



APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

Improve data collection on LGBT populations

State and community surveys have shown that significant health disparities exist within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Federal-level health surveys routinely exclude questions related to sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, while smoking rates within the general population continue to decrease, tobacco use among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people counts among the highest among any U.S. population group. Large-scale survey data are critical in providing the basis for public policies that address group-based disparities in physical and mental health outcomes, as well as for evaluating the individual and social consequences of these policies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has outlined key health goals and needs, and has set the stage for data collection in federal data collection and funding for federal health programs addressing health disparities in the nation.

APA strongly urges the inclusion in nation-wide health surveys of health indicators and federal health policies that address existing health disparities specifically affecting LGBT individuals.

Physical and Mental Health effects

- While numerous studies suggest that sexual orientation and gender identity are linked to a person's physical, mental, and social outcomes (e.g., Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003; Simmons & O'Connell, 2003), the absence of large-scale surveys assessing the experience and social situations of LGBT people is likely to result in inadequate and stereotypical interpretations of these links for public policy initiatives.
- Sexual orientation questions can be broken down to include various dimensions of sexuality, i.e. sexual attraction or desire, sexual behavior, sexual identity, and affiliation (Laumann, Gagonon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Sell, 2007), which all need to be taken into account to effectively address the health needs of LGBT individuals.
- Many members of the LGBT community also form part of other communities experiencing health disparities. For instance, African American gay men are likely to experience health disparities.

Recommendations to improve data collection on LGBT health disparities

APA supports legislative initiatives aimed at increasing federal funding for the inclusion of effective health indicators specifically related to LGBT people, in an effort to enhance federal-level initiatives to prevent and treat health disparities for these individuals.

Specific recommendations for federal policies to improve health outcomes for sexual and gender minorities include the following:

- Initiatives to fund and conduct federal-level surveys that include indicators that adequately address sexual orientation and gender identity as separate study dimensions;
- Efforts to increase quantitative and qualitative research studies among LGBT persons, and to increase opportunities for publication of scientific research of studies that illuminate the specific experiences and health consequences of members of these communities;
- Strategies to ensure cultural competency within health systems and in health care design and provision specific for the health needs of LGBT individuals.

References

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