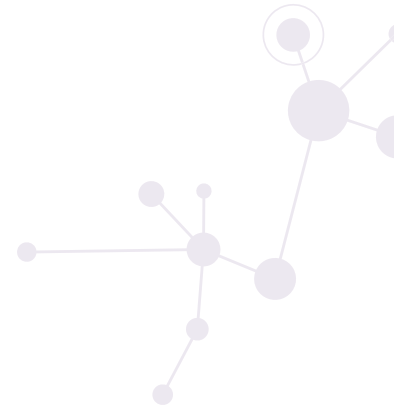# Transgender health

Increasing Access for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Patients Seeking Gender-Affirming Care in Nevada through an Online Statewide Resource Guide

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Abstract

There are limited health care options available for transgender and gender-expansive (T/GE) individuals nationally, particularly those who reside in Nevada. To increase the accessibility of gender-affirming care and support prospective patients in finding providers who offer the services they need, the health systems science lessons in our curriculum informed our development of an online resource guide for gender-affirming care. This multi-phase, community-engaged project compiled health care providers' services, including telehealth, payment, and intentional welcoming and safe spaces for T/GE patients. A key outcome of this project is to make health care services more accessible to the T/GE community through a patient-friendly website, facilitating more positive interactions with their providers and building trust between providers and the T/GE community in Nevada.

Project addressed/problem discovered

Research shows transgender and gender-expansive (T/GE) populations historically and presently experience barriers to health care, particularly in Nevada. While a limited number of gender-affirming providers reside in Las Vegas and Reno, access barriers are compounded in rural and frontier counties of Nevada. Acknowledging that 41% of T/GE individuals report feeling mistreated in a health care setting,[1] yet 73% report feeling less suicidal after receiving gender affirming care[2] and with 72% of the general population using the internet to find health care information,[3] our team collaborated with gender affirming providers and T/GE individuals in the community to create an open, online health care resource guide that lists gender affirming providers in Nevada. This enables patients to more safely and easily identify their options for health care and also gives providers a tool to refer T/GE patients within a trustworthy network.

Approach

Our project grew from the "population, public and social determinants of health domain." First, we conducted a literature review compiling the quantitative and qualitative literature on the health care needs and accessibility challenges T/GE communities experience. After identifying the need to improve access to gender-affirming care and resources, the team was able to recognize barriers on a population level and understand their biological, psychological and social impact.

In developing a solution, the "clinical informatics and health technology" domain informed our methodology. Using a REDCap survey, we collected information from providers and worked to collect, analyze and present the data in a patient-friendly way. We have started translating the data from the survey into a website to be made accessible to the T/GE population and providers.

We intend to affect change in the "health system improvement" domain by making health care services visible and accessible to the T/GE community on a statewide level. By consolidating a list of providers who offer gender-affirming care into a single, accessible resource, this improves the entire health care ecosystem's ability to care for T/GE patients. Not only can T/GE patients find resources they seek with ease, but they can also do so safely and anonymously if desired. Additionally, health care providers caring for this community can leverage our website to build their professional and referral network, which will ideally translate to greater trust, safety, and quality and continuity of care for patients.

We validated the site by reviewing the information our team would collect from providers and receiving feedback on how

to make the site patient-friendly from the very stakeholders and members of the community who would utilize and most benefit from this project. By doing so, our goal was to create a meaningful tool that is sustainable and impactful, improving the "value in health care" domain for patients and providers. Through community partnerships, we will implement a plan to ensure the longevity of this resource guide and reduce barriers to care for the T/GE community. In doing so, the guide will have a virtual and funded home for ongoing changes and improvements.

Outcomes

Our goal for this project is to create an accessible, user-friendly, one-stop-shop for gender-affirming care that can be well-utilized by the Nevada T/GE community and providers. There will be two interfaces—one targeted for patients, the other for providers.

Prospective patients will be able to sort the providers by specialty, services of interest, business hours, availability of telehealth appointments, and additional parameters suggested by the T/GE individuals with whom we have been collaborating. Our team hopes this will severely reduce patients' time and effort spent on finding trustworthy providers who offer quality care. We also want to take the guesswork out of finding appropriate patient referrals on the provider's side and expand each provider's network for patient benefit. Another goal is to create a site for the provider to easily and efficiently search for another health care professional to provide a service they may not be able to provide themselves. This will facilitate a warmer handoff between providers and alleviate stress for the patient.

By following this two-pronged approach, we hope to increase the number of T/GE patients having positive experiences with their providers and increase the community's trust in the health care system overall. Our outcome measures will be extracted from website analytics to quantify the number of page visits, track inter-provider referrals that have been facilitated by the site, and map the geography of where patients are seeking care. To assess patient and provider satisfaction as described above, we will incorporate a user satisfaction survey that asks specifically about the perceived user-friendliness and usefulness of the website. With an eye toward continual improvement, a feedback form will also be available on the site so we can receive and implement changes suggested by website users. These efforts will also increase community buy-in, which is integral to any successful public health effort. Upon completion of this site, we will

be partnering with a team of gender-affirming providers to ensure the site will continue to be updated and helpful for the evolving needs of the T/GE community.

Personal impact

Researching a public health issue and developing a solution to address it from the ground up has given our team a tremendous appreciation for the importance of community involvement in public health research efforts. We received invaluable feedback on the project proposal from community stakeholders and suggestions from T/GE individuals regarding what information they look for in a new provider. Learning from these unique and personal perspectives allowed us to be informed and intentional throughout our project planning and execution. It empowered us as changemakers to create a sustainable solution that mitigates the specific barriers T/GE patients face when seeking health care services, not only specific to their transition, but also for routine or general health care, so they receive trustworthy and quality care the same way any other person needs and deserves. As physicians and patient advocates, we will carry this experience with us in our future practice and with each patient interaction. When interacting with a patient, we will actively involve them in the assessment and plan to provide more effective, informed and quality care. When proposing any institutional or policy changes, we will remain mindful of our position as physicians and always encourage the participation of the people these changes may impact. Specific to this project, we all aspire to be listed on a resource guide similar to this one and be known for providing and being advocates for quality gender-affirming care in our communities.

Sources

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1. 3. Cohen JK. 72% of consumers use the internet to find healthcare info: 6 survey findings. Becker's Hospital Review. Published May 31, 2017. https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/72-of-consumers-use-the-internet-to-find-healthcare-info-6-survey-findings.html. Accessed July 13, 2022.