

A Qualitative Exploration of the Tobacco Control Needs of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community in Colorado

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

A primary purpose of the needs assessment was to better understand the needs of this community in terms of reducing initiation of tobacco use by youth, promoting cessation among both youth and adults, and reducing exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. Additionally, the needs assessment was conducted in order to inform the development and implementation of LGBT-targeted tobacco control efforts.

Specific questions addressed by this needs assessment include:

1. Initiation: What are the primary factors that influence youth and adults in the LGBT community to initiate tobacco use?
2. Cessation: What are the specific cessation needs of the LGBT community?
3. Environmental Smoke: What are the specific needs of the LGBT community related to environmental smoke?

Agency Partnership for the Needs Assessment

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Colorado works to improve the lives of individuals who affiliate with the LGBT movement by building a healthy, inclusive, and empowered LGBT community; providing opportunities for positive social interactions, community service and personal development; and advocating for social justice.

The tobacco control needs assessment provided the Center with the opportunity to continue to build relationships with other LGBT community organizations in the state and to begin capacity building around tobacco issues within the LGBT community. The Center's role in this study was: to serve as a liaison between LGBT organizations throughout the state; to assist local organizations with recruitment of focus group participants; to coordinate the logistics of the focus groups, including providing food and incentives for participants, and finding and securing spaces in which to conduct the focus groups; and to administer the written survey.

The needs assessment was designed and carried out in partnership with OMNI Research and Training, Inc. OMNI is an applied social science research firm that has been working with foundations, government and non-profit agencies in the areas of youth development, substance abuse prevention and treatment, juvenile and criminal justice, and community health and development, for over twenty-five years. OMNI's role in the needs assessment was to develop focus group guides, create the written survey, conduct focus groups, analyze and interpret data, and write the final report.

The LGBT Community in Colorado

In 2000, the U.S. Census released population figures for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people in the form of the number of same-sex unmarried partner households.

These figures reported that Colorado was home to 10,045 gay and lesbian unmarried partner households. Of these, 4,640 were gay male households and 5,405 were lesbian households. In 2000, Colorado had a higher percentage of same sex couples than most other states, and Denver County had the seventh highest percentage of gay or lesbian partner households of all counties in the U.S. at 2.95%. The Denver/Boulder/Greeley MSA had the 12th highest percentage of gay men and lesbians for MSAs with at least one million people. Additionally, Colorado had one county in the top 25 in terms of gay/lesbian population outside of Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

Needs Assessment Process

This needs assessment was designed as a qualitative research study of the attitudes, behaviors, and needs of the LGBT community in Colorado. The needs assessment consisted of two main components: focus groups and surveys. Focus groups were conducted with members of the LGBT community across the state of Colorado, and with owners of LGBT clubs and bars in the Denver area. Surveys were administered in LGBT bars and clubs and at LGBT events.

Findings

A number of trends emerged from this research.

- ❖ The stresses of “coming out” and homophobia were reported to be factors in tobacco use among the LGBT population.
- ❖ Initiation of tobacco use was affected by a lack of knowledge of the addictive properties of tobacco and, especially for youth, by ease of access to tobacco.
- ❖ Cessation strategies varied widely, and attempts to quit were largely unsuccessful.
- ❖ LGBT-sensitive health care providers and cessation programs may be useful tools in cessation efforts.
- ❖ Anti-tobacco campaigns were reported to have little lasting impact on attempts to quit.
- ❖ Perceptions about the impact of environmental smoke and nonsmoking environments on tobacco use were mixed.

Recommendations

Six categories of recommendations resulted from analysis of the focus group and survey data:

Educate the LGBT Community about the Tobacco Use

- ❖ It may be useful to educate the LGBT community about rates of smoking in, and targeting of, the LGBT community. To begin addressing the diversity of smoking triggers and employing appropriate cessation strategies among the LGBT community, this community must first be educated regarding their own

prevalence rates and habits. The data from the focus groups indicates that the participants were often unaware of the rates in their own community, or how these rates differed from heterosexual communities.

Develop Customized Cessation Programs

- ❖ Because of the wide variety of cessation strategies available, and the level of individual variation in the effectiveness of these strategies, it became apparent through the course of this research that a *single* program will not be effective for everyone who wants to quit. Rather, it seemed important to consider developing smoking cessation assessment tools that could appropriately match individuals with a customized cadre of treatment services. Assessment tools could be developed for individual use, use by health care providers, or use within a curriculum or tobacco cessation support group. The tools could be designed to match an individual's life circumstances, needs, strengths, and challenges with a strategy or set of strategies that would be most salient to, and effective with, that individual. A customized cessation program could then be developed for each individual, utilizing the most appropriate strategies.

Develop Gay-Oriented Cessation Programs

- ❖ Focus group and survey data indicate that a portion of the LGBT community may be interested in gay-oriented cessation programs. Though the structure and content of these programs was not specified by participants who were interested in such programs, they indicated that it was important to them that these programs be accepting of, and sensitive to, their sexual orientation. This suggests that it may be important to adapt existing cessation programs to be more culturally sensitive to LGBT issues, and to provide this programming within an LGBT setting, such as the Center, Rainbow Alley, or another LGBT community services organization.

Provide Education to Health Care Providers and Develop More Connections Between the LGBT Community and Gay-Friendly Health Care Providers

- ❖ A substantial number of survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that they would utilize gay-friendly health care providers in their cessation efforts, if they had access to these providers. It may be useful to provide education and training to health care providers on LGBT issues, to increase their awareness of, and sensitivity to, the unique needs of this community. Additionally, it may be useful to increase existing links between gay-friendly health care providers and the LGBT community.

Link Tobacco with Other Issues

- ❖ It may be important for educational campaigns, cessation programs, and initiation prevention strategies include a link between tobacco and other health issues facing the LGBT community. Especially in a community challenged by HIV/AIDS, homophobia, and violence, tobacco use may be seen as less significant, or as part of a larger context. Focus group participants noted that

tobacco use in the LGBT community is one part of larger health and social concerns, and recommended that it be treated as such.

Reduce Environmental Smoke

- ❖ One of the most common requests among participants was for increased attempts by business owners and other entities to prohibit smoking, because, for them, avoiding contexts that triggered tobacco use was very important in their efforts to quit. Given possible sensitivity to issues of rights within the LGBT community, the assertions among club and bar owners that their businesses would be hurt by ordinances limiting environmental smoke, and the lack of agreement within the community on whether such limitations would have the desired impact on tobacco use, any attempts to pursue this should be made with sensitivity to the needs and perceptions of the community and the owners of LGBT establishments.