

Team Members Named 2024 Notable LGBTQIA+ Leaders

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Recognition & Awards

Dr. Shannon Whittington, clinical director of the Gender Affirmation Program (GAP), Alex Karydi, director of Behavioral Health Product Development, and Arthur Fitting, RN, LGBTQ+ Program Manager were named in *Crain's New York Business* 2024 Notable LGBTQIA+ Leaders List. The list recognizes over trailblazers who excel in their respective fields and strive to create inclusive workplaces. Shannon, Alex and Arthur, contribute to the LGBTQIA+ community and help individuals receive the support they need like gender affirming care, community resources, mental health care, and more. Each of them worked on initiatives and projects aimed to give LGBTQIA+ individuals simple and easy to access care.

As director of Behavioral Health Product Development, Alex helped establish the Safe Pathways program in 2023. The program which provides clinical support and mental health resources for LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth that are at risk of suicide. Some of the ways the program helps vulnerable youth is by providing peer support, counseling, and crisis intervention. Teaching children and their families how to overcome behavioral health challenges is key to helping kids in need.

"For Safe Pathways, we provide trainings to family and community members around suicide awareness while also providing direct strategies and interventions to those who need them," explains Alex. "We want to change behavior with these trainings. Research shows that just giving someone information is not a powerful enough method to overcome the stigma and fear about asking someone if they are suicidal. But if you teach ask someone in a safe training environment to ask the hard questions out loud, it's more likely they'll be able to do it again when they're working with youth who are struggling."

For decades, Arthur has helped LGBTQIA+ individuals in times of crisis like the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Arthur, alongside VNS Health, was determined to find ways to get treatment and care for individuals with the conditions. While that fight continues, HIV/AIDS treatment has come a long way.

“When the HIV/AIDS crisis made a transition into a chronic illness mode, the guardrails seemed to come off. Now that people’s physical symptoms were for the most part stabilized, we got more relaxed about treating the social symptoms. But they aren’t separate,” says Arthur.

He also lead a project with our Research Center and other community organizations to study LGBTQIA+ individuals’ lived experiences.

Shannon oversees the GAP and as clinical director she strives to give individuals access to gender affirming care that is cultural accepting and non-judgmental. Since the program has launched, over 1500 patients in all 5 boroughs, Westchester County, and Nassau County have received gender affirming care.

“Our patients experience affirming care in their home, which is very important for their safe recovery. We are able to assess the patients’ needs and provide them with a culturally sensitive clinician who knows how to care for them in a patient-centered way.”

She has advanced Transgender health research and is currently working with Columbia University to propose a five-year NIH-funded study to improve gendering affirming patient care.

Crain’s subscribers can read the full list [here](#).

Our LGBTQ+ program provides culturally-sensitive support services to LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities. Learn more about our programs and the types of care we provide.

[LGBTQ+ Support](#)

Source: <https://www.vnshealth.org/about/newsroom/articles/team-members-named-2024-notable-lgbtqia-leaders/>

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