



3 new programs aim to make health care more equitable for LGBTQ+ people



Ask people what they want out of health care.

Regardless of their differences, they might say they want their doctors and care providers to listen. They might call for competent, compassionate treatment. But some groups have been less likely to find this kind of care. That includes members of the LGBTQ+ community.

To help give everyone an equal opportunity to live their healthiest life, Optum wants to do away with disparities in care that prevent people from accessing the health services they want and need.

Surveys and polls detail the poor health care experiences of LGBTQ+ people. In testimonials collected by the Human Rights Campaign, LGBTQ+ people say they've been refused care, subjected to ridicule and worse.¹ For some, these experiences happened when seeking treatment for ailments like a broken rib — for others, while visiting a family member in the hospital or celebrating a child's birth.

15%

postponed or avoided medical treatment due to discrimination.²

18%

of all transgender respondents were refused care due to or because of actual or perceived gender identity.²

28%

of transgender respondents of color were refused care due to or because of actual or perceived gender identity.²

1 in 3

transgender individuals had to educate their doctor to receive appropriate care.²

“Refusal of care is not OK. A mom not accepted because she’s the other mom? That’s wrong. These types of incidents are breaking trust,” says Gina Debogovich, senior director of Community and Social Media and leader of the LGBTQ+ Health Equity Council at UnitedHealth Group.

“We need to create a sense of trust with our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.”

Three new programs are launching in 2021 as part of Optum health equity efforts. The aim is to help all LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable, cared for and respected when visiting a doctor or any other care provider.

Optum has developed the programs to rebuild relationships and help LGBTQ+ patients find knowledgeable and welcoming providers. The goal of each is to improve the care experience and drive care quality for all.



Training and educating providers and staff

One program is designed to close a gap in education and eradicate biased training.

LGBTQ+ health care needs have not traditionally been covered in medical school. And there are no national accreditation standards for serving LGBTQ+ patients.

Because of that gap, LGBTQ+ individuals may feel unwelcome. Studies show they are less likely to go to the doctor and more likely to refuse or delay care. Delayed care can contribute to poor health outcomes and increased costs. Illnesses or chronic conditions might be missed or left to worsen over time.

To address the training gap, the Optum Care California and Optum Health Education are rolling out an industry-leading, continuing education-eligible training series on LGBTQ+ health equity.

The first session is geared toward anyone who interacts with patients, from office support staff and receptionists to physicians. It will cover basic concepts and terminology and what it means to create a welcoming environment.

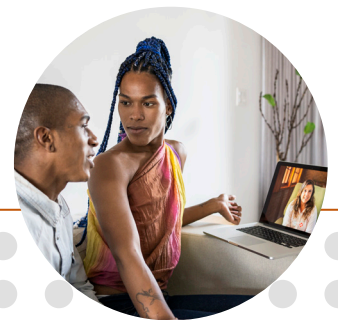
The second session is geared specifically to physicians and providers. It focuses on the unique health care needs of the LGBTQ+ population and best practices for conducting office visits. For both training sessions, health care professionals will be able to receive continuing education credits.

This educational series will roll out across Optum Care throughout this year.

What makes a welcoming environment?

Examples include:

- Revising patient intake forms to include additional gender identities
- Use of preferred name and pronouns
- Access to gender-neutral restrooms
- LGBTQ+ specific clinical services and patient advocates/navigators

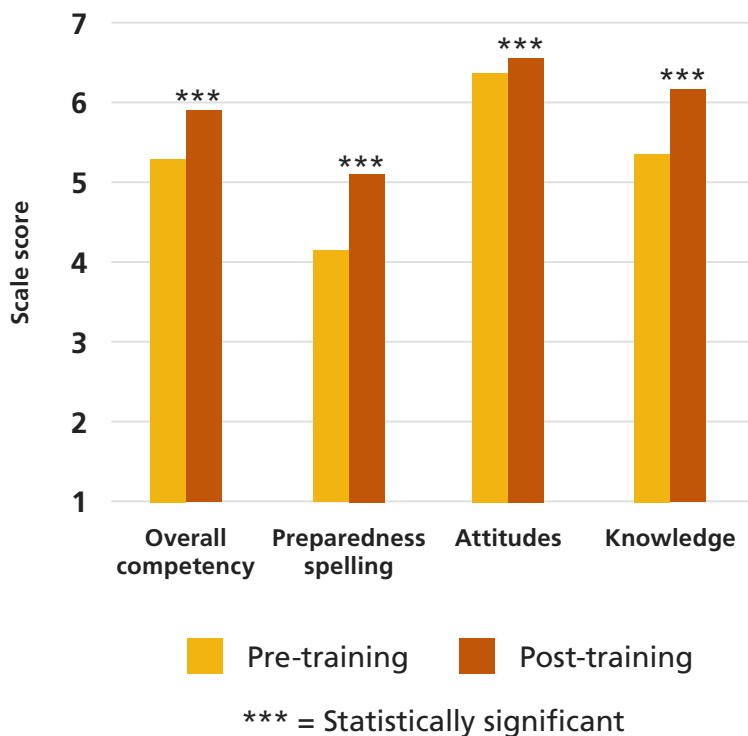


Increasing cultural competency at call centers

Optum is also partnering with [OutCare](#), a nonprofit organization aimed at improving health care for the LGBTQ+ community. Together, the partners are working on training Optum call center staff to better communicate with LGBTQ+ callers.

This training is already showing results. Call center staff improved significantly in all areas measured. That includes staff's preparedness, knowledge, attitudes and overall competency in serving LGBTQ+ clients.

Scale change in LGBTQ+ cultural competency after OutCare training



Identifying LGBTQ+ friendly health care facilities

Outside of its own walls, Optum is expanding the number of resources available to improve care for the LGBTQ+ community.

One example is [Pride365+](#). Optum Behavioral Health and Optum EAP launched the program together. In part, its mission is to educate internal teams, clients and community partners to deliver care and services with dignity, kindness and respect.

One focus is on the specific mental health and substance abuse challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community. Trainings and seminars address suicide prevention and trauma-informed care.

It also offers posters that providers can download and display to identify themselves as LGBTQ+ friendly. And there are tips for all on how to show support in email signatures and social media.

The goal is to ensure all people can get health care from professionals who are knowledgeable and open to providing care.

Pride365+

Includes a toolkit on its website that features:

- A terminology guide
- A guide on how to be an ally
- Information on a hotline for transgender support
- Details on the Sanvello app, which offers on-demand help for stress, anxiety and depression
- Connections to peer-to-peer community groups



Widespread effect of repairing trust

Programs that successfully repair trust have the potential to positively affect many lives. A recent Gallup poll found an estimated 5.6% of Americans identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.³

The percentages are higher for younger people: One in six adult members of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2002) identify as other than heterosexual. That sparks other considerations related to quality, whole-person care.

For example, health care professionals may need to consider how they cover generational differences. They may need to develop plans for helping parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

There's a lot of work to do. LGBTQ+ people disproportionately experience chronic conditions, breast cancer, HPV and obesity. Poverty, race, disabilities and other social determinants of health can make gaps in access and outcomes worse.

Given these factors, investing in programs that strive to create equitable, affirming and supportive environments for LGBTQ+ members and their families will make a difference.

The downstream effects are that all people will have the opportunity to live their healthiest life possible.

Sources:

1. Healthcare Equality Index 2018: Rising to the New Standard of Promoting Equitable and Inclusive Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Patients and Their Families. 2018. Accessed July 7, 2021.
2. Gruber S, Mahowald L, Halpin J. [The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020: A National Public Opinion Study](#). Center for American Progress. October 6, 2020. Accessed July 6, 2021.
3. Jones J. LGBT identification rises to 5.6% in latest U.S. estimate. Gallup. Feb. 24, 2021. Accessed July 7, 2021.



To learn more about how Optum is addressing health equity, visit optum.com/healthequity



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