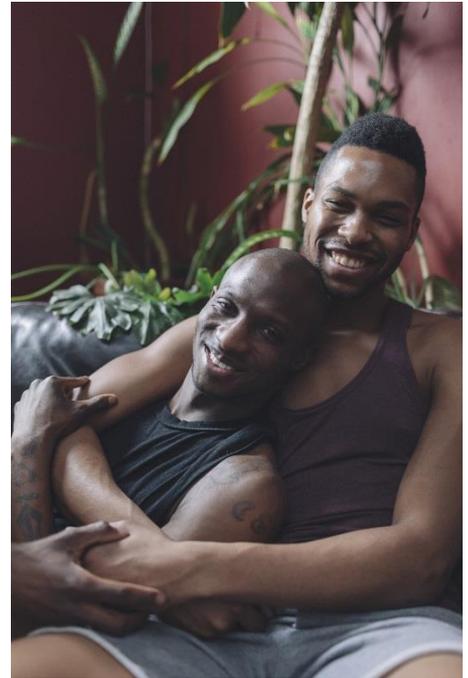


Culturally Responsive Health Care for Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Communities

Providing culturally responsive health care to LGBTQ individuals is an important priority for increasing access to HIV prevention and treatment, and reducing health issues that disproportionately affect LGBTQ communities. LGBTQ patients are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to encounter stigma and discrimination, and are at increased risk for physical and emotional health challenges. The following are particularly significant:

- Men who have sex with men (MSM), particularly Black and Latino men, are at increased risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- In comparison with cisgender individuals, transgender individuals have a higher prevalence of HIV and STIs, mental health issues, and victimization; they also are less likely to have health insurance.
- LGBTQ youth are 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide and more likely to be homeless than other youth.
- Lesbian women are less likely than heterosexual women to access preventive cancer screening.ⁱ



LGBTQ health disparities are attributable in part to the reality that many health care centers do not have the capacity provide a culturally responsive atmosphere that supports the development of trust and comfort needed by LGBTQ individuals. It is critical that health care institutions make a commitment to environmental and attitudinal changes that foster welcoming and safe environments, encourage staff self-reflection about biases, provide training for all levels of staff, and promote system changes that facilitate trust and comfort for LGBTQ communities.

Creating a Welcoming and Safe Environment

A person's first interactions and impressions when visiting a health center can dramatically affect their feelings of trust and comfort. For example, the language used on an intake form, the communication skills/body language of the first contact, and the availability of welcoming posters and symbols can have a powerful effect on how comfortable and respected a patient feels.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for steps that can be taken to create an inclusive and welcoming environment:

1. Identify health center “champions” and involve leadership in planning and implementing changes to support LGBTQ patients.
2. Develop and prominently post non-discrimination policies that include gender identity and expression.
3. Include LGBTQ-affirming imagery as part of health center décor in waiting rooms, medical offices, and bathrooms (i.e. rainbow flag posters or stickers, photographs or posters depicting diverse LGBTQ individuals).
4. Display LGBTQ-inclusive waiting room magazines and educational pamphlets.
5. Designate gender-neutral bathrooms, and/or develop policies that allow people to use the bathroom congruent with their gender identity.
6. Create accountability for homophobic and transphobic remarks from clients and staff.
7. Identify, vet, and continually update LGBTQ friendly referral and resources.
8. Develop/revise intake forms to include language that is welcoming to LGBTQ individuals.
9. Implement staff training and activities to include all levels of staff; and focus on:
 - Awareness of the importance of non-judgmental greetings and early interactions.
 - Values clarification activities that allow staff to safely explore their own biases and avoid assumptions.
 - The impact of discrimination and stigma on health.
 - Definition of terms and use of language that reflects preferences of LGBTQ individuals including the use of preferred names and pronouns.
 - Sexual history taking that is relevant to all individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - Provision of HIV testing, prevention, and treatment.
 - Data collection to identify, track, and report on sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - Resiliency of LGBTQ individuals

Interested in Arranging for Training and/or Technical Assistance at No Cost?

Primary Care Development Corporation's (PCDC's) HIV prevention capacity building assistance (CBA) program provides free training to health care organizations with the goal of expanding and improving the delivery of HIV prevention services within clinical settings. Our program is focused on CDC's High-Impact HIV Prevention strategy and our trainings related to this topic include: Collecting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data; Culturally Competent Care: Incorporating Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Considerations into Practice; and Considerations for Gender Affirming Care.

Please visit pcdc.org/hip to request our services or get more information.

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Citations

¹ Institute of Medicine (IOM). The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding. 2011. www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/The-Health-of-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-People.aspx