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Background

Oral health is critical for overall health and regular access to dental care can prevent serious [health risks associated with oral health problems](#). Unfortunately, many marginalized groups face structural barriers when trying to access dental care, including members of LGBTQ+ communities. LGBTQ+ people often face significant barriers to accessing health care and social support. Advancing oral health equity requires centering the needs and experiences of those most marginalized by the current system; this includes LGBTQ+ people, especially those who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).

LGBTQ+ people often face discrimination and mistreatment when accessing health and dental care, which can have a negative impact on quality of care and decrease the likelihood of accessing care in the future. Many LGBTQ+ people report [experiencing judgment and uncomfortable reactions](#) from their dental care providers. Trans and nonbinary individuals, specifically, are more likely to have experienced [refusal of health care, physical and sexual harassment, and violence in health care settings](#). The psychological trauma induced by discrimination in the health care setting can [escalate dental care-related fear and anxiety](#), contributing to decreased access to care for LGBTQ+ communities.

In addition to facing discrimination in health care settings, stigma and intersecting experiences with racism, transphobia and other forms of oppression make LGBTQ+ people more likely to have chronic conditions, putting them at greater risk of having poor oral health. LGBTQ+ people experience higher rates of [mental health issues, including substance use disorders](#), and [homelessness](#) – conditions that have a negative impact on health outcomes. LGBTQ+ individuals are also more likely to have an [HIV positive status, hepatitis or other chronic conditions](#), which can decrease the body's ability to fight oral health infections. The LGBTQ+ community also experiences higher rates of [depression and suicidal ideation](#) than their heterosexual counterparts.

Coverage of LGBTQ+ health in oral health professional training programs is limited, limiting the cultural competency of the future oral health workforce. Currently, there are limited data detailing the oral health status of LGBTQ+ communities and many LGBTQ+-specific topics are omitted from dental training curricula. When information about LGBTQ+ communities is offered, students are [most likely to discuss the prevalence of HIV](#) and AIDS, but not other important health topics. Consequently, dental care providers are often unfamiliar with LGBTQ+ health disparities and are not well-equipped to treat members of LGBTQ+ communities.

Oral health advocates can push to improve access to care and create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people accessing dental care. As advocates across the country push for more comprehensive Medicaid adult dental benefits, LGBTQ+ communities should be included, as this population often faces coverage-related barriers to care. Advocates can also use a gender-inclusive lens in their oral health resources and communications and push for training curricula to be more inclusive of diverse LGBTQ+ communities.

Talking Points for Advocates

- Advancing oral health equity requires centering the needs and experiences of those most marginalized by the current system; this includes LGBTQ+ people, especially those who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).
- Many LGBTQ+ people face judgement and discrimination when accessing dental care, which can lead people not to access care in the future, putting long-term oral health at risk. LGBTQ+ people of color are at particular risk because of the intersection of this discrimination with racism. Diversifying the oral health workforce and making oral health training more inclusive are key for improving oral health equity.
- LGBTQ+ people are more likely to have chronic conditions that can impact their oral health. Timely access to dental care can help address these oral health problems, but care must be safe, accessible and affordable. Expanding the Medicaid adult dental benefit can help ensure low-income LGBTQ+ people have access to dental care.
- Coverage of LGBTQ+ health in dental education programs is limited, so many dental providers are unfamiliar with LGBTQ+ health disparities and are not well-equipped to treat members of the LGBTQ+ community. Improved training and a more diverse workforce can help address these barriers.
- In addition to barriers in accessing dental care, LGBTQ+ people also experience discrimination in other areas that impact oral and overall health. LGBTQ+ individuals, and trans people in particular, are more likely to experience poverty and housing instability and Black LGBTQ+ people face staggering rates of police violence. Advocates should understand the nondiscrimination protections in place for LGBTQ+ people in their states and advocate for more comprehensive protections, including universal coverage that includes gender-affirming care, accessible and inclusive mental health services and a wide range of nondiscrimination protections, especially for queer and trans people of color.

Sample Tweets

- LGBTQ+ people face barriers to dental care & poor #OralHealth, yet data are limited and often homogenize #LGBTQ people into one demographic. Improved data on the oral health of LGBTQ+ people is integral
- LGBTQ+ people, especial trans people and people of color, face discrimination when accessing dental care, impacting #OralHealth for a lifetime #LGBTQ
- #LGBTQ+ people deserve comprehensive and respectful dental care. Expanding Medicaid dental benefits to all adults and diversifying the #OralHealth workforce can help >> <https://bit.ly/2DSJi36>
- Social determinants impact the #OralHealth of LGBTQ+ communities. Poverty, housing instability, and police brutality are particularly harmful for #LGBTQ POC. The movement for health justice must be intersectional! <https://bit.ly/2CjkRM2>