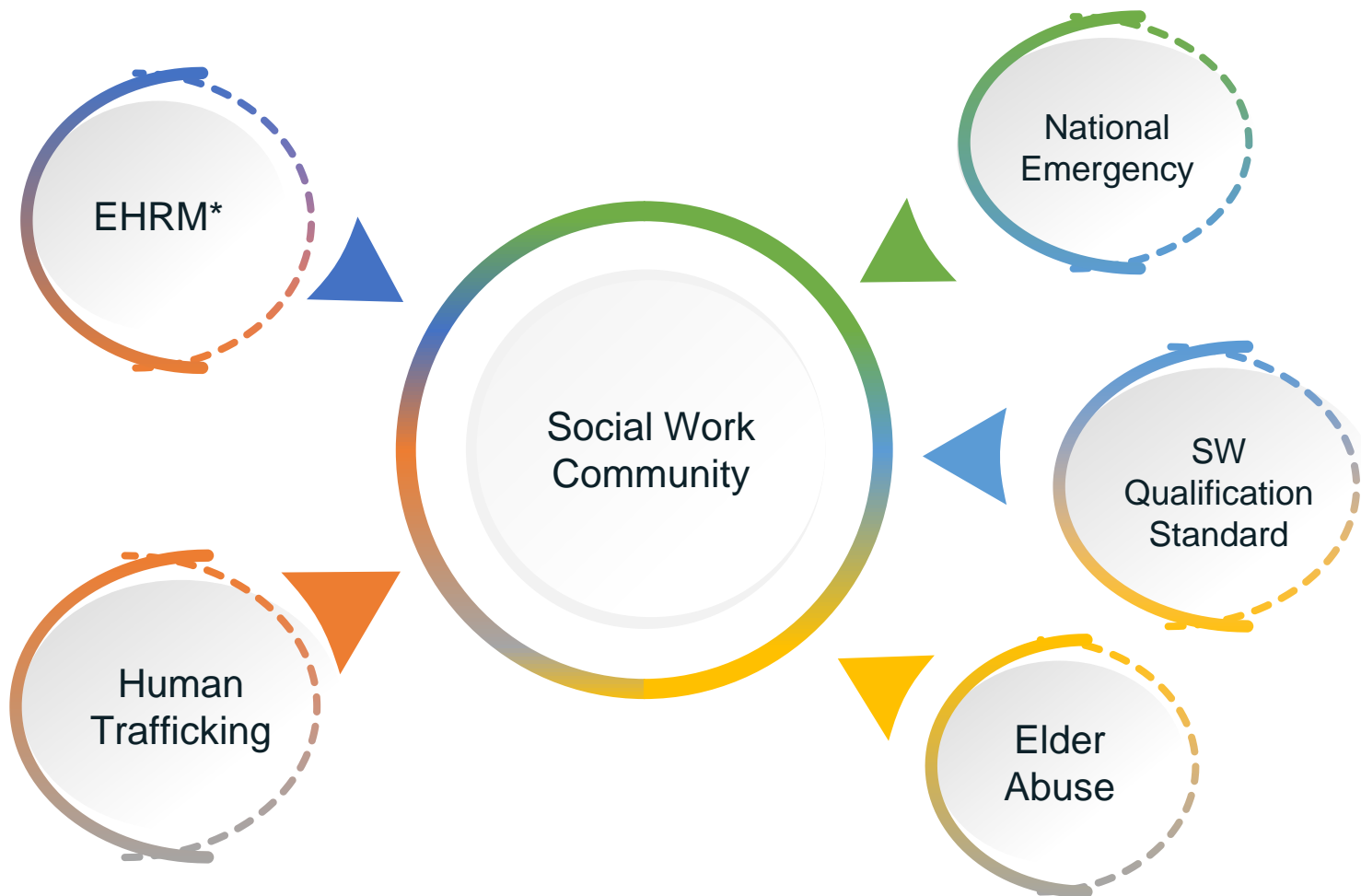
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National SW Tiger Teams



*Electronic Health Medical Record

National Emergency Management Tiger Team

Emergency Management Tiger Team ensured diversity was represented at all levels of the team structure.

- Provided a presentation on the Knowledge and Data Management Monthly Call.
- Provided check-ins with team members.
- Launched the Addressing Systemic Racism Using the Transtheoretical Model of Change tool.
- Launched the Helping Social Workers Address Implicit Bias in Health Care tool.

Elder Abuse Tiger Team

The National SW Elder Abuse Tiger Team conducted the following IDEA related activities:

- Reviewed elder abuse screening tools specific to racially diverse populations, including tools specific to Native American and Black populations.
- To understand the different cultural and ethnic perspectives related to elder abuse, completed a literature review on racial disparities in elder abuse reporting and prevalence.
- Advocated for a process to standardize elder abuse and neglect documentation in the electronic health record to capture data to determine if there are provider biases or over reporting in diverse populations.
- Ensured diversity representation at all levels of the team structure.
- Team Co-Lead presented at Association of VA Social Workers 2021 Conference: *“Ubuntu: What an African Philosophy Can Teach Social Workers About Diversity and Inclusion”*.

Human Trafficking Tiger Team

Human trafficking is rooted in historical traumas related to slavery, exploitation and racism targeted towards traditionally underserved communities

The Human Trafficking Tiger Team ensured diversity was represented at all levels of the team structure

- Facilitated monthly discussions during Tiger Team meetings related to IDEA principles
- Facilitated 18 VA staff trainings referencing diverse populations impacted by human trafficking
- Published 9 fact sheets
- Published 2 resource guides
- Produced key recommendations for VA leadership
- Submitted 2 articles for publication
- Added key information to the Community Advocate Guide produced by the Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program

Consultations

Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) speakers

Group Interventions

SW-LC Knowledge and Data Management Committee

Diversity Metrics

Interview Questions

Diversity Statements

National SW Tiger Teams

Conferences and Presentations

Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Subcommittee of the National Research
Advisory Council



IDEA Training Series



SAVE THE DATE NOTIFICATION!

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Training Series

Date / Time (ET)	Title	Speaker
	<i>Participants MUST pre-register for EACH program attended to be able to print a certificate with the hours attended</i>	
February 24, 2022 2:00-2:20pm	<i>IDEA Training Series Introduction</i>	Terry Allbritton
March 2, 2022 3:00-3:30pm	<i>Broadening a View of Diversity and Inclusion in the Workforce</i>	Angela Giles, DBH, LCSW Carrie DeKorte, PharmD, FACHE, VHA-CM, LHCBB, CMTC, PCC Laurie Young
March 9, 2022 3:00-3:30pm	<i>Diversifying and Increasing Inclusivity through Recruitment, Onboarding, and Hiring</i>	Soni Adams, LCSW Kavitha Reddy, MD FACEP ABoIM
March 15, 2022 3:00pm-3:30pm	<i>Overview of the Importance of Diversity in the Workforce</i>	Soni Adams, LCSW Kavitha Reddy, MD FACEP ABoIM
March 16, 2022 2:00-2:30pm	<i>Options for Recruitment</i>	Annette Flom
March 23, 2022 3:00pm-3:30pm	<i>How to develop a VHA facility Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office</i>	Asale Hubbard, Ph.D.
April 12, 2022 12:00-12:30pm	<i>Take the Next Step into your VHA Career</i>	Gayle Iwamasa, Ph.D., HSRP Claire Collie, Ph.D. Christopher Watson, Ph.D., VHA-CM



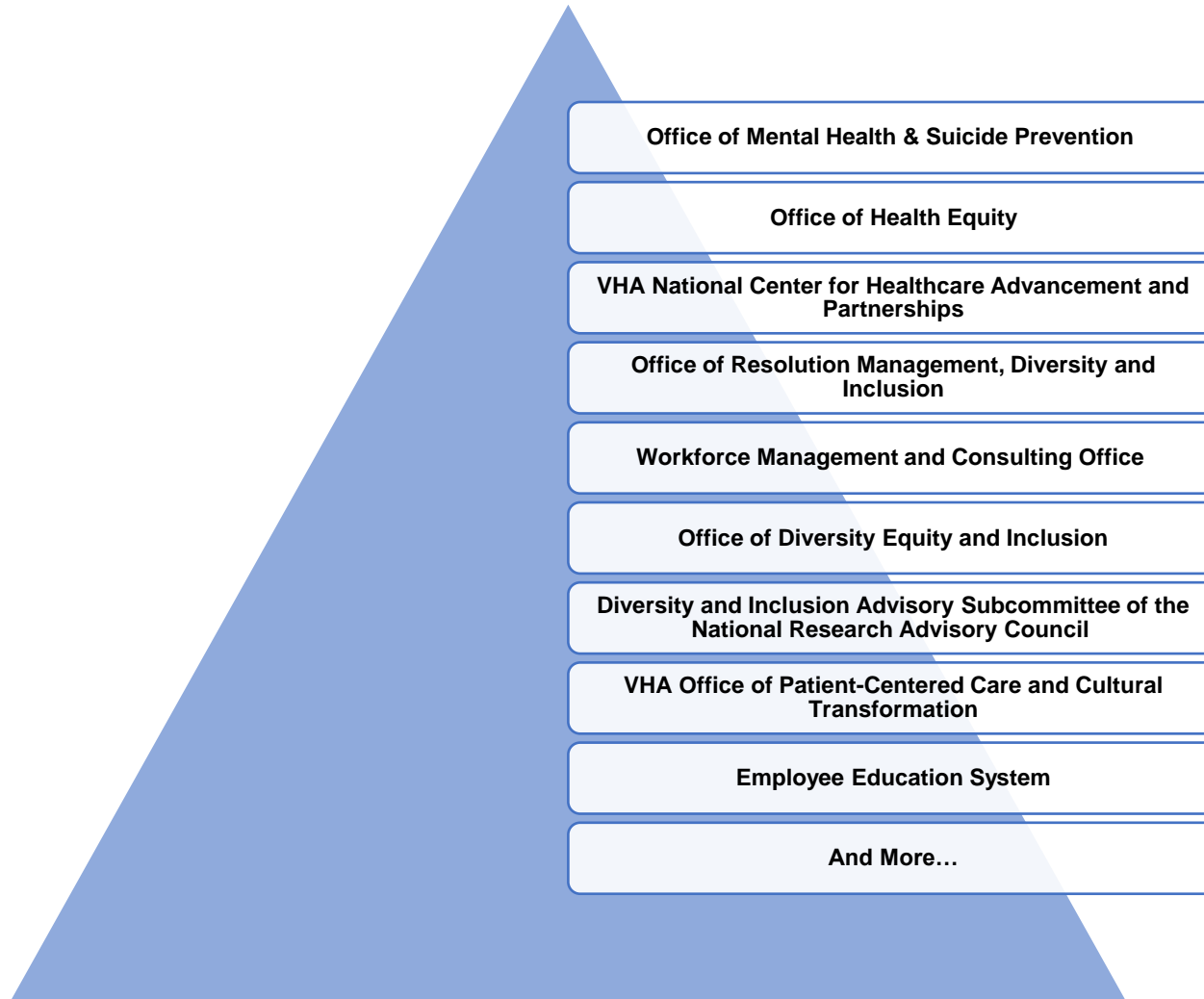
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Partnerships



Social Determinants of Health

"The social determinants of health are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life."

- World Health Organization (2022)

Social Determinants of Health

- Social, economic and physical conditions in the environments where people live, work and play.
- Social and economic disadvantages can result in poor health outcomes and disparities.
 - Poverty
 - Lack of educational opportunity
 - Food insecurity
 - Neighborhood crime



www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY

VHA Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Mission: To create and sustain a diverse, inclusive and safe work environment where all employees can perform at their maximum potential to achieve excellence

Vision: To be the premier health care service provider in the Nation and foster an inclusive and equitable culture where our employees, Veterans and their families are treated with dignity and respect

Values: VA's diversity and inclusion program adheres to and advances the Department's core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence (ICARE)

Goals:

- Build and retain a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce
- Strengthen internal and external partnerships
- Assess diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to enhance productivity throughout the organization

Office of Health Equity

Health Equity Needs

- Differences exist between Veterans
 - Racial and ethnic minority Veterans
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Veterans
 - Veterans in rural settings
 - Women Veterans
- Increase awareness and education
 - Identified health risk factors
 - Social Determinants of Health influencing health
 - Engage/activate health-related behavior change
 - Connect/empower communities to improve health
- Conduct screening, assessments and treatment
- Social determinants of health
- COVID-19 needs
 - Dispel vaccine myths
 - Fact sheets to identify 10 ways to get care and support

www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY



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Office of Health Equity

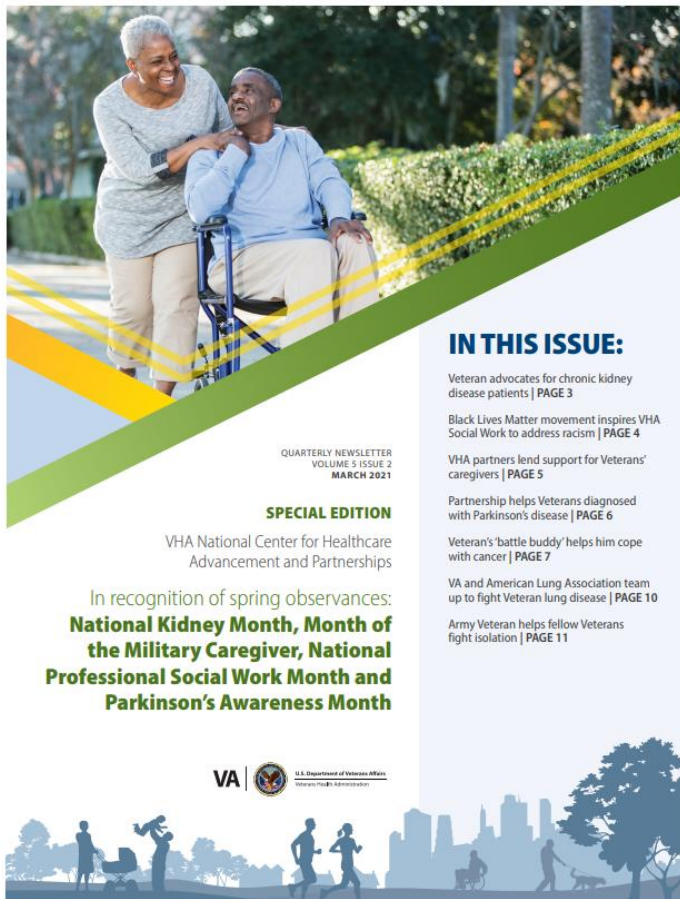
Veterans Health Equity Podcast: Leave No Veteran Behind



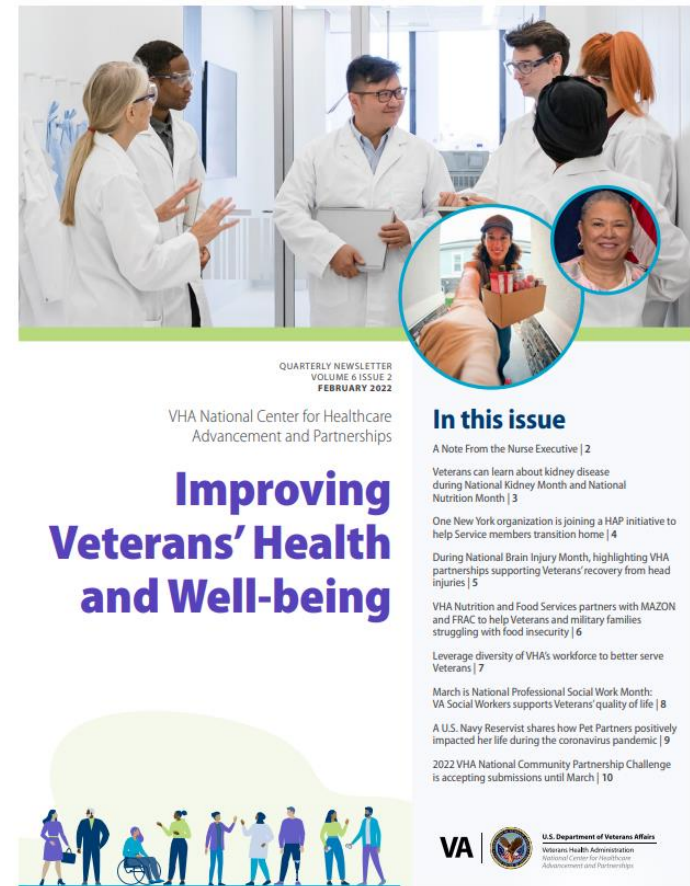
- Addressing Veterans' sociocultural determinants of health
- COVID-19 vaccination and women Veterans
- Discrimination and health outcomes
- Implicit bias and its effects on health in Veterans
- Health equity and medical legal partnerships
- Implicit bias and its effects on health in Veteran
- PRIDE and TelePride
- Reducing VA COVID-19 disparities
- Social determinants of health
- Social justice, ethics and equity
- Using arts to heal

[Office of Health Equity Home \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/health-equity/)

VHA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships



[March 2021 HAP Newsletter \(va.gov\)](https://va.gov)



[HAP Quarterly Newsletter \(va.gov\)](https://va.gov)

IDEA in Virtual Care- Education Series

Partnership Between

- [National Social Work Program](#)
- [Office of Connected Care](#)

Educational series occurred every Thursday in the month of March 2022

Educational Offerings

- Cultural Safety and Competence in Virtual Care
- Ethical and Professional Issues in Virtual Care
- Understanding Biases and Assessing for Readiness for Use of Virtual Care

IDEA Promising Practices

Social Workers Against Institutional Racism (SWAIR)

Social Workers Against Institutional Racism



JOIN US!

What? Social Workers Against Institutional Racism! (SWAIR)

When? Every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month.
1300 – 1400

Where? Due to COVID precautions, this group will meet via Microsoft Teams and in-person group meetings will be determined later.

To participate, please contact **Tarin Bickford, Jason Malcom, Michael Ogunsusi or Derrick Thomas**

Mission Statement

As race and culture are two factors that significantly impact an individual's ability to access opportunity and achieve economic stability, it is no surprise that pervasive systemic racism in the United States has led to a national health crisis. These destructive circumstances have culminated in the reality that in this country, people of color have a lower life expectancy than Americans of European ancestry.

This understanding, in combination with current events, has led to a need for more intentional discussions around race and the impact that race and culture have on our communities, within and outside of the VA Health Care System. Therefore, we felt it necessary to create a group that can provide a safe space for social workers to come together and explore race, culture and how we can move towards developing a shared, sustainable anti-racist practice.

We do not expect everyone who participates in this group to be actively engaged in anti-racist practice or even to fully understand the anti-racism practice model. We do expect each group member to come to the group with an open heart and a willingness to participate with grace and vulnerability, as talking about race and culture can be very difficult and these discussions will be a step toward moving to a more just and equitable society.

Credit:
VA Portland Health Care System
Social Work Services

IDEA Promising Practice



Social Work 4 Black Lives: In 2020, following the tragic murder of George Floyd, six social workers at VA Illiana came together to form Social Work for Black Lives (SW4BL).

SW4BL goals include addressing and combating institutional racism, developing a more diverse Social Work Service line, encouraging discussions about race as a shared experience and developing programming that aligns anti-racism work with Social Work's core values.

SW4BL has organized the following activities:

- Four-part series of listening sessions with topics including “Introduction to SW4BL”, “Microaggressions”, “Health Disparities” and “The White Response”
- Two one-hour long hiring events highlighting DEI within Social Work at VA Illiana
- Partnered with SWAIR Creator, Derrick Thomas, to provide a training and discussion for all supervisors at VA Illiana on Unconscious Bias
- Hosted an event for Social Work staff entitled “The Audacity of Vulnerability” that aimed to address the idea that fear of vulnerability gets in the way of discussing and combating racism
 - This was the most highly attended continuing education unit event for social work that VA Illiana facility has ever had
- Upcoming quarterly Journal Club which will use research and other news articles to better understand disparities that impact Black people and how social workers can advocate to end these disparities
- Provide ongoing professional consultation to Social Work Colleagues

Credit:
VA Illiana Social Work Service



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For Consideration.....



Are you having
conversations
about social
justice issues
and the
impacts on
clients?

Next Steps Taking Action to Bridge the Gap

Invest in continued education and training

Leadership support

Make IDEA everyone's responsibility

Tap into your teams' insights

Set aspirational goals

Prioritize actions with the greatest impact

Recognize cultural differences

Obtain a working knowledge of your area

Cultural Competence Benefits Everyone



- Improves communication
- Acceptance of differences in appearance, behavior and culture
- Recognition of personal biases
- Effectively interact with people of different cultures

References

- [Department of Veterans Affairs Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Access \(I-DEA\) Action Plan –September 2021](#)
- [National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships](#)
- [Office of Health Equity](#)
- [Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion \(ORMDI\)](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Tip 59: Improving Cultural Competence](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](#)
- [VA Social Work](#)

Thank You

“A Diverse Mix of Voices Leads to Better Discussions, Decisions, and Outcomes for Everyone.” — Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google

