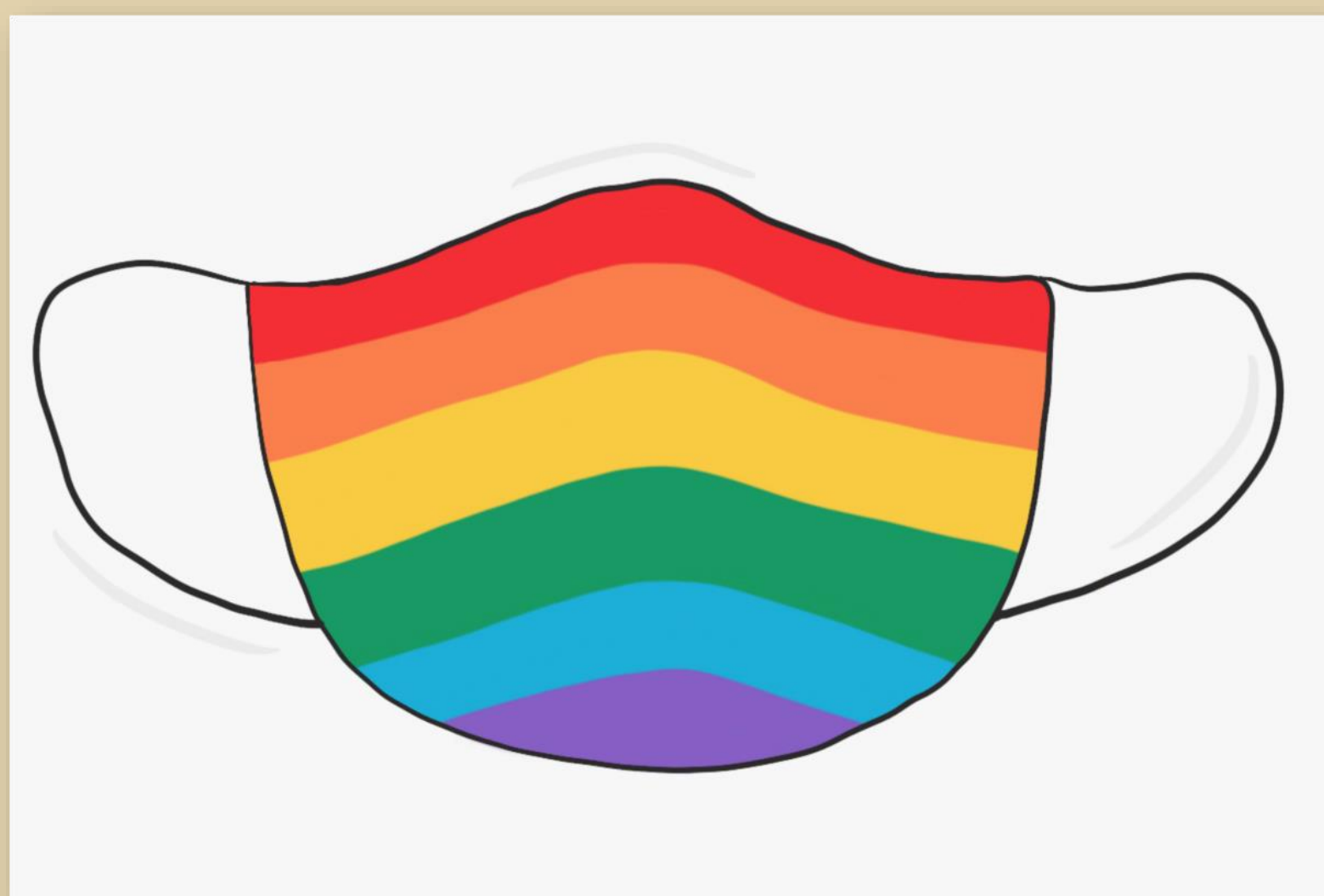# Supporting Improvements in Healthcare and Community Services for LGBTQ+ Individuals
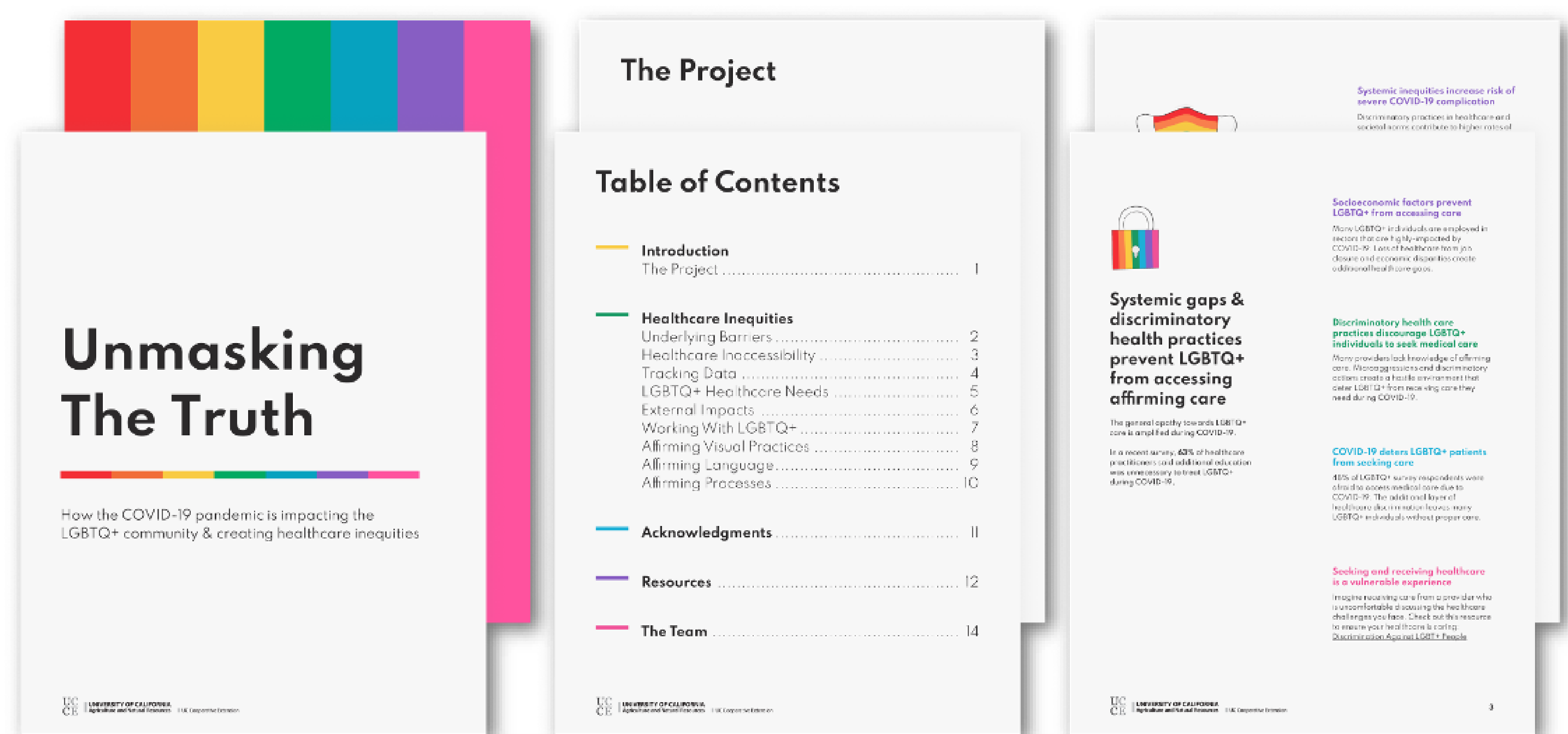
Overview

UCOP emergency funding enabled statewide research by UCCE to understand the barriers to LGBTQ+ healthcare and community services during the pandemic. This research provided data that have implications beyond the pandemic, highlighting discrepancies in healthcare providers' and community service organizations' understanding of LGBTQ+ individuals' needs and experiences. UCCE's research and extension efforts supported improvements across multiple levels of influence to improve health outcomes, including supporting improvements in state policy to collect gender identity and sexual orientation for COVID-19 throughout all counties in California. This effort supported the following UC ANR Public Value Statements: 1) Promoting healthy people and communities, and 2) Developing an inclusive and equitable society.

Project Activities

- Research was completed virtually due to COVID-19.

- Identified potential partners through professional networks and agreed to participate after phone and email contacts with the research team. In total, 23 California organizations and professionals representing 5 counties: Imperial, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and Marin participated in focus groups, statewide survey, and educational campaign development and dissemination.

- Conducted three focus group over Zoom with participants from the following groups: LGBTQ+ serving organizations, Community organizations, and Healthcare professionals. Transcribed focus group recordings and analyzed transcripts using thematic coding.

- Developed needs assessment survey questions utilizing focus group key themes. The survey included demographic questions, Likert-type questions, and several open-ended questions. Survey questions were adapted for three participants groups: LGBTQ+ community members (25 survey questions), Community organizations (21 survey questions), and Healthcare professionals (20 survey questions). The survey was disseminated by partners, as well as through UCANR channels and directly sent to California major healthcare organizations and associations to target physicians. Analysed quantitative and qualitative survey data.

- Findings from the focus groups and surveys were utilized to develop an educational campaign to be disseminated to the public through partnering organizations. Including:

  - Social Media Toolkit: including a 3-week calendar of dates to post content, and 9 posts, including images and captions for posts, tailored to social media channel. Each post consisted of 4 slides, with 1 visual graphic followed by 3 information slides.

  - Unmasking the Truth: How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Impacting the LGBTQ+ Community & Creating Healthcare Inequities. This shareable PDF included: An overview of the entire research project, social media content adapted into a booklet, and additional educational and support resources.

- Presented research findings and project efforts to Cooperative Extension professionals and other academics, elected officials, health care and community service providers, and the general public through webinar and conference presentations, newsletter and online communications, and meetings.

- Developing additional training for medical and mental care providers, as well as their professional staff to support providers in addressing project findings in partnership with UCSF Department of Family and Community Medicine's Transgender Healthcare Consultant.

Findings Summary

Findings were prioritized into nine priority areas, addressed in the educational campaign. These included:

- Underlying Barriers
- Healthcare Inaccessibility
- Tracking Data
- LGBTQ+ Healthcare Needs
- External Impacts
- Working with LGBTQ+ clientele/patients
- Affirming Visual Practices
- Affirming Language
- Affirming Practices

To summarize the findings, systemic gaps and discriminatory practices prevent LGBTQ+ individuals from accessing affirming care. For example, care providers often assume patients' gender and sexuality and 38% of care providers reported that they do not ask about or address health concerns specific to patients' LGBTQ+ identities. (Learn how to assess gender and sexual history.)

While 100% of providers responded that they demonstrate an effort to display affirming practices, only 35% LGBTQ+ individuals felt their provider was affirming. (Learn how to provide a welcoming environment.) There is a general apathy towards providing affirming care as 63% of providers reported that additional education was unnecessary to treat LGBTQ+ patients. (Sign up for UC Cooperative Extension's Providing Affirming Care Workshop.)

Beyond highlighting these findings, the campaign also provided viewers with educational resources to take steps to address the gaps. For example, learning how to assess gender and sexual history through the Association of American Medical Colleges or learning how to provide a welcoming environment through the American Medical Association.