

**Faith Family Equality**

The Latinx Roundtable



# LGBTQ+ Latinx Health Guide for Faith Communities

LATINX HEALTH

LGBTQ+ HEALTH

HIV/AIDS



Center for  
LGBTQ & GENDER STUDIES  
in Religion

**Thank you for picking up this guide; it is an important step in learning more about health challenges affecting Latinx persons and communities. This guide includes information on HIV/AIDS and its impacts on Latinx persons, families, and faith communities. Furthermore, it includes information on specific health concerns for LGBTQ+\* persons and communities. Gaining this knowledge is important in becoming more understanding of and empathetic to LGBTQ+ persons, persons living with or impacted by HIV/AIDS, and broader issues that affect Latinx communities. This guide also aims to destigmatize persons living with HIV/AIDS.**

It is important to acknowledge that learning is an ongoing process. No matter how successful an individual, family member, or a congregation is in understanding the health challenges of Latinx persons and communities and persons with HIV/AIDS, there is always room to grow and extend acceptance, understanding, support, and affirmation.

Although offering some general information, this guide deals specifically with LGBTQ+ health issues, including HIV/AIDS, and it is intended for persons, families, and faith communities who want to respond in a more loving way toward family and community members who are LGBTQ+ or who are living with or impacted by HIV/AIDS. We hope that this information will help individuals, families, and faith communities to be more welcoming and supportive of all.

\* **LGBTQ+** – Not all communities or countries use the same acronyms. It is important to research and investigate these differences when using this resource.

\*\* **Use of the term “Latinx”** – We understand that not all Latino/a/x/Hispanic persons use the term Latinx. We use the term Latinx as a non-binary term, using the “x” as an open identity for any person that is part of these polycentric and multicultural communities.

# Latinx Health: A Starter Guide

In the United States, the Covid19 pandemic has exposed the disparity in positive health outcomes for Latinx persons and communities—and for other minoritized communities. Yet, many of the challenges faced by Latinx persons are not new.

Covid19 in persons with comorbidities increases their risk for worse outcomes. Many of these conditions—diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, asthma, etc.—greatly affect Latinx persons and communities because of disproportionately higher levels of poverty and limitations in access to preventative care. For some Latinx persons, their immigration status also greatly impacts access to health care. Finally, for some Latinx persons, access to providers who speak Spanish or Portuguese or to those who can offer translation services is limited. Latinx LGBTQ+ persons have additional compounding challenges that affect their health and access to health care. For example, Latinx persons are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS.

This guide can help faith communities learn about health concerns specific to Latinx communities as well as health concerns specific to LGBTQ+ persons and those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Each of these communities has a different responsibility for learning and understanding. For faith communities, this may mean offering medical clinics that are open to the public regardless of a person's immigration or insurance status, while also offering culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. For Latinx communities, this may mean taking greater care of the communities' health and working on preventing, managing, and reducing the incidence of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, asthma, etc. This may also include working on changing some cultural habits that affect when and how persons seek medical care. For Latinx LGBTQ+ communities, this may mean better awareness about health providers who understand their specific health concerns and learning about ways of preventing HIV transmission.

## Latinx Health: General Challenges

Some of the general challenges that disproportionately affect the health of Latinx persons and communities include:

- Lack of health insurance.
- Immigration Status.
- Place of residence.
- Food insecurity.
- Access to providers who provide services with appropriate linguistic and cultural sensitivities.
- Delayed diagnosis. (Although cancer rates for Latinx people are lower than the general population, mortality is greater because of later diagnosis.)
- Work injuries.
- Diabetes.
- Obesity.
- High blood pressure.
- Asthma.

## Latinx LGBTQ+ Health: More Specific Challenges

In addition to the general health challenges that affect Latinx persons and communities, Latinx LGBTQ+ persons and communities have other additional challenges. These include:

- All the general challenges listed above.
- Discrimination, stigma, and bias in healthcare, including being refused healthcare.
- Lack of healthcare worker training in working with LGBTQ+ persons.
- Suicide.
- Depression and anxiety.
- Substance abuse.
- Isolation.
- Some gender cultural norms in Latinx communities.
- Homelessness.
- Delay in seeking care.

- Less likely to fill prescriptions.
- HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted infections.
- Limited appropriate healthcare and housing in detention facilities, including immigration facilities.

## **Trans Latinx Persons: Additional Challenges**

- Magnified incidences of depression, suicide, substance abuse, and violence.
- Increased levels of homelessness and unemployment; less educational attainment.
- Specific coverage exclusions from health insurance.
- Access to comprehensive and affirming healthcare.
- Access to hormones.
- Intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- Transgender women of color have a greater incidence of HIV infection than LGB persons and white transgender persons.

## **Latinx Persons and HIV/AIDS: More Health Challenges**

- Stigma.
- Access to treatment.
- Unequal access to PrEP (“pre-exposure prophylaxis” is a means of HIV prevention for people who do not have HIV; by taking a daily dose of this drug, individuals can reduce their risk of contracting HIV if they are exposed to the virus).
- Lack of knowledge of HIV status.

# HIV and AIDS:

A challenge which reveals other challenges faced by LGBTQ+ Latinx persons and communities.

The following section is specific to HIV and AIDS, yet it is illustrative of the many other health challenges faced by Latinx LGBTQ+ communities.

## What is HIV?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS. There are therapies that reduce the virus load in a person, but it is important to understand that HIV is transmissible.

## What is AIDS?

Acquired Immunodeficiency Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) can occur in the late stages of HIV infection.

## Who can get infected with HIV?

Anyone can get infected with HIV.



**KNOW YOUR STATUS. GET TESTED.**

**October 15**

is National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD)

**December 1**

is World AIDS Day

HIV and AIDS have impacted Latinx persons and communities for decades now. Unfortunately, families and faith communities have, at times, stigmatized persons living with or impacted by HIV/AIDS. We believe that the imperatives to “love our neighbor” and “to respect the dignity of every human being” invite families and faith communities to show acceptance, support, understanding, and affirmation. One way to accomplish this is by educating ourselves and our communities about HIV/AIDS, treatments, strategies, and about ways to manage and prevent HIV/AIDS, as well as ways to promote overall health and wellness in our families and faith communities.

## **Families and Faith Communities**

Families and faith communities play a vital role in a holistic response to HIV/AIDS by:

- Educating people on preventing exposure to HIV/AIDS.
- Providing physical and spiritual care and support to those infected and affected.
- Combating stigma and discrimination.
- Advocating for all stigmatized and minoritized communities.

Success requires the involvement of family and faith-community members and others to collectively educate the community and respond compassionately. This better serves the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of persons living with and impacted by HIV/AIDS.

## **LGBTQ+ Youth**

Young LGBTQ+ persons face unique health challenges in their lives and, when they are not raised in settings that are safe, respectful, and loving, they face many additional health risks.

In addition, as Latinx persons and communities, we often ignore information about health and healthy living because we are taught at a very early age that we should not seek medical care unless we are extremely sick.

There are several important components that help create a safe and healthy environment for Latinx LGBTQ+ persons, including young persons. They mostly start with an approach and offering of correct information.

- Have a holistic approach to the person, inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, race, and ethnicity, etc.
- Although the risks and challenges are similar, understand that Latinx persons and communities are very diverse, multicultural, and polycentric. These issues are dealt with differently by different communities.
- Promote healthy habits that avoid substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviors, etc. Poor health habits increase the risk for HIV, Hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Recognize that substance abuse is often a tool that LGBTQ+ people use in an attempt to cope with homophobia, transphobia, racism, and their families' lack of support and acceptance.
- "Coming Out" in contexts or communities that are not understanding or affirming puts persons at risk of experiencing many adverse health effects.
- LGBTQ+ persons share many of the same problems as those who are heterosexual. The difference for LGBTQ+ persons is that these problems may be compounded by race/ethnicity. In addition, their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (SOGI) is often stigmatized and not supported by society; in addition, a person's SOGI is often not discussed openly or accepted in their families and faith communities.
- Latinx LGBTQ+ persons are often taught, from a very early age, that they should not talk about certain subjects. Among those "forbidden" subjects are sex, sexuality, gender identity, cancer, mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and obesity (just to name a few).
- Many Latinx persons are accustomed to being silenced or not discussing openly certain subjects. Our cultures often teach us to shy away from certain topics that may bring about shame and this, in turn, can lead to denial, silence, and/or the experience of being stigmatized. This cultural norm of silence or topic-avoidance can diminish a person's self-esteem and can place LGBTQ+ people at risk because they are neither allowed to ask—nor be informed—about unhealthy behaviors.



- The cultural norm of topic-avoidance or silence can also have devastating results such as depression, suicide, homelessness, substance abuse, etc. HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can also enter a person's life as a consequence of family and community silences.
- Young Latinx LGBTQ+ people often find themselves in highly stressful situations. "Coming out" to family members is not always easy among Latinx people. But more difficult is "coming out" to ourselves. It is not easy for many.
- In addition to our own "coming out" process, young Latinx people can also face problems at home. Some of these problems may include substance abuse in parents, domestic violence, arguing among family members, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, undocumented immigration status, an overbearing parent, an abusive sibling... or a combination of these problems.
- Self-image can also be a problem for young Latinx LGBTQ+ persons, and lack of LGBTQ+ and/or Latinx role models in society and in families can further complicate efforts to lead a healthy lifestyle.



Faith communities and Latinx families can do much to prevent HIV infection. By educating themselves, their families, and their faith communities, they can become supportive, understanding, and affirming of their family members, including young Latinx LGBTQ+ persons. All of this reduces the risks of:

- Substance Abuse.
- Bullying.
- Other risky behaviors.

All of these above risks contribute to the risk of higher suicide and HIV rates.

Latinx people continue to be heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS: today there are approximately 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and over 250,000 of them are Latinx. The states with the largest number of persons living with HIV and AIDS are New York and California.

HIV today is no longer a death sentence for Latinx people. Once a person becomes positive, they can still live a very long, happy, and productive life. However, HIV does call for a change in living habits because persons who are HIV-positive need to eat well and engage in a sufficient amount of physical exercise that can help to relieve stress in one's daily life. HIV-positive persons should limit—and, in most cases, avoid altogether—the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Those who have become HIV-positive are also prescribed a rigid drug therapy of medication designed to slow the spread of the virus, to contain it, and often to kill virus cells. Only one person has been known to “be cured” of HIV or AIDS. When you hear that people have a “non-detectable” level of HIV virus in their bloodstream, this means that the virus is not currently found in their blood (after blood tests), but the HIV virus always remains in a person's muscle mass if they are HIV-positive. That is why HIV is not completely curable — but it *can* be contained.

HIV and AIDS are not “LGBTQ+ diseases.” Anyone can contract the HIV virus and, if untreated, can develop AIDS. HIV/AIDS can be contracted by people who do not engage in safer sex practices, but it does not follow or require a specific sexual orientation or gender identity. Within the LGBTQ+ community gay or bisexual men are more likely to be positive than lesbian women and the rates are increasing for transgender communities.

### **The following are the most common ways to contract HIV:**

- Having unprotected sex (e.g. without a condom) with someone who is already infected.
- Having contact with the blood of someone who has HIV (e.g. receiving a blood transfusion with blood from someone who is infected with HIV).
- A mother who has HIV can pass it on to her baby. However, good pre-natal care can reduce this risk.
- Using an unsterilized needle that was previously used by someone with HIV.

## A number of factors contribute to the spread of HIV in Latinx communities:

1. Behavioral risk factors for HIV differ by country of origin. Data suggest that the highest percentages of diagnosed HIV infections among Latinx men are attributed to sexual contact with other men, regardless of place of birth. However, men born in Puerto Rico have a substantially higher rate of diagnosed HIV infections than Latinx men who were born elsewhere—the higher rate of HIV infection among Puerto Rican men is attributed to injection drug use.
2. Latinx men and women are most likely to be infected with HIV as a result of sexual contact with men. Latinx women may be unaware of their male partners' sexual behavior and risk-taking.
3. Injection drug use continues to be a risk factor for Latinx people, particularly those living or born in Puerto Rico. In addition, both casual and chronic substance users (among Latinx people) may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected sex, when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
4. The presence of some sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can significantly increase one's chances of contracting HIV. And a person who has both HIV and some STIs has a greater chance of infecting others with HIV. The rates of STIs remain high among Latinx people.
5. Cultural factors may affect the risk of HIV infection. Some Latinx people, for example, may avoid testing, counseling, or treatment out of fear of rejection by family and community, or out of fear of affecting their immigration status. Traditional gender roles and the stigma surrounding homosexuality in Latinx families and communities may make it difficult for many Latinx people to seek testing, treatment, and counseling support.
6. Greater acculturation into U.S. culture has both negative (engaging in behaviors that increase the risk for HIV infection) and positive (communicating with partners about practicing safer sex) effects on the health behaviors of Latinx people.
7. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lower educational attainment, inadequate health insurance, limited access to health care, and/or language barriers may contribute to higher HIV infection rates among Latinx people.

Due to fear of deportation, undocumented immigrants may be less likely to access HIV prevention services, get an HIV test, or receive adequate treatment and care when living with HIV.

# Taking Action

*“Let us start building!”*

So they committed themselves to the common good.

*Nehemiah 2:18b*

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## What can faith communities do?

- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate health resources.
- Offer on-site clinics that serve ALL people, regardless of immigration or insurance status.
- Identify, support, and promote community health-clinics or providers that serve Latinx communities and immigrants.
- Identify, support, and promote healthcare providers and clinics that are welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ+ persons.
- Advocate for better access to health care and for access to higher-quality health care.
- Celebrate World AIDS Day in congregations (December 1).
- Offer or identify needle/syringe exchange programs.

## What can Latinx families do?

- Educate each other on the prevention and management of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, asthma, HIV, etc.
- Advocate for one another.
- Focus on regular health screenings.
- Learn about the specific health challenges of their LGBTQ+ family members and advocate for them.
- Promote the value of each person knowing their own HIV status.
- Support HIV+ family members in their treatment.
- Fight against homophobia and transphobia.

## What can LGBTQ+ Latinx persons do?

- Educate each other on the prevention and management of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, asthma, HIV, etc.
- Know your HIV status.
- Advocate for one another.
- Focus on regular health screenings.
- Learn about the specific health challenges of their LGBTQ+ family members and advocate for them.
- Identify, support, and promote healthcare providers and clinics that are welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ+ persons.

## For more information, go to:

- Latino Commission on AIDS:  
<https://latinoaids.org/>
- National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day (October 15):  
<http://nlaad.org/>
- The Body: HIV/AIDS Resource Center for Latinx People:  
<https://www.thebody.com/collection/hiv-latinx>
- Youth Pride:  
<https://www.youthprideri.org/>
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health:  
<https://www.wpath.org/>
- New York State Department of Health: A Guide to HIV/AIDS Education in Faith Communities:  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/9256.pdf>



[www.clgs.org](http://www.clgs.org)  
[www.fefamiliaigualdad.org](http://www.fefamiliaigualdad.org)

## About The Faith, Family, Equality Latinx Roundtable at CLGS

The Latinx Roundtable was created on a basis of love, acceptance, and positive transformation.

We strive to promote understanding, acceptance, and affirmation of Latinx LGBTQ+ persons and their families by transforming Latinx faith communities and the wider Latinx community.

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