

## Spotlight on LGBTQ+ Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Understanding and Addressing Disproportionate Rates of Homelessness and Housing Discrimination within the LGBTQ+ Community

### Introduction

June marks Pride Month, a dedicated period for celebrating and commemorating the LGBTQ+ community. This is an opportunity to reflect upon the rich history and individual lives that make up this vibrant community. Yet, it's also a stark reminder of the adversities this group continues to face. A particularly pressing issue is homelessness and housing insecurity, which **disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ individuals**.

Studies show queer adults are twice as likely<sup>1</sup> to have experienced homelessness compared to the general population. It's important to note that the term "queer" is inclusive, accommodating individuals who don't identify as exclusively straight or conform to binary gender identities.

Discrimination, both subtle and explicit<sup>2</sup>, creates significant disparities for the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in the housing sector. The prejudice these individuals face can be traced historically to biased policies and attitudes. Despite some progress, LGBTQ+ individuals still report **higher rates of housing discrimination**<sup>3</sup>, which confirms the fight for equal housing access is far from over. This inequality is keenly felt by individuals who identify as queer, highlighting the necessity to recognize and address their unique needs and experiences. There is a pressing need to tackle these disparities head-on and foster a world where everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, feels **safe, secure and accepted**.

### Key Takeaways

- **Pervasive Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in LGBTQ+ Community:** LGBTQ+ individuals, and particularly youth, are disproportionately affected by housing insecurity and homelessness. This is often a result of strained familial relationships and rejection after coming out.
- **Historical and Ongoing Discrimination:** The history of biased and anti-LGBTQ+ policies and actions have a present-day impact. Many LGBTQ+ individuals report higher rates of housing discrimination, indicating an ongoing fight for equal housing access. The transgender community faces particularly acute discrimination, with a significant number of transgender individuals experiencing homelessness or eviction due to their gender identity.
- **Need for Inclusive and Safe Support Services:** Addressing the disparities faced by the LGBTQ+ community in housing requires inclusive and safe support services. Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, as well as culturally competent services, are critical.

## Disparities in Housing/Homelessness

Disparities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals can be traced back through a history of biased and anti-LGBTQ+ policies and actions.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, discrimination was outright and explicit,<sup>5</sup> while other times it was subtle and came in the form of ignoring queer buyers and renters.<sup>6</sup> **LGBTQ+ individuals continue to report higher rates of housing discrimination,**<sup>7</sup> indicating the fight for equal housing access for all is ongoing.

Josiah Robinson, Prism Project managing director, recognizes that the disparities are indisputable. “Research shows that **gender and sexual minorities experience disproportionately higher rates of housing instability than cisgender and heterosexual individuals.** We know that widespread stigma, discrimination, and lack of basic civil rights protections contribute to this inequity. It is critical that all LGBTQ+ youth and adults in Tulsa are awarded **equal access** to public, private and faith-based housing, social services, and support services, without fear for their safety.”

Housing instability disproportionately affects a substantial number of queer individuals during their formative years, as supported by statistics revealing that **more than 25% of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.**<sup>8</sup> This alarming trend is frequently attributed to strained relationships with immediate family members, with about **one in eight queer individuals in Tulsa reporting unsupportive family environments.**<sup>9</sup>

Research conducted by the Prism Project found that several respondents had experienced homelessness yet had not utilized shelters.<sup>10</sup> Nearly 90% of respondents who reported experiencing homelessness said they did not use emergency shelters, and 30% of those individuals did not do so out of a concern for their safety. The prevailing avoidance of shelters highlights the importance of protecting and serving queer people.

A Way Home for Tulsa (AWH4T) partner agencies acknowledge the **need to address disparities faced by queer people experiencing homelessness**, particularly queer youth experiencing homelessness.<sup>11</sup> Youth Services of Tulsa (YST) operates an LGBTQ+ program aimed at assisting young adults understand their identities and self-expression, and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) highlights the significance of diversity within their programs, including that of sexual orientation and gender diversity.

### Key Statistics

- Queer adults are twice as likely as the general population to have experienced homelessness in their lifetime.
- More than 25% of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.
- About one in eight queer individuals in Tulsa report unsupportive family environments.
- Half of all LGBTQ+ youth's primary reason for homelessness is being forced out of the home by family.
- Nearly 90% of respondents who reported experiencing homelessness in a survey by the Prism Project did not use emergency shelters.
- 30% of those individuals did not do so out of concern for their safety.
- One in five transgender individuals have experienced homelessness in their lifetime.
- Between 2016 and 2019, there was an 88% increase in the number of transgender individuals experiencing homelessness.
- More than one in 10 transgender individuals report being evicted from their homes solely because of their gender identity.

## Understanding the Risks and Challenges

Recognizing the unique needs of queer individuals experiencing housing instability or homelessness is crucial in addressing this issue. Such individuals face various challenges, including **targeted discrimination, lack of affirming resources and limited support networks**.<sup>12</sup> Due to the aforementioned challenges faced by queer individuals, they might not feel safe disclosing their identities to service providers causing this population to be consistently underreported.<sup>13</sup> Abiding by inclusive housing practices and holding others accountable for providing inclusivity creates an environment that addresses these obstacles.

Deepening our understanding of the risks and challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community is essential for making meaningful progress.

While transgender individuals are an integral part of the LGBTQ+ community, it is crucial to acknowledge the targeted discrimination they face, which is distinct to their experiences. Transgender people are disproportionately affected by homelessness, with **one in five**<sup>14</sup> having experienced homelessness in their lifetime. Between 2016 and 2019, there was an **88% increase**<sup>15</sup> in the number of transgender individuals experiencing homelessness. As the visibility of the transgender community grows, so does the number of instances of discrimination they encounter. More than **one in ten**<sup>16</sup> transgender individuals report being evicted from their homes solely because of their gender identity. When discussing housing insecurity and discrimination within the LGBTQ+ community, it is imperative to recognize the unique vulnerability faced by transgender individuals.

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## Addressing LGBTQ+ Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Tulsa is home to a flourishing queer community. Queer individuals facing housing insecurity or homelessness can be assured that all **AWH4T service providers value diversity and equity within their programs**. AWH4T service providers are diligent about respecting clients' preferred names and pronouns. Data collection regarding sexuality and gender identity is also in the process of improving throughout AWH4T to better understand the full scope and impact of queer homelessness in Tulsa. **Listening to LGBTQ+ individuals when they state their needs and prioritizing client choice are two key contributing factors that outline AWH4T service providers' dedication to addressing the disparities faced by this community.**

Efforts to prevent queer homelessness must include implementing **strong anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies**, which promote stable housing and help individuals stay connected to education and employment. Additionally, creating an **inclusive environment and offering culturally competent services is crucial** to guarantee the safety and comfort of LGBTQ+ folks when accessing essential services, including emergency shelter.

Standing in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community during times of adversity is crucial to ensure queer folks feel safe and supported. The fight for fair housing access is ongoing. Recognizing the needs unique to LGBTQ+ individuals is the first step in addressing disparities.

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