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Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local VA Medical Center Celebrates 2 years in Healthcare Equality Leadership

White River Junction VA Medical Center is proud to serve all who have served



WHITE RIVER JUNCTION—For two years the White River Junction Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center has been a proud leader in healthcare equality. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released the 2019 Healthcare Equality Index (HEI), listing White River Junction VA Medical Center as Vermont’s only leader.

This year there were 680 healthcare facilities nationwide that participated. The HRC posed a series of questions to each participant on their Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) inclusive policies and procedures. These questions were based upon the four criteria in being a leader of healthcare equality: *Non-Discrimination and Staff Training, Patient Services and Support, Employee Benefits and Policies, and Patient and Community Engagement.*

“Being recognized as a healthcare leader in LGBTQ equality is something we are very proud of because our employees believe in this and have made healthcare equality for Veterans one of our top priorities.” Explains Dr. Brett Rusch, Executive Director of White River Junction VA Medical Center. “At the medical center and at all of our clinics, we are working diligently and tirelessly to create a safe and welcoming environment for all our Veterans. The White River Junction VA serves all who served.”

When you walk through the VA Medical Center in White River Junction and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics throughout Vermont and New Hampshire you will notice staff wearing rainbow lanyards, all-gender bathrooms and a large HRC symbol upon entry to the Granite building. These are subtle touches incorporated to make our LGBTQ population acutely aware you are welcome.

“We’re focused on creating a welcoming environment.” explains Salissa Wahlers, LICSW, the facility LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator. “We want to emphasize our commitment to serving the various healthcare needs of all our Veterans.”

White River Junction VA Medical Center was among the incredible 406 facilities that received a full score of 100 on the HEI in 2019. An impressive 81% of the participants received a score of 80 or higher. These numbers demonstrate the dedication facilities across the country have to going beyond the baseline in healthcare needs.

“The health care facilities that participate in HRC’s Healthcare Equality Index are making clear that they stand on the side of fairness and are committed to providing inclusive care to their LGBTQ patients.” said HRC President Alphonso David. “Going beyond inclusive non-discrimination policies, these health care facilities are adopting best practices in the areas of LGBTQ patient care and support, employee policies and benefits, and LGBTQ patient and community engagement. We commend all of the HEI participants for their commitment to providing inclusive care for all.”

The remarkable progress reflected in the 2019 HEI includes:

- Over half of HEI participants now have written gender transition guidelines;
- 75% of hospitals surveyed offer trans-inclusive benefits -- an impressive eight percentage point increase over last year, and numbers that bring them on par with their corporate counterparts, as measured by HRC’s 2019 CEI;
- A 35% increase in training hours recorded -- clocking in at more than 94,000 hours of LGBTQ care training provided;
- A 60% increase in the number of HEI participants whose electronic health records capture a patient’s sexual orientation, and a 40% increase in the number of HEI participants whose electronic health records capture a patient’s gender identity.

As the standards evolve, so will your White River Junction VA Medical Center healthcare team. “We are proud to serve all who have served.”

Look for your VA team in the Burlington, Vermont Pride Parade this Sunday, September 8 at 12:30PM on Church Street. There will also be a table with VA information at Battery Park immediately following the parade. Join us at this powerful event!

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