



Barriers that Prevent LGBTQ+ Individuals from Accessing Healthcare

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Gaps in the System

LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to put off getting medical care because of barriers that exist on a structural and individual level.¹ In San Diego County, several trends illustrate gaps in the current medical system. When speaking with Steve Carroll, Senior Director of Behavioral Health Services for the San Diego LGBT Community Center, he noted that while many healthcare providers have a basic level of training for providing services for the LGBTQ+ community, they **lack a higher level of training and thus lack confidence**. For LGBTQ+ individuals, it can be incredibly difficult to find a provider who is competent. After conducting a focus group with several LGBTQ+ individuals, I found that for many of them, finding a provider who they felt comfortable with was rare (full focus group findings can be found below). Interviewees noted that it was a “roll of the dice” whether they would be respected during a doctor’s visit. Mr. Carrol specified that LGBTQ+ individuals often reached out to the Center because they wanted to find a competent provider but were not able to do so on their own.

The Impact of Negative Experiences

In both my interview with Mr. Carroll and the focus group, a common theme that emerged was those negative experiences for LGBTQ+ folks’ compound on top of one another. This can take many forms - transgender individuals being misgendered, having their dead

¹ Barriers to Health Care Among Adults Identifying as Sexual Minorities: A US National Study



names² used, or medical providers saying I can't help you because I don't know how to help you. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to avoid care because of these experiences, which Mr. Carroll described this as having one foot in the door and one foot out. Focus group members indicated that they have all had negative experiences that greatly affected how they access medical care. Members of the focus group repeatedly asked for medical providers to believe their LGBTQ+ patients about their experiences and what was going on with them.

Focus Group Discoveries Summary

1. Participants indicated misgendering, and the use of dead names occurred with frustrating regularity.
2. Some of the participants indicated that interactions with insurance were a significant challenge to accessing care; specifically, behavioral health services appeared to be a pressing challenge.
3. Some of the participants said they put off gender-affirming care out of fear of how they would be treated. Others indicated that they simply couldn't afford to take time off to undergo gender-affirming procedures.
4. Participants all had significantly negative experiences with a healthcare provider at some point, and these negative experiences affected their interactions with the healthcare system.

² Why Deadnaming Is Harmful



Structural Changes to Address these Barriers

In my interview with Mr. Carroll, he identified three main changes that needed to happen to address barriers to healthcare. **One**, there needs to be better ways to collect information on the LGBTQ+ community that accurately represents the community. **Two**, there needs to be a higher level of training for healthcare providers. Safe and affirming does not mean healthcare providers are offering competent and confident services to the LGBTQ+ community. **Finally**, providers should improve how they market their competent staff so that the LGBTQ+ community knows where they can find medical services. Members of the focus group repeatedly asked for medical providers to believe their LGBTQ+ patients about their experiences and what was going on with them.

More information on healthcare access for the LGBTQ+ community

Barriers to Health Care Among Adults Identifying as Sexual Minorities - NIH	Link
Health and Access to Care and Coverage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals in the U.S. - KFF	Link
Why Deadnaming Is Harmful – Cleveland Clinic	Link

Resources for LGBTQ+ Resources in San Diego County

The San Diego LGBT Community Center	Link
The Transgender Health and Wellness Center	Link
The North County LGBTQ+ Resource Center	Link