



CALIFORNIA LGBTQ-HEADED FAMILIES IN 2017: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Tens of thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Californians are parents or primary caregivers of children. But in spite of recent legal wins both statewide and federally, much work remains: economic vulnerability, healthcare access, social isolation, and school climate pose disproportionate challenges. Solutions which take into account the most vulnerable LGBTQ families in California will benefit not just all LGBTQ Californians, or all families in the state, but all Californians.

California is home to at least 100,000 same-sex couples, and one in six (16%) of these couples are raising children under the age of 18.¹ Nationwide, in the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, an even higher percentage of respondents (18%) reported they were parents.² Two-thirds of children currently living with same-sex couples were likely born in previous different-sex relationships, but the number of “intentional” LGBT families, formed by LGBT couples or single parents either via adoption, foster care, alternative conception, or surrogacy, is growing.³

These families come from every ethnic and racial community, as well as every socioeconomic stratum. However, LGBTQ families are more likely than their non-LGBTQ counterparts to experience poverty and food insecurity.⁴ In fact, **1 in 5 children of LGBTQ parents live in poverty**, and are also more likely than their counterparts to be without health insurance coverage. These disparities are even more pronounced among LGBTQ people of color. Discrimination against LGBT workers negatively affects their health and the economic stability of their families. It is not alarmist to say that we will be facing domestic humanitarian crisis if we continue to see reduction of federal and state resources to support families. More than 1 in 4 LGBT adults (27 percent) in the country report not having enough money for food in the past year; and **46 percent of LGB adults aged 18-44 who are raising children received food stamps in the past year alone.**

¹ The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2016). *Same-sex Couple and LGBT Demographic Data Interactive*. Other studies nationally place these percentages at 48% of LGBTQ women and 20% of LGBTQ men: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2013), *LGBT Parenting in the United States*.

² The National Center for Transgender Equality (2016). *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*.

³ Gary Gates, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institute, *The Future of Children* (2015). *Marriage and Family: LGBT Individuals and Same-Sex Couples*.

⁴ M.V. Lee Badgett, Laura E. Durso, & Alyssa Schneebaum, The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2013). *New Patterns of Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community*.

LGBTQ Californians experience the same stark regional differences in economic and social well-being as do their non-LGBTQ counterparts. Los Angeles County and the Bay Area stand apart from the South and Central Valley and the North and Mountain regions of the state: urban LGBTQ Californians on average experience far less poverty and far more educational attainment and social acceptance on average than do rural LGBTQ Californians, highlighting these LGBTQ families' increased need for resources and support.⁵

LGBTQ families statewide are affected not only by policy issues impacting LGBTQ people generally, but also by those touching all families, including those around adoption and foster care, alternative conception and surrogacy, as well as affordable health care access, paid family leave, and workplace protections. Where our economic and legal vulnerabilities go, so go those of our children, multiplying those impacts through an inheritance of either security or disparity.

Finally, parents and caregivers who are immigrant and/or trans identified, generally, and trans women of color in particular, face unique challenges, ranging from increased isolation from family, to increased vulnerability to violence, to increased targeting by attempts at discriminatory legislation.

In spite of the family recognitions conferred by marriage equality, ongoing areas of concern for LGBTQ-headed families in California include disproportionate *social isolation*, unwelcoming *school climate*, barriers to *healthcare access*, and *economic vulnerability*. The current social and political climate intensifies concerns in each of these areas, particularly for the most vulnerable LGBTQ families. Remedies for each of these challenges are within reach, but must be given sufficient priority in the agendas of both LGBTQ and family support organizations.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Despite the prevailing stereotype of California gay-headed families as affluent, homogenous, and well-integrated, recent data demonstrate that poverty rates and economic vulnerability among LGBT-headed families are disproportionately high, particularly among LGBTQ families of color and rural LGBTQ families.

- Child poverty rates in same sex couple households are twice those of heterosexual married couple households.
- Median household income of same sex couples with children is 23% less than that of heterosexual married parents
- Only 51% of same sex couples with children are homeowners, compared to 77% of heterosexual married parents.
- African Americans in same sex couples have a poverty rate three times the rate of whites in same-sex marriages and significantly higher than African Americans in heterosexual married relationships.
- Lesbian couples are more likely to receive food stamps and public assistance than women in heterosexual marriages.

⁵ The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2015). *The LGBT Divide in California*.

- The economic disadvantage experienced by LGBT people is pervasive: even gay men in couples (generally thought of as most likely to be affluent) have annual earnings 15% less than those of heterosexual married men.⁶

HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Many healthcare environments and medical providers can be unwelcoming to LGBTQ-parented families, or may simply be untrained to provide assistance with their unique needs. Health coverage disparities and unequal access to health insurance because of slow implementation of federal mandates or lack of recognition of LGBTQ-parented families also add to this disparity in terms of access.

- Low-income LGBT parents and caregivers and their children face multiple barriers to services: 9% of married different-sex couples raising children live in poverty, whereas twice this number of LGBTQ couples raising children do.⁷
- Non-citizen individuals in same-sex couples are three times more likely to be uninsured than citizens, and are also more likely to have an income below the poverty level,⁸ and children of same-sex foreign-born LGBTQ parents face additional challenges, since they continue to be invisible under current immigration law and in most immigrant communities across the state.
- A quarter of respondents to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reported a problem in the last year with their insurance due their being transgender; lack of access to adequate insurance coverage, mistreatment by health providers, and health providers' discomfort or inexperience with treating transgender people create additional barriers for trans parents' access to proper health treatment.⁹

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Explicit support and community for LGBT parents and caregivers is rare yet necessary.

- Prevailing presumptions in both heterosexual and LGBTQ communities that parenthood and family are essentially heterosexual and cisgendered.
- Virtually all books, television programs, and movies to which children are exposed validate only heterosexual love, romance, marriage, families, and parenting, rendering LGBT-parented families nearly invisible, and kids growing up in such families unrecognized.
- LGBTQ parents and caregivers consistently name the need to break isolation and build community as the primary motivators for participation in LGBTQ family organization events.¹⁰

SCHOOL CLIMATE

⁶ U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. (2010a). DP202. Selected social characteristics in the United States: 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year estimates [Data file].

⁷ Movement Advancement Project, et al. (2011). *All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families*.

⁸ The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2015). *The LGBT Divide in California*.

⁹ S.E. James, et al., National Center for Transgender Equality (2015). *U.S. Transgender Survey Report*.

¹⁰ Our Family Coalition (2013, 2015). *Bay Area LGBTQ Family Community Needs Survey*.

Great strides have been made in the passage and implementation of the FAIR Education Act, but LGBTQ people and families remain largely invisible in classrooms, and much remains to be done to support LGBTQ-headed families.

- Misunderstanding remains widespread that to talk about LGBTQ people and families is equivalent to talking about adult sexuality; the developmental inappropriateness of discussion about sexuality at the pre- and elementary school level in turn functions to suppress all reference to LGBTQ family diversity as well as anti-LGBTQ bias at a time when such messages are both effective and appropriate.¹¹
- Children of LGBTQ parents experience the damaging impacts of homophobia in school or after-school programs, and are targeted for harassment at a higher rate than their peers.¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy work which takes into account the most vulnerable LGBTQ families in California will benefit not just all LGBTQ Californians, or all families in the state, but all Californians. Below are but a half dozen recommendations which, if implemented, would go a long way to easing the burden of discrimination for tens of thousands of LGBTQ Californians.

- Increase support for targeted family programming at the two dozen regional LGBTQ community centers across the state.
- Increase support for LGBTQ family cultural competency trainings for family resource centers and at family service agencies statewide, with a focus on Central and Southern farm regions as well as far Northern and mountain regions of the state.
- Increase access to online LGBTQ family support resources, to enable both working and geographically isolated LGBTQ families to access necessary information and community.
- Provide staff development trainings at schools across the state, addressing family diversity, gender roles, and difference-based bullying.
- Ensure that classroom curricula and educational materials, such as books and posters, include information about the lives and accomplishments of LGBTQ figures, both historical and contemporary, famous and ordinary.
- Ensure that school districts and family support agencies update forms to gender neutral language regarding parental roles (i.e., “parent/ guardian” rather than “mother/father”).

About Our Family Coalition: Our Family Coalition (OFC) advances equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families with children through support, education, and advocacy. Founded in 2002 and with offices in San Francisco and Oakland, OFC works with families throughout the Bay Area to create visibility for LGBTQ families with children, and to provide opportunities to thrive as valued participants in our schools, institutions, and communities.

¹¹ Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*.

¹² California Safe Schools Coalition (2005). *Research Brief: School Safety for Students with LGBT Parents*.