



# APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

## Health Disparities related to LGBT status

There is limited research on health disparities experienced by sexual and gender minorities. However, an increasing number of research studies in recent years suggest that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals are at greater risk than the general population to suffer adverse health outcomes. This is due in part to the continued stigmatization of LGBT persons.

### Research Findings

- In the workplace, experiencing prejudice and discrimination, and concealing a same-sex orientation may be linked to job burnout and lower levels of general health (Sandfort, Bos, & Vet, 2006).
- Several studies of gay men who conceal their homosexuality found that these men showed a higher risk of suffering from disease outcomes such as upper respiratory infections and accelerated HIV disease progression (Cole, 2006).
- Cardiac and cancer risk factors are more prevalent among lesbian women than heterosexual women, because they appear to be more likely to smoke, have an unhealthy diet, and be overweight (Cochran et al., 2001).
- For lesbian and bisexual women, the experience of homophobia and heterosexism within the health care system is related to avoidance of routine health care screenings (McNair, 2003).
- Lesbian women are less likely to use preventive cancer-related screening services than heterosexual women because many screening programs are not designed to include lesbian women in their target audience (Dibble & Roberts, 2003).
- In a large-scale longitudinal study, breast cancer rates among lesbians and bisexual women were found to be higher than for heterosexual women (Valanis et al., 2000).
- Recent quantitative and qualitative studies with transgender women show high HIV infection rates among these individuals, as well as elevated levels of lifetime behaviors associated with HIV infection, with low self-esteem as major cause for sexual risk-taking (Kaufman, 2008).

### Recommendations

APA supports legislative initiatives aimed at increasing federal funding for quantitative and qualitative research studies among LGBT persons that show the specific experiences and health consequences of these individuals. Such research could also demonstrate some protective and resilience factors among the majority of LGBT individuals who are healthy, despite the challenges they face. This would provide a more solid foundation for the creation and implementation of culturally sensitive prevention and treatment programs that specifically focus on the needs of LGBT populations.

## References

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