

In 2017, 4.5 percent of the United States population identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning/queer (LGBTQ). According to a 2017 Gallup poll, 4.6 percent of Colorado population identify as LGBTQ, or approximately 262,000 people, ranking Colorado 13th in the nation for number of people identifying as LGBTQ.<sup>1</sup> The 2018 Point-in-Time Survey, the only national count of people experiencing homelessness, identified 51 people who identified as transgender or gender non-conforming, or 0.5 percent of the homeless population in Colorado.<sup>2</sup> The Point-in-Time otherwise does not survey gender expression or sexual orientation, making it nearly impossible to accurately report on the number of people experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ, and furthering the challenges to provide adequate services to people experiencing homelessness who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning/queer.



Young adults who identified as LGBTQ, ages 18 to 25, experienced homelessness within the last 12 months at over twice the rate of their heterosexual cisgender (a person whose gender matches the sex assigned at birth) peers.<sup>3</sup> LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, who self-report between 20 percent and 40 percent of the total homeless population, are significantly overrepresented

rejection, being forced out of the home because of family rejection, physical, emotional or sexual abuse at home or in school, aging out of the foster care system, or financial or emotional neglect by family.<sup>5</sup> There are currently no federal programs specifically designed to meet the needs of gay and transgender homeless youth, of which the average age is 14 years old.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, LGBTQ youth are often homeless for longer periods of time than their cisgender heterosexual peers, and transgender youth spend the most time experiencing homelessness of all subpopulations. Data from New York City shows that the average period away from family for youth is 26 months, and the average period is slightly higher for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth at 29 months. However, for transgender youth, it jumps dramatically to an average period of separation from family of 52 months.<sup>7</sup> Not only are LGBTQ youth becoming homeless at a younger age but are also subject to violence, discrimination, and trauma of life on the streets.



and under-resourced.<sup>4</sup> A report by the Williams Institute indicates that the top five reasons for homelessness among LGBTQ youth include running away due to family

### EMPLOYMENT

Employment and earnings are directly related to housing security and risk of homelessness. LGBTQ people face discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender expression which leads to lower wages and higher rates

of poverty and homelessness. Even with the Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 2007 which added protection for LGBTQ Coloradans into the state's employment anti-discrimination laws, and with Colorado as one of only 20 states that protect against both sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in employment in the public and private sector, disparities still exist in communities throughout the state and nation.<sup>8</sup>

Forbes recently reported that heterosexual men bring in the highest incomes, followed by gay men, heterosexual women, and lesbian women taking home the lowest pay.<sup>9</sup> Further still, transgender individuals face the greatest barriers to employment and economic security. Transgender individuals experience an unemployment rate three times greater than the nationwide rate.<sup>10</sup> As a result, people who identify as transgender face high levels of poverty and housing insecurity, with one in three living in poverty, and a whopping one in four reporting that they have experienced homelessness in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

LGBTQ communities of color face systemic injustices of discrimination in hiring, firing, and wages. A study from National Public Radio showed that while one in five LGBTQ people reported experiencing employment discrimination, one in three LGBTQ people of color reported the same.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, LGBTQ workers of color are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage jobs.<sup>13</sup> The outcome is extreme poverty for people of color in the transgender community, with black transgender individuals most impacted with 34 percent reporting a house income of less than \$10,000 per year.<sup>14</sup>

## HEALTHCARE

LGBTQ people have less favorable health outcomes due to lack of access, fear of discrimination, and disparate treatment. One of the major challenges for LGBTQ communities is accessing health care. Seventy percent of transgender or gender non-conforming patients and 56 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual patients surveyed have experienced some type of discrimination in healthcare, making it more challenging to access care and trust medical providers.

People in same-sex relationships are more likely to be uninsured or underinsured, more likely to have unmet health needs and, for women, are less likely to receive preventative screenings like mammograms or Pap tests.<sup>15</sup> Compared to the cisgender population, LGBTQ people have higher rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, Substance Use Disorders, weight control

challenges, smoking, depression, anxiety, and violence/victimization.

Equally concerning is the high rate of mental health concerns among LGBTQ people experiencing homelessness. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth experiencing homelessness are more likely than heterosexual youth experiencing homelessness to have a current major depressive episode, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and have made at least one suicide attempt.<sup>16</sup> This, in part, can be attributed to feelings of isolation and disconnection from social networks as well as childhood trauma disproportionately experienced by LGBTQ youth.<sup>17</sup>



Hormone replacement therapy, which may be medically necessary for a transgender person to feel like themselves, can be a financial burden and uncomfortable or difficult to access. This can lead to people going outside of the healthcare system to get the hormones they need. This may mean sharing of syringes for injectable hormones, putting a transgender person at risk of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other illnesses.<sup>18</sup>

While it is clear there are significant challenges within the healthcare system for LGBTQ people, the state has worked to create laws protecting this class of individuals. In a major win at the state legislature in 2019, Colorado passed a law banning conversion therapy for minors which prohibits a licensed physician specializing in psychiatry or a licensed, certified, or registered mental health care provider from engaging in conversion therapy with a patient under 18 years of age.

## HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless believes housing is a





human right. However, across our nation, LGBTQ people face housing discrimination. In one of the largest national studies of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, 19 percent reported being denied the sale or rental of a home or apartment, with the rates even higher among people of color: 47 percent among transgender or gender non-conforming Native Americans and 37 percent among African Americans; 11 percent of people in the same study reported being evicted because they were transgender or gender non-conforming. This rate nearly tripled among African Americans with 37 percent reporting that they were evicted because of their gender identity or expression.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, 23 transgender people were murdered in the United States, according to the Human Rights Campaign. Transgender people are put at even greater risk of violence when they do not have the safety, security, and privacy of a home. The threat of violence and discrimination may discourage transgender individuals experiencing homeless from accessing housing resources. Further, the shelter resources that are available may not offer services that meet the unique needs of the transgender community.

Under the Department of Housing and Urban Development, sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected classes under the Federal Fair Housing Act. While states have individually worked to enact laws protecting gender identity and sexual orientation, no national law exists to date. Twenty-eight states have no protections for this type of discrimination in housing, causing 73 percent of LGBT Americans to be strongly concerned about housing discrimination from agents, landlords, and neighbors.<sup>20</sup>

Without adequate protections, LGBTQ people are at greater risk of homelessness. Within the LGBTQ population, transgender individuals arguably face the greatest risk of victimization and most significant barriers to resources

when homelessness occurs. The Human Rights Campaign reports that roughly half of transgender individuals seeking emergency shelter have been sheltered based on their sex assigned at birth, rather than the way they present or identify, putting them in danger of harassment and even physical and sexual assault by other residents and staff.<sup>21</sup> One in four report having been assaulted while in emergency shelter. According to a survey from the National Center for Transgender Equity, about a third of transgender people in search of shelter had been outright rejected.<sup>22</sup>

In September 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development published a rule requiring federally funded shelters to admit, house, and serve all individuals in accordance with their gender identity, including transgender people. The rule expands on



nondiscrimination in HUD's 2012 protections.<sup>23</sup> However, a recent rule proposed by HUD could weaken protections for transgender people experiencing homelessness, including severely limiting access to shelters.

### BELINDA'S STORY

After her parents divorced, Belinda became homeless at the age of 15 and chose to move with friends to Denver in search of a better life. Shortly after her arrival, Belinda came out as a lesbian. She started working at a gay bar and restaurant as a cook and became part of the LGBTQ community. While working at the bar, Belinda started using cocaine and drinking heavily. She says she "lost everything through drugs," including her girlfriend, Linda.

Belinda experienced homelessness sporadically for nearly 30 years which came with added danger due to her sexual orientation. "Back then, I was scared of the cops because I'm gay. More than once, I've been attacked by the police because I'm a lesbian." While Belinda had

a strong community, anti-LGBTQ stigma put her at risk among her peers on the streets as well.

In 2009, Belinda was able to address her physical and behavioral health challenges at the Stout Street Health Center and secure housing with Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. She describes her experience at the Coalition as “the red carpet treatment.” Once she was settled in her apartment, a neighbor sold her a computer and helped her set up a Facebook profile. Through Facebook, Belinda was able to reconnect with her ex-girlfriend, Linda. “We got lunch. When I saw her, it was like the love had never left,” she says, smiling big. Belinda and Linda have been together for eight years and Belinda has been stably housed for ten years. “I just want to live a peaceful life and focus on improving my health. I feel like I’ve survived a lot.”

## COLORADO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS AND THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Through its broad range of services, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless works to help LGBTQ people and others to heal from the trauma of the streets, secure high-quality housing, and access integrated health care. The Coalition believes in creating low barriers to services, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and works to provide patient-centered, inclusive, trauma-informed care for the LGBTQ population. At the Coalition’s Stout Street Health Center (and its five satellite health center locations), staff treat the whole patient and strive to adopt best practices in LGBTQ health care. The Coalition works tirelessly to serve all people and provide a safe place to live and thrive.

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