



EMPOWERED

Colorado LGBTQ+ Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Initiative

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Sexual Health and the LGBTQ+ Community

As we approach sexual health awareness month in September, it's a time to consider: What is sexual health? The answer, as most health related subjects are, is more complicated than your typical doctor's forms can encompass.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual health is defined as "...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity." The core tenant of sexual health relies on having a positive internal relationship with yourself and respectful external relationships with others in regards to sex. Although it's a relatively simple idea, it's much harder to put into practice.

This ideal state requires knowledge and comfort with the subject, however, sex is a complicated subject filled with misinformation and stigma. This is particularly true for LGBTQ+ folks, who often have to go looking independently for any information related to their sexual

health. There are currently **zero states that require sex education curriculums** to include LGBTQ+ sexual health, resulting in a severe lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education. Sexual minority youth who are uninformed are more likely to be **sexually assaulted**, and are at **higher risk** for HIV infection, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancy, and other risky sexual behaviors.

A lack of culturally relevant healthcare providers compounds the issue for LGBTQ+ folks of all ages. **Lesbian and bisexual women have higher rates of breast cancer** and cervical cancer. The risk of cancer is even higher for **transgender men and women**. Partially, this is due to the fact that LGBTQ+ individuals are **less likely to go to doctors for preventative care**, which includes things like mammograms, pap smears, and prostate exams. LGBTQ+ folks also have **higher rates of HPV infections**, and gay and bisexual men have an **increased risk of HIV**. ➔

5 HEALTHY TIPS

...On Practicing Safer Sex

- 1 **Talk about sex!** Leave shame out of the conversation and normalize talking with your partner(s).
- 2 **Know your boundaries** around safer sex beforehand.
- 3 **Use barriers**, like dental dams, condoms, and gloves. Never reuse them, and make sure you know how to use them correctly.
- 4 **Use lubricant** to prevent micro-tears in barriers and reduce friction that could cause a break.
- 5 **Educate yourself on STIs** and what you can do to prevent them. There is a lot of stigma around STIs even though they are incredibly common, and most can be treated effectively.

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ADVOCATE

DAFNA

MICHAELSON JENET

Representative Dafna Michaelson Jenet (she/her) of Colorado's House District 30 has been fighting for mental health policy for her three terms in service. Her primary legislative focuses are youth, particularly foster care youth, mental health, and healthcare access. She is pushing to have Colorado be the first state to require insurance companies to cover an annual mental health wellness exam for all Coloradans.



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SEXUAL HEALTH *continued*

Often times doctors don't have an understanding of LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education or are not open to it. This can put queer folks in a very vulnerable, if not dangerous, position when they out themselves to their doctor for a chance to receive accurate sexual health information.

The WHO definition of sexual health goes on to say, "Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships..." This requires a foundation of comfort



and freedom to explore one's sexuality, which in our current society is taboo for the average person. It's even harder for LGBTQ+ folks who have to climb additional barriers placed in front of them, including discrimination, violence,

and internalized shame around their identity. There is clearly a lot of work to be done in the sexual and reproductive health field around parity. In the meantime, it is important for sexual health advocates to support LGBTQ+ folks by reducing stigma and helping them receive the care they deserve.

Resources:

[The Trevor Project](#)

[GLSEN Sex Ed](#)

[Whitman-Walker Health](#)

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

STATE OF THE STATE

Your voice matters! Be seen, be heard, and be represented in the largest mental health and wellness survey of LGBTQ+ Coloradans. We are counting on community members to share their experiences that will inform LGBTQ+ behavioral health priorities for community organizations and state leaders. By conducting this survey, Envision:You will document specific gaps, needs, and opportunities in behavioral health for LGBTQ+ Coloradans to identify funding and training needs, inform public health campaigns, and support policy work. As a thank you for your participation, we are offering \$15 gift cards to King Soopers/Kroger, Target, or Safeway/Albertsons. **TAKE THE SURVEY**



COLORADO LGBTQ+ BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
STATE OF THE STATE SURVEY REPORT

FRESH PRESS

The postponed 2020 Summer Olympic Games, occurring July 23-August 8, marks a record amount of participation from publicly out LGBTQ+ athletes. According to [Outsports](#), at least 168 out athletes are participating in the Tokyo games, which is more than triple the number who participated in the 2016 Rio games. There are at least 27 different countries this year that will be represented by at least one publicly out athlete across 30 different sports, including the first openly transgender Olympian athlete, [Laurel Hubbard](#), the New Zealand weightlifter. The United States has the most out athletes with more than 30 known participants, and women outnumber the list of men by around an eight to one margin. This Summer Olympic Games also marks the first time the International Olympics Committee has officially recognized a Pride House hospitality suite for LGBTQ+ athletes and visitors, and it will continue on as a permanent community center after the Olympics come to a close.

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COMMUNITY PARTNER

A long time collaborator with Envision:You, OMNI Institute is a non-profit social science consultancy that strives to make positive social change through their research. They have consulted on and increased capacity for many of Envision:You's programs,



enabling our commitment to create research-based programming. Our most recent partnership resulted in the creation of the [State of the State research survey](#), which is informed by OMNI Institute's expertise in the social sciences.

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