

## **“LGBTQ Health in Canada: A Call for a New Approach”**

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**ABSTRACT** - The concept of healthy living in Canada has become a common focus in public health discourse. With increasing panic surrounding “unhealthy” body weights, poor diets, and sedentary behaviour, many Canadians have at least some idea of what a healthy living campaign looks like. Despite the public health agency of Canada’s (PHAC) acknowledgement that social determinants of health (SDOH) have concrete impacts on individuals and communities ability to experience healthy living, the Healthy Living Strategy which has been implemented still only focuses on individualized components of health such as body weight, eating habits and physical exercise.

It is important to consider the many ways in which individuals and communities experience healthy living. While targeting the entire population as a whole can be argued as a way to collect large amounts of information, flaws appear particularly when looking at those who are not accounted for at all in these programs. When the diversity of a population is ignored, it has serious health impacts. Factors such as sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be ignored as important indicators to be included on national health surveys. This is important as LGBTQ communities have high rates of depression, homelessness, poverty, alcohol and substance abuse, experiences of violence, and risks of suicide.

This research advocates for a new approach to LGBTQ health. First, by providing an assessment of the ways in which these populations are commonly understood in public health research, policy and promotion, we separate the commonly used acronym to assess the distinct health needs that arise from the different communities that live under ‘LGBTQ’. Further, the issue of transgender rights and health discourse is still an emerging consideration for many researchers in health and promotion. Especially when discussing public health and research, trans populations are neglected the most, leaving many health professionals and providers without adequate knowledge and resources, and trans people without access to competent primary healthcare or services. Due to this, we pay particular attention to the way in which the current public health discourse contributes to further marginalizing trans people in health care systems and services.

Secondly, we provide a framework of inclusion/exclusion to understand the ways in which LGBTQ health needs and disparities must be understood by health professionals and academics alike in a more inclusive and holistic way. In order to minimize health disparities in LGBTQ communities, it is essential to create research and public health initiatives that incorporate the lived realities of LGBTQ populations in order to avoid perpetuating stigma and marginalization. It is an aim of this research to provide a comprehensive framework for which healthcare providers, researchers and policy makers can draw upon in order to serve these populations with increased competence and respect.