



Testimony for Joint Legislative Hearing of the 2015-2016 Health Budget

From the Empire State Pride Agenda

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In 2009, the Empire State Pride Agenda (Pride Agenda) – New York’s statewide LGBT civil rights and advocacy organization – commissioned the first-ever statewide needs assessment of LGBT New Yorkers. By collecting over 3,500 surveys, interviewing dozens of LGBT experts, and utilizing existing data sets, the Pride Agenda was able to produce a comprehensive, scientifically-driven report that clearly illustrates the state of LGBT Health in New York. Community-based organizations have always known the severity of the health disparities impacting LGBT communities, but they lacked the data to reinforce their stories. The data that we have obtained supports what we have always known anecdotally: LGBT New Yorkers are disproportionately impacted by a staggeringly wide array of health disparities and New York State is not doing enough to address those disparities. Ranging from mental health to substance abuse to lack of adequate primary care, the multiple service needs of LGBT New Yorkers are further compounded by the lack of culturally competent and affirming services available to address the unique needs presented by some of New York’s most marginalized residents.

- Forty percent of LGBT people stated there were not enough health professionals who are adequately trained and competent to deliver services to LGBT people.
- LGBT people of color face more barriers to health and experience more depression and loneliness than white people and yet lack access to mental health and support group services.
- Thirty percent of transgender and gender non-conforming people said they were currently or formerly homeless.

The Pride Agenda is the proud coordinator of the New York State LGBT Health and Human Services Network (the Network). Consisting of over 50 service providers, the Network provides cost-efficient, preventative health and human services that address many of the urgent and unmet needs of LGBT New Yorkers. Some of the crucial services that Network organizations provide include:

- Health and wellness programs including primary and preventative care;

- Mental health treatment and family counseling;
- Domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- Crime victim assistance;
- Homeless youth services; and
- Alcohol and substance abuse prevention.

Many of those served by Network organizations are groups who have been historically marginalized including youth, seniors, people of color, people of low income and transgender individuals.

With the support of state government, LGBT service providers have been capable of creating a statewide infrastructure that can address the service gaps for LGBT New Yorkers by focusing on collaboration and resource-sharing. The Network also provides a statewide platform to launch the kind of innovative and scalable programming that addresses persistent health disparities and produces healthy outcomes on a community-wide level all across New York State.

With the Empire State Pride Agenda's small investment in LGBT health and human services, in 2014 the Network provided trainings, speaking engagements and educational events to various communities and organizations throughout New York State and continues to provide cost-efficient, preventive and supportive services to over 1.5 million New Yorkers in all 62 counties of the state.

Even though Network organizations have a proven track record of success, their resources are stretched very thin. Since 2007, the Network has lost nearly \$3 million in state funding, a 35% cut. The reduction in funding from New York State in recent years has already seriously weakened the capacity of LGBT organizations to provide services to their communities. Network organizations continue to be resourceful, resilient and responsive, but eventually doing more with less becomes doing less with less at a time when that is an unacceptable option.

Despite these odds, Network organizations continue to persevere. From cutting program hours to laying off essential employees, LGBT-serving organizations continue to make the necessary sacrifices to provide these much-needed services, but they cannot continue this work alone. LGBT New Yorkers need state lawmakers to continue to demonstrate leadership on LGBT health and human services. Both the Governor and the state Legislature share a responsibility to ensure LGBT New Yorkers and their families receive the healthcare they deserve. New York State cannot afford to ignore its responsibility to some of its most vulnerable citizens.

Only through partnership with the NYS Legislature will LGBT service providers be able to weather this economic storm and continue to provide critically-needed services to LGBT New Yorkers and their families.

The Pride Agenda shares the same goal as the Legislature - to ensure taxpayer dollars are used effectively and responsibly in order to achieve goals for which they are distributed - and is committed to maintaining transparency and accountability in the use of state funding.

As the NYS Legislature deliberates the 2015-2016 budget priorities, the Pride Agenda hopes the state Legislature continues to support LGBT health and human services and provides organizations with the resources they need to provide cost-effective, preventative services to LGBT New Yorkers.

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