



# Forum on Rural Population Health

May 19-21, 2025  
Seaside, Oregon  
[ohsu.edu/orhforum](https://ohsu.edu/orhforum)



## Advancing Health Equity for LGBTQ+ Veterans: Discharge Upgrades and Access to Care in Rural Communities

Ian Michael, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs





OREGON DEPARTMENT  
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS

# Advancing Health Equity for LGBTQ+ Veterans: Discharge Upgrades and Access to Care in Rural Communities

*Forum on Rural Population Health / 21 May 2025*



PRESENTED BY

Ian Michael, LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator





# Veteran Equity – Why It Matters



SCAN ME!

To access  
ODVA's Veteran Benefit  
Magazine (digital)



SCAN ME!

To access  
'Beyond the Uniform'  
and build community





# The Barriers Veterans Face



To learn more about  
Returning Veterans  
Project (non-ODVA)



Scan QR Code for  
ODVA Transportation  
Services







## Veterans on Symptoms of PTSD



To watch  
this video  
again





# The Power of Opening Up



To watch  
this video  
again





# Traumatic Brain Injury



To watch  
this video  
again







# Opening Doors. Removing Barriers. (VA & DOD)





# Door 1: Know Your Rights

**SCAN QR CODES  
FOR MORE INFO:**

**QR #1: Benefit Eligibility based on character of discharge (38 CFR 3.12)**

→ The official VA guidance on PTSD, MST, combat, and other trauma as qualifying factors.

**QR #2: VA Compelling Circumstances Policy Overview**

→ The official VA guidance on PTSD, MST, combat, and other trauma as qualifying factors.

**QR #3: VA Discharge Upgrade Tool**

→ A step-by-step guide to exploring upgrade and benefits options.



1



2



3



## Door 2: VA Character of Discharge Review (COD)



To Learn More About  
VA CODs



**VA Character of Discharge (COD) Determination:**  
An administrative decision that evaluates whether a veteran's discharge qualifies for VA benefits (all or some) despite the veteran's discharge being less-than-honorable.





## Door 3: Discharge Upgrade Petition (BCMR)



Many service members, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, face mental health issues during service, leading to misconduct and a less than honorable discharge. This can limit access to VA benefits, hurt job prospects, and damage reputation and self-esteem. Discharge Upgrades can help!

To Request Legal Assistance  
with Discharge Upgrades for  
Veterans from All Eras





## Door 4: Accessing Veteran Benefits (ODVA)



The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) offers a comprehensive magazine (1) and online tool (2) to help veterans navigate benefits like claims, education, and healthcare, providing up-to-date information and instructions on how to access support.

To View Online Tool



To View Magazine







# Brené Brown on Empathy



To watch  
this video  
again





## Door 4: Accessing Veteran Benefits (CVSO)

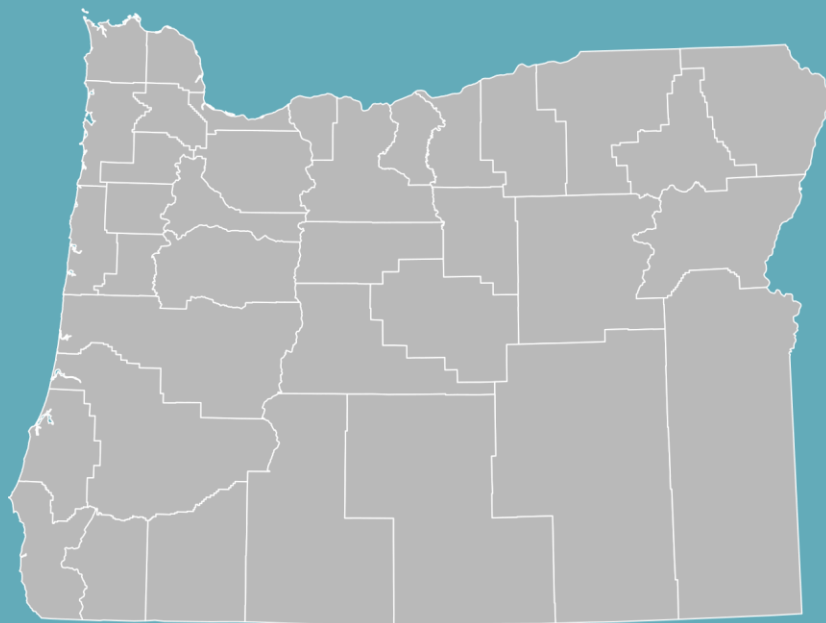


**SCAN ME!**

To locate your nearest  
County Veteran Service  
Office



In Oregon, County Veteran Service Offices are an invaluable resource. They help veterans navigate the complex VA system, ensuring they complete the necessary paperwork to access all their entitlements. CVSOs provide personalized assistance for applying for benefits and ensure that veterans receive the services they deserve.





## Door 4: Accessing Veteran Benefits (VA)



**SCAN ME!**

To learn more  
about  
Veteran Benefits  
(from A-Z)



To access VA  
benefit factsheets,  
start learning, and  
sharing them



A common myth is that veterans automatically know what benefits they're entitled to — but most don't. That's why knowing where to access accurate, up-to-date information is essential to advancing health equity and ensuring no one is left out.





# Why Discharge Status Still Matters



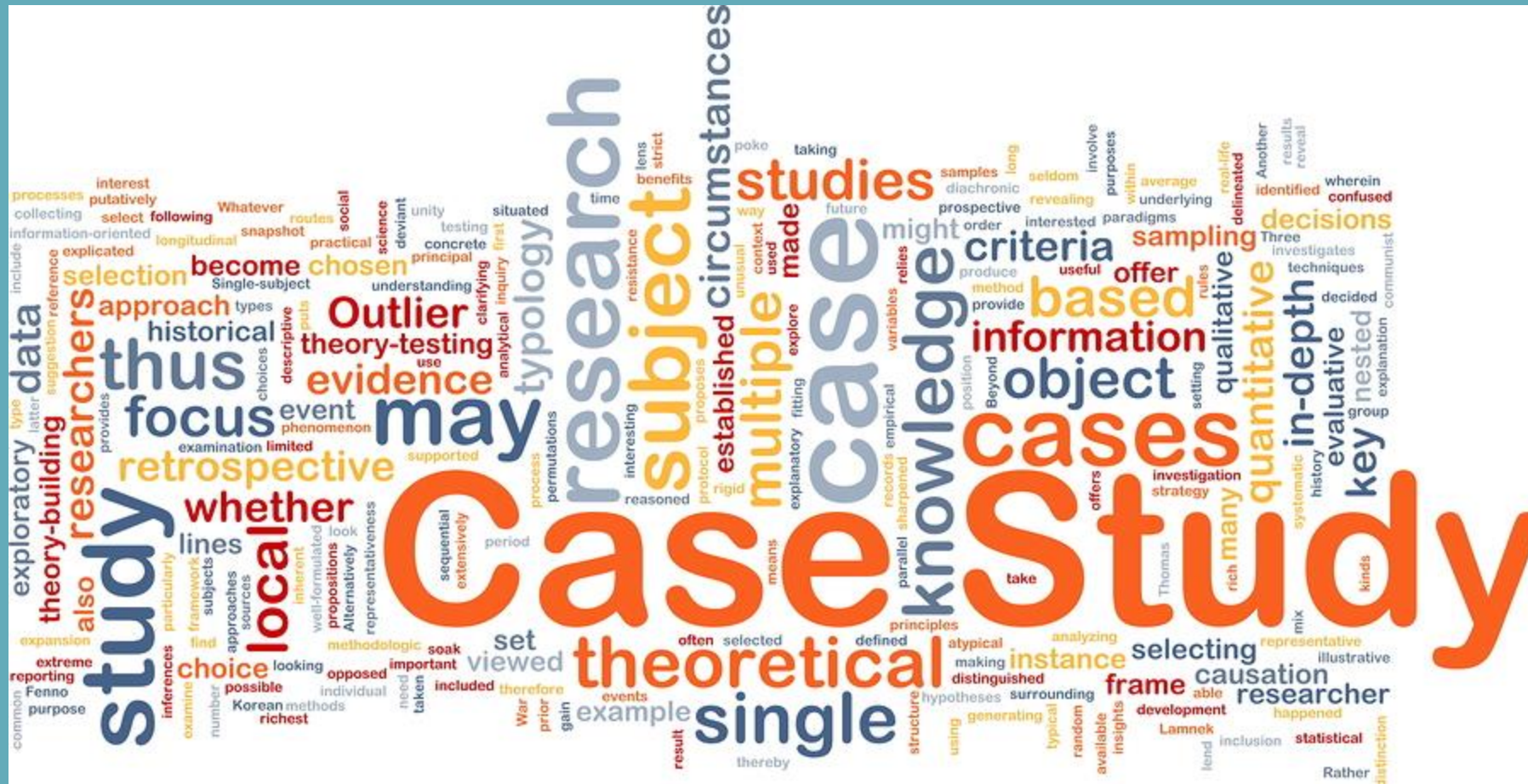
To learn more about  
Discharges and  
Benefits



## Military Discharge Benefits Chart

Type of Benefits	Character of Discharge				
	Honorable Discharge	General Discharge (Under Honorable Conditions)	Other Than Honorable Discharge	Bad Conduct Discharge	Dishonorable Discharge
VA Disability Compensation	Yes, eligible	Yes, eligible	Eligible in some cases	Eligible in some cases	No, ineligible
VA Health Care	Yes, eligible	Yes, eligible	Eligible in some cases	Eligible in some cases	No, ineligible
Education Assistance (G.I. & 9/11 Bills)	Yes, eligible	No, ineligible	No, ineligible	No, ineligible	No, ineligible
Mental Health and Sexual Trauma Care	Yes, eligible	Yes, eligible	Eligible in some cases	Eligible in some cases	No, ineligible
Employment Training, Life Insurance, and Home Loans	Yes, eligible	Yes, eligible	Eligible in some cases	Eligible in some cases	No, ineligible









## How You Can Help

In everyday conversations and outreach, listen for signs that someone may be a veteran or facing challenges related to their discharge status. You don't need to be an expert—just a trusted resource who knows how ask the right questions, listen for red flags, and to refer them to the right support and help them access the benefits they deserve.



ask



listen



refer



## How You Can Help



ask

Ask the right questions:

- “Did you serve in the military?”
- “Do you use VA services?”
- “Have you ever applied for benefits — or been turned away?”



## How You Can Help



listen

Listen for red flags:

- “I got kicked out back then.”
- “I was told I didn’t qualify.”
- “I popped on a urinalysis.”
- “I was kicked out for being gay.”
- “They said my discharge was bad, so I gave up.”



## How You Can Help



refer

Then follow up and refer:

- “There are new VA rules. You might qualify now — even if you didn’t before.”
- “I know someone who can help. Can I connect you?”



## In Closing

All the tools, techniques and technology in the world are nothing without the head, heart and hands to use them wisely, kindly and mindfully.

Rasheed Ogunlaru

“quotezancy”





## Q&A





**Ian Michael**

**LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator**

**Email: [odva\\_lgbtqvets@odva.oregon.gov](mailto:odva_lgbtqvets@odva.oregon.gov)**

**Phone: (971) 720-9016**

**Website: Scan QR code**





# Thank you to the 2025 Forum partners!

Forum on Rural  
Population Health

