



American Medical Women's Association

The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915

American Medical Women's Association Position Paper on Principals of Lesbian Health Issues

Based on all available literature, it has been clearly shown that there is no psychiatric or physiological pathology associated with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. However gay, lesbian, and bisexual people's relationships are proscribed by the legal code of many states, with legal marriage denied them in every state of the United States, decreasing the stability of gay or lesbian committed relationships. This country also prohibits its gay, lesbian, and bisexual citizens from serving openly in the armed forces with no regard to their service record. This legal discrimination reflects an unfortunate and pervasive hatred of gay, lesbian and bisexual people causing psychological harms, violence, and legal and religious prohibitions, all with medical consequences.

These homophobic societal and family attitudes affect those children who recognize a gay, lesbian or bisexual identity within themselves, conferring on them a tenfold risk of suicide in comparison to heterosexual youth. Homophobic attitudes of society and the family further perpetuate low self-esteem in the lesbian, gay or bisexual adult resulting in higher rates of substance abuse, psychological distress, and relational dysfunction. Research indicates that health care practitioners also have homophobic attitudes, which impact negatively on quality patient care, adding to the distress of the patient, and creating alienation from the medical system, with subsequent loss of care.

There is only minimal research on lesbian health issues, with survey data suggesting that lesbians may have a higher body fat index, lower parity, fewer and less frequent visits to the physician for screening, and higher rates of smoking and alcohol use and abuse, putting lesbians theoretically at higher rates of breast, colon, ovarian, endometrial and lung cancer as well as heart disease.

We believe that discrimination against any humans on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, age, physical ability, or sexual orientation should not be tolerated as such discrimination has serious health consequences. We believe that, as physicians, our attitudes have an impact on those of society, and should set a clear example of respect for diversity. The American Medical Women's Association thus stands unified in a broad policy of nondiscrimination against lesbian, bisexual and gay individuals, urging the following:

- National legislation to end discrimination by sexual orientation in housing, employment, marriage and tax laws, child custody and adoption laws, to redefine family to encompass the full diversity of all family structures and to ratify marriage for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.
- Vigorous condemnation of anti-gay prejudice and violence by leaders in our government, religion, education, business and the media, with swift prosecution of those who commit hate crimes based on sexual orientation.
- Creation and implementation of educational programs about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and their families in the schools, religious institutions and the wider community to teach respect for all humans.
- Initiation of and National Institute of Health support of prospective research on lesbian health issues, with stratification of existing longitudinal studies by sexual orientation so that a demographic picture can be generated and appropriate targeting for screening tests initiated.

- Recognition by all healthcare providers that homophobia is a health hazard to all individuals, and compromises the delivery of our highest standard of medical care.