



The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) has renewed VHA’s status as a Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) for a two-year term to 2021.

The BPSO designation recognizes VHA’s continued support to nursing and interprofessional teams to build capacity, maximize clinical excellence through best practices, and evaluate outcomes.



Meet VHA Client Partner Zinta Erdmanis

Zinta Erdmanis was introduced to VHA’s caregiving services in 2016, when her husband became ill and required palliative care. Now Zinta is one of VHA’s Palliative Care Steering Committee members and a committed client partner. We sat down with Zinta to chat about her life, her experience with VHA, and the importance of being involved as a client partner.

How did you become involved with VHA?

In 2016, my husband was diagnosed with ALS and almost immediately became a palliative patient. My husband didn’t want to be hospitalized, he wanted to live out his life at home. The Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) referred us to VHA, and he began receiving homecare, nursing and other services. After my husband passed away, VHA asked me if I would be interested in becoming a part of the palliative care steering committee. I was quite honoured, because I wanted to help others in the same position as I was.

Can you share some projects you’ve worked on?

One of the more important projects that I was involved with was the development of the palliative care section on VHA’s website. These pages provide information on palliative care, links to different disease websites, financial assistance information, self-care resources and so much more. I’m very proud to have worked on this, because when I was a caregiver, I didn’t have a lot of time for myself, and I didn’t have time to look for information. Being able to provide caregivers information that’s easy to source saves them a lot of stress, grief and time.

How has your experience been with VHA in general?

It’s been good! The palliative steering committee work is something I very strongly believe in. It is such a horrible time for caregivers and their family members, and we are trying to make it as easy as possible for them. I’m very proud of VHA and their commitment to palliative care. It’s an important initiative because as the population ages, there are going to be more and more people at home looking for end-of-life care.

When my husband was ill, it was a very lonely experience, even though I had my family and friends around. One day your life is perfectly normal, the next day you’re thrown into a terminal illness, and your world is turned upside down. You have to learn very quickly where you can go, what your resources are, where you can find help—and



Zinta poses with her daughter outside of their home

that’s not always easily available. The programs and the materials that we’re developing are helping people who are in a similar situation, and I’m very proud of that.

Why do you think it is important for clients to be involved in making decisions?

I think it’s a great opportunity for both VHA and their clients to be involved in decision making processes, because we each learn about the other’s perspective. I think VHA learns a lot about the complexities of palliative care and end-of-life situations from clients, and it brings a lot of compassion to VHA and their care providers. And clients learn a lot from VHA—they learn about the services that are available, they develop very strong relationships with the caregivers. During my husband’s illness, our home care providers were amazing. They stayed in touch after my husband’s passing and I felt like they became part of the family. There are so many compassionate people working at VHA!

What would you tell someone who is interested in becoming a client partner?

I personally found it very rewarding and stimulating, and I met a lot of new people. I’m afraid that when my time on the palliative steering committee comes to an end, I will be at a bit of a loss and will need to find something else to do at VHA. In the end, becoming a client partner is worthwhile and very rewarding!

Please watch a video with Zinta to learn more about her story here: <https://bit.ly/2M6Rw9P>.

Become a client partner and share your voice!

VHA is always looking to improve. Join the conversation. If you would like to share your thoughts and become a Client Voice partner at VHA, please contact ClientVoice@vha.ca or **647-460-8595** for more information.



VHA Shows Colours of LGBTQ2S Support

In recent months, you may have noticed your VHA personal support worker or care provider wearing a rainbow lanyard to display their ID tag. The rainbow lanyard is our way to help our staff and service providers indicate to our clients and their work colleagues that they and VHA support the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) community.

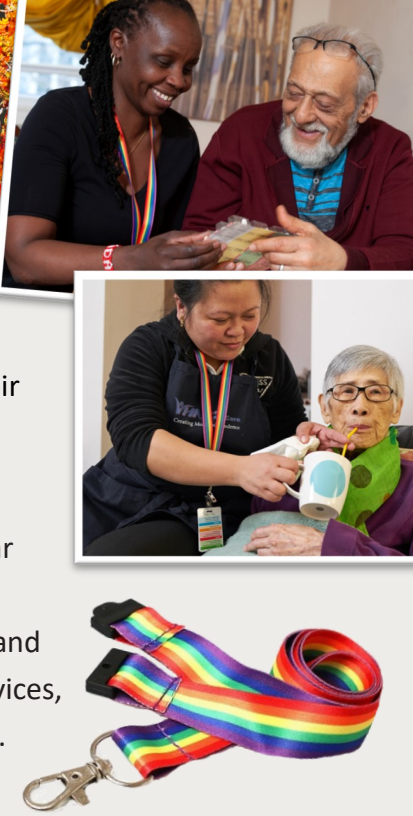
Care providers who are wearing the rainbow lanyard have attended training on LGBTQ2S inclusion and have chosen to wear the lanyard to show that they are an ally to the LGBTQ2S community. They have learned about the specific challenges that LGBTQ2S people face as they age, as well as how to use respectful, affirming language, and how to challenge homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour. Our goal is to ensure that all service providers deliver LGBTQ2S-positive care and services, and as we train more staff and service providers about LGBTQ2S inclusion, you may see rainbow lanyards worn more often.

What does it mean to be an ally?

For VHA and our service providers, being an ally to the LGBTQ2S community means that:

- We believe that all people should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what their gender identity or sexual orientation is;
- We work from a client-centric approach that recognizes that each person brings unique experiences and valid perspectives to their care, and that these are important even if the care provider may not fully understand them; and
- We—as an organization and as individuals—are willing to question and examine the stereotypes and prejudices we hold, even if it is uncomfortable to do so, to become more open and inclusive.

VHA staff and service providers represent the diversity of the communities we serve, and we celebrate the diversity of our staff and clients. We know that being an inclusive organization involves an ongoing process of learning and evolving. If you have feedback about how VHA and our staff and service providers can be more welcoming and inclusive, please let us know by contacting ClientVoice@vha.ca.



New VHA Website to Help Those Living with Dementia

We know caregiving is a difficult role. Sometimes it can feel lonely and it can be hard to find the information you need. This can be especially challenging when caring for someone with dementia. VHA is hoping a new website with information about dementia care will provide some help. The website can be found at www.vha.ca/DementiaCare.

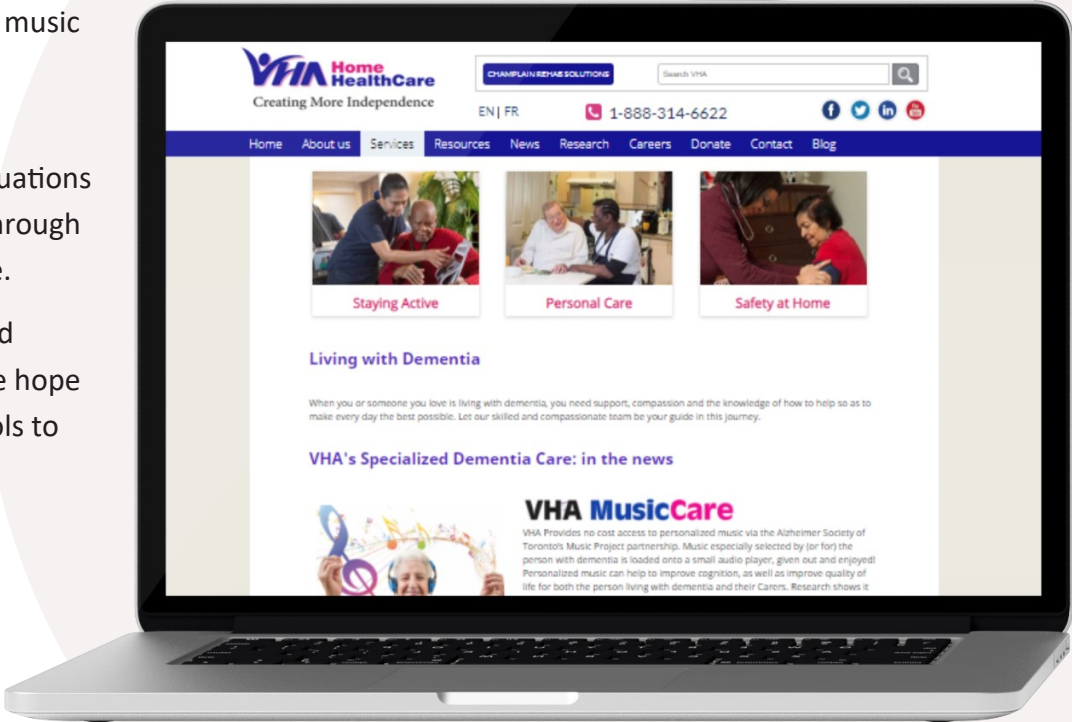
This website includes information regarding:

- Staying Active, including an Activation Toolkit that provides suggestions for involving those living with dementia in everyday tasks around the home to keep them active
- Keeping Safe at Home, including a manual for managing Responsive Behaviours, a term which describes many common, and sometimes distressing, behaviours that people living with dementia may display as a way to communicate a need. These include things like yelling, hitting, spitting, pinching, repetitive actions or speech, and wandering
- Personal Care
- MusicCare, a VHA program that provides access to personalized music at no cost through the Alzheimer’s Society of Toronto’s music partnership program
- P.I.E.C.E.S., a training program that provides tools to assist in situations where people living with dementia are expressing themselves through hitting, verbal aggression, wandering and avoiding personal care.

"Caring for a loved one with dementia is emotionally demanding and requires lots of unexpected skills and support. With this website, we hope to reduce caregiver challenges by providing them with a suite of tools to help make their lives easier," says Catherine Chater.

The new website also provides information on the way VHA service providers can help provide support and assistance for various situations.

Please visit www.vha.ca/DementiaCare for more information.



Let us know what you think!

We are interested to hear your feedback about this newsletter. Please contact Senior Communications & PR Manager **Tracey Turriff** at tturriff@vha.ca or **416-280-8426** with any comments or if you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email. Thank you!

