



National Coalition *for* LGBT Health

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American Psychological Association
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(CHAMP)
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Lesbian Health & Research Center, UCSF
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New York LGBT Community Center
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AIDS Institute
Philadelphia Health Department, AACO
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Southeastern Massachusetts
The Praxis Project
Rainbow Access Initiative
The SafeGuards Project
St. Cloud State University- GLBT Services
Tapestry Health
University of California, San Francisco
UMHS-Comprehensive Gender Services Program
Verbena Health
Whitman-Walker Clinic
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

**Testimony for the Committee on Education and Labor; Health,
Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee
Hearing: "An Examination of Discrimination Against Transgender
Americans in the Workplace"
Submitted by Rebecca E. Fox, National Director
National Coalition for LGBT Health**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on the harm employment discrimination causes transgender people. The National Coalition for LGBT Health is composed of sixty organizations from across the country, including health departments, community health centers and mental health service organizations. Based on their extensive experience in public health and with the transgender community, our members identify access to stable, safe employment that includes health insurance as a key factor to improve health outcomes and alleviate health disparities.

Being transgender is neither pathological nor a barrier to employment, although transgender people experience significant, pervasive, and interlinked barriers to both health care and employment. In fact, transgender people exhibit mental health problems that are comparable to those seen in other persons who experience major life changes, relationship difficulties, chronic medical conditions, or significant discrimination on the basis of minority status.¹

Transgender people are significantly more likely to be unemployed than the general population. Because employment is tied to health insurance in the U.S., transgender Americans likewise face a high rate of being uninsured. Studies in major metropolitan areas, including New York City, San Francisco and Washington, DC, have found fully half of the transgender community is uninsured compared to around 12% among non-transgender people. These rates become even higher for transgender people of color.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) agree with the Coalition's position that employment protection is linked to better health outcomes. Both government agencies state that the lack of access to employment and the social marginalization created through denial of employment can lead to higher rates of physical and mental illnesses for transgender people.

In a fact sheet, the CDC posits that the lack of employment protections lead to an increased risk of HIV infection for transgender people. According to the CDC, the social marginalization of transgender people can result in the denial of employment, and “transgender people face stigma and discrimination, which exacerbates their HIV risk. The stigma of transgender status is associated with lower self-esteem, increased likelihood for substance abuse and survival sex work in [male to female] MTFs, and lessened likelihood of safer sex practices.”ⁱⁱ The HIV rate among transgender people, especially transgender women, is between 14 and 69 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to SAMHSA, a lack of civil rights protections—including employment nondiscrimination statutes—leads to an increase in mental illness and substance abuse in the transgender community.^{iv} In *A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals*, the agency makes the direct link between drug and alcohol usage by the transgender community and lack of employment protections. SAMHSA also states, “additional relapse triggers or significant clinical issues for transgender clients might include the inability to find, engage in, or maintain meaningful or gainful employment simply because they are transgender.”^v

Lack of insurance results from lack of employment, which results from stigma and discrimination bolstered by a gap in the laws for protecting civil rights. Being chronically uninsured or underinsured means transgender people do not access preventative care, such as screenings for heart disease, high blood pressure and cancers. In turn, this lack of preventative care increases the morbidity rates and shortens the lifespan of many transgender people resulting in the disparities we see in health outcomes for this community compared to the general public. This is especially true for transgender people of color.

The Committee has undertaken an important step towards eliminating health disparities by holding today’s hearings. While employment protections are not a cure all, they are certainly an important step in improving the health and well-being of transgender people. The Coalition asks that Congress continue this work by enacting legislation that helps transgender people achieve employment free from the fear of discrimination.

ⁱ Dean, Lauren et al. “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: Findings and Concerns.” *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association* 4.3 (2000).

ⁱⁱ “HIV/AIDS and Transgender Persons” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed online at <<http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/pdf/FS-Transgender-06192007.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Leslie, Dominique Rosa et al. “Clinical Issues With Transgender Individuals.” *A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals*, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007.

^v Ibid.