

Request for Information on the Development of the Fiscal Years 2026 – 2030 NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Sexual & Gender Minority Health Research

Contextual note: This response is formatted to fit the [online submission form](#), which only allows for four 500-word responses. It does not allow for any preamble or context. Each field requests a 500-word maximum response to each of the below bolded questions. I will include our reference list in the last field.

Please provide your perspective on the following topic: The highest priority needs, and emerging areas of opportunity related to SGM health research at NIH.

Available research consistently highlights the urgent need to address stigma, discrimination, and violence faced by LGBTQI+ individuals in their personal lives, employment, housing, and health care (Casey et al., 2019). LGBTQI+ individuals experience higher rates of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence; research in this area would aid in the development of resources and targeted interventions to reduce such violence.

Discrimination is associated with mental and physical health disparities, substance use disorder, and suicidality (Busby et al., 2020). Efforts to understand and combat these issues are crucial for promoting equity and well-being within LGBTQI+ communities. Further, it is vital to understand the role that relationships and community support play in building resilience against discrimination and minority stress. APA supports a population health approach to improve health, health equity, safety, and well-being, which states that “a biopsychosocial perspective is important across the lifespan and across the communities and settings where people live, work, learn, and play” (APA, Psychology’s Role in Advancing Population Health, 2022).

Research on the impacts of intersectional identities on mental and behavioral health represents an emerging area of opportunity related to SGM health research. Intersectional identities tend to experience higher levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence, and additional barriers to medical and psychological care, as compared to individuals belonging to one minoritized identity alone (Swann et al., 2024). This research should include areas related to aging SGM individuals, who face unique challenges and require individualized care.

Research should also focus on the psychological and physiological impacts of harmful practices such as conversion therapy and restrictions or bans on gender affirming care. In

its 2024 Policy Statement on Affirming Evidence-Based Inclusive Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary Individuals, APA noted: “the imposition of such bans poses a direct threat to the mental health and emotional well-being of transgender, gender diverse, and nonbinary youth, exacerbating the already high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts among this vulnerable population” (American Psychological Association, 2024). Finally, technological development has had significant impacts on SGM individuals; it can enable LGBTQI+ individuals to engage with others and find community, but can also spread damaging misinformation about sexual and gender minorities (Berger et al., 2022). It is crucial to understand the impact of technology on marginalized communities and how to best utilize technology to improve health, health equity, safety, and well-being.

Please provide your perspective on the following topic: Actions that NIH should prioritize to advance SGM health-related research.

Research can only advance with sufficient resources. It is important that NIH provide adequate funding to advance SGM health-related research and data collection. At the same time, NIH should disseminate information on how this research aids SGM communities. NIH should also establish and maintain partnerships with other research organizations to share data and strengthen research initiatives. NIH should pursue the collection of accurate and comprehensive data, including in combination with other agencies and organizations.

It is vital that organizations and agencies cultivate a skilled and diverse workforce to ensure research is comprehensive and equity-based, which includes educating, mentoring, and training a diverse workforce, hiring and elevating diverse voices in the workplace, and providing continuing education related to sexual and gender diversity. As an association with a longstanding history of devoting attention to and advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) related issues, APA strongly believes these factors are critical to advancing biomedical, behavioral, and psychological research supported by the NIH (American Psychological Association, 2021). Accordingly, APA supports NIH's continued efforts to foster inclusive excellence in the research workforce.

Please provide your perspective on the following topic: Partnerships NIH should pursue, both inside and outside of government, to advance SGM health-related research.

Local and community-based organizations play a crucial role in providing individualized resources and support to SGM individuals. In particular, educational and health-related institutions and organizations, at local and national levels, can offer valuable insights into

the needs of SGM individuals. Other executive offices and agencies such as the Census Bureau, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services can contribute important data and research, and can benefit from the research conducted by NIH. National advocacy organizations provide vital information on the needs of LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as policy and data analysis and advocacy services. Finally, collaboration with policymakers at local and national levels ensures the application of NIH research in policy is beneficial to SGM populations.

Please provide your perspective on the following topic: Any other relevant topics that NIH should consider when developing the next NIH-Wide strategic plan for SGM health research

SGM individuals face unique challenges; particularly related to discrimination, stigma, and violence; in healthcare, education, and the workforce, all of which has been shown to impact mental and physical health. As such, it is vital that research on SGM health includes exploration of the experiences of SGM individuals in educational, healthcare, and professional settings, and the impacts of interventions that may reduce discrimination. Research should also incorporate the benefits of professional education and training in different settings. The APA's Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Sexual Minority Persons "aim to help practitioners understand the diversity of sexual minority identities, recognize patients' resilience as well as their challenges, and broaden the focus of research to include participants from more diverse backgrounds" (APA Task Force on Psychological Practice with Sexual Minority Persons, 2021). A similar resource developed by the NIH, specifically for researchers, would help promote equity and thoroughness in SGM health research.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the NIH for your commitment to advancing research on the health and well-being of sexual and gender minorities. As an organization dedicated to promoting psychological science, the APA emphasizes the importance of inclusive research that considers the unique needs and experiences of SGM populations. Your strategic plan provides a vital framework for addressing health disparities, enhancing data collection, and fostering collaboration across disciplines. We look forward to continued collaboration and progress in advancing SGM research.

References

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