



**LGBT COMMUNITY:**  
FAMILIES FOSTERING A PATH TO RECOVERY



**“I TRULY BELIEVE THAT NOTHING I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE IF I WAS NOT A PERSON IN RECOVERY.”**

— PHILIP

### **THE ISSUE**

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community face unique challenges, including bullying, homophobia, and discrimination. Although national data on LGBT populations is still scarce, more than a decade of research indicates LGBT populations have been associated with high rates of alcohol consumption and substance abuse.<sup>1</sup>

The prevalence of individuals in the LGBT community developing mental and/or substance use disorders is highlighted by the following:

- Lesbian women may experience more mental disorders—such as major depression, phobia, and post-traumatic stress disorder—than women with opposite sex partners.<sup>2</sup>
- Factors such as verbal and physical harassment, negative experiences related to “coming out,” substance use,<sup>3</sup> and isolation,<sup>4</sup> all contribute to higher rates of suicide attempts among gay men and youth than other populations.

## SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

HETEROSEXUAL

LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL

## ADOLESCENTS IN GRADES 7–12 WHO SELF-IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL ARE MORE THAN TWICE AS LIKELY TO HAVE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AS THEIR HETEROSEXUAL PEERS.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health—LGBT Youth. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>.

- Compared to heterosexuals, young adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer have a 1.3 times greater likelihood of heavy alcohol use, 1.6 times greater likelihood of marijuana use, 2.9 times greater likelihood of injection drug use, and 3.3 times greater likelihood of cocaine use.<sup>5</sup>
- Lesbian and bisexual women who were “out” experienced more emotional stress as teenagers and were 2 to 2.5 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation in the past 12 months than heterosexual women.<sup>6</sup>
- Adolescents in grades 7–12 who self-identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual are more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide as their heterosexual peers.<sup>7</sup>
- Studies have shown that suicide attempts among transgender people can range from 16 to 32 percent.<sup>8</sup>
- A disproportionate number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth experience homelessness each year in the United States; and homeless LGBT youth have particularly high rates of mental health and substance use problems, suicidal acts, violent victimization, and a range of HIV risk behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

The approximately nine million LGBT Americans<sup>10</sup> need to know that they are not alone. LGBT Americans who experience mental illness or substance use disorder and their families can receive help, and in turn share their stories to help others on the journey to recovery.

### FINDING SUPPORT

LGBT community members who have developed a mental and/or substance use disorder need support in their pathway to recovery. Family, friends, and allies can provide this support and guidance.

Research shows that few parents and caregivers have had the opportunity to talk about their experiences, concerns and hopes for their LGBTQ (Questioning/Queer) child with a supportive, nonjudgmental professional.<sup>11</sup>

Family acceptance is critical to supporting LGBTQ young adults’ well-being. Studies show that the family’s acceptance of LGBTQ young adults helps protect against depression, suicidal behavior, and substance abuse by promoting self-esteem, social support, and overall health.<sup>12</sup> LGBTQ young adults whose family reacted negatively during their adolescence were 5.9 times more likely to have high levels of depression and 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs than peers from families who reacted positively during their adolescence.<sup>13</sup>

### PROMOTING RECOVERY

LGBT adults and youth in recovery can find strength and support through their families of origin, families of choice, the LGBT community, and its allies.

As the number of resources for the LGBT community grows, there is an increased focus on improved access to recovery and treatment programs and support services that address the specific concerns and needs of the LGBT community. It is important to provide LGBT affirming services through affirming staff to ensure treatment needs can be addressed in a safe and respectful environment.

Resources for families and communities helping LGBT individuals in recovery:

- **Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Addiction Professionals and Their Allies** ([www.nalgap.org/](http://www.nalgap.org/)): Provides information, training, networking, and advocacy about addiction and related problems, and support for those engaged in the health professions, individuals in recovery, and others concerned about the health of gender and sexual minorities.

- **The Family Acceptance Project** ([familyproject.sfsu.edu/](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/)): Works to prevent health and mental health risks for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children and youth, including suicide, homelessness and HIV—in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities.
- **National Network to Eliminate Disparities (NNED) in Behavioral Health** ([nned.net/](http://nned.net/)): Supports information sharing, training, and technical assistance among organizations and communities dedicated to the behavioral health and well-being of diverse communities.
- **CDC Health Risks Among Sexual Minority Youth** ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/smy.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/smy.htm)): Provides specific estimates for alcohol, tobacco, and drug use among sexual minority youth and resources for CDC's activities to promote health and safety among sexual minority youth.
- **CDC Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health** ([www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/](http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/)): Provides information and resources on health issues and inequities affecting LGBT communities for both professional and general public audiences, including links to other sources.
- **Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network** ([www.gsanetwork.org/](http://www.gsanetwork.org/)): Helps GSAs in schools connect with each other and with other community resources and publishes national reports on LGBT bullying and harassment in schools.
- **Human Rights Campaign, Children & Youth** ([www.hrc.org/topics/children-youth](http://www.hrc.org/topics/children-youth)): Provides a wealth of resources for supporting LGBT youth, from creating an inclusive learning environment for students to understanding the challenges and resiliency of this population.
- **Center of Excellence for Transgender Health** ([www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/](http://www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/)): Seeks to improve the overall health and well-being of transgender individuals by developing and implementing programs in response to community-identified needs.
- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC): Preventing Suicide among LGBT Youth Kit** ([www.sprc.org/training-institute/lgbt-youth-workshop](http://www.sprc.org/training-institute/lgbt-youth-workshop)): Helps staff in schools, youth-serving organizations, and suicide prevention programs take action to reduce suicidal behavior among LGBT youth.
- **YES Institute** ([yesinstitute.org/](http://yesinstitute.org/)): Aims to prevent suicide through communication and education about gender and orientation.
- **The Trevor Project** ([www.thetrevorproject.org/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/)): Offers a nationwide, around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for LGBT and questioning youth.
- **National LGBTQ Task Force** ([www.thetaskforce.org/](http://www.thetaskforce.org/)): Provides resources and training opportunities to train and mobilize activities across the nation to support full freedom, justice, and equality for LGBTQ people.
- **Positive Youth Development Online Training Course** ([ncfy-learn.jbsinternational.com/course/index.php?categoryid=7](http://ncfy-learn.jbsinternational.com/course/index.php?categoryid=7)): Offers an online training course on positive youth development, developed by the Family and Youth Services Bureau. The training course is intended for youth service professionals and helps them put positive youth development into practice in their day-to-day work.
- **Runaway and Homeless Youth Capacity Building for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Questioning Youth Populations Fact Sheet** ([www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/lgbtq-demonstration-project](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/lgbtq-demonstration-project)): Describes a project that will respond to these needs of LGBTQ youth by developing a blueprint to reduce the 40 percent of homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ over the 3 years of the project (the 3/40 BLUEPRINT). This blueprint will build the capacity of Transitional Living Programs to serve LGBTQ homeless youth by strengthening their efforts to better understand and address the needs of this population.

With the support of friends, family, other LGBT community members and allies, individuals can begin to celebrate and share their own successes as they progress on the path to recovery.

For more information, including **Recovery Month** resources for families and the community, public service announcements, events across the country, and social media tools, visit the **Recovery Month** website at [www.recoverymonth.gov/](http://www.recoverymonth.gov/).

This list is not exhaustive of all available resources. Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the **Recovery Month** website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



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<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Social Work Education for the Prevention and Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders – Module 10G: Sexual Orientation and Alcohol Use Disorders. Retrieved from [pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Social/Module10GSexualOrientation/Module10G.html](https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Social/Module10GSexualOrientation/Module10G.html).

<sup>2</sup> Gilman, S.E., Cochran, S.D., Mays, V.M., Hughes, M., Ostrow, D., & Kessler, R.C. (2001). Risk of psychiatric disorders among individuals reporting same-sex sexual partners in the national comorbidity survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91, 933–939.

<sup>3</sup> Berg, M.B., Mimiaga, M.J., & Safren, S.A. (2008). Mental health concerns of gay and bisexual men seeking mental health services. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 54(3), 293–306.

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, D., Tran, A., Lee, R., & Van Ryn, M. (2008). Effects of perceived discrimination on mental health and mental health services utilization among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. *Journal of LGBT Health Research*, 4(1), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Michael P. Marshal, Mark S. Friedman, Ron Stall, Kevin M. King, Jonathan Miles, Melanie A. Gold, Oscar G. Bukstein, and Jennifer Q. Morse. (2008). Sexual orientation and adolescent substance use: a meta-analysis and methodological review. *Addiction*, 103(4): 546–556. doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2008.02149.x.

<sup>6</sup> Koh, A.S., & Ross, L.K. (2006). Mental health issues: A comparison of lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(1), 33–57.

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health—LGBT Youth. Retrieved from [www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Clements-Nolle, K., Marx, R., & Katz, M. (2006). Attempted suicide among transgender persons: The influence of gender-based discrimination and victimization. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(3), 53–69.

<sup>9</sup> Keuroghlian AS, Shtasel D, Bassuk EL. (2014) Out on the street: A public health and policy agenda for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*. 84(1), 66-72.

<sup>10</sup> Gates, G. (2011). How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender? Retrieved from [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Ryan, C., & Chen-Hayes, S. (2013). Educating and empowering families of LGBTQ K-12 students. In E. S. Fisher & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating school environments to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students and families: A handbook for school professionals* (pp. 209-227). New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan, C., Russell, S. T., Huebner, D. M., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(4), 205-213.

<sup>13</sup> Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics*, 123(1), 346-352.