

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Health: A Priority in *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020*



The Wisconsin state health plan *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020: Everyone Living Better, Longer* (<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/>) represents the third decade of statewide community health improvement planning that is designed to benefit the health of everyone in Wisconsin and the communities in which we live, play, work, and learn. *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 (HW2020)* declares a bold vision: Everyone Living Better, Longer, which reflects the plan's goals to:

- Improve health across the life span, and
- Eliminate health disparities and achieve health equity

The plan's mission is to assure conditions in which people can be healthy, and members of healthy, safe, and resilient families and communities.

HW2020 builds on the previous plan (*HW2010*) by strengthening and clarifying its emphasis on health disparities and achieving health equity. The plan seeks to improve the health of vulnerable populations, based on the following characteristics:

- race and ethnicity
- socioeconomic status and educational attainment
- sexual orientation and gender identity
- disability status

LGBT Populations in the State Plan

HW2020 is organized around twelve health focus and nine infrastructure areas. Many of these address sexual identity/orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual) and gender identity (transgender). For example in the health focus area *Tobacco use and exposure*, the third objective is:

By 2020, decrease the disparity ratio by 50 percent in tobacco use and exposure among populations of differing races, ethnicities, sexual identities and orientations, gender identities, educational or economic status, and high-risk populations.

Health focus and infrastructure areas most relevant to disparities experienced by LGBT populations include the following:

Health Focus Areas

Alcohol and drug use
Chronic disease
Communicable disease
Injury and violence
Mental health
Nutrition
Oral health
Physical activity
Reproductive and sexual health
Tobacco use and exposure

Health Infrastructure Areas

Access to health services
Adequate public health funding
Diverse & competent workforce
Public health research & evaluation
Systems to manage health information

HW2020 excels not only in its recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity as critical determinants that affect the health of individuals and communities, it also acknowledges that individuals are affected by multiple social determinants, as exemplified by this quote from a community leader, featured prominently on page 6 of the document:

“Health disparities and health equity are a complex set of issues for populations who experience life through the intersections of race, gender and/or as a sexual minority. The stress of these identities caused by stigma and discrimination, not the identity itself, affects a person’s self esteem, which often affects people’s ability to take preventive measures to assure good health. We must therefore teach psychological independence. We are not what they say we are.”

*Brenda Coley, Chairperson
Wisconsin Minority Leadership Council
Director of Adult Services
Diverse and Resilient, Inc., Milwaukee*

Building on The Foundation of the State Health Plan

In order to reduce disparities experienced by LGBT populations, it is critical to engage in the following activities:

- ***Expand collection, analysis and use of data regarding LGBT populations***
The Institute of Medicine recommends that sexual orientation and gender identity should be routinely included in data collection as standard demographic items.¹ **HW2020** identifies comprehensive data as a crucial component to tracking progress in eliminating health disparities. Wisconsin collects data regarding sexual minority status (sexual orientation and sex of sex partners) on the adult Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). In addition, surveys beyond YRBS and BRFSS should expand collection of sexual minority variables.²
- ***Collaborate with those working in health focus and infrastructure areas to highlight needs and expand services to LGBT populations***
LGBT individuals experience significant disparities in a variety of health areas, including: alcohol and drug use, injury and violence prevention, mental health, reproductive and sexual health, and tobacco use and exposure. To reduce LGBT disparities, programs can:
 - align resources with the LGBT data that are currently available;
 - include the LGBT community in funding announcements and requests for proposals (RFPs);
 - include LGBT community leaders to plan and improve services; and
 - design tailored educational, media, and outreach programs and materials to ensure that services reach LGBT people and are provided in a culturally competent manner.³

Agencies are encouraged to complete the **HW2020 Endorsement Form** ([click here](#)) to show how their agency priorities and activities support the goals and objectives of **HW2020**.

For additional information, see the Wisconsin Department of Health Services LGBT Health web site at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lgbthealth/>.

¹ IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2011. *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press

² Federal surveys that currently ask about sexual orientation include: [National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey](#); [National Survey of Family Growth](#); [National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions](#); [National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health](#); and the [National Comorbidity Study-R](#).

³ The Joint Commission. *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide*. Oak Brook, IL, October 2011. Available from: <http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/LGBTFieldGuide.pdf>