



Exploring self-directed violence among sexual and gender minority Veterans

Disclosures

- The author/presenter has no conflicts of interest to disclose.
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- The opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the funders, institutions, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or the United States Government.

Review suicide research among LGBT and LGBT Veterans

Explain theoretical frameworks salient to LGBT health

Describe VA initiatives and resources for health equity

This presentation includes topics related to suicide, if you or someone you know may be experiencing distress or thoughts of self-harm, help is available 24/7:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Poll Question 1

What is your primary role in VA?

- A. Student, trainee, or fellow
- B. Health care provider
- C. Researcher
- D. Data manager or analyst
- E. Administrative or policy-maker

Gender is more than just sex

Gender identity

Innate sense of self as male, female both, or neither

Gender expression

Social portrayal of gender identity

Gender nonconformity

Identity and expression transcend socially constructed binary of female and male



'Transgender' is an umbrella term

Transgender having gender identity or gender expressions not traditionally associated with one's sex assigned at birth

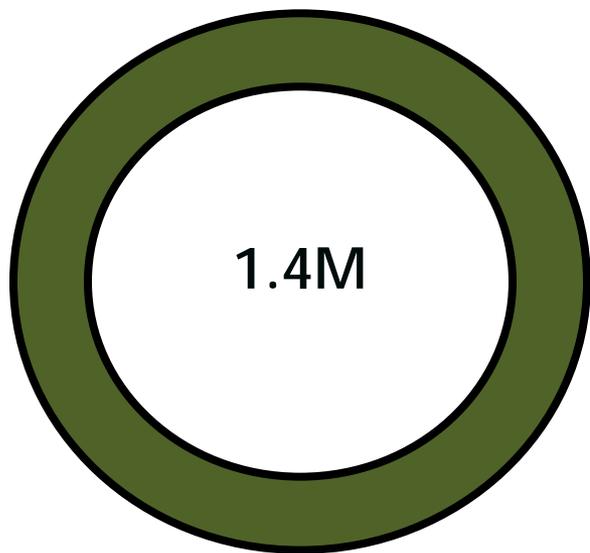
Transgender woman assigned male sex at birth and identifies as female/feminine

Transgender man assigned female sex at birth and identifies as male/masculine

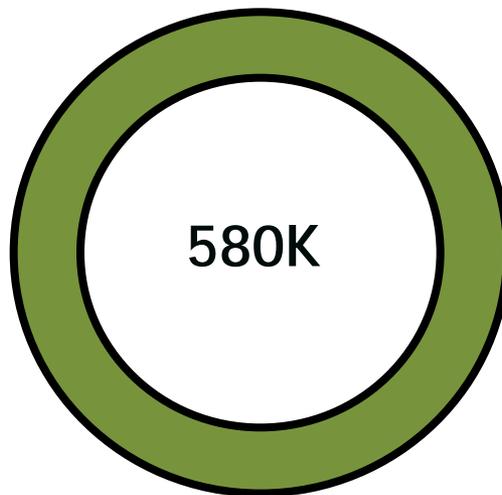
There are a lot of gender identities, and they do not depend on medical therapies or interventions.

How many transgender people in US?

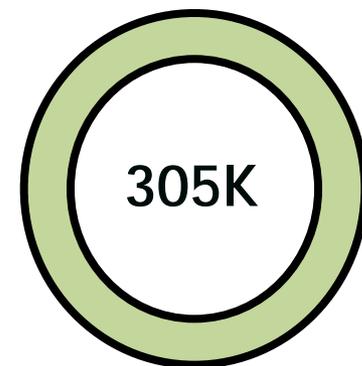
Transgender¹



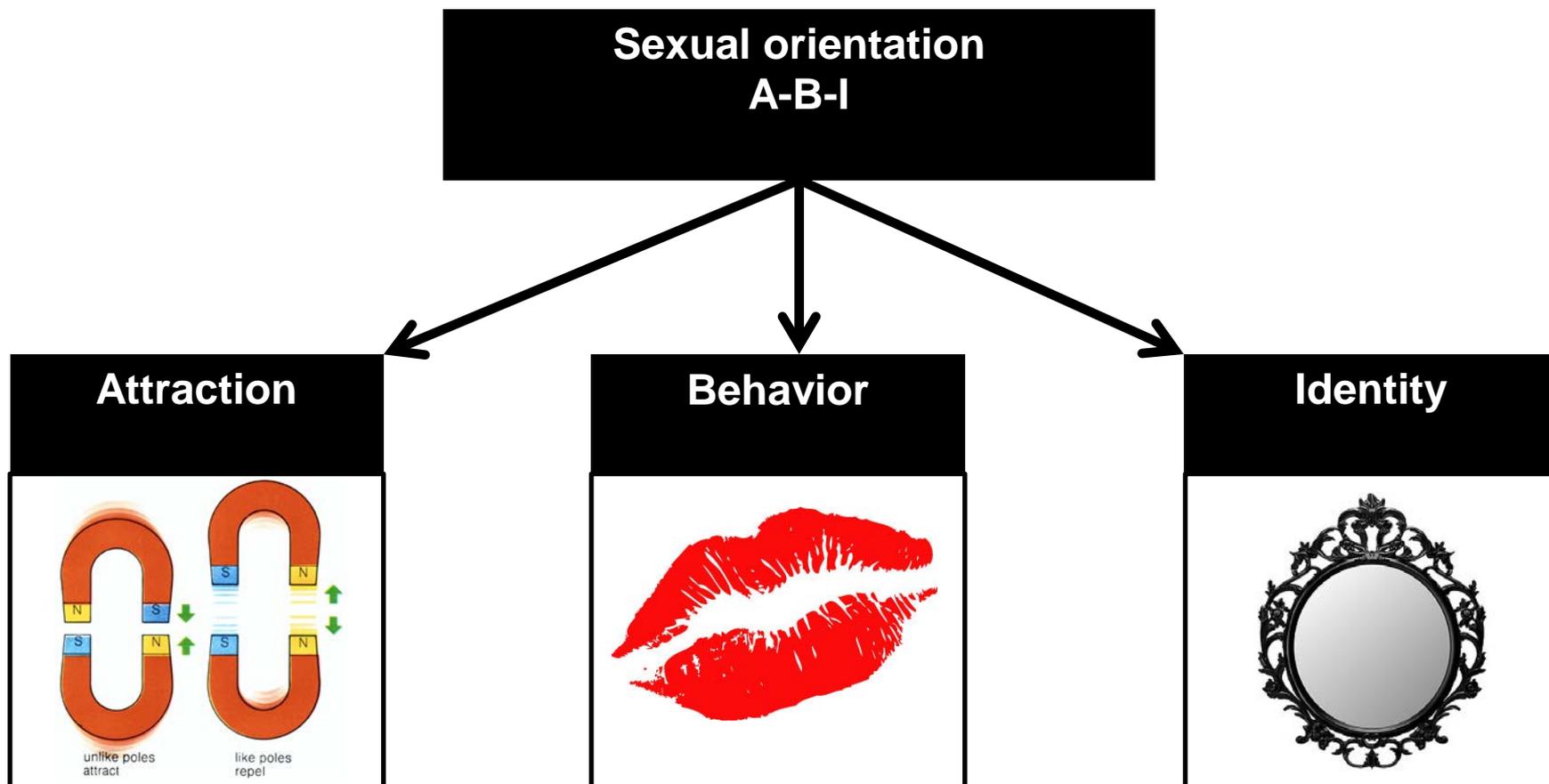
Wyoming



Pittsburgh

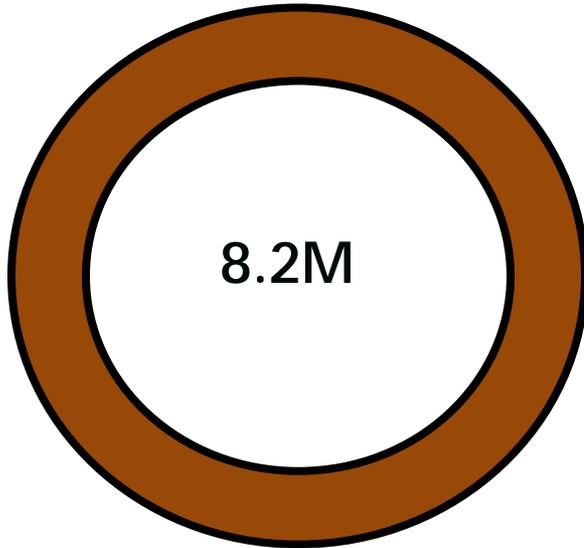


Sexual orientation typically defined by 3 constructs

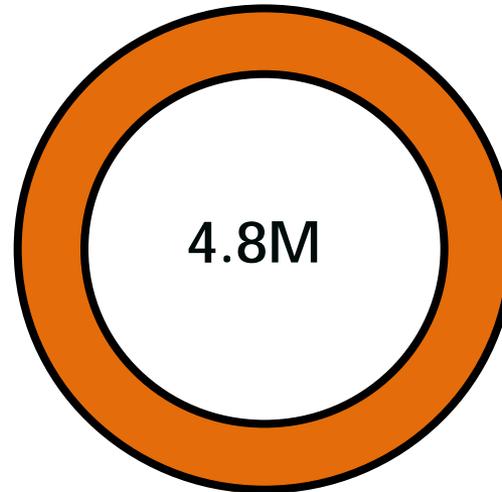


How many LGB people in US?

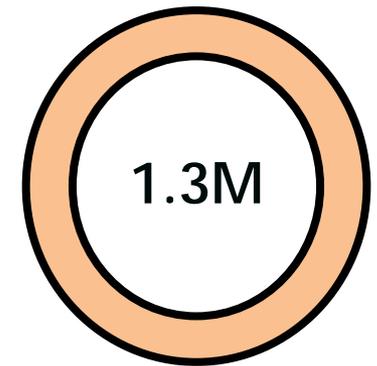
LGB¹



Alabama



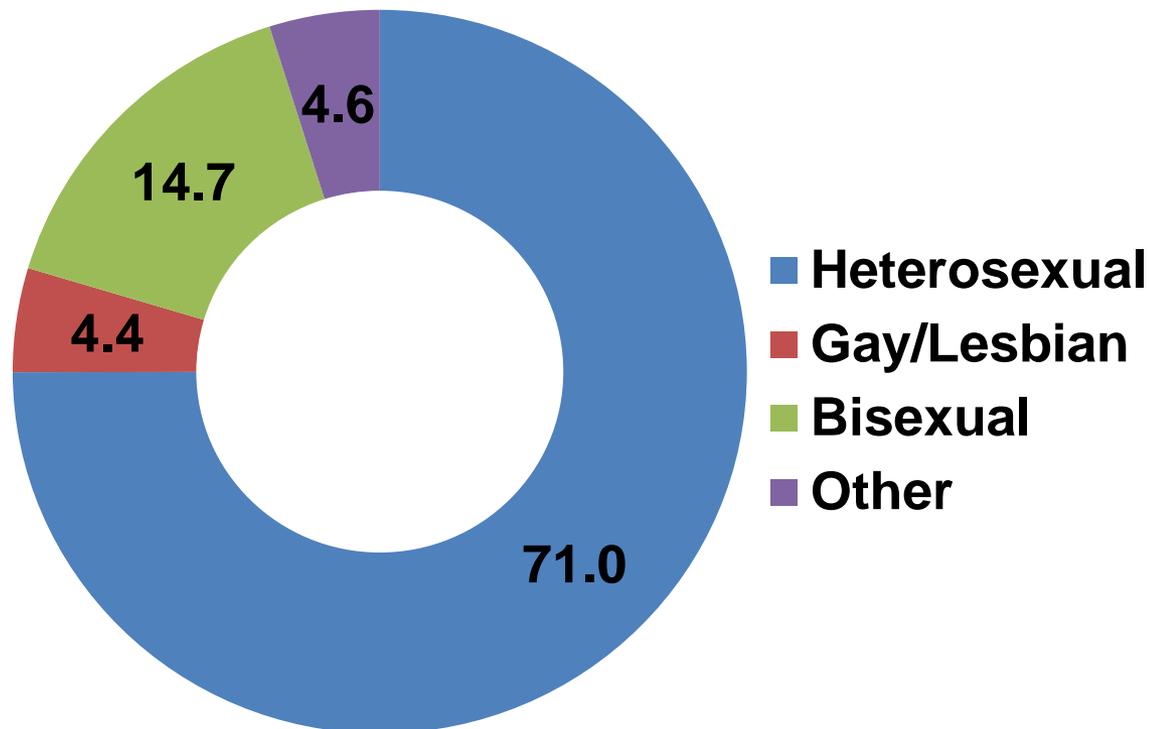
Dallas, TX



LGB is not T

Sexual orientation is different from gender identity

EX: Sexual identity among transgender respondents, 2015 BRFSS



Objectives

Review suicide research among LGBT and LGBT Veterans

Explain theoretical frameworks salient to LGBT health

Describe VA initiatives and resources for health equity

Suicide ideation and attempt more frequent among LGB than heterosexuals

Decades of research – so many studies, there are at least 4 reviews

BMC Psychiatry



Research article

Open Access

A systematic review of mental health harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual populations
Michael King*^{1,2}, Joanna Seal

Journal of Adolescent Health 49 (2011) 115–123



JOURNAL OF
ADOLESCENT
HEALTH

www.jahonline.org

Journal of Homosexuality, 58:10–51, 2011
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DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2011.534038



between Sexual Minority and

Suicide and Self-Harm in Bisexual, and Transgender and Intersex Populations

AJPH RESEARCH

ANN P. HAAS, PhD,¹ MORTON M. SILVERMAN, PhD, MSPH,³ ROBERT A. MATHIAS, PhD,⁴ SUSAN D. COCHRAN, PhD,⁵ and MORTON M. SILVERMAN, PhD,⁶

Lifetime Prevalence of Suicide Attempts Among Sexual Minority Adults by Study Sampling Strategies: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Travis Salway Hottes, MSc, Laura Bogaert, MSc, Anne E. Rhodes, PhD, David J. Brennan, PhD, and Dionne Gesink, PhD

Sexual minority adults have over 3-5xs higher prevalence of lifetime suicide attempt

AJPH RESEARCH

Lifetime Prevalence of Suicide Attempts Among Sexual Minority Adults by Study Sampling Strategies: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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4%

Heterosexuals,
population
studies

17%

Sexual minority,
all
studies

11%

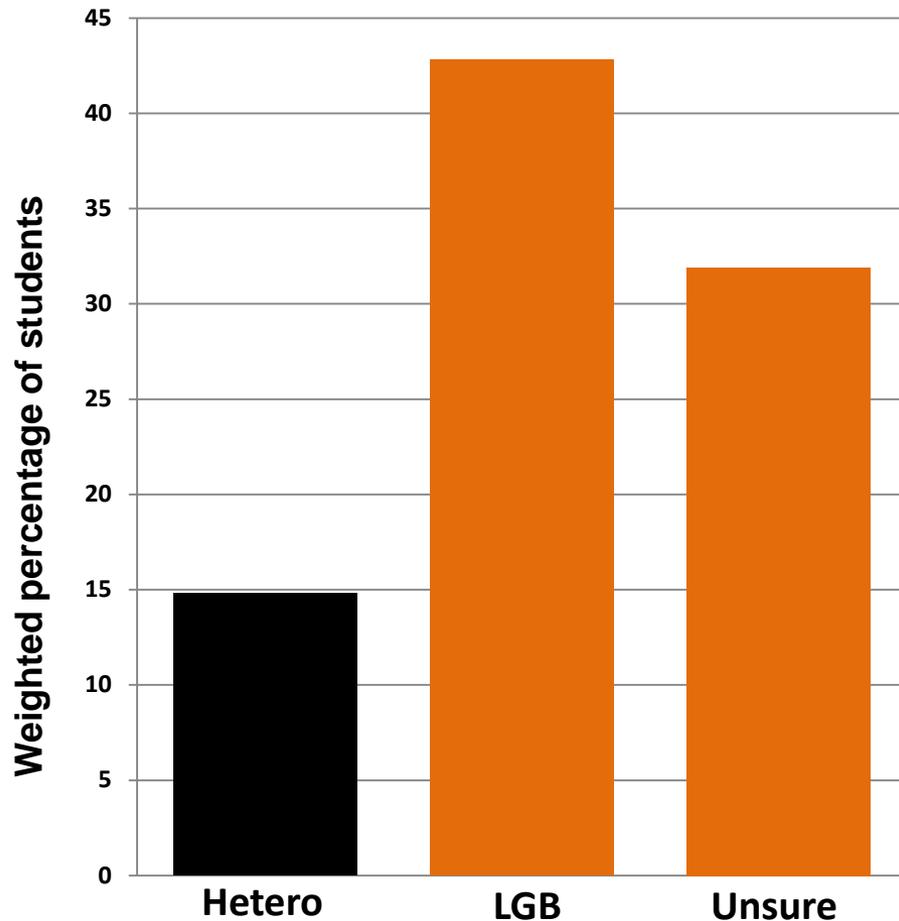
Sexual minority, population studies

20%

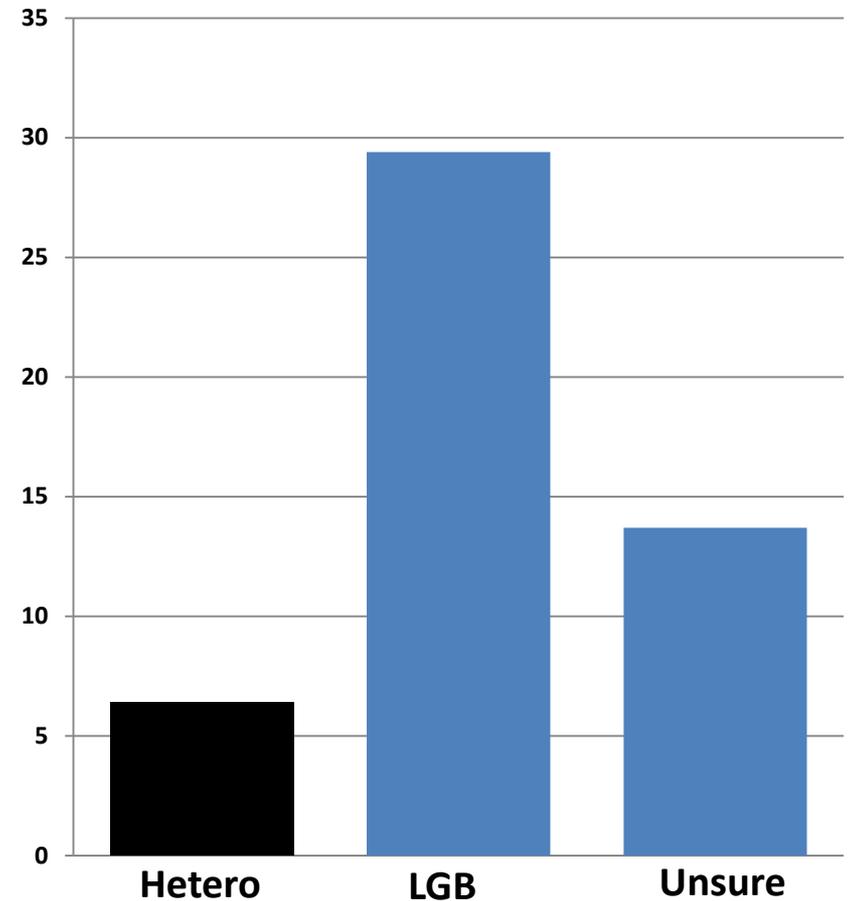
Sexual minority, community studies

Disparities among LGB adolescents

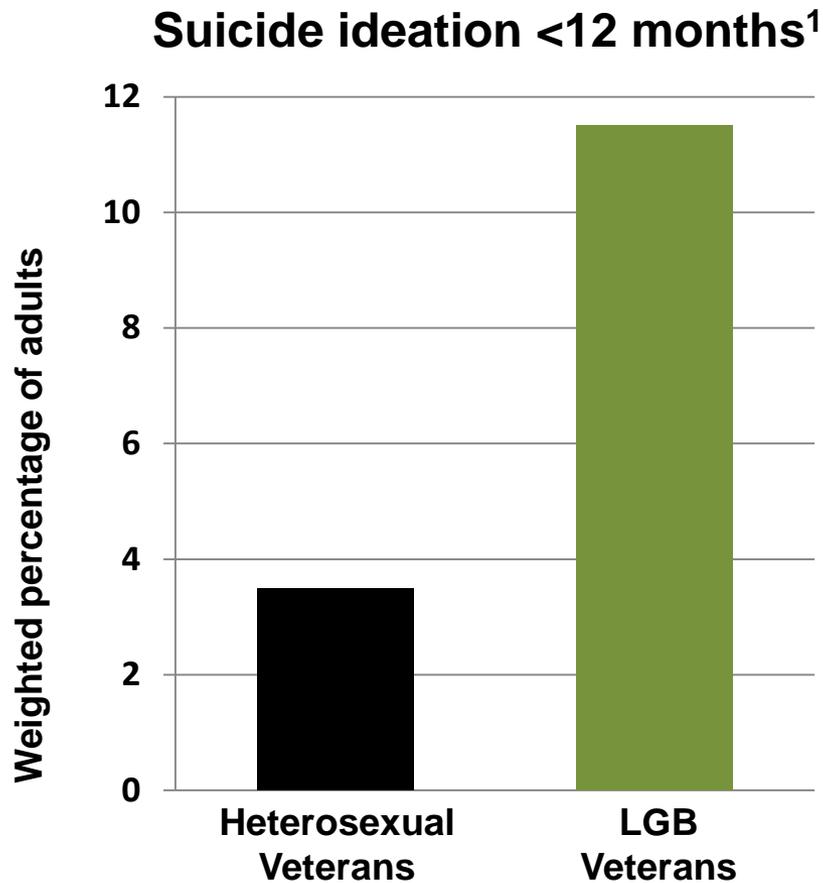
Suicide ideation <12 months



Suicide attempt <12 months



Similar disparities among LGB Veterans



MA Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System



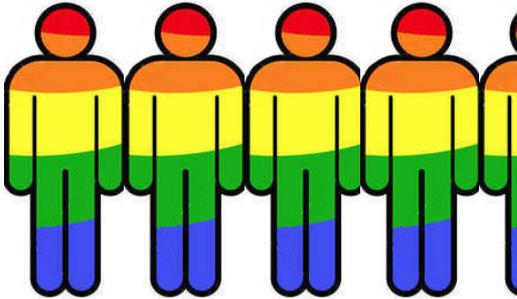
California Health Interview Survey

1. Blosnich JR, Bossarte RM, Silenzio V. Suicidal ideation among sexual minority veterans: results from the 2005-2010 Massachusetts BRFSS. *Am J Public Health.* 2012; 102(S1):S44-47.

2. Blosnich JR, Mays VM, Cochran SD. Suicidality among veterans: Implications of sexual minority status. *Am J Public Health.* 2014; 104(S4):S535-7.

Similar disparities among LGB Veterans

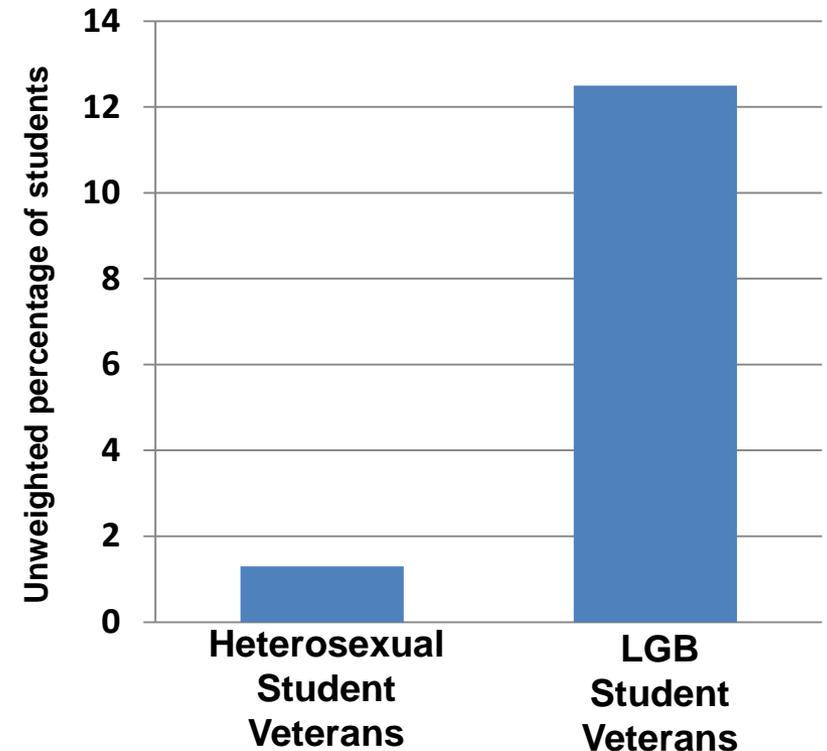
Intentional self-harm <12 months¹



Among college-enrolled Veterans, sexual minority Veterans had greater odds than heterosexual Veterans

aOR=4.35 (95%CI: 1.60-11.82)

Suicide attempt <12 months²

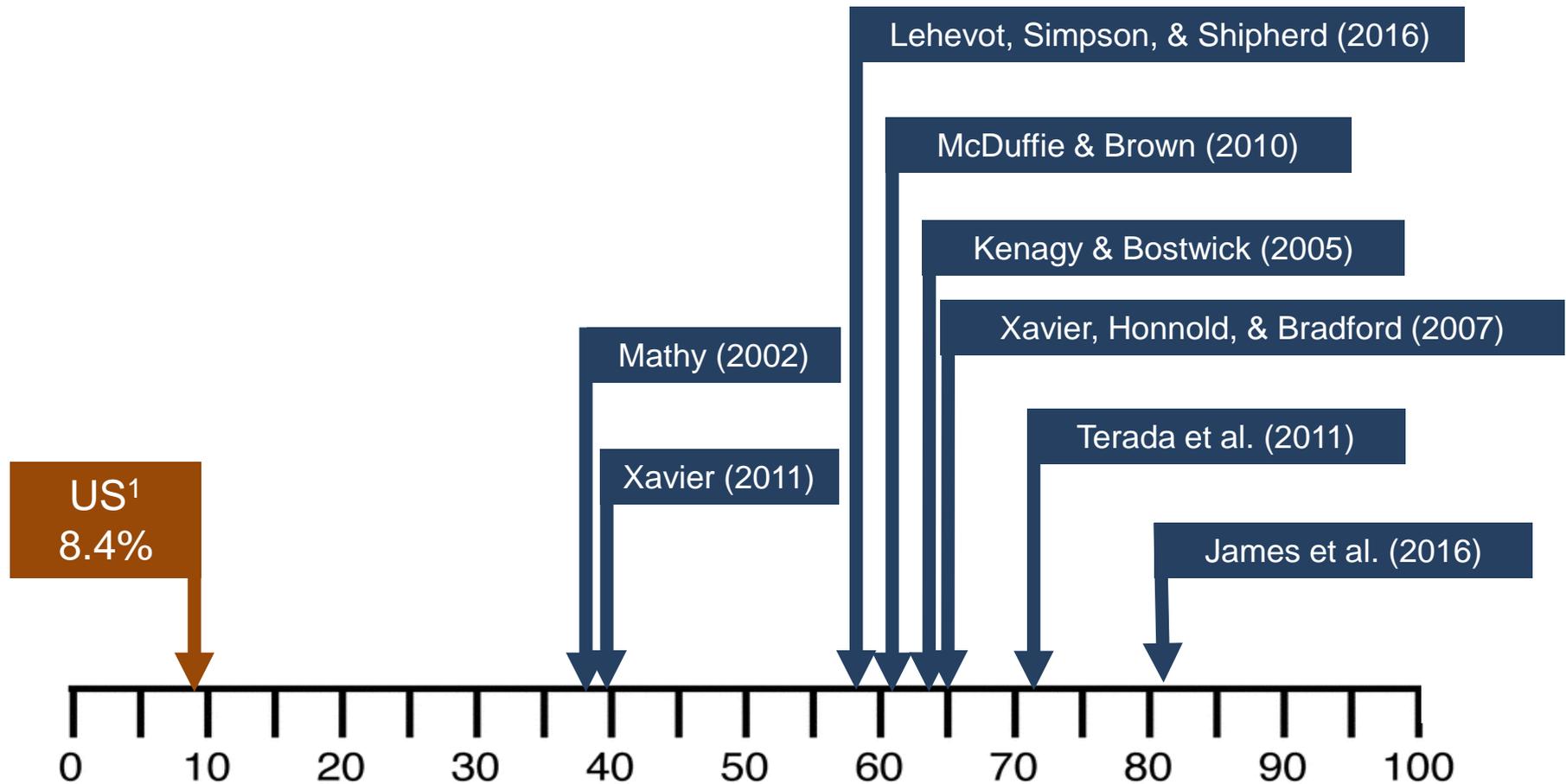


National College Health Assessment

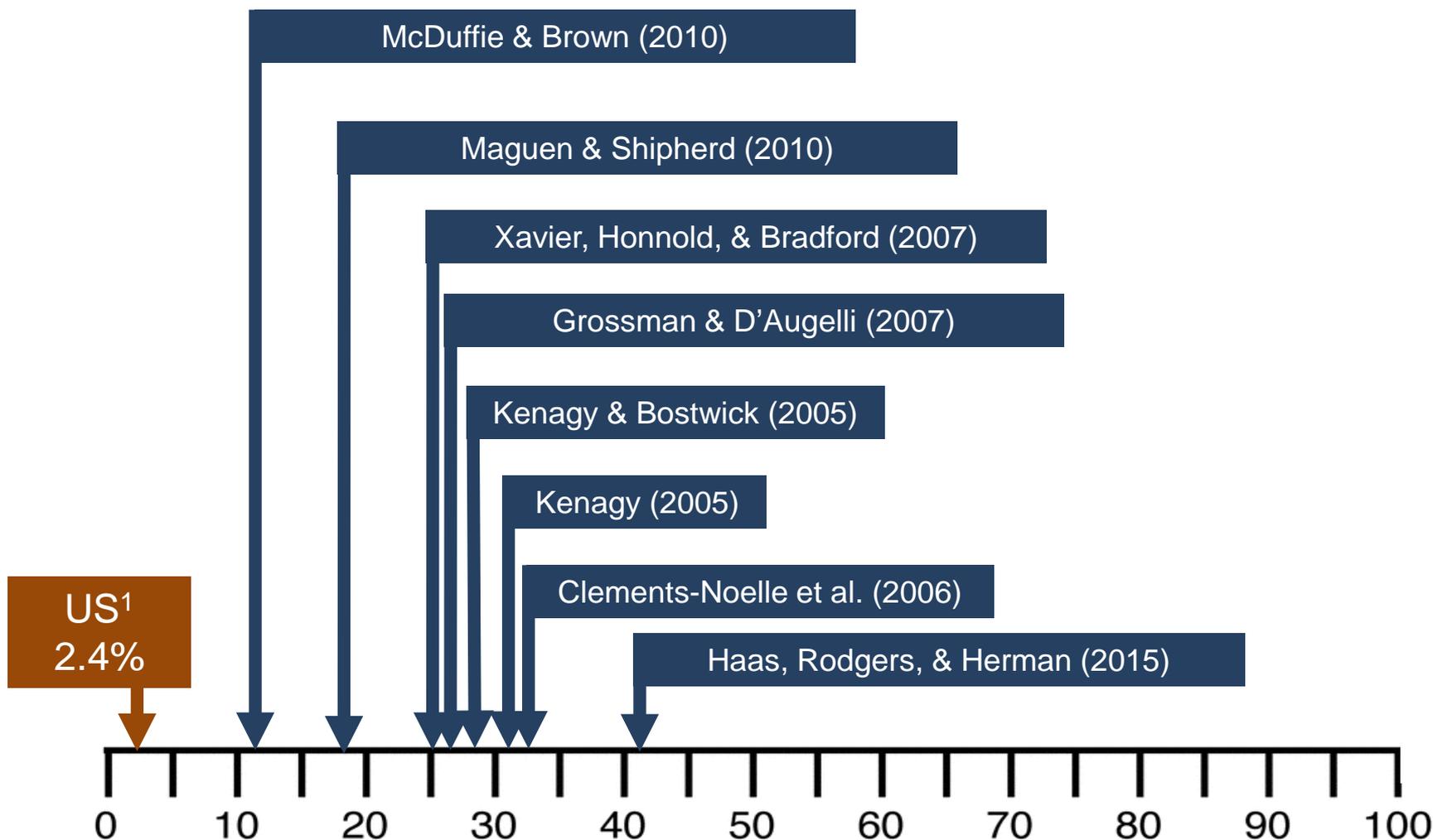
1. Blosnich, J.R., Kopacz, M.S., McCarten, J., & Bossarte, R.M. (2015). Mental health and self-directed violence among student service members/veterans in postsecondary education. *Journal of American College Health*, 63(7), 418-426

2. Blosnich, J.R., Gordon, A.J., & Fine, M.J. (2015). Associations of sexual and gender minority status with health indicators, health risk factors, and social stressors in a national sample of young adults with military experience. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 25(9), 661-667.

High prevalence of lifetime suicide ideation among trans individuals

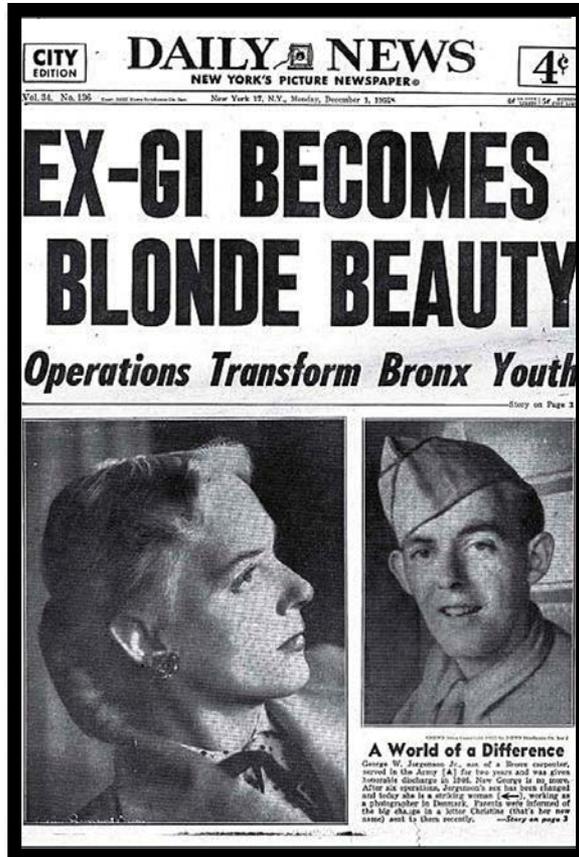


High prevalence of lifetime suicide attempt among trans individuals



1. Baca-Garcia E, Perez-Rodriguez MM, Keyes KM, et al. Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in the United States: 1991-1992 and 2001-2002. *Mol Psychiatry*. 2010; 15(3): 250-259

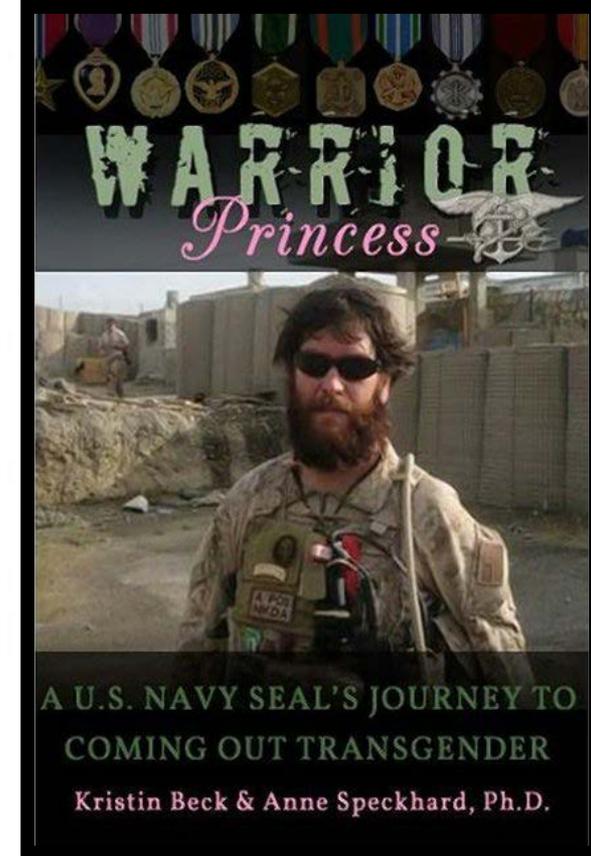
Historical context of trans issues and the U.S. military



1952



1999



2013

National Transgender Discrimination Survey: 20%¹

Community sample of MTF: 30%²

Gender identity disorder (GID)

- 302.85 GID in adolescents or adults
- 302.6 GID not otherwise specified

6.2/100,000 among VHA utilizers³

4.3/100,000 in US general population

About 10-13% of
US adults are
Veterans

1. Gates G, Herman JL. (2014). Transgender military service in the United States. www.williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/military-related/us-transgender-military-service/
2. Shipherd JC, Mizock L, Maguen S, Green KE. (2012). Male-to-female transgender veterans and VA health care utilization. *Int J Sexual Health*. 2012;24:78-87.
3. Blosnich JR, Brown GR, Shipherd JC, Kauth M, Piegari RI, Bossarte RM. Prevalence of Gender Identity Disorder and suicide risk among transgender veterans utilizing Veterans Health Administration care. *Am J Public Health*. 2013; 103(10): e27-e32.

A word about GID

We don't use it anymore

- That is soooooo DSM-IV...
- Gender dysphoria is DSM-V

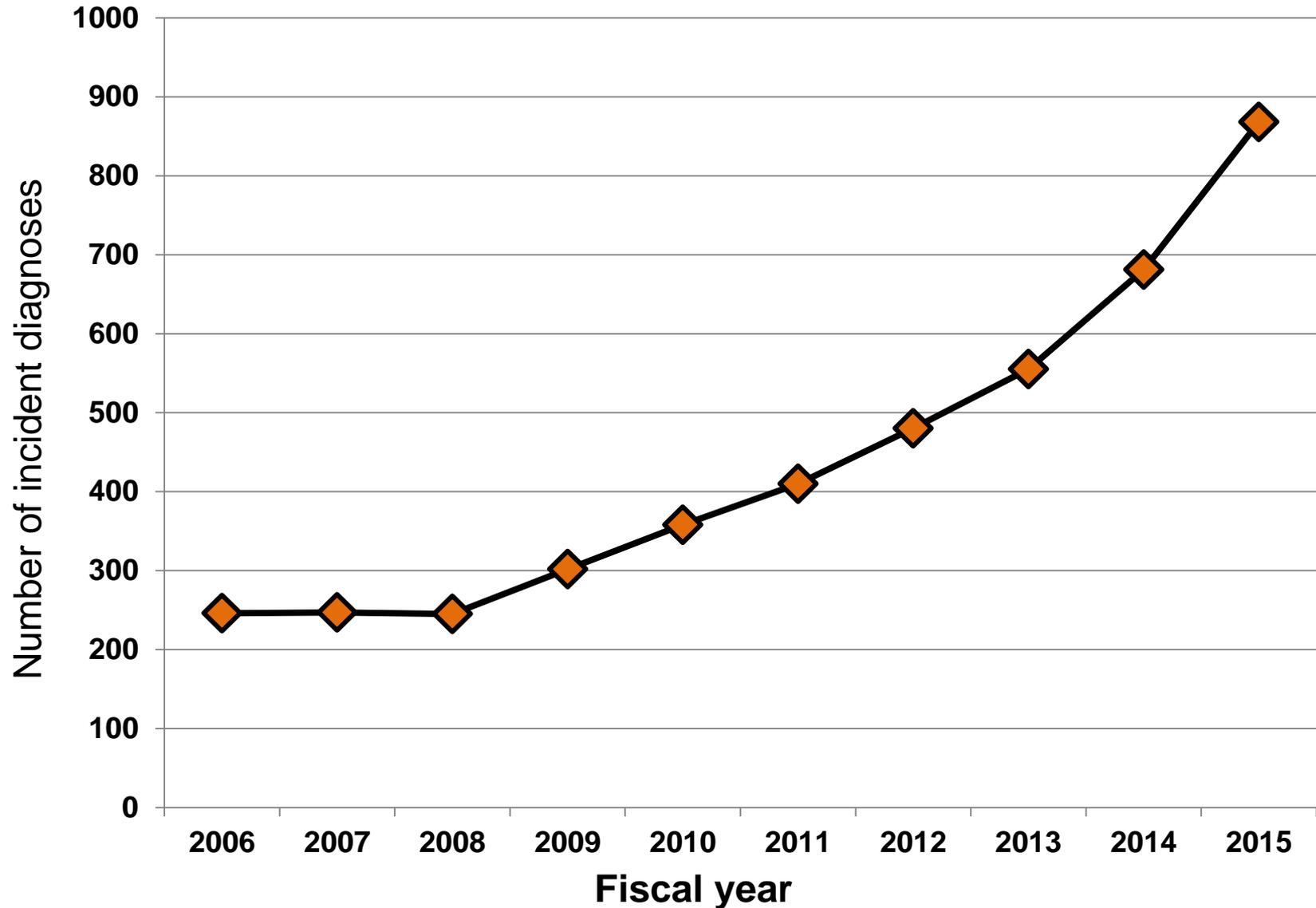
It's controversial

- Pathologizing person rather than social and institutional problems that create distress for person

**Not all people with GID/GD may identify as trans;
Not all trans people have diagnoses of GID/GD**

- In a trans sample, 50% reported a GID diagnosis¹

Increasing Prevalence of GID/GD in VHA



Why so many trans people in the VHA?

Flight into Hypermasculinity¹

GID more prevalent among natal males²

Policies to affirm care for trans patients³

Increasing visibility of people who are trans

1. Brown, G. Transsexuals in the military; flight into hypermasculinity. *Arch Sexual Behav.* 1988; 17(6), 527-537.

2. Landen M, Walinder J, Lundstrom B. Prevalence, incidence and sex ratio of transsexualism. *Acta Psychiatr Scand.* 1996;93(4):221---223.

3. VA. Veterans Health Administration Directive 2013-003: Providing health care for transgender and intersex veterans. Veterans Health Administration. 2013. Available at: http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2863. Accessed December 2, 2013

High rate of suicide-related events among VHA trans veterans¹

Suicide-related events, VHA Veterans with GID

<u>Fiscal year</u>	<u>GID cases with >1 suicide-related event</u>	<u>Total GID diagnoses</u>	<u>Period prevalence^a</u>
2009	40	979	4,085.80
2010	49	1,162	4,216.87
2011	68	1,326	5,128.21

For comparison, in 2010, the crude prevalence in VHA approximately 200/100,000 patients²

a= per 100,000 population

1. Blosnich, J.R., Brown, G.R., Shipherd, J.C., Kauth, M., Piegari, R.I., & Bossarte, R.M. (2013). Prevalence of Gender Identity Disorder and suicide risk among transgender veterans utilizing Veterans Health Administration care. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(10), e27-e32.

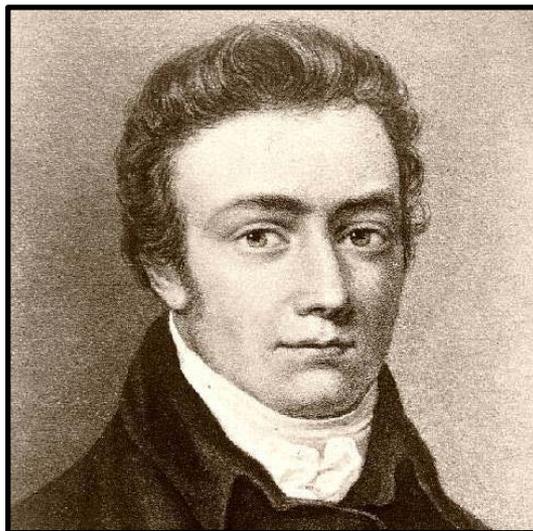
2. Kemp, J.E., & Bossarte, R.M. (2013). Suicide data report, 2012. Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs.

Poll Question 2

Given what we just covered, what do you think about the suicide death rate among LGBT populations?

- A. It's higher than non-LGBT
- B. It's lower than non-LGBT
- C. Meh...probably the same as non-LGBT
- D. *crickets chirping*

Lack of LGBT status limits utility of mortality data



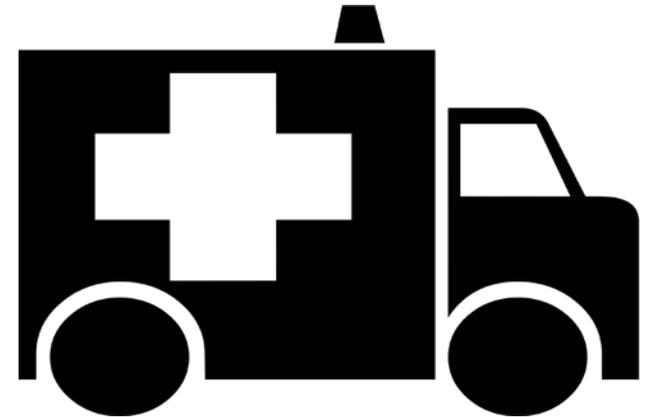
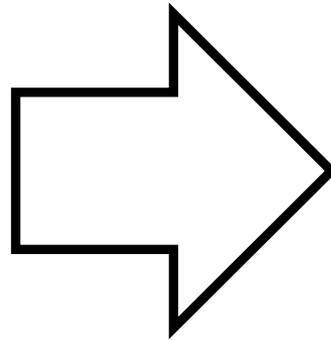
Water, water everywhere, and
not a drop to drink

Currently, over 2 million Americans die each year, but because LGBT status isn't collected, those data cannot be used to answer questions about LGBT health.

Greater health risks may mean greater risk of death



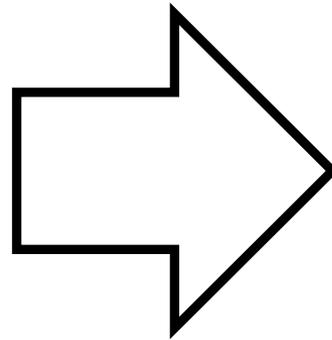
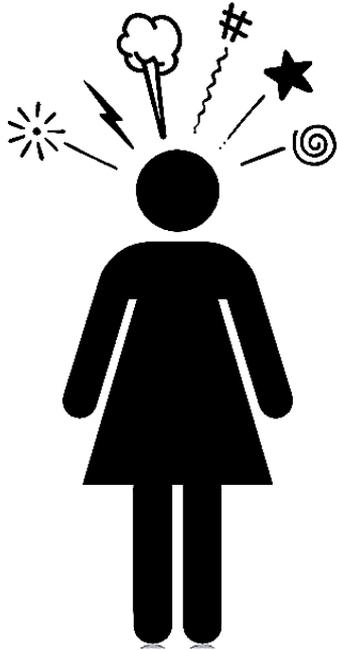
**LGBT more likely to be victims
of assault¹**



**Greater risk of death from
homicide?**

1. Rothman, E. F., Exner, D., & Baughman, A. L. (2011). The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the United States: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 12*(2), 55-66.

Greater health risks may mean greater risk of death



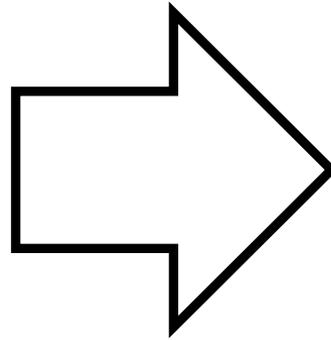
LGBT more likely to experience chronic stress¹

Greater risk of death from heart attack or stroke?

Greater health risks may mean greater risk of death



**LGBT more likely to have
suicide ideation and attempt at
some point in their lives¹**



**Greater risk of death from
suicide?**

Three main types of comparative LGBT suicide mortality studies

- Survey data with follow-up mortality data
- National registry data
- Medical record data

Survey Data: Suicide risk based on lifetime sexual behavior

National Health & Nutrition Examination Survey¹

Only 85 MSM; no suicide deaths

General Social Survey²

MSM did not have higher risk of suicide

WSW had 6 times the risk of suicide than non-WSW

Women's Health Initiative³

No difference in suicide risk among WSW & non-WSW

1. Cochran SD, Mays VM. Sexual orientation and mortality among US men aged 17 to 59 years: results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III. Am J Public Health. 2011; 101(6): 1133-1138.

2. Cochran SD, Mays VM. Mortality risks among persons reporting same-sex sexual partners: Evidence from the 2008 General Social Survey—National death index data set. Am J Public Health. 2015; 105(2): 358-364.

3. Lehavot K, Rillamas-Sun E, Weitlauf J, Kimerling R, Wallace RB, Sadler AG, et al. Mortality in postmenopausal women by sexual orientation and veteran status. The Gerontologist. 2016; 56(Suppl 1): S150-S162.

Registry Data: Suicide risk among same-sex and opposite sex partnerships

	Same-sex partnership	
	Men	Women
Danish registry 1990-2001 ¹	8x	No difference

1. Mathy RM, et al. The association between relationship markers of sexual orientation and suicide: Denmark, 1990–2001. *Soc psych psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2011. 46(2): 111-7.
2. Frisch M, Simonsen J. Marriage, cohabitation and mortality in Denmark: national cohort study of 6.5 million persons followed for up to three decades (1982–2011). *Int J Epidemiol.* 2013; 42:559-78.
3. Björkenstam C, Andersson G, Dalman C, et al. Suicide in married couples in Sweden: Is the risk greater in same-sex couples? *Eur J Epidemiol* (2016) 31: 685.

Medical record data: Suicide risk among transgender samples in clinical care



Netherlands¹

Suicide 5x more likely in MtF; no difference in FtM compared with general Dutch population



Sweden²

Suicide 19x more likely than matched controls



US³

Suicide rate 2x higher than VHA population

1. Asscheman H, et al. "A long-term follow-up study of mortality in transsexuals receiving treatment with cross-sex hormones." *European Journal of Endocrinology* 164.4 (2011): 635-642.

2. Dhejne, Cecilia, et al. "Long-term follow-up of transsexual persons undergoing sex reassignment surgery: Cohort study in Sweden." *PloS one* 6.2 (2011): e16885.

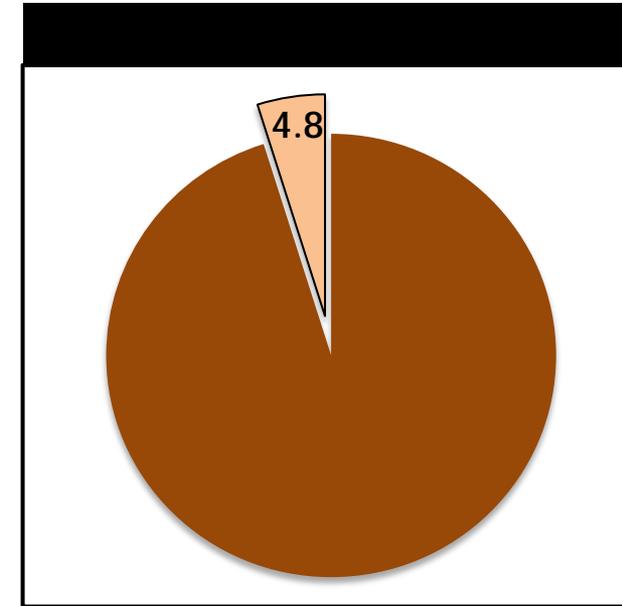
3. Blosnich, J. R., Brown, G. R., Wojcio, S., Jones, K. T., & Bossarte, R. M. (2014). Mortality among veterans with transgender-related diagnoses in the Veterans Health Administration, FY2000–2009. *LGBT health*, 1(4), 269-276.

High rate of suicide mortality among transgender VHA Veterans¹

2000-2009 National Death Index

Crude suicide rate: 82/100,000 person-years

Similar to rates in VA patients with serious mental illness (e.g., depression)²



Average age of suicide 49.4 (vs. 54.5 among Veterans)

Greater burden from more years of potential life lost

1. Blossnich JR, et al. "Mortality Among Veterans with Transgender-Related Diagnoses in the Veterans Health Administration, FY2000–2009." *LGBT Health* 1.4 (2014): 269-276.

2. Ilgen MA, Bohnert AS, Ignacio RV, et al. Psychiatric diagnoses and risk of suicide in veterans. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2010;67:1152–1158.

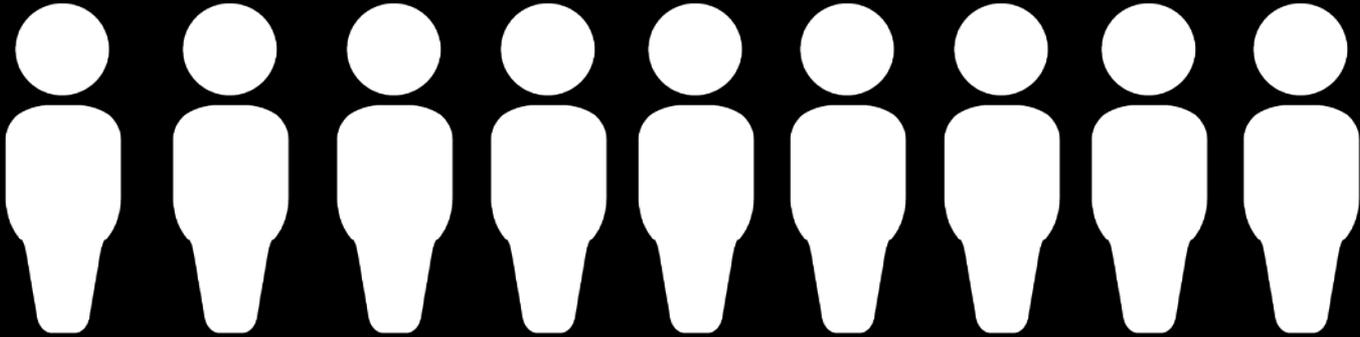


Significant amounts of time must pass



**Defining sexual orientation as lifetime sexual
behavior**

**Defining transgender populations using clinical
measures**



The sample is static

Need large samples for rare outcomes and
minority groups



**Identity measured at first time point may not
reflect identity at time of death**

Objectives

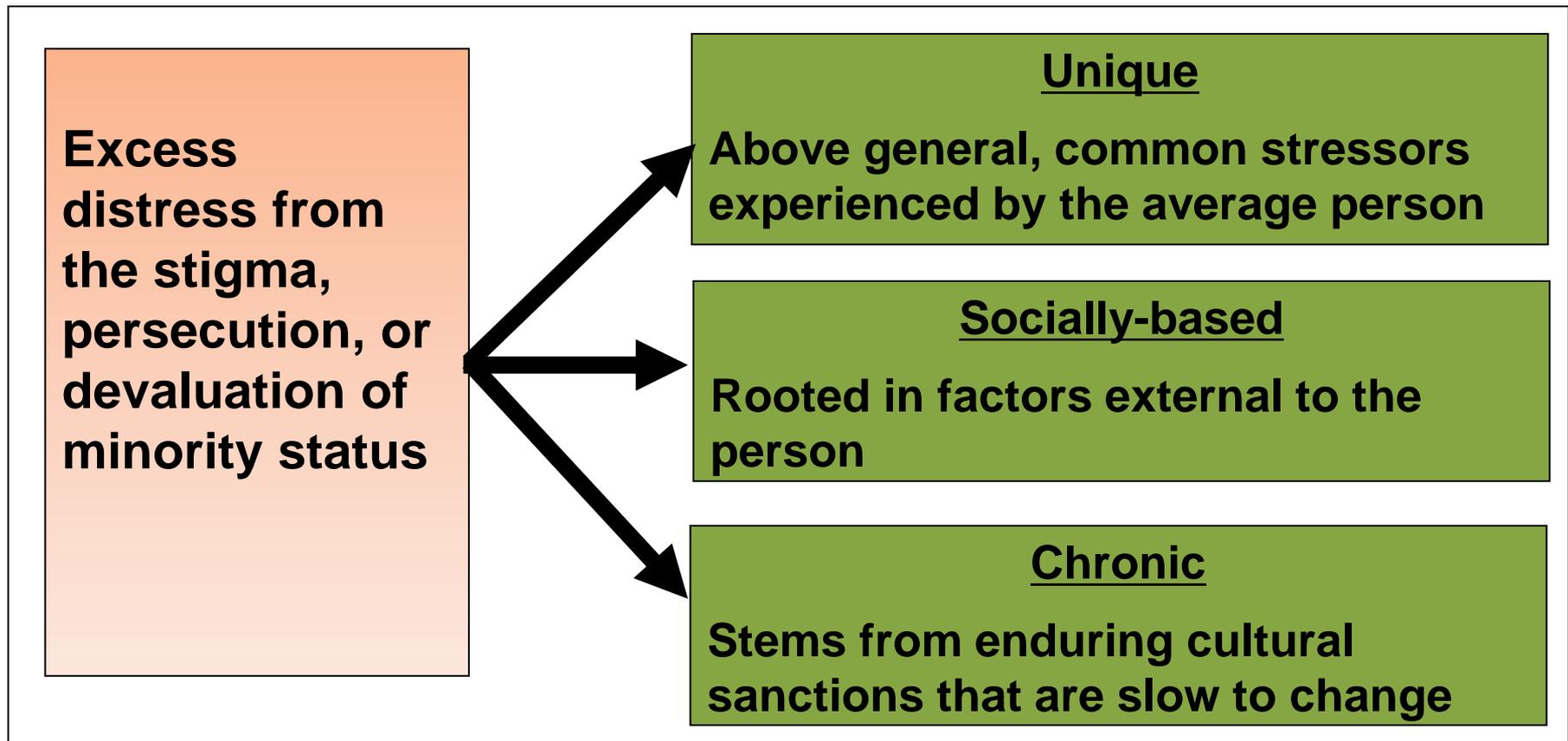
Review suicide research among LGBT and LGBT Veterans

Explain theoretical frameworks salient to LGBT health

Describe VA initiatives and resources for health equity

Minority stress is unique, external, and chronic

Minority Stress Model¹

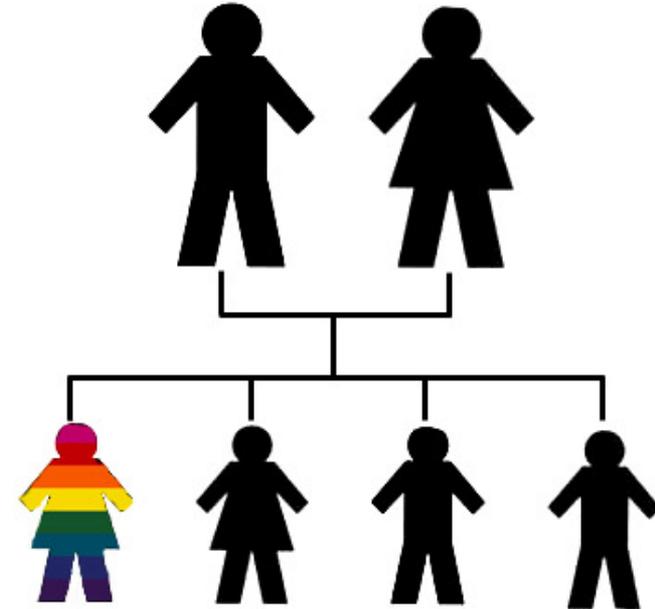


1. Meyer IH, Northridge ME. Prejudice and discrimination as social stressors. In: Meyer IH, Northridge ME, editors. The health of sexual minorities: Public health perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations. New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media; 2007. p. 242-267.

Unique experiences that contribute to minority stress among LGBT populations

Horizontal vs. vertical organization¹

“Passing” as non-LGBT and cognitive dissonance



Continuous negotiation of disclosure - “coming out” is a constant process

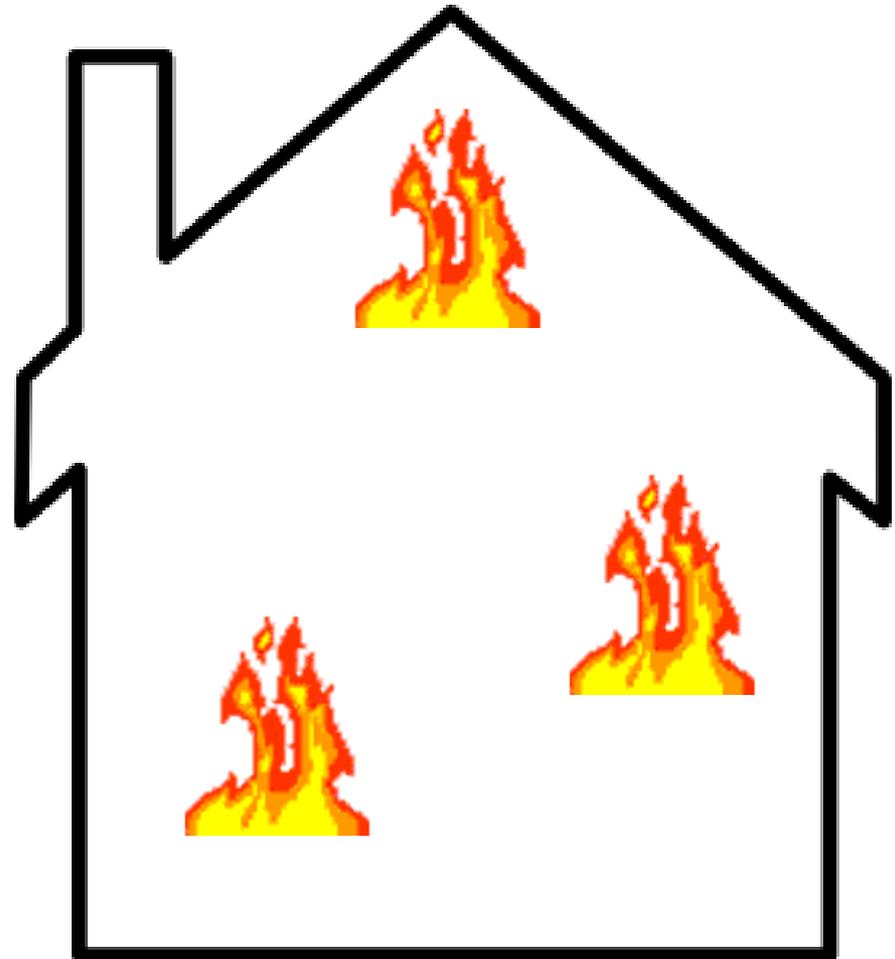
1. Gonsiorek J. Gay male identities: concepts and issues. In: D'Augelli A, Patterson C, eds. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 1995:24-47.

LGBT disparities often co-occur

Syndemic Theory¹

Co-occurrence of 2 or more epidemics that create excess burden of disease

“...must not only prevent or control each disease but also the forces that tie those diseases together.”



Risk factors for self-directed violence: Homelessness



**In general, about 4
out of 100 people
are LGB**



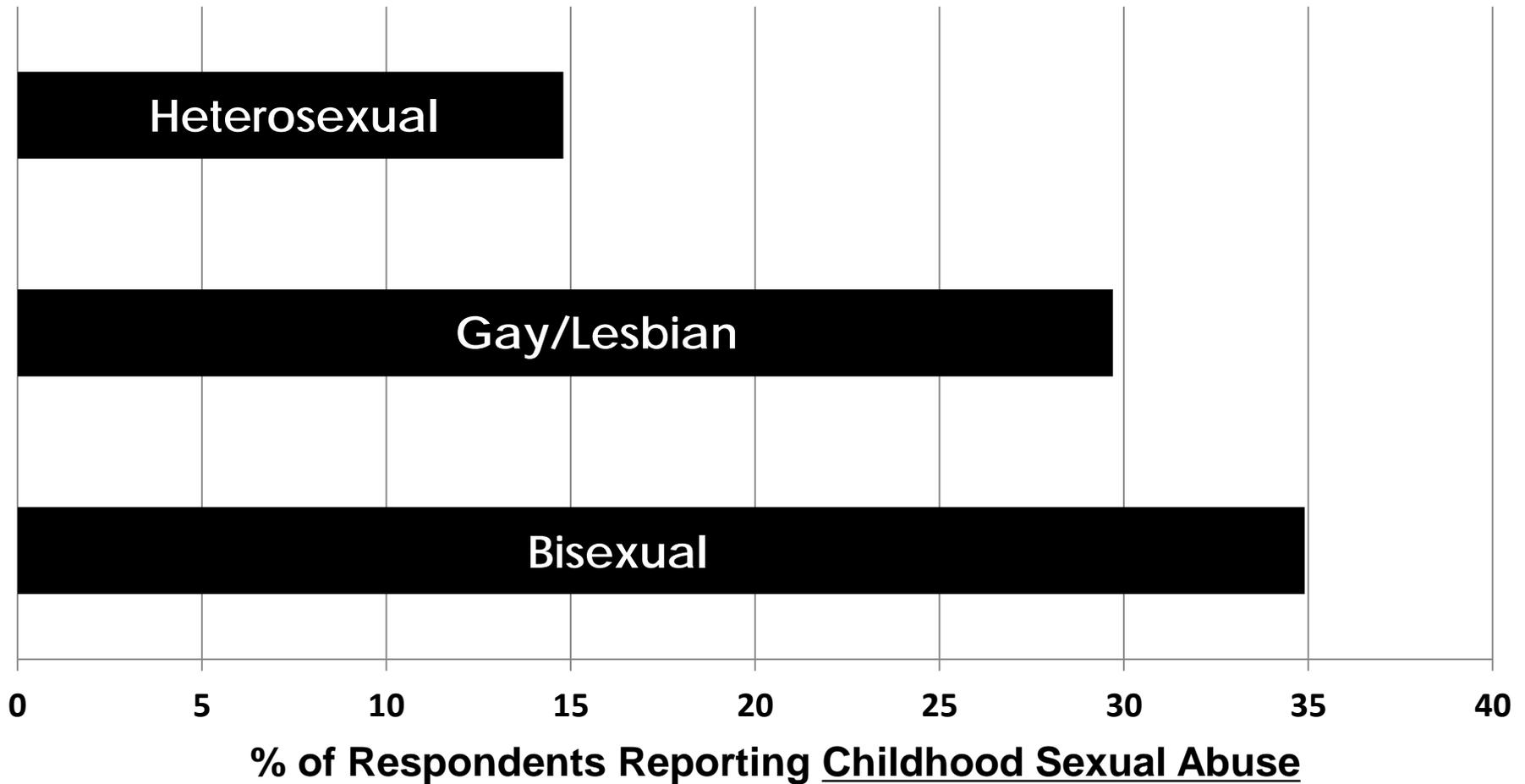
**In a sample of youth
experiencing
homelessness, 34 out of
100 were LGB¹**

Administration for Children and Families, DHHS

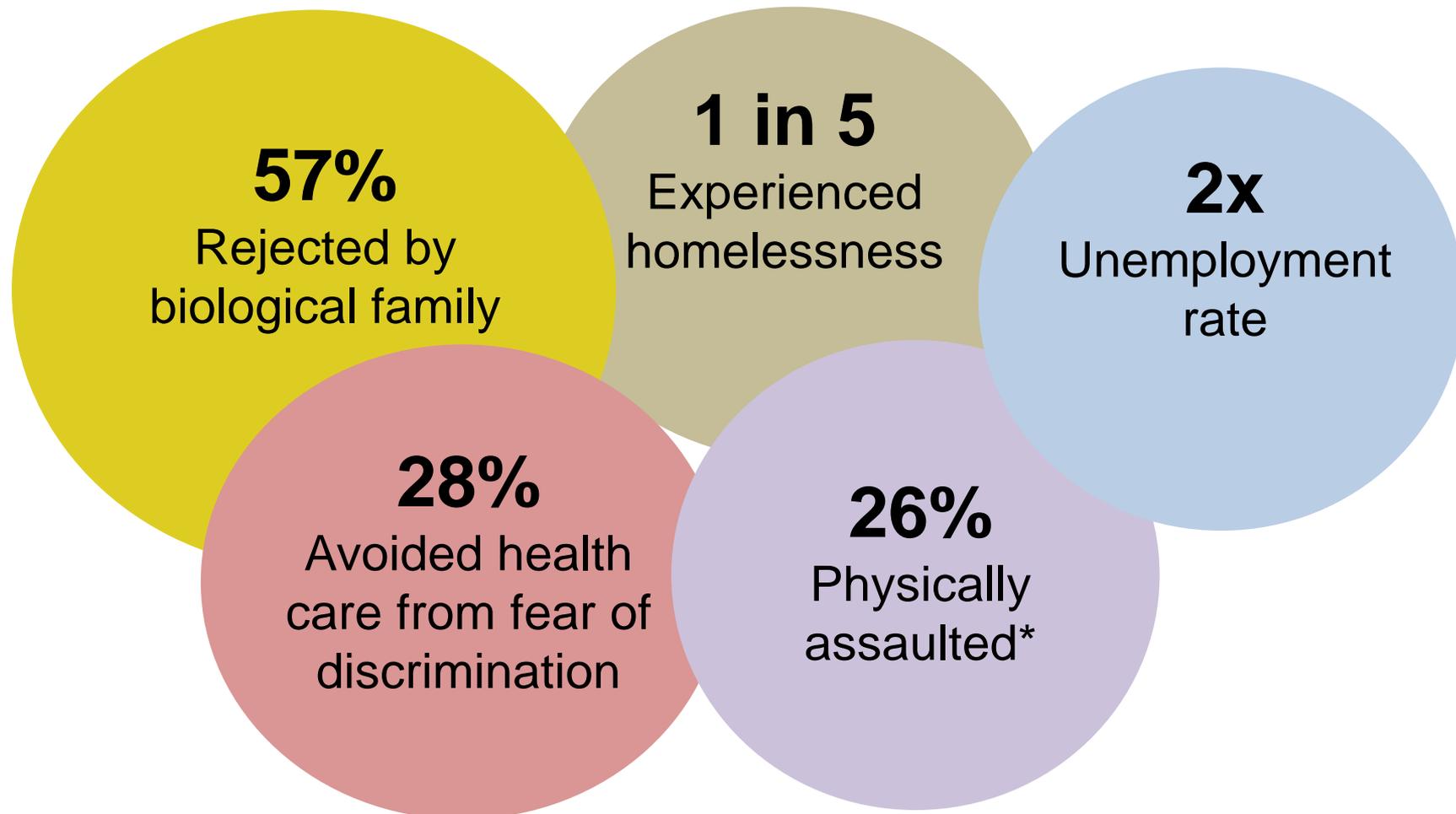
1. Whitbeck, L, Lazortiz, M.W., Crawford, D., & Hautala, D. (2016). Administration for Children and Families Family and Youth Services Bureau Street Outreach Program. Lincoln, NE: The Office of Data, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation and the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families

• https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/data_collection_study_final_report_street_outreach_program.pdf

Risk factors for self-directed violence: Violence



Social stressors among trans individuals¹



National Transgender Discrimination Survey

1. Grant, J.M., Mottet L.A., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J.L., & Keisling, M.. Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011

* Asked in specific contexts (e.g., interactions with family, in medical settings, jails/prison) and not with a general question of experiences

Objectives

Review suicide research among LGBT and LGBT Veterans

Explain theoretical frameworks salient to LGBT health

Describe VA initiatives and resources for health equity

Structural initiatives and resources

Directive

Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420

VHA DIRECTIVE 2013-003

February 8, 2013

PROVIDING HEALTH CARE FOR TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX VETERANS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy regarding the respectful delivery of health care to transgender and intersex Veterans who are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system or are otherwise eligible for VA care.

LGBT Health Program (10P4Y), Office of Patient Care Services

Michael R. Kauth, PhD
Michael.kauth@va.gov



Jillian C. Shipherd, PhD
Jillian.shipherd@va.gov

Structural initiatives and resources

Internal VA SharePoint

<http://go.va.gov/LGB>

<http://go.va.gov/Transgender>



The screenshot shows the SharePoint interface for the Transgender Education site. At the top, there are navigation options: "Site Actions", "Browse", and "Page". Below this is a header area with a rainbow flag icon and the text "Transgender Education SharePoint". A secondary navigation bar includes "Transgender Education SharePoint", "LGBT Glossary", "LGBT Program", and "Facility Resources".

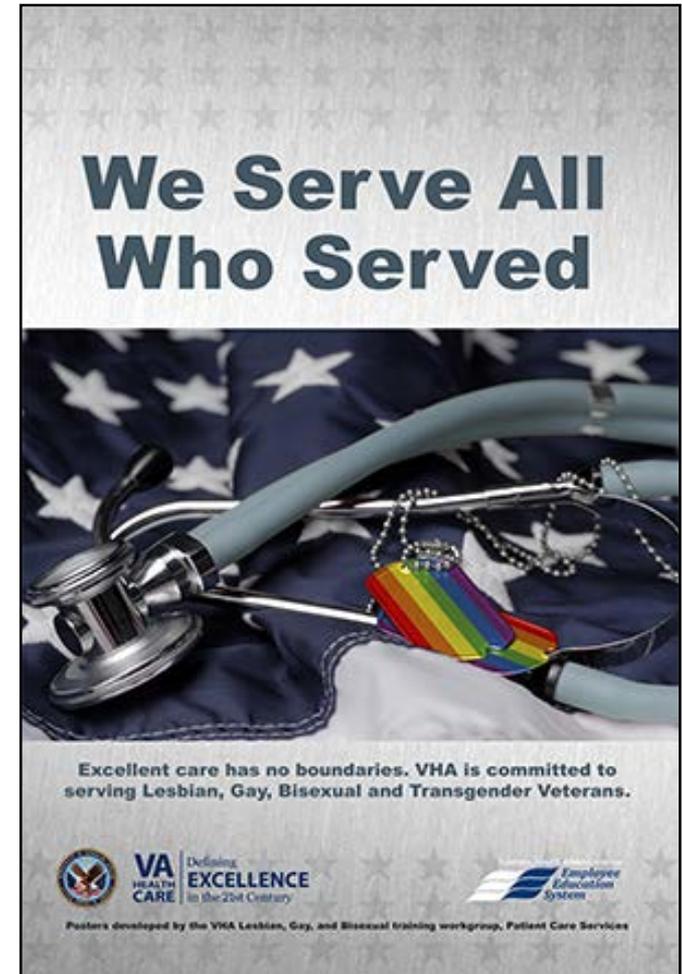
Quick Links

- Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Education SharePoint
- VA Policies, Directives, and Fact Sheets
- Trainings
- Nominate LGBT Activities for I CARE Recognition

Transgender

WE SERVE ALL WHO SERVED

Excellent care has no boundaries. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans Welcome to the Transgender Education site is designed to bring together clinicians working with Transgender Veterans or patient populations. On this site you will find training materials.



We Serve All Who Served

Excellent care has no boundaries. VHA is committed to serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans.

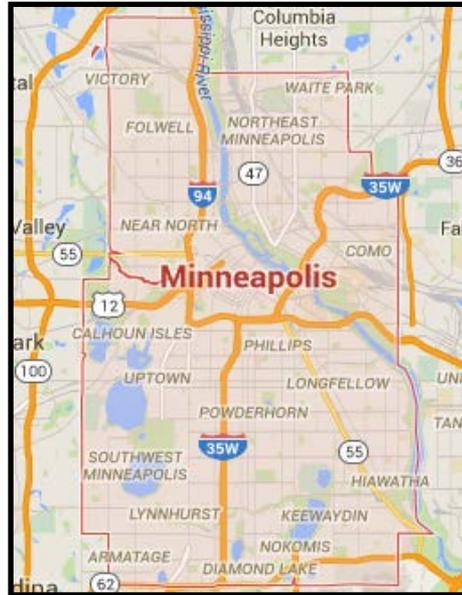
VA HEALTH CARE | Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

Employee Education System

Posters developed by the VHA Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual training workgroup, Patient Care Services

Structural initiatives and resources

Transgender e-Consultation Network



Specialty Care Access Network – Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (SCAN-ECHO)

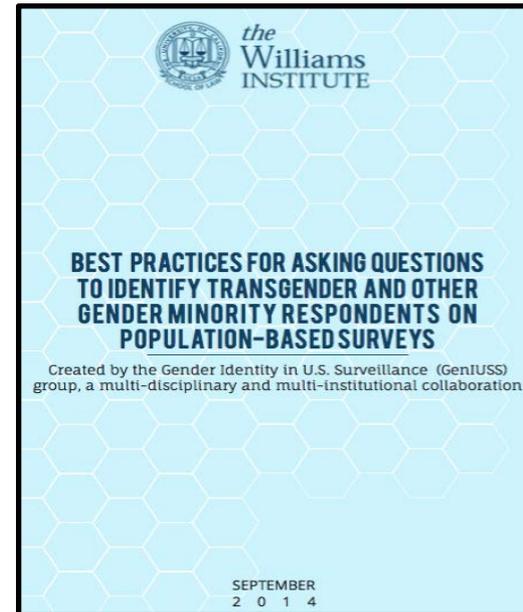
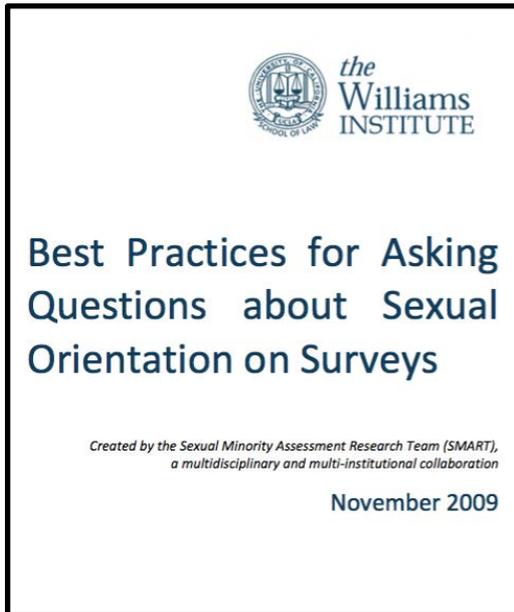
- Training in transgender health for providers

Inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity data

Standard demographic information

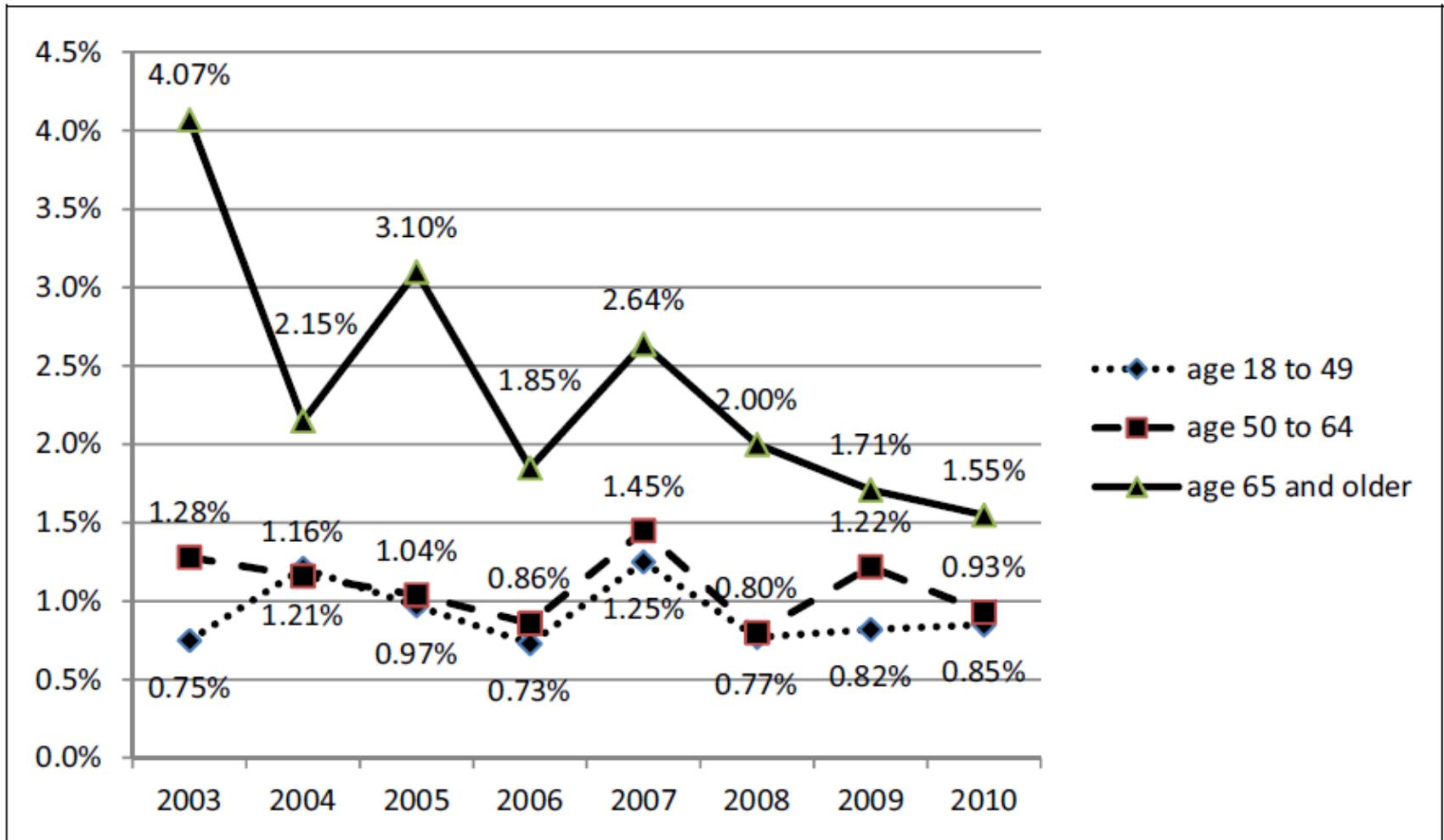
**Newly added to several federal health surveillance surveys
- BRFSS, NSDUH, NHIS**

There are free online guides that can help!

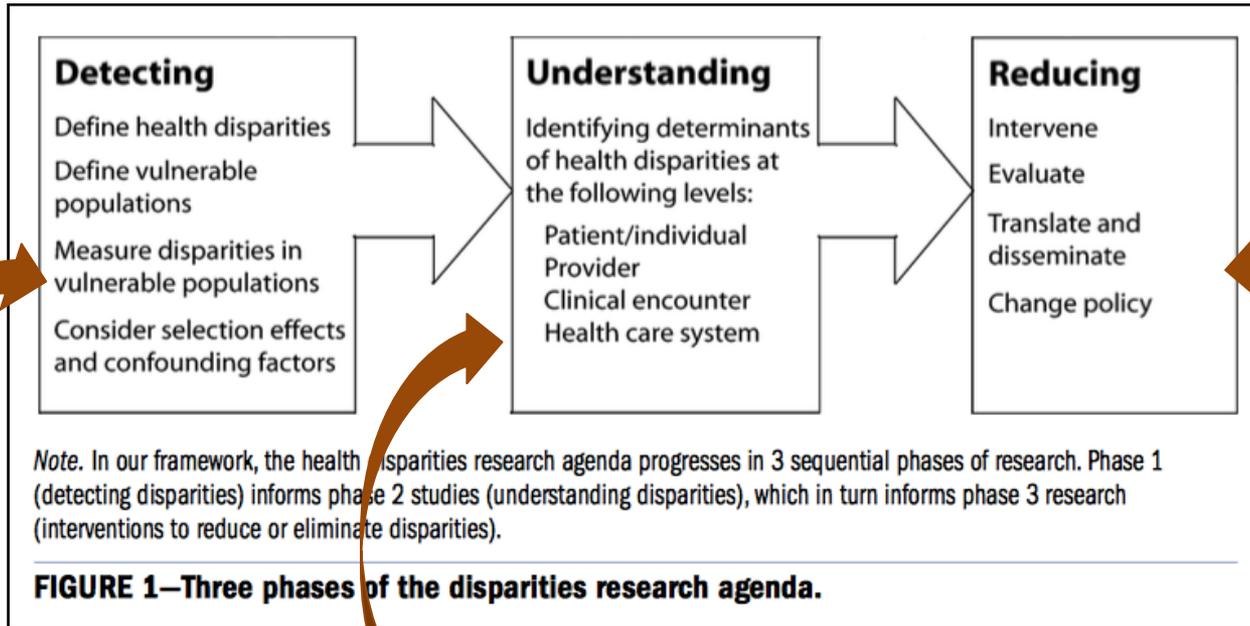


People will answer

Refusal rates to sexual orientation question, Washington BRFSS 2003-2010



Without LGBT data, health equity research is hampered



What is the extent of suicide risk among LGBT Veterans in VA?

What are unique risk factors for LGBT Veterans in VA?

How do VA suicide prevention services reach LGBT Veterans? Do they work for them?

Take home points

We know LGBT populations have greater prevalence of suicide ideation and attempt than their non-LGBT peers, but we do not know if LGBT populations have greater rates of death from suicide

LGBT status, itself, does not *cause* suicide ideation or attempt—it likely stems from societal stigma projected onto LGBT people

VA resources for LGBT:

<http://go.va.gov/LGB>

<http://go.va.gov/Transgender>

Sexual orientation and gender identity data are critical for research to inform intervention and prevention!



Excellent care has no boundaries. VHA is committed to serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans.

Thank you!

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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)