These pages focus on the health disparities in the Pittsburgh area, due to their importance in health information as well as information that is relevant to different communities and resources.

The website of Pennsylvania's Health Department, 850 McRefen Road, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219.

We attended the meetings of the New Pittsburgh Council, Community Advisory Board (CAB) of the University of Pittsburgh's Translational Institute (CTSI), the Urban League of Pittsburgh and the UMPC for Inclusion.

This month the "Take Charge of Your Health" took a look at the LGBT community in Pittsburgh. Members are pictured at the Black Pride 2013. At a celebration at Highland Park in June 2013. (Photo by Rozanne P. Sweeney/Flyer)

Young people who make up the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) population are diverse. They have health needs and risks that are LBGT specific. Some LBGT youths experience health disparities, or inequalities, because of the discrimination and stigma they face.

People who identify as LBGT have specific health needs. They may have a harder time getting health care. They need care that is LGBT relevant and respect the status they hold. They are called LGBT. Some LBGT people are not able to maintain their status, so they don't get the care they need. Health care professionals aren't always trained in addressing LBGT specific health needs; some have even refused to treat LBGT patients. Some LBGT people turn to unhealthy behaviors (like substance abuse) to cope with misunderstanding or rejection from loved ones and society.

Gay-related stressors are present in the LGB community. Some LBGT couples are not permitted to be married. Many LBGT bars are targets of legislation and even violence. Some LBGT couples are even living the marriage anxiety. This is a very stressful situation. Gay-related stressors are the experiences LBGT people have because they identify with the LGB community.

Michael P. Marshall, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry and of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh and psychologist with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC's Division of Adolescent Medicine, and colleagues, have studied LBGT health disparities, particularly among youths. They found that LBGT youths are more likely to experience bullying, physical abuse from peers and sexual abuse than heterosexual youths. Because of this abuse, they are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, behavioral and substance abuse problems. Researchers have found that LBGT youths are at an increased risk for suicide, homelessness (some LBGT youths get kicked out of the house when their parents find out the youths are gay) and use fewer preventive health services than heterosexual youths. LBGT youths don’t even have the same access to participate in research. People under the age of 18 require parental consent to be involved in a study. Because LBGT youths get left out (or “come out”) their parents of their LBGT status, getting parental consent may be problematic or unattainable.

It's important to note that, despite difficult gay-related stressors and discrimination, most LBGT youths report being healthy and happy. An increasing number of studies indicate health disparities affect different populations. It's well-known that there are health disparities in the African American community. It's also known that there are health disparities in the LGBT community. One question is whether individuals are members of both communities, such that they have two “intersecting” minority identities, have even more disparities than people who are members of only one or the other. In his research, Dr. Marshall tested this question. He found evidence that African American LBGT girls and young women have no greater disparities than Caucasian LBGT girls and young women. In fact, he found that African American young women who identified as LBGT had smaller disparities than White young women. The researchers like Dr. Marshall are now looking into the implications of this finding.

It's possible that African American girls and young women who have been experiencing and coping with racial discrimination for a long time, are able to use these coping skills when they experience gay-related discrimination” says Dr. Marshall.

"Perhaps they have been able to form family members for skills to cope with racism, and the skills they’ve learned they can use to fight against discrimination in general, which decreases their risk for disparities," Dr. Marshall adds. “As researchers, we don’t know yet from where we need to understand how they learn their coping skills so we can help others who are in need.

For the purposes of this article, we will define sexuality as identity, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The transgender population has been defined as people who have been assigned to one gender at birth, but who identify with different from the LBGT population. They are referred to as transgender in the discharges in the trans parenthood popula- tion in a separate issue.

Resources

If you know a young person who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, sexual orientation or identity, Dr. Marshall recommends the following resources:

"Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC’s Division of Adolescent Medicine, gender and sexual development clinic: They’re a multidisciplinary team of health providers who help gay and transgender teens who are struggling with sexual orientation or gender identity issues. They offer services to help kids and families in the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-friendly medical and social services and provider, and the LGBTQ community.

http://www.chp.edu/ghp/ 412-692-6677

Gay and Lesbian Community Center – Friday nights are youth night, and LGBT youths can go and hang out in a supervised setting and be themselves in a safe space.

http://www.glcg.org/ 412-422-0114; 210 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Pursed works to improve the well-being of the LGBTQ youth community,gender, queer, and allied youth.

www.dreamsofhope.org/ 413-361-2085

Metro Community Health Center is LGTB-friendly and non-judgmental.

http://www.mchc.org/ 412-247-2210

All of these organizations are for free or low cost to community partners at partners@pitt.edu.