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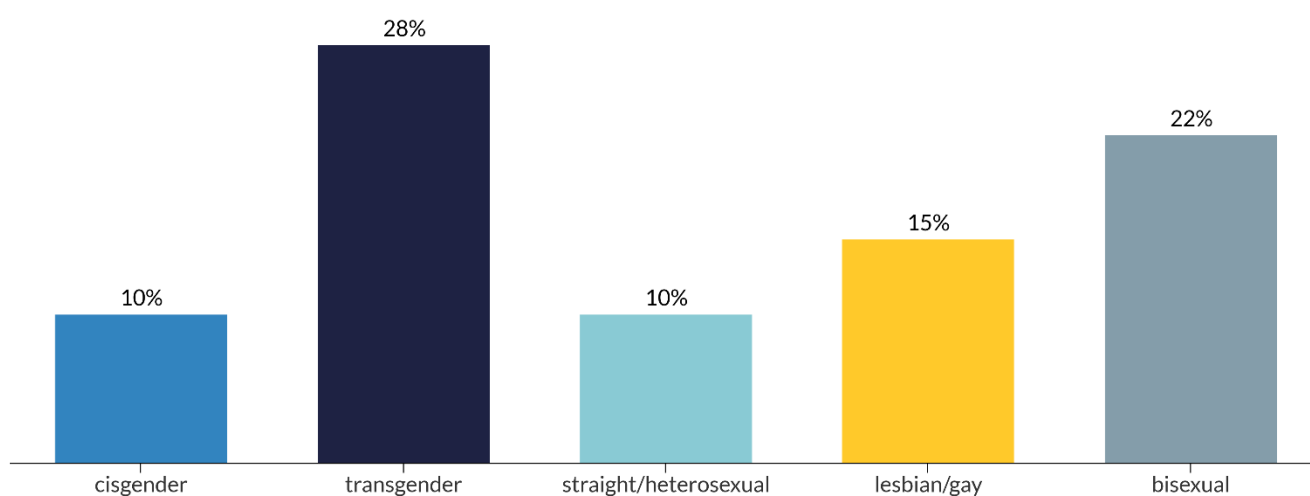
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LGBT PEOPLE & ACCESS TO PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Analysis by Brad Sears and Kerith J. Conron

December 2018

Percent of adults in California who delayed or didn't get prescription medications in the past year, by gender identity and sexual orientation



Source: Williams Institute analysis of California Health Interview Survey, 2015-2017

Many Americans worry about the high costs of prescriptions medications. A recent [poll](#) by the Kaiser Foundation found that about 60% of Americans report taking at least one prescription medication and that 80% of all Americans feel that the current cost of prescription drugs is unreasonable. There is currently [broad public support](#) for addressing this issue, which is likely to be a focus in the next session of Congress. This brief provides a snapshot of Californians' access to prescription medications among LGBTQ and cisgender and straight/heterosexual adults.

Data from the California Health Interview Survey indicate that LGBT people (5.6% of respondents) are more likely to delay getting the prescription medicines they need or to go without them entirely. This is particularly true for more vulnerable parts of the LGBT population, including bisexuals, transgender people, lesbians, those with low incomes, and the elderly.

While 10% of straight people in California reported delaying or going without the prescription medicines they needed in the past 12 months, that percentage was higher for gay men and lesbians (15%)—and more than double for bisexuals (22%). (Table 3)

The difference in delaying or going without prescription medications was even greater between cisgender people and transgender people. Although this difference was not statistically significantly different due to the small number of transgender people in the dataset (Table 2), it is consistent with what we know about [health disparities for transgender people](#) in general. In fact, given the large percentage of transgender people who are poor and [unstably housed](#)—and therefore are less likely to have been reached by CHIS—there is reason to believe the actual difference in prescription medication access may be even greater.

CHIS also asks why respondents delayed or went without medical care in general (not just prescription medicines). Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were slightly more likely to report the main reason as “cost, lack of insurance, and other insurance reasons.”

Williams Institute [research](#) has consistently documented that LGBT people are more likely to live in poverty. Among Californians who are below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, 12% of straight people reported that they delayed or went without prescription medicines in the past year, compared with 21% of gay and lesbian CHIS respondents and 25% of bisexual respondents. (Table 4)

CHIS data also show that sexual minority women face more barriers to accessing prescription medications than men. (Tables 6 and 7). Twelve percent of straight or heterosexual women in California delayed or went without prescription medications in the past year, compared with 18% of lesbians and 26% of bisexual women. These rates were lower for men of all sexual orientations: 9% of straight or heterosexual men delayed or went without prescription medications in the past year, compared with 13% of gay men and 16% of bisexual men. This is not surprising because [more women, in general, live in poverty](#) or have low incomes. Within the LGB community, a 2018 Williams Institute [report](#) that found sexual minority women, in particular, were more likely to have low incomes than heterosexual women.

Prior Williams Institute [research](#) shows these differences may also disproportionately impact older LGBTQ Californians, who are [more likely](#) to be on one or more prescription medications. Based on CHIS data from 2015-2017, 10% of straight Californians aged 60 or over reported delaying or not getting prescription medications in the past year compared to 22% of older LGB respondents. (Table 8)

These data suggest that LGBT people will be disproportionately impacted by potential reductions in mandated prescription drug coverage and/or potential increases in prescription drug costs.

Table 1. Adult respondents to the California Health Interview Survey 2015-2017, by sexual orientation

Sexual orientation	
Straight or heterosexual	93.0% (92.5 – 93.6) 0.3 24,225,000
Gay, lesbian or homosexual	2.4% (2.1 – 2.8) 0.2 635,000
Bisexual	3.1% (2.7 – 3.4) 0.2 798,000
Not sexual/celibate/none/other	1.5% (1.2 – 1.7) 0.1 378,000
Total	100.0% - - 26,036,000

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 2. Adult respondents to the California Health Interview Survey 2015-2017, by gender identity

Gender identity	
Not transgender (i.e., cisgender)	99.6% (99.5 – 99.8) 0.1 29,110,000
Transgender or gender nonconforming	0.4% (0.2 – 0.5) 0.1 112,000
Total	100.0% - - 29,222,000

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 3. Delayed or didn't get prescription medication in the past year in California, by sexual orientation

	Straight or heterosexual	Gay, lesbian or homosexual	Bisexual
Delayed or didn't get medicine	10.3% (9.5 – 11.2) 0.4 2,497,000	15.2% (10.7 – 19.7) 2.3 98,000	22.2% (16.8 – 27.5) 2.7 178,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	89.7% (88.8 – 90.5) 0.4 21,728,000	84.8% (80.3 – 89.3) 2.3 537,000	77.8% (72.5 – 83.2) 2.7 620,000
Total	100.0% - - 24,225,000	100.0% - - 635,000	100.0% - - 798,000

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 4. Delayed or didn't get prescription in the past year in California, by gender identity

	Not transgender (i.e., cisgender)	Transgender or gender nonconforming
Delayed or didn't get medicine	10.4% (9.7 – 11.1) 0.4 3,022,000	27.8%* (9.8 – 45.7) 9.2 32,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	89.6% (88.9 – 90.3) 0.4 26,088,000	72.2%* (54.3 – 90.2) 9.2 80,000
Total	100.0% - - 29,110,000	100.0% - - 112,000

*Statistically unstable

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 5. Delayed or didn't get prescription in the past year in California among those at 200% or less of the federal poverty level, by sexual orientation

	Straight or heterosexual	Gay, lesbian or homosexual	Bisexual
Delayed or didn't get medicine	12.4% (11.1 – 13.6) 0.6 1,065,000	21.3% (11.9 – 30.6) 4.8 39,000	24.7% (15.7 – 33.6) 4.6 78,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	87.6% (86.4 – 88.9) 0.6 7,551,000	78.7% (69.4 – 88.1) 4.8 149,000	75.3% (66.4 – 84.3) 4.6 247,000
Total	100.0% - - 8,615,000	100.0% - - 188,000	100.0% - - 325,000

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 6. Delayed or didn't get prescription in the past year in California among women, by sexual orientation

	Straight or heterosexual	Gay, lesbian or homosexual	Bisexual
Delayed or didn't get medicine	12.0% (10.9 – 13.2) 0.6 1,467,000	18.4% (10.4 – 26.4) 4.1 42,000	25.8% (18.8 – 32.9) 3.6 135,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	88.0% (86.8 – 89.1) 0.6 10,710,000	81.6% (73.6 – 89.6) 4.1 185,000	74.2% (67.1 – 81.2) 3.6 383,000
Total	100.0% - - 12,177,000	100.0% - - 228,000	100.0% - - 517,000

Source: 2015 – 2017 California Health Interview Survey; 95% confidence interval is displayed in table

Table 7. Delayed or didn't get prescription in the past year in California among men, by sexual orientation

	Straight or heterosexual	Gay, lesbian or homosexual	Bisexual
Delayed or didn't get medicine	8.6% (7.5 – 9.6) 0.5 1,031,000	13.4% (7.7 – 19.2) 2.9 56,000	15.6% (7.5 – 23.7) 4.1 43,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	91.4% (90.4 – 92.5) 0.5 11,017,000	86.6% (80.8 – 92.3) 2.9 352,000	84.4% (76.3 – 92.5) 4.1 238,000
Total	100.0% - - 12,048,000	100.0% - - 407,000	100.0% - - 281,000

Table 8. Delayed or didn't get prescription in the past year in California among those 60 years of age or older, by sexual orientation

	Straight or heterosexual	Gay, lesbian, homosexual or bisexual
Delayed or didn't get medicine	9.8% (8.1 – 11.5) 0.9 414,000	21.5% (9.0 – 34.0) 6.4 31,000
Didn't delay getting medicine	90.2% (88.5 – 91.9) 0.9 3,809,000	78.5% (66.0 – 91.0) 6.4 114,000
Total	100.0% - - 4,224,000	100.0% - - 145,000