



EMPOWERED

Colorado LGBTQ+ Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Initiative

Danielle Lewis Pelusi

Nutrition and Mental Health

March marks the start of **National Nutrition Month**, an annual campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. It is a time to focus on, "making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits." We find ourselves in a time when such a campaign is sorely needed. The term 'quarantine 15' is still floating around social media and people are struggling with what physical and mental wellness means for them in quarantine.

Zachari Breeding, registered dietitian nutritionist and owner of **Sage Nutritious Solutions**, remarked that factors like socioeconomic status, access to resources, culture, and identity all play a role when discussing individualized wellness.

An individual's relationship with nutrition and their body is further complicated by the barriers of stigma, shame, and misinformation. He concluded that now is the time to forgive ourselves for any perceived shortcomings in physical wellness routines. It is time to get our minds and bodies ready for when we are truly free to pursue our goals again.



Zach suggests that accessing mental health resources is a good place to begin the journey towards personal health. This is especially true in the face of COVID-19. It is widely acknowledged that symptoms of anxiety and depression have worsened for many during the pandemic. The same is also **being reported** of behaviors associated with eating disorders (ED).

LGBTQ+ individuals experience unique stressors that may contribute to developing an ED. They also face unique challenges for accessing identity affirming behavioral healthcare. This is especially impactful for ED treatment, which often centers around identity and acceptance.

Some statistics: Among men who have eating disorders, **42% identify as gay**.

Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are 2 times as likely to report binge-eating at least once per month in a year. The reality is that research addressing transgender and gender non-conforming individuals is lacking. Yet the connection has been drawn between the internal experience of being trans and **how it impacts the development of an ED**. This is also true of **people of color** - we really don't know what →

5 HEALTHY TIPS

...for maintaining physical wellness

- 1 Choose more whole foods.** The aim is to get more nutrient dense foods (and yes, they can be frozen!)
- 2 Be active.** Find an activity you enjoy that involves movement. The gym is not required!
- 3 Consult a registered dietitian for personalized advice.** Many grocery stores have a dietitian on staff that will provide free services, you can find a list of registered dietitians [here](#) or you can find a list of vetted online voices [here](#).
- 4 Drink more water!**
- 5 Build consistent habits.** Respect wherever you are at by starting with small steps and allowing for imperfection.

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION INITIATIVE

Envision:You is committed to prioritizing and understanding the lived experiences of queer, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QBIPOC), and those with other intersecting, marginalized identities (e.g., older adults, persons with disabilities). To best support, educate, and empower members of Colorado's diverse LGBTQ+ community, Envision:You is dedicated to incorporating an intersectional lens to all current and future programming, as well as to its organizational standards. This is a continual process that strives to recognize the strength and resiliency that already exists within QBIPOC communities and build upon it to enact sustainable, impactful change.

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NUTRITION & MENTAL HEALTH *continued*

ED looks like in communities of color due to this lack of research. **We do know that people of color are significantly less likely to receive help for disordered eating behaviors**, especially women of color.

The middle-class, white, cisgender woman has been the dominant narrative when discussing eating disorders, and it actively hurts those with marginalized identities who are struggling. Transgender folks and people of color are especially harmed when excluded from the

"Despite the negative messaging LGBTQ+ individuals (especially BIPOC) have been conditioned to internalize, I deeply believe our bodies are beautiful. We are told that our bodies take up too much space, are too loud, too bright, too confusing, too much, but this is not true." —Hayden Evans

conversation. Recognizing that intersectional, marginalized identities play a role in folks' ED experiences is one of the first steps in addressing

the current gaps in research and treatment disparities.

If you are looking to make a change this National Nutrition Month, forge your unique path forward, whether that's by pursuing physical wellness, body positivity, treatment services, or better mental health.

ED support for POC

**National Eating Disorder Hotline
(Text or Call): 800-931-2237**

ADVOCATE HAYDEN EVANS

Hayden Evans (they/them) was introduced to Envision:You when they presented at the first **Summit** in 2019. Now they serve as a program coordinator and lead the **How to Have the Talk** program while supporting several others.



When they aren't working on their biochemistry degree at the University of Denver, you are likely to find them enjoying one of many outdoor activities, including rock climbing, biking, skiing, and hiking.

FRESH PRESS

Out Boulder County has conducted a **survey** that is the first in the nation to look at attitudes among the LGBTQ+ population when it comes to COVID-19 vaccine reluctance. The survey found that 17% of respondents who identified as LGBTQ were, "hesitant or reluctant to take it," while only 9% of non-LGBTQ respondents said the same. Safety concerns, needing more information, concerns about effectiveness, and distrust of the government were the main barriers listed by respondents. The unique concerns of HIV-positive individuals were also raised, as most vaccine makers don't disclose the HIV status of their research participants. This

leaves the question open as to how it might affect an individual who is HIV-positive or if it might interact with HIV medications. Out Boulder County's survey highlights the need to identify LGBTQ+ individuals in data collection so that public health campaigns, like vaccination programs, can better meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

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COMMUNITY PARTNER

SonderMind is a network of behavioral health providers on a mission to redesign behavioral healthcare to become more accessible and approachable by connecting patients with therapists in their network. They have partnered with Envision:You



to provide the **LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Provider Training Program** for their providers at a reduced rate, stating a commitment to ensuring providers across the country are able to provide culturally relevant and affirming care.

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