

April 21, 2020

Second Open Letter About COVID-19 and LGBTQ+ Communities

As we move further into population level interventions and continue to grapple with care shortages and economic harms as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned LGBTQ+ and allied organizations call upon public health authorities, health care institutions, government agencies and policymakers to address the following concerns:

Ensuring Nondiscrimination in Health Care Settings. There is a long history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the health care system. Even where they do not encounter overt discrimination, too many LGBTQ+ individuals and families experience a lack of understanding, unwelcoming attitudes, and even hostility from health care providers and staff. In high-stress situations with looming threats of shortages of life-saving medical equipment, hospital beds and health care staff, the danger of implicit if not explicit bias against queer patients is especially worrisome. Community concerns have been heightened by recent reports that an evangelical organization which New York City is depending on to help address the COVID crisis there, is requiring volunteers to subscribe to its explicitly anti-LGBTQ “statement of faith.”¹ In addition to the very real possibility of mistreatment, the fear of encountering discrimination or hostility discourages many LGBTQ+ people from promptly seeking medical care² – which endangers them, their families and friends, and the entire community during this pandemic.

Documenting and Reporting the Impact of COVID on LGBTQ+ Communities. One of the greatest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ communities is invisibility to policymakers, public health officials and health care providers due in significant part to the failure to collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) from patients and in government-sponsored surveys. Available reporting suggests that most jurisdictions are not collecting such data from patients and in COVID-19 prevention efforts.³ This failure makes it much more difficult to ensure that communities that are marginalized by health care systems are fully served and protected. The disproportionate rates of infection and death related to COVID-19 among Black and Latinx populations⁴ demonstrate the urgency of removing systematic barriers to good health and economic stability among stigmatized groups.

Protecting the Economic Health of LGBTQ+ People. The pandemic is having a grossly disproportionate, devastating effect on lower-income people and people working in service industries, many of whom are losing their jobs, their health insurance, and their means of support. Notwithstanding stereotypes to the contrary, LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately low-income. Studies have documented that on the national level 22% of our community members live in poverty, as compared to 16% of non-LGBTQ people.⁵ For some subsets of our community, this gap is even more profound; nearly one in three (29.4%) transgender people and cisgender bisexual women live in poverty.⁶ The economic toll of necessary social distancing measures, and business shutdowns, therefore, are harming our communities as well as many others.

Therefore, we call on federal, state and local public health authorities, health care institutions, and government officials to:

- Take a clear, strong, and public stand against any discrimination in this pandemic, whether based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, religion, or disability. This includes adding language prohibiting discrimination on all COVID-19 response legislation. It is particularly important to include explicit safeguards to prevent discrimination against residents of long-term care facilities, residential treatment facilities, halfway houses, youth in foster care systems, and other particularly vulnerable persons.
- Reach out to national, state and local LGBTQ+ organizations in order to listen to community concerns and to clearly convey the commitment to nondiscriminatory, culturally competent, and welcoming care for all.
- Ensure all COVID-19 data collection and reporting include SOGI demographic measures.
- Ensure government aid programs respond to the disproportionately distributed economic harms resulting from this pandemic and protect against discrimination on any of the factors noted above. There is an urgent and growing need for expanded income, medical benefits, housing and nutrition assistance for unemployed people and those whose wages have been suspended; job protection; inclusive paid sick leave and family leave; protections against evictions and utility cutoffs; and government-mandated safety precautions for health care workers, employees at grocery stores, delivery workers, sanitation workers, and others who are less able to protect themselves through social distancing.

As national, state, and local LGBTQ and allied organizations, we will continue to share important public health information to our populations and recommit to ensuring that racial equity and economic justice are leading values in our collective response to this pandemic.

Original Signers:

Whitman-Walker Health

National LGBT Cancer Network

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance

New York Transgender Advocacy Group

SAGE

Additional Signers:

1Hood
Alder Health Services
Alliance For Full Acceptance
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Athlete Ally
Atlanta Pride Committee
Bisexual Organizing Project - BOP
Black and Pink, Inc.
Boston Pride Committee
Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center
Cal Voices
California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
Capital Pride Alliance
Center on Halsted
CenterLink
Chicago House and Social Services Agency
Civil Liberties & Public Policy
Compass LGBTQ Community Center
Counter Narrative Project
CrescentCare
CRUX Climbing
DBGM, Inc.
Desert AIDS Project
Desi Q Diaspora IIc
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance - AllianceQ
Dreams of Hope
Equality California
Equality Federation
Equality Florida
Equality North Carolina
Erie Gay News
Evaluation, Data Integration, and Technical Assistance (EDIT) Research Program at Northwestern University
Family Equality
Fenway Health
Fierce Pride
FORGE, Inc.
Freedom for All Americans
Freedom Oklahoma
GALAEI
Garden State Equality
Gay City: Seattle's LGBTQ Center
Georgia Equality
Georgia Equality
GLAAD
GLBT Alliance
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Global Healthy Living Foundation/
CreakyJoints
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Hispanic Federation
HIV Medicine Association
Horizons Foundation
Howard Brown Health
Hudson Pride Center
Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation
Human Rights Campaign
Indy Pride, Inc.
Inside Out Youth Services
InterPride
Justice in Aging
JustUs Health
Keystone Business Alliance
Lambda Legal
Lansing Association for Human Rights
Legacy Community Health
Legal Aid at Work
Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender Physician Assistant (PA) Caucus
Lexington Fairness
LGBT Center of Central PA
LGBT Center of Greater Reading
LGBT Center of Raleigh
LGBTQ Center OC
LGBTQ Community Center of Southern Nevada
LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council of Pittsburgh
Mass Equality
Mazzoni Center
Methodist Federation For Social Action

Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH)
MKE LGBT Community Center
Movement Advancement Project
NAACP
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Equality Action Team
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Newark LGBTQ Community Center
Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center
Oakland LGBTQ Community Ctr.
Oasis Legal Services
Oklahomans for Equality
One Colorado
Our Family Coalition
Out Alliance
OutCenter of Southwest Michigan
OutFront Kalamazoo
OutFront Minnesota
OutNebraska
OutRight Action International
Pennsylvania Equality Project
Pennsylvania Youth Congress
People For the American Way
Persad Center, Inc.
PFLAG Jersey Shore
PFLAG National
PFUND Foundation
Planned Parenthood of the North Country New York
Pride Center of the Capital Region
Pride Community Center, Inc (Brazos Valley, Texas)
Pride Community Services Organization

PRIDENTON
Princess Janae Place Inc
PROCEED INC.
Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa County
RESULTS DC
RI Public Health Institute
Rockland County Pride Center
Safeguarding American Values for Everyone (SAVE)
San Diego Pride
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
San Francisco Voice & Swallowing Sero Project
SF LGBT Center
Silver State Equality-Nevada
SisTers PGH
SpeakOUT Boston
Still Bisexual
The Center on Colfax
The Charles Knapper Project
The Diversity Center
The Gala Pride and Diversity Center
The LGBT Center
The LGBT Center of Greater Reading
The LGBTQ Center Long Beach
The LGBTQ Committee of the National Action Network
The LOFT LGBT Community Services Center
The Montrose Center
The San Diego LGBT Community Center
The Source LGBT+ Center
The TransLatin@ Coalition
The Trevor Project
Thomas Judd Care Center
Thundermist Health Center
Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund
Trans Empowerment Project
Trans Lifeline
Transgender Law Center
Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico
Translatina Network

Triangle Community Center
TriVersity Center for Gender and Sexual
Diversity
Tucson Interfaith HIV AIDS Network Inc aka
TIHAN
U.S. People Living With HIV Caucus

Washington County Gay Straight Alliance,
Inc.
Wellness AIDS Services
William Way LGBT Community Center
Young Democrats of Georgia LGBTQ
(Stonewall) Caucus

¹ <https://www.metroweekly.com/2020/04/group-behind-nyc-covid-19-tent-hospital-is-forcing-volunteers-to-abide-by-anti-gay-statement-of-faith/>

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/23/you-dont-want-second-best/anti-lgbt-discrimination-us-health-care>

³ Ferrannini J. Online Extra: LGBTQ Agenda: State, City Criticized for Not Counting Sexual Orientation of COVID-19 Patients. Bay Area Reporter. April 10, 2020.

https://www.ebar.com/news/latest_news//290690/online_extra:_lgbtq_agenda:_state,_city_criticized_for_not_counting_sexual_orientation_of_covid-19_patients; Johnson C. States Won't Collect LGBTQ Data on COVID-19 – And Advocates Aren't Happy. The Washington Blade. April 1, 2020. <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2020/04/01/states-wont-collect-lgbtq-data-on-covid-19-and-advocates-arent-happy/>.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/nyregion/coronavirus-race-deaths.html>

⁵ Badgett MVL, Choi SK, Wilson BDM. LGBT Poverty in the United States. October 2019. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-in-the-united-states/>.

⁶ Ibid.