



LGBTQ INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

True to the very philosophy of public parks and recreation is the idea that all people—no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation—have access to quality programs, facilities, places and spaces that make their lives and communities great. Those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer or questioning (LGBTQ) have historically faced discrimination, often in the form of offensive comments, threats or harassment, and violence, but park and recreation agencies are uniquely positioned to offer inclusive spaces, places and programs and provide welcoming support.

WHY PARKS NEED TO PRIORITIZE LGBTQ INCLUSION

Research shows that lack of physical and social activity opportunities contributes to health disparities across LGBTQ persons, bolstering the need for programming through park and recreation agencies. Research suggests LGBTQ individuals face health disparities linked to societal stigma, discrimination, and denial of their civil and human rights. Social discrimination against LGBTQ persons has been associated with high rates of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, and suicide. LGBTQ youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide, and lesbians and bisexual females are more likely to be overweight or obese¹. A recent study also shows more teenagers are identifying themselves with nontraditional gender labels such as transgender or gender-fluid, but those same teens reported having significantly poorer health, including mental health, than their peers². Park and recreation agencies meet the needs of the local LGBTQ community through a variety of programs and offerings, providing increased opportunities for physical activity and healthy living. Examples of programs in parks and recreation include:

- Health and wellness programs, like group exercise classes or outdoor adventure programs, that explicitly state they are inclusive of all community members
- Creating welcoming and inclusive facilities that provide safety and comfort to the LGBTQ community
- Family programs; including, before/afterschool and out-of-school time programs, summer camps and early childhood programs that are cognizant of all family units
- LGBTQ outreach programs, youth groups and mentoring services
- Gay-straight alliances and connections to local social service providers

¹ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health" <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health>

² CNN, 2018, "More US teens are rejecting 'boy' or 'girl' gender identities, a study finds" <http://www.cnn.com/2018/02/06/health/teens-gender-nonconforming-study-trnd/index.html>



ADDITIONAL WAYS TO PROMOTE LGBTQ INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Creating a welcoming and safe environment in which LGBTQ people can trust community health providers is a great first step to promoting inclusion for LGBTQ persons. Parks and recreation can promote LGBTQ inclusion through:

- **Messaging:** It's important to recognize that although spaces and programs may be open to all, members of the LGBTQ community may feel more comfortable when that message is explicitly stated and supported by staff. Consider adding messaging to promotional materials or on display in facilities that assures all community members that they are welcome.
- **Facility Improvements:** Park and recreation agencies can add features to their facilities that aid in the comfort and increased reception of safety to the LGBTQ community. These features include gender neutral and/or unisex restrooms, private/family style locker and changing rooms, and identifying safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.
- **Promoting Gender-Neutral Interactions:** Train staff to use gender-neutral pronouns during interactions with all constituents to support an open environment. It is not possible to always correctly guess someone's gender based on the person's name or their physical appearance. One way to prevent this mistake is by addressing people without using any terms that indicate a gender. For example, instead of asking, "How may I help you, sir?" you can simply ask: "How may I help you?"
- **Community Representation:** Programs, services and offerings should reflect the community's interests and needs. Engage the local community in this conversation to ensure they are represented in decision making processes. Additionally, ensure that park and recreation staff, especially those working with youth, can successfully establish relationships with the community and has shared interests and priorities.

Inclusive Efforts in Parks and Recreation:

In 2016, the City of Seattle adopted a new All-Gender Restroom Ordinance. The All-Gender Restroom Ordinance helps achieve greater restroom access for transgender and gender diverse individuals. Seattle's Public Accommodations Ordinance (SMC 14.06) also clarifies the rights of individuals to use gender-specific facilities that are consistent with their gender identity. All-gender restrooms are facilities that anyone can use regardless of gender. They benefit many people, including transgender and gender diverse individuals, people who require the assistance of a caregiver of a different gender, and parents with children of a different gender.

TAKE ACTION NOW

- [Pledge your commitment](#) through Commit to Inclusion
- [Submit a success story](#) with your own Parks for Inclusion story to be featured on NRPA's Success Story database
- Share what your agency is working on through social media, using the hashtag **#ParksForInclusion**
- Check out more ways to get involved on the [Parks for Inclusion resource database](#)

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