

Army policy allows transgender Soldiers to serve openly

By Devon Suits, Army News Service 24 June 2021



Today, the Army released an updated policy that transgender Soldiers can serve openly (Photo Credit: U.S. Army photo illustration).

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WASHINGTON -- Transgender personnel and individuals with gender dysphoria who can meet the Army's standards for military service can now serve openly in their self-identified gender, according to a new policy approved this month by the Army secretary.

Army directive 2021-22 changes the service's retention, separation, in-service transition, and medical care standards for transgender personnel and refines entry criteria for individuals with gender dysphoria, following Department of Defense guidance, said Maj. Gen. Douglas F. Stitt, military personnel management director.

"People are the strength of our Army," Stitt said Tuesday. "Our ability to assess and retain qualified personnel provides a more diverse and stronger Army, enhancing readiness."

A Soldier's gender identity will no longer be a basis for involuntary

separation or military discharge, denied reenlistment or continuation of service, or subjected to adverse action or mistreatment, the policy states.

The updated policy will apply to all active-duty, National Guard and Reserve Soldiers, U.S. Military Academy cadets, and contracted Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets. Military medical providers will provide medically necessary care for transgender Soldiers following guidelines by the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs and the Army surgeon general, Stitt said.

"Every Soldier is different," Stitt said. "When a military medical provider gives diagnosis of gender dysphoria, that Soldier will need to sit down with their chain of command and medical provider to determine what is medically necessary for an effective transition."

Commanders should approach a Soldier's gender transition in the same way they approach any Soldier receiving any other necessary medical treatment, the policy reads. Leaders must also do their part to minimize the impact on mission readiness, all while balancing the Army's needs with the desires of the transitioning individual.

Once a Soldier is stable in their self-identified gender, they can then request to change their gender marker in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. Once the change is complete, all policies and standards for that given gender will then apply, the policy reads.

Individuals will then be expected to meet all uniform, grooming, body composition, physical readiness, and drug-testing standards. Similarly, a Soldier's identified gender in DEERS will permit them to access gender-specific facilities, such as bathrooms and showers.

Recruitment

Transgender personnel and individuals with gender dysphoria must meet all applicable medical accession standards to gain entry into the Army, the policy reads.

Before the updated Army guidelines, individuals with gender dysphoria were presumptively disqualified unless stable for 36 months and willing and able to serve in their biological sex, Stitt said. Under the new guidance, this duration to meet standards is now 18 months of stability and the person can serve in their self-identified gender.

"This gives the Army a bigger applicant pool to consider," Stitt said.

Applicants must present documents to validate their self-identified gender, such as a birth certificate, U.S. passport, or a certified copy of a court order reflecting one's self identified gender, the policy states.

If an individual cannot meet a medical criterion, they can request a waiver for evaluation under DOD and Army policies. The standard for approval will be determined individually and must be in the Army's best interests after a thorough review of the individual's potential.

Equal opportunity

The Army must continue to operate in an environment free from harassment and unlawful discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, Stitt said. Training on the new policy will be necessary to ensure proper integration throughout the force.

Over the next year, the service will launch a three-tiered training model, starting with the Judge Advocate General, Medical and Chaplain Corps, and Inspector General personnel, Stitt added.

The second tier will follow shortly after and provide education to leaders and supervisors, followed by unit-level training during the third tier.

All training on the updated policy must be completed no later than June 25, 2022, Stitt said. The Army will then have until September 2022 to adjust existing instruction blocks to train personnel on gender dysphoria and any changes to DOD and Army transgender policies.

"Department of Defense policy allows transgender personnel to serve openly," Stitt said. "Now we have the Army policy to support it."