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A Strategic Framework for Improving Conditions for Learning for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Students

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Health and Social Development Program Promoting Well-Being for LGBTQ Youth and Their Families

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Healthy development depends on the interplay between protective and risk factors that affect a child through early adulthood. Identity formation, parent and peer relations, and connection to community are especially important factors. Research reveals that experiencing marginalization, physical or verbal threats, discrimination, and trauma can negatively affect physical, social, emotional, and mental health. For youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or questioning (Q) their sexual orientation or gender identity, these risks present particular challenges to their well-being.

Research highlights striking disparities:

- 26% of LGBTQ youth are forced from their homes because of conflicts with their families; 30% report physical violence at home over their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Up to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness are LGBTQ.
- LGB youth report higher rates of feeling sad or hopeless and seriously considering suicide (more than double that of heterosexual peers in some communities).
- LGB youth self-report being victims of violence at school at rates higher than those of their heterosexual peers (four times greater in some communities). They also skip school at higher rates because they feel unsafe there.
- LGBTQ youth are overrepresented and experience differential treatment in the child welfare system. A recent landmark study found that LGBTQ youth represented 19% of those placed in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County; 13% reported being treated poorly by the foster care system (compared with 6% of non-LGBT youth).

AIR's Health and Social Development Program builds workforce awareness, knowledge, and skills to better serve youth and families. Working with many systems, including schools, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice agencies, we strive to enhance positive youth development and strengthen protective factors through implementation of evidence-based policies and practices.

Examples of AIR's LGBTQ Work

Research and Evaluation

AIR is assessing the experiences and quality of services for LGBTQ youth involved with Washington, DC's juvenile justice system. This study will inform the juvenile justice system on ways to improve policy and practice to create better health and life outcomes for LGBTQ youth.

AIR is conducting a health survey of LGBT adults for the District of Columbia Department of Health to improve understanding about health characteristics and inform community interventions to address health needs.

Research citations are available upon request.



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Technical Assistance and Training

For the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, AIR leads a technical assistance team on an *initiative to prevent LGBTQ youth homelessness* and intervene early when it occurs. Conducting pilots in Cincinnati and Houston, AIR guides development and implementation of plans to improve stable housing, permanency with their families, and well-being for LGBTQ youth. AIR also facilitates federal partner involvement and is assessing the initiative's progress and outcomes.

AIR offers *presentations and trainings* to human service professionals and policymakers in communities nationwide and at national conferences. Drawing on current research and practice, AIR's trainings build a deep understanding of the experiences and challenges LGBTQ youth and families report, their health and mental health needs, barriers to their success and well-being, and strategies and resources to immediately apply in practice.

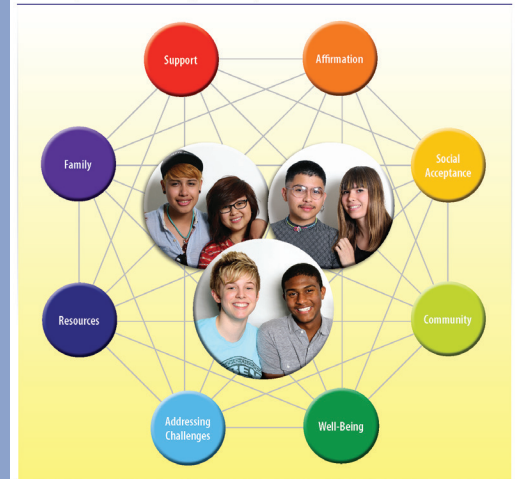
AIR coordinates the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) *national workgroup to address the needs of LGBTQ, Intersex (I), and two-spirit (2-S) youth and families*, comprised of experts working to develop new tools to improve policy and practice in grantee communities. For more than a decade, AIR worked closely with SAMHSA's Child, Adolescent and Family Branch to develop and implement *innovative strategies to build communities' LGBTQ cultural and linguistic competence*.

Resources

AIR develops and distributes consumer-driven resources that integrate current research and recommended policy and practice to strengthen human services systems.

- For SAMHSA, development of *A Guide for Understanding, Supporting, and Affirming LGBTQI2-S Children, Youth, and Families*, endorsed by the National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of Social Workers
- A strategic planning tool and an interactive video, *10 Standards of Care: Improving Services for LGBT Young People*, each based on 10 standards of care developed by AIR
- For the Anaheim City School District, *cultural and linguistic competence discussion guides*, including one on LGBT students and their families to support guided discussions during staff trainings
- For *findyouthinfo.gov*, targeted information and resources on topics related to LGBT youth
- *Improving Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes for LGBT Youth: A Guide for Professionals*, co-edited by AIR's Jeffrey Poirier, with six chapters written by AIR experts

A Guide for Understanding, Supporting, and Affirming LGBTQI2-S Children, Youth, and Families



The American Institutes for Research (AIR) mission is to conduct and apply the best behavioral and social science research and evaluation toward improving people's lives—especially for those in disadvantaged circumstances. AIR's Health and Social Development Program strives to realize this mission by transforming what health, social service, and education systems do.

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