

LGBTQ Health Disparities Research Collaborative



Coordinators: May Chen, MSPH and Dirk Davis, MPH

Faculty Advisors: Kate Muessig, PhD and GerShun Avilez, PhD

Objective:

The objective of the LGBTQ Health Disparities Research Collaborative is to provide graduate students and faculty members at UNC-Chapel Hill with a space to engage in critical conversations related to issues of LGBTQ health. In particular, we will bring individuals together to share ongoing research, network, and collaborate on research, practice, and advocacy efforts here at UNC-Chapel Hill. In line with the NIH 2016-2020 Sexual and Gender Minority Health Strategic Plan¹, our efforts aim to 1) strengthen the community of scholars to promote innovative, multidisciplinary research on population-level LGBTQ outcomes, 2) provide solutions to current barriers in conducting LGBTQ health research, and 3) expand the current knowledge base on sexual and gender minority health and well-being.

Rationale:

Research suggests that sexual and gender minorities face health disparities linked to societal stigma, discrimination, and denial of their human rights. This discrimination has been associated with numerous poor health outcomes, with LGBTQ-identified people of color shouldering a disproportionate burden of these outcomes². In 2011, the Institute of Medicine published a landmark report highlighting substantial gaps in our understanding of the health status of LGBTQ populations³ and the NIH Sexual and Gender Minority Research Coordinating Committee has since called for prioritizing health research for LGBTQ populations¹.

Although a number of faculty and students at Carolina are actively engaged in research concerning LGBTQ populations, there are few opportunities currently available for collaborating and sharing work across disciplines. The lack of such spaces represents a significant barrier for advancing existing LGBTQ health research and offering new opportunities for students and faculty interested in beginning research on LGBTQ health. Moreover, the lack of such spaces may disproportionately impact LGBTQ-identified students who may have a vested interest in this work. The LGBTQ Health Disparities Research Collaborative seeks to bridge this gap. The Department of Health Behavior currently co-hosts the only course on LGBTQ health available anywhere in the Research Triangle area, including UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke, Wake Forest, NC Central, and NC State. The course, made possible by the advocacy work of previous graduate students, has provided a platform for interdisciplinary LGBTQ health research here at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, but unfortunately it is only offered every other year. The LGBTQ Health Disparities Research Collaborative builds on and expands these efforts by establishing a more permanent space for continued dialogue and scholarship on the issues facing sexual and gender minority populations.

Activities:

The Collaborative plans a variety of activities to increase student and faculty exposure to research-related issues of LGBTQ health as well as provide professional development opportunities for students. These include:

- Sponsoring a guest speaker series, including visiting scholars from out-of-state every semester and scholars from Carolina and other local organizations on a bimonthly basis
- Organizing a writing group where interested students will collaborate on publishable manuscripts related to the health of sexual and gender minorities
- Sharing resources related to relevant conferences, funding, and training opportunities
- Creating and disseminating guidelines on sexual orientation and gender identity measurement and other related research best practices among faculty and students
- Providing a platform for giving and receiving feedback on ongoing grants, presentations, and other research-related activities from LGBTQ health scholars and practitioners

¹National Institutes of Health Sexual and Gender Minority Research Coordinating Committee. (2016). NIH FY 2016-2020 Strategic Plan to Advance Research on the Health and Well-being of Sexual and Gender Minorities.

²Healthy People 2020. (2016). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health. Retrieved from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health#one>

³Institute of Medicine Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and T. H. I. and R. G. and O. (2011). *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People. The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding*. National Academies Press. <http://doi.org/10.17226/13128>