Unmasking The Truth

How the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the LGBTQ+ community & creating healthcare inequities

2020 COVID-19 Emergency Fund Project

UC CE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources   ❙ UC Cooperative Extension

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The Project

COVID-19 is a health pandemic that has impacted people worldwide. However, marginalized populations are at a higher risk for health complications.

While anyone can be infected by the virus, marginalized communities experience a much larger impact due to existing health inequities within the United States. LGBTQ+ individuals are part of these vulnerable communities. In fact, LGBTQ+ individuals are part of every marginalized and vulnerable group in society which compounds the negative impacts of COVID-19. LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk of underlying chronic medical conditions, such as asthma and cancer, and are also more impacted by poverty, physical conditions, and mental health conditions that put them at increased risk during the COVID-19 crisis. It is very important that healthcare providers, community-based organizations, policymakers, and the general public are aware of the increased risks that vulnerable and marginalized populations face during this pandemic.

Currently, there is a gap in medical providers' knowledge of the specific medical challenges that LGBTQ+ individuals face. Healthcare professionals and medical providers needed to be prepared to effectively communicate, engage, and treat LGBTQ+ individuals during this health crisis. Discriminatory practices and healthcare gaps put LGBTQ+ individuals at increased risk of exposure to and severe complications from COVID-19. Prior research demonstrates that LGBTQ+ individuals report poor quality healthcare and abuse in healthcare facilities. Due to these practices, LGBTQ+ individuals are likely to postpone medical care due to the fear of stigmatization. Increasing awareness and competency of healthcare providers, medical professionals, and community service organizations is vital during the COVID-19 crisis to support positive health outcomes of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The University of California Cooperative Extension created this educational campaign in order to inform healthcare providers, community-based organizations, policymakers, and the general public about the impacts of COVID-19 on the LGBTQ+ population. With this campaign, we hope to increase healthcare equity and to increase the quality of healthcare services for LGBTQ+ individuals. These efforts can increase the likelihood that LGBTQ+ individuals receive care that is affirming and competent during this COVID-19 health crisis.
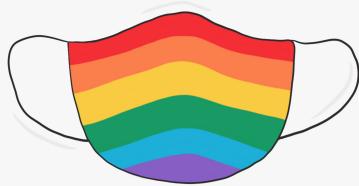
LGBTQ+ individuals are at high-risk for severe COVID-19 complications

LGBTQ+ individuals exist in **every** marginalized group in our society which compounds the negative impacts of COVID-19 they already have to endure from discriminatory practices & healthcare gaps.

Systemic inequities increase risk of severe COVID-19 complication

Discriminatory practices in healthcare and societal norms contribute to higher rates of chronic and immunocompromised conditions for LGBTQ+ individuals, increasing risk for severe complications from COVID-19 infections.

LGBTQ+ people are at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure

LGBTQ+ individuals work in higher-risk industries (ie. food service, retail). Economic and healthcare disparities often prevent LGBTQ+ folks from accessing affordable healthcare care once sick.

LGBTQ+ individuals are part of every high-risk group

Vulnerable populations (ie. elderly, people of color, immunocompromised, etc.) are disproportionately experiencing negative effects of COVID-19.

Learn more about this issue from these resources

LGBTQ+ Covid-19 Risk
Increased Worker Exposure LGBTQ+

Systemic gaps & discriminatory health practices prevent LGBTQ+ from accessing affirming care

The general apathy towards LGBTQ+ care is amplified during COVID-19.

In a recent survey, **63%** of healthcare practitioners said additional education was unnecessary to treat LGBTQ+ during COVID-19.

Socioeconomic factors prevent LGBTQ+ from accessing care

Many LGBTQ+ individuals are employed in sectors that are highly-impacted by COVID-19. Loss of healthcare from job closure and economic disparities create additional healthcare gaps.

Discriminatory health care practices discourage LGBTQ+ individuals to seek medical care

Many providers lack knowledge of affirming care. Microaggressions and discriminatory actions create a hostile environment that deter LGBTQ+ from receiving care they need during COVID-19.

COVID-19 deters LGBTQ+ patients from seeking care

48% of LGBTQ+ survey respondents were afraid to access medical care due to COVID-19. The additional layer of healthcare discrimination leaves many LGBTQ+ individuals without proper care.

Seeking and receiving healthcare is a vulnerable experience

Imagine receiving care from a provider who is uncomfortable discussing the healthcare challenges you face. Check out this resource to ensure your healthcare is caring: Discrimination Against LGBT+ People
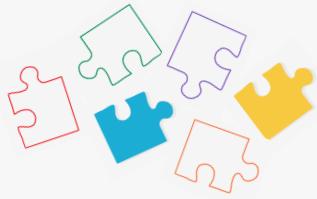
Data is not being tracked on how COVID-19 is impacting the LGBTQ+ community

We cannot **fully** understand the extent of a problem if we don't record the data on it. This makes it vital to record LGBTQ+ information as it pertains to COVID-19.

Data on LGBTQ+ is needed to track the effects of COVID-19

We cannot understand a problem without collecting data. This is necessary to track the full scope of the pandemic on vulnerable LGBTQ+ population.

Data impacts governmental and community responses to COVID-19

Tracking the correlated data between LGBTQ+ and COVID-19 is important. Without this information, it is difficult to see and address the increased vulnerability of LGBTQ+ individuals have from COVID-19.

Multiple levels of discrimination impact LGBTQ+ individuals

Data shows vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. LGBTQ+ individuals are members of these populations. We can see how these effects are compound by tracking LGBTQ+ information, in addition to demographics related to other vulnerable populations.

Legislation directly affects the LGBTQ+ community

California recently passed a measure requiring health providers to track comprehensive data to understand how COVID-19 is impacting LGBTQ+ individuals. Read more on that here: Bill SB 932

There are gaps in healthcare providers' knowledge about their LGBTQ+ clientele needs

LGBTQ+ healthcare needs are not only unmet by healthcare providers, but their needs are also being **misunderstood**.

Providers don't understand the needs of LGBTQ+ patients

100% of healthcare providers responded that they demonstrate an effort to display affirming practices. Yet, only 35% LGBTQ+ individuals felt their practitioner was actually affirming.

Transgender people face delays in healthcare

Gender affirming surgeries have been delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19. This causes extra stress and mental health concerns for people with gender dysphoria.

LGBTQ+ are experiencing a loss of affirming spaces

Due to quarantine, several people had to return home. Many LGBTQ+ people returned to an environment that rejects their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Read stories about the different realities of LGBTQ+ community members during COVID-19

LGBTQ+ Invisibility in Medical Care
COVID-19 and Transgender Adults

Mental health concerns are increased during COVID-19

LGBTQ+ individuals & service providers are both reporting **increased** mental health concerns from their clients related to social isolation, sheltering in unaffirming spaces, or a sense of hopelessness.

LGBTQ+ are experiencing isolation from a lack of social support

LGBTQ+ are more likely to find social support outside their immediate families due to rejection of their identities, but COVID-19 restrictions prevent many LGBTQ+ from accessing support.

There are higher risks for drug and alcohol abuse during COVID-19

LGBTQ+ and service providers reporting increased drug and alcohol use/abuse. Many LGBTQ+ individuals seem to be utilizing this maladaptive coping strategy during COVID-19.

No other option but to shelter in non-affirming or violent spaces

COVID-19 has caused many LGBTQ+ individuals to leave affirming spaces (ie. college). Many people have to quarantine in environments that force identity repression or exposure to domestic violence.

Provide support via mental health check-ins and referrals to affirming mental healthcare providers

The connection between COVID-19, LGBTQ+ Youth, Mental Health, & Suicide Prevention
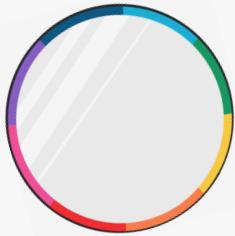
Self-reflection improves the ability to demonstrate affirming care

The gaps from providers' knowledge about LGBTQ+ healthcare needs **contribute** to disparities in the health care system.

Assumptions of sexuality & microaggressions from providers discourage LGBTQ+ from speaking out when providers don't inquire about their LGBTQ+ status.

Ongoing self-reflection practices is needed to improve affirming care

100% of healthcare providers surveyed that they believe their practice is affirming. However, 30% of these providers do not engage in basic affirming practices.

Having assumptions undermine the needs of LGBTQ+ patients

Providers often assume the sexuality of their patients and 38% of healthcare providers said they don't address health concerns related to patients' LGBTQ+ identities.

Respecting LGBTQ+ identities improves the chances of patients continuing care from you

LGBTQ+ individuals are at high risk of severe complications from COVID-19. Yet, 30% LGBTQ+ report they aren't seeking appropriate healthcare because they lack access to an affirming provider.

Have conversations with your LGBTQ+ patients about their healthcare needs

Ask about gender identity and sexual orientation

LGBTQ+ patients look for signals to determine if providers are affirming

LGBTQ+ patients **look** for cues if a provider is affirming or not - this may be based on community reputation, LGBTQ+ specific resources, or just a rainbow pride sticker.

You can provide visuals to signal LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare

LGBTQ+ patients look for pronouns in e-mails and gender neutral language forms. LGBTQ+ friendly imagery and non-discrimination statements are also helpful to assess if a provider is affirming.

## 58% of LGBTQ+ patients find affirming healthcare through community referrals

Having a reputation that you and your practice are LGBTQ+ affirming is a trusted signal of affirming care for LGBTQ+ patients. Your reputation can be built via cooperation with local LGBTQ+ organizations or support of the community.

Having updated LGBTQ+ specific resources can signify allyship and competent healthcare

Having gender and sexuality inclusive materials like LGBTQ+ specific information and resources available to see on display and online can make a patient feel more comfortable receiving care.

Prioritize keeping up with LGBTQ+ information and creating an affirming culture at your practice

Steps to signify you are an LGBTQ+ affirming practitioner
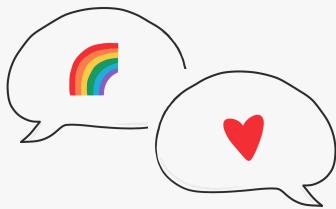
Inclusive language is part of LGBTQ+ affirming care

Using LGBTQ+ inclusive language verbally and on forms results in **improved** overall quality of care received by the patient & a better understanding of LGBTQ+ healthcare needs by the provider.

Why is it important to discuss LGBTQ+ specific health?

The LGBTQ+ community faces specific healthcare disparities that must be addressed by providers in order to help patients with the correct care and prevention.

Using appropriate pronouns and language is part of culturally competent care

Misgendering patients or using insensitive language negatively impacts their mental health which overall strains the relationship between patient and provider. Always ask and use the patients' pronouns.

Inclusive forms help LGBTQ+ patients feel comfortable which leads to competent healthcare

Only 52% of healthcare providers use LGBTQ+ inclusive forms. Examples of inclusive forms you can start practicing include gender neutral language, asking for gender identity, and removing sex-specific language. Misgendering or using inappropriate language can alienate patients who may instead forgo seeking care altogether.

Best practices are available on how to create inclusive forms and work with LGBTQ+ patients

How to create inclusive forms for LGBTQ+ patients

Do you know best practices for treating & working with LGBTQ+ patients?

Being knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ health issues makes a difference in your patients' lives. By following guidelines on inclusive care, you **can** help bridge the gap in LGBTQ+ healthcare disparities.

When working with LGBTQ+ patients, exercise discretion

Not all LGBTQ+ patients may be open about their identities, therefore consider how confidentiality or conversations via telehealth appointments can impact care and overall safety for LGBTQ+ patients, especially adolescents.

Converse with LGBTQ+ patients about their gender and sexual healthcare needs

Never assume that LGBTQ+ patients are solely gay, lesbian, or cisgender. It is necessary to understand the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and stay informed on social issues and cultural norms that can impact your LGBTQ+ clientele.

Create and maintain an environment that respects all LGBTQ+ identities

Ensure that your staff are consistently being trained on LGBTQ+ issues and that clients respect each other. Make a plan of action to watch for, prevent, and remedy LGBTQ+ microaggressions in your practice that are experienced by LGBTQ+ clients and staff.

You have the power and responsibility to keep providing LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare

Are you meeting these guidelines on providing care for your LGBTQ+ clients?

Acknowledgments

Our hope is that this campaign raises awareness about the increased vulnerability the LGBTQ+ community has to the harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This educational campaign is the culmination of six months of research, development, and partnership. LGBTQ+ people are a community that have been largely invisible in discussions surrounding COVID-19, and deserves much more investigation and attention. Through improved inclusivity in medical practices, increased access to affirming healthcare, and structural change such as tracking LGBTQ+ demographic data in COVID cases and hospitalizations, improvements can be made.

Resources

American Medical Association: Creating an LGBTQ-friendly practice
Step by step guide on how to create an LGBTQ friendly healthcare environment.

Association of American Medical Colleges: Gender and Sexual History
Video that walks through the process of asking questions relating to gender and sexual history in a healthcare setting and engage LGBTQ clientele.

Bill: SB 932
Legislation signed by Governor Gavin Newsom strengthening protections of LGBTQ individuals, including tracking COVID-19 impacts on the LGBTQ community.

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association: Guidelines for care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Patients
Extensive guide to providing LGBTQ-affirming medical care.

Human Rights Campaign Foundation: The Lives and Livelihoods of Many in the LGBTQ Community are at Risk Amidst COVID-19 Crisis
Report from the HRC about the varying causes why the LGBTQ community is at higher risk during COVID-19.

Lambda Legal: When Healthcare Isn't Caring
Report based on survey responses on discrimination against LGBTQ individuals and individuals living with HIV in healthcare.

Mental Health America: BIPOC and LGBTQ COVID-19 Resource
Bank of resources addressing mental health issues for LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals during COVID.

National LGBT Health Education Center: Focus on Forms and Policy - Creating an Inclusive Environment for LGBT Patients
Guide on how to create inclusive, LGBTQ affirming forms that represent your clientele's information accurately.

OutCare Health: LGBTQ+ Healthcare resources in all 50 states
LGBTQ+ healthcare resources in each state including primary care, mental health services, youth groups, and support groups.

The Fenway Institute: Meeting the Health Care Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People: Ending Invisibility and Improving Quality Care
Presentation on bias towards LGBTQ people in healthcare settings.

The Fenway Institute: Understanding the Health Needs of LGBT People
Learning and addressing the health disparities in the LGBTQ community.

Resources

The Trevor Project: Implications of COVID-19 for LGBTQ Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
Details harmful effects of byproducts of COVID-19 pandemic, such as isolation or living in affirming spaces, that put LGBTQ youth at risk of serious mental distress.

UCLA News Release: Why the LGBTQ+ Community is at Greater Risk from COVID-19
Report stating that LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to have existing chronic health conditions and lower rates of health insurance.

UCLA Williams Institute: Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 Among Transgender Adults in the U.S.
Details characteristics of trans individuals that put them more at risk of COVID-19 infection or hospitalization.

UW LGBTQ+ Resource Center: LGBTQ+ Intersectional Identities and Resources
A collection of educational and supportive resources on LGBTQ+ identities including race, ethnicity, sexuality, intersex, aromatic, religion, and spirituality.

The Team

Dr. Katherine Soule

She/Her - Academic

Dr. Katherine Soule is the lead academic for this educational campaign to address the health inequities facing the LGBTQ+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic. She secured funding through the UC Office of the President in order to develop this six month campaign. She currently serves as the Assistant Vice Provost of UC Cooperative Extension, the Director of UC Cooperative Extension and Youth, Families, & Communities Advisor for the San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. Dr. Soule seeks to provide solutions to the challenges that youth, families, and communities face on the Central Coast of California. She focuses on the creation of innovative and effective interventions, policy-relevant research, and educational trainings to address the following major goals: 1) Increasing health equity in marginalized communities, 2) Improving food security and safety for food insecure residents, and 3) Promoting economic prosperity in low-income communities. While these efforts positively address several public values, as a queer leader the connecting thread across all her efforts is the pursuit of an inclusive and equitable society.

Danielle Pacheco

She/Her - Student Intern

Danielle Pacheco is a member of the Smittcamp Family Honors College at California State University, Fresno. Danielle received the President's Honors Scholarship and currently serves as President of Fresno State's Women's Alliance. She is also a member of several Honors Societies and actively participates in various on-campus organizations. Danielle joined this team in order to further her engagement in advocating for marginalized communities. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself, she is passionate about raising awareness of the challenges that many LGBTQ+ individuals face and encouraging civic engagement in order to counteract discriminatory policies. Danielle is interested in pursuing public policy work after graduation in order to facilitate political change and to continue to advocate for marginalized communities.

The Team

Trent Baldwin

He/Him - Student Intern

Trent Baldwin is a current student at The Ohio State University, where he is majoring in Community Leadership with an emphasis in Community Extension Education, and an interdisciplinary minor in Youth Development. He is an alumnus of the California 4-H program, which helped shape his views on the value of youth development opportunities. Within the field of youth development, he is passionate about LGBTQ+ youth, mental health and wellness, substance abuse prevention, and service learning. He prioritizes accessibility and inclusivity in his youth development work. Aside from youth development, Trent is also passionate about agriculture and food systems as he comes from a farming family, and LGBTQ+ issues. He is a founding member of Ohio State's collegiate Cultivating Change chapter, where he serves on the executive board planning programs for LGBTQ+ students in food, agriculture, and environmental sciences. He hopes to see a future where queer folks can pursue careers in the field of agriculture without the fear of marginalization. Throughout his career, he hopes to be a champion for rural LGBTQ+ folks everywhere.

Moon Moua

She/They - Designer

Moon Moua strives to be a conscious creator in all sectors of her life to inspire authenticity, growth, and holistic healing. She works through a lens influenced by compassion, wonder, and potential as Moon continues to learn what it means to show up as her authentic self every day. Previously as a social worker, Moon felt compelled to be a conduit of equitable social justice where she advocated for clients through a biopsychosocial framework. Now as a designer, Moon uses her social work experience to design meaningful visual experiences with integrity and humility. Moon continues to bridge her passion for social justice and art to create mindful and decolonized design that sparks connection from within in hopes for social healing and change for - not a better world - but an intentional, deserving, and compassionate world for all life.