



# Supporting Your LGBTQ Employees During Pride Month and Beyond



**Each year in June, the LGBTQ community and its allies celebrate Pride Month, showcasing the diversity of the LGBTQ community and exploring the past and present of LGBTQ advocacy.**

While our society has made great strides when it comes to discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, there's still plenty of work to be done. As an employer, one of the most meaningful ways you can honor Pride Month is by reviewing your health care benefits to ensure that they fully support the health and wellbeing of all of your employees, including those who are LGBTQ.

# Understanding LGBTQ Health Disparities

Health care equity is a real issue when it comes to the LGBTQ population. People who are LGBTQ are at higher risk than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts for a number of medical conditions, diseases, and infections, including cancer, obesity and behavioral health issues.<sup>1</sup> There are also barriers to health care access for LGBTQ individuals, most of which can be traced back to discrimination and oppression.<sup>2</sup>



People who are LGBTQ are denied treatment at a much higher rate than their straight and cisgender peers, and are more likely to be treated in a dismissive, even abusive manner. Health care providers may make inappropriate assumptions about individuals' gender and orientation, provide treatment that isn't right for their needs, or even lack a basic understanding of LGBTQ health concerns. In one recent study, 1 in 3 transgender people surveyed said they actually had to educate their doctor

<sup>1</sup> [LGBTQ+ Health Disparities](#) - Cigna, 2/2017

<sup>2</sup> [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health](#) - ODPHP

about what it meant to be transgender in order to receive appropriate care.<sup>3</sup> Patients have also reported being told that clearly unrelated health concerns are a result of their LGBTQ status.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of these kinds of experiences, LGBTQ individuals are less likely to get the medical care they need. In one study, 15% of LGBTQ Americans reported postponing or avoiding medical treatment due to discrimination, including nearly 3 in 10 transgender individuals.<sup>5</sup>

Choosing a health plan that's committed to supporting LGBTQ health and wellness can help ensure that all of your employees can access high quality care, no matter their sex, gender or sexual orientation.

## What to look for in a health plan to support your LGBTQ employees

**One of the most effective ways employers can support the health and wellness of their LGBTQ employees is by ensuring they have access to high quality, appropriate care through their health plan.**

**Make sure your health plan has relationships with providers who have received cultural competency training and/or specialize in care for LGBTQ individuals.**

Your plan's provider-selection tools should allow employees to search for providers that specialize in LGBTQ health needs, treatment, and concerns.

**Ensure that your plan includes robust coverage and resources for behavioral health and substance use disorders.** LGBTQ individuals are three times as likely to experience a mental health disorder as to individuals who identify as

<sup>3</sup> [The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020](#) - Center for American Progress, 10/6/20

<sup>4</sup> [Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ People From Accessing Health Care](#) - Center for American Progress, 1/18/18

<sup>5</sup> [The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020](#) - Center for American Progress, 10/6/20

straight<sup>6</sup> and report higher levels of drug and alcohol use.<sup>7</sup> A health plan that takes a whole-person approach to care, with care managers who specialize in behavioral health and innovative ways for members to access treatment, such as telehealth, apps, and online programs, can make it easier for LGBTQ members to get the support they need.

**Choose a plan that's committed to meeting the unique medical needs of transgender members, with coverage for gender affirming surgery, hormone therapy, and specialized behavioral health services.** Leading plans also offer integrated care management teams to help transgender members navigate their care. Such teams include both medical and behavioral health care managers who have specialized training in transgender health issues and cultural competency skills.

Finally, look at the policies and programs your health plan has in place within their own organization. If they're an LGBTQ-friendly workplace, chances are their products and services will reflect that commitment.



<sup>6</sup> [LGBTQI - NAMI](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Substance Use and SUDs in LGBTQ\\* Populations - NIH](#)

# Building an inclusive workplace culture

In a 2020 survey conducted by The Center for American Progress, 36% of LGBTQ and transgender respondents said they experienced harassment or discrimination in the workplace.<sup>8</sup> In addition to choosing a health plan committed to LGBTQ members, companies can take concrete steps to create a workplace that's fully inclusive and empowering to all employees. This might include:



**Ensuring that gender-neutral bathrooms are available**



**Offering educational opportunities for employees, such as cultural competency training and professionally hosted topically relevant lunch n' learns**



**Working with LGBTQ employees and their allies to generate ideas for partnerships and philanthropy that support the LGBTQ community**



**Supporting employee-led affinity groups for LGBTQ employees that provide opportunities for networking, volunteering, and advocacy**

<sup>8</sup> [The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020](#) - Center for American Progress, 10/6/20

For more information and ideas, employers can look to advocacy organizations like the **Human Rights Campaign**, which offer a range of resources related to workplace equality and inclusion.

At Tufts Health Plan, we recognize the challenges that LGBTQ individuals face when it comes to their health and wellbeing. It's why we're committed to promoting access to high-quality care for our LGBTQ members at every stage of their journey. Our commitment to equity extends to our own workplace as well: We're proud to have received a score of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's annual Corporate Equality Index (CEI), the nation's foremost benchmarking survey and report measuring corporate policies and practices related to LGBTQ workplace equality.

Visit [tuftshealthplan.com/employercontact](https://tuftshealthplan.com/employercontact) to learn more about how we can help you support your employees' health, happiness, and wellbeing.

