



## For Immediate Release

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### Contact:

Scout, 401-267-8337, [scout@cancer-network.org](mailto:scout@cancer-network.org) or  
Hector Vargas, [hvargas@glma.org](mailto:hvargas@glma.org).

## **OPEN LETTER ABOUT CORONAVIRUS AND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES** ***Over 100 Organizations Ask Media & Health Officials to Weigh Added Risk***

New York, NY - Over 100 national and local organizations have signed on to an open letter to health and media outlining how COVID-19 may pose an increased risk to the LGBTQ+ population and laying out specific steps to minimize any disparity.

"As the media and health communities are pushed into overdrive about COVID-19, we need to make sure the most vulnerable among us are not forgotten. Our smoking rates alone make us extremely vulnerable and our access to care barriers only make a bad situation worse," notes Dr. Scout, the Deputy Director for the National LGBT Cancer Network, "This letter outlines simple steps to ensure no population is further stigmatized by a virus."

"As an organization dedicated to the health and well-being of LGBTQ communities, we urge LGBTQ individuals to practice measures recommended by public health experts, such as frequent handwashing, to prevent the spread of this virus," said GLMA President Scott Nass, MD, MPA. "At the same time, like our colleagues who joined the open letter, we call on public health officials to ensure the LGBTQ community is considered and included in the public health response to COVID-19 based on potential risk factors that exist in our community."

The letter was initiated by a coalition of six organizations: the National LGBT Cancer Network; GLMA Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality; Whitman-Walker Health; SAGE; New York Transgender Advocacy Group; and National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance. The full text and additional organizational response resources can be found online at this link (<https://cancer-network.org/coronavirus-2019-lgbtq-info/>) and is included below.

## OPEN LETTER ABOUT CORONAVIRUS AND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

As the spread of the novel coronavirus a.k.a. COVID-19 increases, many LGBTQ+ people are understandably concerned about how this virus may affect us and our communities. The undersigned want to remind all parties handling COVID-19 surveillance, response, treatment, and media coverage that LGBTQ+ communities are among those who are particularly vulnerable to the negative health effects of this virus.

Our increased vulnerability is a direct result of three factors:

1. The LGBTQ+ population uses tobacco at rates that are 50% higher than the general population<sup>1</sup>. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that has proven particularly harmful to smokers.
2. The LGBTQ+ population has higher rates of HIV and cancer, which means a greater number of us may have compromised immune systems, leaving us more vulnerable to COVID-19 infections.
3. LGBTQ+ people continue to experience discrimination, unwelcoming attitudes, and lack of understanding from providers and staff in many health care settings, and as a result, many are reluctant to seek medical care except in situations that feel urgent – and perhaps not even then.

In addition, there are more than 3 million LGBTQ+ older people living in the United States. LGBTQ+ elders are already less likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to reach out to health and aging providers, like senior centers, meal programs, and other programs designed to ensure their health and wellness, because they fear discrimination and harassment. The devastating impact of COVID-19 on older people – the current mortality rate is at 15% for this population – makes this a huge issue for the LGBTQ+ communities as well<sup>2</sup>.

LGBTQ+ communities are very familiar with the phenomena of stigma and epidemics. We want to urge people involved with the COVID-19 response to ensure that LGBTQ+ communities are adequately served during this outbreak. Depending on your role, appropriately serving our communities could involve any of the following actions:

- Ensuring that media coverage notes the particular vulnerabilities of any person with pre-existing respiratory illnesses, compromised immune systems or who uses tobacco products. While populations – like LGBTQ+ communities – can be at increased risk, it is important to note the overall state of health that contributes to any person's increased vulnerability to contracting COVID-19.
- Ensuring health messaging includes information tailored to communities at increased risk for COVID-19, including LGBTQ+ populations. An example of such tailored messaging is including imagery of LGBTQ+ persons in any graphic ads.
- Providing LGBTQ+ individuals resources to find welcoming providers, such as the ones provided [here](#), if they are experiencing symptoms like a cough or fever and need to seek medical attention.
- Ensuring funding to community health centers is distributed in a fashion that accounts for the additional burden anticipated by LGBTQ-identified health centers.
- Whenever possible ensuring health agencies partner with community-based organizations to get messaging out through channels we trust.

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<sup>1</sup> Buchting et al. 2017; Creamer et al. 2019

<sup>2</sup> Wu Z, McGoogan JM. Characteristics of and Important Lessons From the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak in China: Summary of a Report of 72 314 Cases From the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. JAMA. Published online February 24, 2020. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.2648

- Ensuring surveillance efforts capture sexual orientation and gender identity as part of routine demographics.
- Ensuring health workers are directed to provide equal care to all regardless of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity/presentation, ability, age, national origin, immigration status, race, or ethnicity.
- Ensuring that all COVID-19 responses take into account exceptionally vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ communities, including our elders, bi people, and black and brown trans and gender nonconforming/nonbinary people.
- Since xenophobic responses are heavily impacting the Asian American communities, ensuring all communications and responses related to COVID-19 attempt to counter any such xenophobic responses, avoid racial profiling, and discourage the public from doing so as well.
- Ensuring LGBTQ+ health leadership, along with all providers and health care centers, are provided with timely and accurate information to disseminate.

As LGBTQ+ community and health leadership, the undersigned organizations offer to stand shoulder to shoulder with the mainstream health leadership to make sure we learn from history and do not allow any population to be disproportionately impacted or further stigmatized by a virus.

#### **Initial signers:**

National LGBT Cancer Network  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing  
LGBTQ Equality  
Whitman-Walker Health

SAGE  
New York Transgender Advocacy Group  
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander  
Alliance

#### **Additional Signers:**

Advocates for Youth  
Advocating Opportunity  
Alder Health Services  
Antioch University MFA Program  
Athlete Ally  
Atlanta Pride Committee  
Bi+ Georgia  
BiNet USA  
Bisexual Organizing Project-BOP  
Black Lives Matter Houston  
Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center  
Cal Poly Pride Center  
California LGBTQ Health and Human  
Services Network  
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center  
Capital Pride Alliance  
CARES  
Center on Halsted  
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT  
Centers  
Civil Liberties & Public Policy  
Cobb County Democratic Party

Compass LGBTQ Community Center  
Corktown Health Center  
Counter Narrative Project  
CreakyJoints & Global Healthy Living  
Foundation  
CrescentCare  
Darker Sister Center  
Deaf Queer Resource Center  
Desert AIDS Project  
Desi Queer Diaspora  
Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance - AllianceQ  
Eastbay Stonewall Democratic Club  
Einstein Health Network Pride Program  
Equality Arizona  
Equality California  
Equality Federation  
Equality North Carolina  
Equitas Health  
Erie Gay News  
Evaluation, Data Integration, and Technical  
Assistance (EDIT) Program, ISGMH,  
Northwestern University

Family Equality  
Fenway Health  
Fierce Pride  
Four Corners Alliance for Diversity  
Freedom Oklahoma  
GALAEI  
Garden State Equality  
Gay City: Seattle's LGBTQ Center  
Gay Elder Circle  
Gender Equality New York, Inc. (GENY)  
Gender Justice League (Washington State)  
Georgia Equality  
GLAAD  
GLBT Alliance of Santa Cruz  
Greater Erie Alliance for Equality  
Greater Palm Springs Pride  
Harvey Milk Foundation  
Hetrick-Martin Institute  
HIV AIDS Alliance of Michigan  
HIV Medicine Association  
Horizons Foundation  
Howard Brown Health  
Human Rights Campaign  
Independence Business Alliance  
Indiana Youth Group  
Infectious Diseases Society of North America  
Inside Out Youth Services  
InterPride  
Iris House Inc  
Keystone Business Alliance  
Lambda Legal  
Lansing Area AIDS Network (LAAN)  
Lansing Association for Human Rights  
Legacy Community Health  
Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender PA Caucus, Inc.  
LGBT Center of Central PA  
LGBT Center of Greater Reading  
LGBT Center of Raleigh  
LGBT Elder Initiative  
LGBTQ Center OC  
Lyon-Martin Health Services, a program of HealthRight360  
Mass Equality  
Matthew Shepard Foundation  
Mazzoni Center  
Milwaukee LGBT Community Center

Minority Veterans of America  
Mossier Social Action and Innovation Center  
Nanook Diversity & Action Center  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Coalition for LGBT Health  
National Equality Action Team  
National LGBTQ Task Force  
National LGBTQ Task Force  
Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center  
No Justice No Pride  
Oakland LGBTQ Community Ctr.  
Oasis Legal Services  
Oklahomans for Equality  
Oklahomans for Equality  
One Colorado  
Openhouse  
Our Family Coalition  
Out Alliance  
Out And Equal  
Out Boulder County  
OutCenter of Southwest Michigan  
OutFront Kalamazoo  
OutFront Minnesota  
OutNebraska  
OutRight International  
Pennsylvania Youth Congress  
Persad Center, Inc.  
PFLAG National  
PFund Foundation  
Pizza Klatch  
Positive Women's Network  
Pride Center of the Capital Region  
Pride Center Of Vermont  
Pride Community Center, Inc  
Pride Community Services Organization  
Princess Janae Place Inc  
Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa County  
Rhode Island Public Health Institute  
Rockland County Pride Center  
San Diego Pride  
San Francisco AIDS Foundation  
San Francisco Voice and Swallowing  
San Francisco Voice and Swallowing  
SAVE - Safeguarding American Values for Everyone  
SERO Project

SF LGBT Community Center  
Sisters PGH  
St. James Infirmary  
Still Bisexual  
The DC Center for LGBT Community  
The Gala Pride and Diversity Center  
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender  
Community Center  
The LGBT Health Resource Center of Chase  
Brexton Health Care  
The LGBTQ Center Long Beach  
The LOFT LGBT Community Services Center  
The Montrose Center  
The Social Impact Center  
The Source LGBT+ Center  
The Trevor Project  
Thomas Judd Care Center  
Trans Empowerment Project  
Trans Lifeline  
Trans Youth Equality Foundation  
Transgender Education Network of Texas  
(TENT)  
Transgender Law Center  
Transgender Legal Defense & Education  
Fund  
TRANSnetwork  
Triangle Community Center  
Trillium Health

TriVersity Center for Gender and Sexual  
Diversity  
Tucson Interfaith HIV AIDS Network Inc aka  
TIHAN  
Twin Cities Pride  
U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus  
UNIFIED-HIV Health and Beyond  
Washington County Gay Straight Alliance,  
Inc.  
We Are Family  
Wellness AIDS Services  
William Way LGBT Community Center  
Young Democrats of Georgia LGBTQ  
(Stonewall) Caucus

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*The National LGBT Cancer Network works to improve the lives of LGBTQ cancer survivors and those at risk by educating the LGBTQ communities about our increased cancer risks; training health care providers; and advocating for LGBTQ engagement in mainstream cancer organizations. We are home to one of eight CDC funded national tobacco and cancer disparity networks. Learn more at [cancer-network.org](http://cancer-network.org).*

*GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality is a national organization committed to ensuring health equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) and all sexual and gender minority (SGM) individuals, and equality for LGBTQ/SGM health professionals in their work and learning environments. To achieve this mission, GLMA utilizes the scientific expertise of its diverse multidisciplinary membership to inform and drive advocacy, education, and research. To learn more, visit [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org).*