

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health **New**

Overview

Goal

Improve the health, safety, and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals.

Overview

LGBT individuals encompass all races and ethnicities, religions, and social classes. In the United States, approximately 2 to 5 percent of the population is estimated to be LGBT.¹ Sexual orientation and gender identity questions are not asked on most national or State surveys, making it difficult to estimate the number of LGBT individuals and their health needs.



Research suggests that LGBT individuals face health disparities linked to societal stigma, discrimination, and denial of their civil and human rights. Discrimination against LGBT persons has been associated with high rates of psychiatric disorders,² substance abuse,^{3, 4} and suicide.⁵ Experiences of violence and victimization are frequent for LGBT individuals, and have long-lasting effects on the individual and the community.⁶ Personal, family, and social acceptance of sexual orientation and gender identity affects the mental health and personal safety of LGBT individuals.⁷

The LGBT companion document to *Healthy People 2010*⁸ highlighted the need for more research to document, understand, and address the environmental factors that contribute to health disparities in the LGBT community.

Why Is LGBT Health Important?

Eliminating LGBT health disparities and enhancing efforts to improve LGBT health are necessary to ensure that LGBT individuals can lead long, healthy lives. The many benefits of addressing health concerns and reducing disparities include:

- Reductions in disease transmission and progression
- Increased mental and physical well-being
- Reduced health care costs
- Increased longevity

Efforts to improve LGBT health include:

- Curbing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) with interventions that work.⁹
- Implementing antibullying policies in schools.¹⁰
- Providing supportive social services to reduce suicide and homelessness risk among youth.¹⁰
- Inquiring about and being supportive of a patient's sexual orientation to enhance the patient-provider interaction and regular use of care.¹¹
- Providing medical students with access to LGBT patients to increase provision of culturally competent care.¹²

Efforts to address health disparities among LGBT persons include:

- Expansion of domestic partner health insurance coverage¹³
- Establishment of LGBT health centers
- Dissemination of effective HIV/STD interventions⁹
- Reduced physician self-reported homophobia¹⁴

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Understanding LGBT Health

Understanding LGBT health starts with understanding the history of oppression and discrimination that these communities have faced. For

example, because bars and clubs were the only safe places where LGBT individuals could gather, alcohol abuse has been an ongoing problem.¹⁵

Social determinants affecting the health of LGBT individuals largely relate to oppression and discrimination. Examples include:

- Legal discrimination in access to health insurance, employment, housing, marriage, adoption, and retirement benefits
- Lack of laws protecting adolescents from bullying in schools
- Lack of social programs targeted to and/or appropriate for LGBT youth, adults, and the elderly
- Shortage of health care providers who are knowledgeable and culturally competent in LGBT health

The physical environment that contributes to healthy LGBT individuals includes:

- Safe schools, neighborhoods, and housing
- Access to parks and recreational activities
- Availability of safe meeting places
- Access to health services

LGBT health requires specific attention from health care and public health professionals to address a number of disparities, including:

- LGBT youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide.¹⁶
- LGBT youth are more likely to be homeless.^{17, 18, 19}
- Lesbians are less likely to get preventive services for cancer.^{20, 21}
- Gay men are at higher risk of HIV and other STDs, especially among communities of color.²²
- Lesbians and bisexual females are more likely to be overweight or obese.²³
- Transgender individuals have a high prevalence of HIV/STDs,²⁴ victimization,²⁵ mental health issues,²⁶ and suicide²⁷ and are less likely to have health insurance than heterosexual or LGB individuals.²⁸
- Elderly LGBT individuals face additional barriers to health because of isolation and a lack of social services and culturally competent providers.²⁹
- LGBT populations have the highest rates of tobacco,^{30, 31} alcohol,^{31, 32} and other drug use.^{31, 33, 34}

Emerging Issues in LGBT Health

A number of issues will need to be evaluated and addressed over the coming decade, including:

- Prevention of violence and homicide toward the LGB community, and especially the transgender population
- Nationally representative data on LGBT Americans
- Resiliency in LGBT communities
- LGBT parenting issues throughout the life course
- Elder health and well-being
- Exploration of sexual/gender identity among youth
- Need for a LGBT wellness model
- Recognition of transgender health needs as medically necessary

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