

Transgender Health Factsheet

Transgender people face many of the same problems in the healthcare system as the rest of the LGB population - including barriers to care, little to no research on their health needs/issues, and general prejudice. However, there are several actions transgender people can engage in to promote health and wellness.

Barriers to care experienced by trans individuals might include:

Lack of health insurance coverage: Current research shows that transgender individuals may be particularly at risk for not having insurance. Many health insurance providers fail to provide insurance for LGBT partners. Also, surgeries and other aspects of sexual reassignment which transgender individuals may seek out may not be covered by insurance.

Limited research on transgender health issues: Because so little funding has been allocated to researching transgender health, health care providers often do not have adequate knowledge of the issues and concerns unique to transgender individuals. This can impact the provision of appropriate preventive recommendations and quality treatment options to transgender individuals.

Discrimination: What little research that has been done on transgender access to care shows a widely diverse group of people routinely subject to extreme discrimination in many facets of their lives, including in the health care arena. Stories of transgender people being laughed at by providers, turned away from hospitals, or even denied trauma care are commonplace in the transgender communities. This discrimination and the fear of it are the largest barriers to care for these populations.

Recommendations:

Encourage Transgender patients to engage in routine cancer screening: Transgender (FTM) men who have not undergone mastectomy need routine breast cancer screenings. According to the American Cancer Society and Gender.org, there may still be risk of breast cancer even after sexual reassignment surgery, such as chest reconstruction, because breast muscle wall tissue remains. Breast tissue cells might be present in the nipple area as well as throughout the chest area. In turn, FTM men should follow breast screening guidelines for their age group, including being familiar with their own bodies and checking regularly for changes to the tissues in the chest area.

Transgender men who have not undergone hysterectomy and genital reconstruction should continue to receive regular Pap tests and pelvic examinations. Taking testosterone may increase the risk of ovarian cancer if the level exceeds the person's receptor capacity and is converted into estrogen. (This is especially significant for people obtaining hormones from unlicensed sources, not from a medical provider.)

Although, there are no confirmed studies at this time, transgender women (MTF) who are on high levels of estrogen may be at increased risk of breast cancer. Routine breast exams and being familiar with one's body can help identify signs of cancer in their earliest, most treatable stages.

Encourage patients to quit smoking: Transgender individuals may smoke at similar or even higher rates than the LGB community. Smoking increases the risk of several health problems including cancer and heart disease. LGBT-specific smoking cessation programs can provide transgender individuals with the resources to quit.

Discuss safe sex practices: Contracting a sexually transmitted infection can seriously impact a person's health. Fortunately, STI transmission can be greatly reduced through the use of barriers such as condoms and dental dams during sexual contact. Learn more about safer sex at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/safer-sex-4263.htm>.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.trans-health.com/>

<http://www.transgendercare.com/default.asp>

References:

- American Cancer Society
- Gender.org
- <http://www.amsa.org/lgbt/transgender.cfm>
- <http://www.safeguards.org/?p=65>