



MASSACHUSETTS BREAST CANCER COALITION



Breast Cancer in the LGBTQ+ Community

Regardless of gender or sexuality, having breasts is the most significant risk factor for developing breast cancer. Being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender in itself does not make a person more likely to develop cancer. Still, sociological factors associated with being a member of the LGBTQ+ community can increase risk. These factors include discrimination from uneducated or hostile healthcare providers, being less likely to have health insurance, facing stigma in access to housing and social services and being at greater risk for substance use.¹

Many breast health awareness messages are delivered to women when they see providers for contraceptive guidance or gynecological testing. Because lesbians are often less likely to seek or obtain these services or appointments, due to the factors described above, they are less likely to be aware these programs and tools exist. They are less likely to be diagnosed in the early stages of disease when breast cancer is most curable.²

Quick Stats: Did you know...

... AFAB individuals who never carry a pregnancy to term have an increased risk of breast and gynecological cancers.¹

...lesbian women are more than three times as likely to die from breast cancer compared to heterosexual women.³

...lesbian women have greater risks for developing breast cancer, including higher substance use rates, obesity, and lack of access to quality health care.⁴

...compared to heterosexual women, bisexual women were only 55% as likely to meet mammography guidelines.⁴

...a study found that trans individuals eligible to receive breast cancer screenings were 70% less likely to get them compared to cisgender individuals.³

...individuals who have had top surgery have a decreased risk of breast cancer, but still have breast tissue and should be screened regularly.⁷

Environmental Injustices Among LGBTQIA+ Populations

One of the first national studies that examined the environmental health risks among sexual minority populations was conducted in 2017 by researchers from the University of Texas at El Paso's Department of Sociology & Anthropology.⁴ They looked at the urbanization of sexual minorities into polluted inner-city neighborhoods following the end of World War II in pursuit of community kinship and social capital. Their findings supported their hypothesis that majority groups often exclude LGBTQ+ individuals, businesses, and higher levels of education from their heteronormative spaces, only exacerbating the environmental injustices for members of these minority communities.⁵

This study showed us that...

- health disparities among sexual minority populations may be exacerbated by harmful environmental exposures.⁵
- urbanization has afforded white and privileged people access to less polluted environments while racial and sexual minorities have been concentrated in more heavily polluted metro areas.⁵

continued...

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Breast Cancer in the LGBTQ+ Community

Cancer treatment and survival rates are greatly influenced by the discrimination and stress that LGBTQ+ patients experience both in and out of the healthcare system³. What can be done to help address the health disparities faced by those in the LGBTQ+ community?

- Through continuing education, ensure healthcare providers have the skills to appropriately inquire and support a patient's sexual orientation and gender identity during each visit to help promote continued use of care. Training to provide culturally competent care should be an integrated component of all patient care training.⁶
- Improve collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data in patient records and health-related surveys to better identify health disparities in the LGBTQ+ community.⁶
- Develop easy-to-access social services for LGBTQ+ youth who are susceptible to increased suicide rates and homelessness.⁵

Looking for a way to find the right LGBTQ-friendly health care provider?

Regular mammograms are important for all people with breasts and breast tissue, and regular gynecological exams are important for all people with a uterus and/or cervix, regardless of their gender or sexuality. There are resources available to find a healthcare provider who will respect your identity and provide appropriate care.

GLMA (Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality, formerly known as the Gay & Lesbian Medical Association) created a free online Provider Directory where individuals can search for primary care, specialists, behavioral services, and other health professionals in their area.

The World Professional Organization for Transgender Health (WPATH) has a tool on their website to help you find a provider in your area who is a WPATH member.

References:

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⁶ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health | Healthy People 2020. [Healthypeople.gov. https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health](https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health). Published 2020. Accessed January 4, 2021

⁷ Gynecological care for trans men. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/gynecological-care-for-trans-men/art-20473719> Published November 13, 2019. Accessed October 19, 2021.