

Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 among Older LGBT Adults in California

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Although all people are susceptible to COVID-19 infection and disease, based on currently available information about the epidemiology of the disease in China, the California Department of Public Health identified as high risk for serious COVID-19 illness people age 65 and older, individuals with compromised immune systems, and individuals who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease.¹

Demographics

About 3.3% of Californians age 65 and older are lesbians, gay men, and bisexual men and women, and 0.2% are transgender people. Based on this, we estimate that 162,300² LGB people (93,300 men and 69,000 women) and 9,000 transgender people age 65 and older live in California and are at high risk for serious illness from COVID-19.³

Health Conditions

Of the men and women age 65 and older, 53,100 LGB people—including 34,000 men and 19,000 women—and 3,000 transgender people have fair or poor health.

Asthma. 27,000 LGB people, including 12,800 men and 14,200 women, and 2,000 transgender people have asthma

Diabetes. 43,300 LGB people, including 30,300 men and 13,000 women, and 1,000 transgender people have diabetes

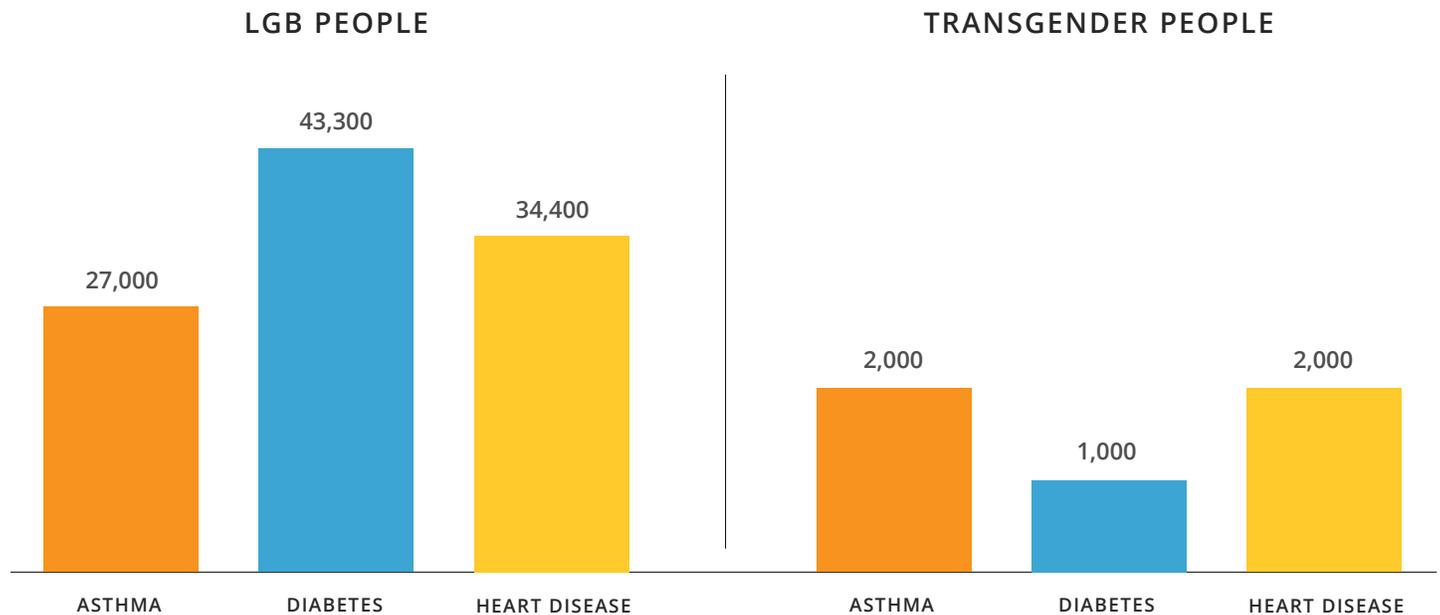
¹ Accessed online 3/26/2020 <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>

² Population estimates are rounded to the nearest hundred. Due to rounding, estimates for LGB men and women will not always add up to the total LGB population.

³ Estimates for LGB people include transgender LGB people and estimates for transgender people include people of all sexual identities.

Heart disease. 34,400 LGB people, including 18,900 men and 15,500 women, and 2,000 transgender people have heart disease

Figure 1. LGB and transgender people aged 65 and older in California with particular health conditions



Social and Economic Vulnerabilities

In addition to vulnerabilities due to health problems, LGBT older people are at risk related to social and economic vulnerabilities. In particular, the California Department of Public Health recommends that people reduce risk by, among other things, considering “ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks.” It is important to remember that many LGBT people live alone and disconnected from family and may need special assistance.

- In California, 64,600 LGB people, including 44,100 men and 20,500 women, and 3,000 transgender people live alone.

In addition, poverty is a risk for many diseases through various pathways (e.g., access to competent health care) and people who are poor have a difficult time securing essential services.

- In California, 40,700 gay/bisexual men, 23,000 lesbian/bisexual women, and 6,000 transgender people age 65 and older live below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Source

Data on transgender people is based on AskCHIS using pooled data for 2015–2018.⁴ The report on LGB people draws on data from the 2015–2016 The report draws on data from the 2015–2016 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). Sexual orientation can be measured through the constructs of identity, attraction and behavior (SMART, 2009). Analysis for this report is based on the CHIS survey measure of sexual identity, that is, people identifying as LGB and straight or heterosexual. In 2015–2016, CHIS included, for the first time, LGB people aged 70 and older who previously had not been asked CHIS survey questions related to sexual identity. Because CHIS is a population-based survey, findings from this report are representative of California’s older adult population.

Data are drawn from Choi, S.K., Kittle, K. & Meyer, I.H. (2018). *Aging LGB Adults in California: Findings from the 2015–2016 California Health Interview Survey*. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

⁴ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, Los Angeles, CA. AskCHIS 2015-2018. Available at <http://ask.chis.ucla.edu>. Exported on March 31, 2020.