



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

HRC ISSUE BRIEF: HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

THE PROBLEM

Homelessness and housing insecurity is a growing problem confronting LGBT individuals of all ages across the country. The economic downturn continues to disproportionately impact lower income LGBT families and individuals. Family rejection, coupled with the absence of employment discrimination protections and relationship recognition, compounds financial insecurity for many in our community.

LGBT youth are overrepresented in the overall homeless youth population

LGBT youth are at an increased risk for homelessness. As the average age of coming out drops, LGBT children are faced with family rejection at a younger, more vulnerable age. Many LGBT youth report their identity as being directly linked to their homelessness. Once on the street, these youth are at increased risk for sexual abuse and exploitation.

Emergency shelters are not consistently safe or welcoming for LGBT families

Homelessness is traumatic and disruptive for any family. While many shelters provide emergency services for parents with children allowing families to stay intact, some have policies that explicitly deny gay and lesbian couples from receiving services as a family unit. LGBT families with children, particularly in states without marriage equality or other relationship recognition, are routinely denied services and family-unit housing that would otherwise be provided to heterosexual families.

Transgender individuals experience discrimination in housing and emergency shelters

Many transgender individuals experiencing homelessness, due to employment and housing discrimination or family rejection, turn to emergency shelters for relief. All too often, however, they are turned away outright solely based on their gender identity, or are not permitted access to the appropriate housing for their gender. This is unsafe and many homeless transgender individuals may have no other choice but to stay on the street—exposed to the elements and the possibility of bias-motivated violence.

LGBT older adults face discrimination in housing and long-term care

LGBT older adults are more likely to age without the benefits of children and other family supports compared to other seniors. LGBT seniors also have lower rates of homeownership due to lifelong employment and housing discrimination. Few states have extended protections to keep a same-sex spouse from being forced to move from the couple's home as a result of a partner's illness and Medicaid income eligibility requirements. In the absence of a support or caregiving network, a long term-assisted living facility is often the only option when an LGBT older adult becomes disabled or is otherwise unable to afford rent, and such facilities may not be welcoming or affirming of an LGBT individual.

WHAT HAS THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION DONE TO ADDRESS LGBT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS?

- The Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has awarded numerous grants under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act specifically to assist LGBT homeless youth. ACF also provided \$13.3 million to the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center for a five-year effort to address barriers to permanency and well-being for LGBT foster youth.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued regulations prohibiting discrimination in federal public housing programs and federally-insured mortgage loans. HUD also requires its grantees to comply with

LGBT-inclusive state and local housing discrimination protections. The Department has also published guidance providing discrimination protection for some members of the LGBT community under the Fair Housing Act; for example, categorizing discrimination against transgender people based on sex stereotyping as sex discrimination under the Act for purposes of enforcement.

HOW IS HRC WORKING TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN THE LGBT COMMUNITY?

- HRC urges Congress and the administration to ensure increased federal funding and prioritization of data collection on the LGBT homeless population, specifically youth and aging populations, and support LGBT specific centers and shelters to meet the unique needs of the community.
- HRC encourages state, local, and federal agencies to ensure that LGBT youth are placed in welcoming and affirming foster homes.
- HRC continues to push Congress to appropriate funds to conduct the Prevalence and Incidence Study of runaway and homeless youth mandated by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 2008, providing invaluable data about the populations impacted by youth homelessness.
- HRC is actively engaged with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as the Department implements the recent Equal Access regulations and creates guidance requiring emergency shelters to be welcoming to all families and prohibiting unsafe housing practices within single-sex shelters.
- HRC continues to work in coalition with other LGBT and aging groups to encourage the administration to adopt LGBT cultural competence standards for all federally- funded nursing homes and long-term assisted living facilities. HRC also continues to urge the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging to designate LGBT older adults as a target population for purposes of funding and outreach for all programs under the Older Americans Act.
- HRC continues to provide resources and support for the passage of the Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) Act, which would explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation in housing and credit.

DID YOU KNOW?

20-40%

of all homeless youth identify as LGBT.¹

62% of homeless LGBT youth attempt suicide.²

1 in 5 transgender people in the U.S. have been refused a home or apartment, and more than one in ten have been evicted, because of their gender identity.³

NEARLY 1/3 of transgender people report being denied housing in an emergency shelter because of their gender identity. 42% of transgender people facing homelessness have been forced to stay in a shelter living as the wrong gender.⁴

43% of LGBT older adults in long term care report discrimination by health care providers.⁵

¹ National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce Policy Institute, National Coalition for the Homeless, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness* (2007).

² Van Leeuwen Jm et al, *Child Welfare* (2005).

³ National Center for Transgender Equality, National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (2011).

⁴ National Center for Transgender Equality, www.transequality.org

⁵ National Senior Citizens Law Center National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders, Lambda Legal, National Center for Lesbian Rights and National Center for Transgender Equality, *LGBT Older Adults in Long-term Care Facilities: Stories From the Field* (2011).