



## **LGBTQ+ Mental Wellness Care Toolkit**

Thank you for your interest in improving mental wellness for LGBTQ+ individuals. Your contributions to mental wellbeing are important. In fact, they can save lives. We hope you find the insights and resources in this toolkit helpful. We wish you and your patients well in the journey to better health.





*Young people feel really anxious and scared about the sort of direction that our country is going in. And what that means is that they don't see a place for them in the world. And it makes them feel hopeless and helpless because they see adults running the world into the ground...and so I think what we are seeing now is that young people are really concerned that as they get older, there is no future for them. And a lot of young people reaching out to us can't picture what it's like being 25. A lot of people say things like, "I don't imagine myself as an adult. What does that even look like? Where is there a job? Where is there a space? I'm living in a rural environment. I have to leave here, leave my family, leave my church."*

**Dr. Tia Dole**, Chief Clinical Operations Officer, The Trevor Project



## Key areas of concern

### Historic framing and legacy impact

- Antiquated mental illness designations in authoritative health care guides
- Societal promotion of LGBTQ+ “cures” (ex. discredited conversion “therapy”)
- Societal indifference to LGBTQ+ health crises (ex. AIDS/HIV)

### LGBTQ+ community stressors

- Harmful policy and rhetoric from political, religious, and media groups
- Harmful speech and actions from local community members
- Social, familial, and religious rejection
- Stigma and bias in employment, housing, health care, and other basic needs
- Visible racism and violence against minority and/or LGBTQ+ communities
- Pandemic-driven isolation from community (often chosen family)

### Common areas of misunderstanding or risk

- Lack of knowledge about the seriousness of the LGBTQ+ mental health crisis
- Higher risks of suicide ideation and attempt for LGBTQ+ communities
- Generational differences in demographics, expression, and communication
- Youth LGBTQ+ concerns and resultant cascading impacts on their wellbeing
- Antiquated, unchanged views of LGBTQ+ mental health needs
- Critical mental wellbeing impact of identity affirmation
- Amplified impact of multiple traumas and negative coping mechanisms



## Ways you can help

Issue	How you can help
<p><b>Education:</b> Providers may not understand how to be an active and effective ally.</p>	<p>Embrace the need for continuous learning. Be willing to take risks and defend LGBTQ+ individuals when witnessing words and actions harmful to community members. Consider becoming a mentor, participating in an LGBTQ+ resource group, or volunteering with an LGBTQ+ organization.</p>
<p><b>Education:</b> New pronouns and vocabulary may be unfamiliar to providers.</p>	<p>Take time to learn basic vocabulary related to gender diverse communities. Use the pronouns the patient requests. Be familiar and comfortable with three primary pronoun sets (he/him, she/her, they/them) as a starting point.</p>
<p><b>Education:</b> Providers may not know that an LGBTQ+ individual is considering suicide.</p>	<p>Understand suicide warning signs. Do not ignore instincts/intuition when you feel something is wrong. Ask appropriate questions and show support through words and actions. If a person is in danger, do not leave them and instead offer your time and support through their situation.</p>
<p><b>Safety/Trust:</b> Isolation from the COVID-19 pandemic and other sources like living in rural communities can exacerbate stress for LGBTQ+ individuals.</p>	<p>Ensure that LGBTQ+ community members have a steady, dependable support network (including virtually, if necessary). If relationally appropriate, be a part of support networks. Provide resources that can facilitate connection for times of higher connection need. (Our resources section has some suggestions.)</p>



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**Safety/Trust:** LGBTQ+ community members experience chronic stress from feeling unsafe, impacting both their physical and mental health.

Separating the outside world from what's happening within an organization is more and more difficult as the lines between life and work continue to blur. Personal, lived experiences drive both how environments are viewed and what people need to thrive.

Leaders should truly demonstrate care about diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging to start creating a psychologically safe environment. Model transparency, authenticity, and vulnerability in your own life. Openly adopt policies and affirm that your environment is a safe space.

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**Safety/Trust:** LGBTQ+ individuals (especially transgender and gender-diverse individuals) are often unsure if they are welcome in an environment.

To provide safe forums for self-identification, use pronouns in schools, meetings, name badges, email signatures, and other related situations. Use gender neutral terms in conversation. Promote LGBTQ+ individuals into visible leadership positions to build organizational competency and demonstrate welcomeness.

Know that everyone makes mistakes. If a mistake is made, take accountability, correct yourself, and move forward.

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**Safety/Trust:** LGBTQ+ individuals may not be open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Protect any sexual orientation and gender identity disclosures as you would any protected health information (PHI). Do not make identity assumptions and statements. Intentionally affirm your personal commitments to supporting diverse communities so people understand they are safe.

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**Safety/Trust:** LGBTQ+ individuals can be apprehensive about their patient experience with new providers and can even delay care because of this.

Know that first impressions are critically important. Take cultural and clinical competency continuing education to provide more responsive care. Consider learning from an LGBTQ+ reverse mentor, especially as a remunerated consultant. Communicate openness to patient feedback and personal/professional improvement.

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**Barriers to Access:** Members of the LGBTQ+ community have difficulty finding providers who are fluent with LGBTQ+ care, including in mental health.

Focus on being an openly affirming provider. Seek and take LGBTQ+ training. Seek inclusion in provider directories like those offered by Included Health or the GLMA. Ask insurers for provider network directory flags indicating that your practice is LGBTQ+ affirming, is an LGBTQ+ community member, is LGBTQ+ cultural competency trained, and/or offers LGBTQ+ medical services.

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**Barriers to Access:** LGBTQ+ community members may face rejection and hostile actions from government, family, and more, increasing mental stress, pressure, and risks.

Tackle social determinants of health (SDoH) needs in local LGBTQ+ communities. Listen to young and intersectional LGBTQ+ individuals about needs and then participate in tasks actively addressing those needs, including local non-profits and charities.

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**Systems/Process:** Patient intake forms often do not contain sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) options that fit the patient.

If collecting SOGI data is necessary, expand answer options on intake forms to include the LGBTQ community. Allow patients to provide pronouns. Do not pressure individuals into premature disclosures. Make answering SOGI questions optional. Recognizing context matters, check with recognized LGBTQ health organizations for best practice guidance. (Our resources section has more help on handling pronouns.)





## Resources for more information

### Resources for mental health support

- [\*\*The Trevor Project\*\*](#): Trained counselors available 24/7 for young people in crisis (**866-488-7386**)
- [\*\*Trans Lifeline Hotline\*\*](#): Transgender-operated 24/7 support line for crisis and non-crisis situations (**877-565-8860**)
- [\*\*Q Chat Space\*\*](#): A safe online community for LGBTQ+ teens to connect

### Resources for LGBTQ+ youth support

- [\*\*GLSEN\*\*](#): Organization devoted to supporting LGBTQ+ students and creating bully- and harassment-free and LGBTQ-inclusive learning environments
- [\*\*It Gets Better Project\*\*](#): Organization devoted to uplifting and empowering LGBTQ+ youth globally

### Resources for patients and families

- [\*\*Coming Out: A Handbook for LGBTQ Young People\*\*](#): The Trevor Project's guidebook for learning about identity and how to share identity with other people
- [\*\*Included Health\*\*](#): Health care concierge service for employees with gender diverse family members that also helps providers become more inclusive through education and a database of transgender-friendly providers

### Resources for improving your policies and practices

- [\*\*GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality\*\*](#): Online repository of resources for patients and providers
- [\*\*Human Rights Campaign Foundation\*\*](#): Resources for policy and practice guidance, housing topics such as EHR, pharmacy, patient interaction for health care providers
- [\*\*Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders \(SAGE\)\*\*](#): Research on LGBT seniors and resources for caregivers and improving cultural competency
- [\*\*Ready, Set, Go\*\*](#): National LGBT Health Education Center's document featuring guidelines and tips for handling SOGI data