



City of Seattle

Seattle LGBTQ Commission

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PRESS RELEASE

Seattle LGBTQ Commission's Open Letter to Elected Officials

As Seattle enters a new era in leadership, the Seattle LGBTQ Commission looks forward to working toward a more just and equitable future for all people in our city. We write this open letter in the hopes that the next Mayor and City Councilmembers can work with us on the following issues that disproportionately impact the LGBTQ community. Specifically:

Homelessness and Housing Issues - LGBTQ communities are disproportionately at risk of experiencing homelessness. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, one in five trans individuals are discriminated against when seeking a home, and one in five will experience homelessness.¹ An estimated 20-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.² With this in mind, our recommendations are the following:

- Allow individuals to self-identify when accessing services and gather more information on the overlap between homelessness and LGBTQ identification
- Protect safety at sanctioned encampments³
- Recognize chosen families at shelters⁴
- Develop policies for unsanctioned encampments that center dignity and stability, and stop the inhumane homeless camp sweeps⁵
- Assess and eliminate barriers to homelessness services⁶
 - This is particularly an issue for individuals who do not identify with a binary gender, as many of the current services are divided by gender
- Train staff and service providers, ensure compliance⁷
- Work to ensure no Seattle residents are denied housing due to gender identity, sexual orientation, or HIV status
- Create policies to increase supplies of and access to affordable housing, both in the short-term and long-term

Drug Use Services and Safe Consumption Sites - LGBTQ individuals have a higher rate of issues with drug use. An estimated 20-30% of the LGBTQ community have substance use issues, as compared to about 9% of the general population.⁸

¹

¹ ["Housing & Homelessness"](#) National Center for Transgender Equality, accessed Nov 3, 2017

² *Id.*

³ These items are elaborated upon in our Dec 8, 2016 letter to the Mayor's office and City Council

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ ["Why the Gay and Transgender Population Experiences Higher Rates of Substance Use"](#) Center for American Progress, Mar 9, 2012



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Our recommendations for drug use services and safe consumption spaces are the following:

- Advocate for, implement, and properly fund safe consumption spaces
- Improve HIV prevention, care, and treatment among substance users, including persons who inject drugs (PWID)
- In rehabilitative spaces, allow individuals to self-identify and recognize chosen families (e.g. allow family visits to occur irrespective of biological relations)

Hate Crimes and Justice - Hate crimes in Seattle have risen 139% when comparing the first six months of 2016 to the first six months of 2017.⁹ This includes incidents targeting members of the LGBTQ community. Many in the LGBTQ community have intersecting identities that lead them to not report hate crimes due to a lack of trust with the Seattle Police Department. We recommend the following:

- Increase oversight capabilities of the Community Police Commission
- Support CM Herbold's audit of hate crimes, and pledge to take actionable steps to combat this rising tide
- Work directly with communities of color to find solutions that most directly support LGBTQ individuals of color
 - This may include e.g. supporting community-based policing or other changes in training or oversight
- Support victims of sexual assault and revise City policies with respect to accusations of sexual assault by City employees
- Study and respond to how domestic violence manifests itself in queer communities
- Implement protections for trans and non-binary individuals who are jailed or incarcerated. For example:
 - Make gender-neutral holding cells available
 - Ensure access to necessary medical therapies and treatments
 - Work to reduce prison sexual abuse, which disproportionately targets LGBTQ individuals

Trans Health and Trans Rights - Trans and nonbinary people have a much lower life expectancy than the general population (often reported to be in the range of 30-35 years of age).¹⁰ This is attributed both to the high rate of suicide attempts within the trans community (as many as 30-50% of trans people attempt suicide),¹¹ and high risk of being victims of homicide, especially trans women of color. Our recommendations are the following:

- Work to extend trans life expectancy through increased access to mental health services
- Combat rising hate crimes, particularly against trans women of color (see previous section)
- Ensure trans students can access facilities that match their identities in schools
- Support insurance coverage of and broad access to trans healthcare needs. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Gender affirmation surgery and treatment
 - Fertility and assisted reproduction needs
 - Procedures that insurance may have previously designated as for a single gender, e.g. pap smears for trans men
- Support efforts to further study and combat discrimination against trans and nonbinary individuals, especially within the workplace

⁹ ["Hate crimes, bias incidents increase in Seattle, police say"](#) Seattle Times, Sept 12, 2017

¹⁰ ["State of Emergency Continues for Trans Women of Color"](#) Huffington Post, Aug 13, 2015

¹¹ ["Suicide Attempts among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Adults"](#) AFSP and Williams Institute, Jan 2014



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HIV Stigma and People Living with HIV - The LGBTQ community is disproportionately at risk of contracting HIV. Yet even with recent great strides in medicine, many still face barriers to treatment. We urge the Council and next Mayor to help identify, address, and reduce stigma experienced by people living with HIV (PLWH) and individuals at risk for HIV. Additionally, we recommend doing the following:

- Improve HIV prevention, care, and treatment among substance users, including persons who inject drugs
- Increase access to safe, stable, and affordable housing for PLWH and people at risk for HIV
- Improve sexual health education, physical and behavioral health services, and social supports and interventions for Seattle youth
- Invigorate and strengthen meaningful community engagement and empowerment for people and communities disproportionately affected by HIV-related disparities and stigma
- Support routine, standardized HIV screening for all Washington residents
- Encourage increased access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), an important HIV prevention tool
- Revise health policies to meet the unmet needs of sexual minorities
- Work to remove barriers in insurance coverage and increase health care affordability for PLWH and individuals at risk for HIV

Aging LGBTQ Populations and Queer Community Public Programs - The openly LGBTQ population spans a larger age range than ever before, exposing some gaps in how the community at large is served. Additionally, many LGBTQ individuals (particularly at both ends of the age spectrum) would prefer to have community spaces available that do not center around bars and nightlife. We recommend the following:

- Provide assessments of and training to nursing homes and other medical facilities to ensure they adequately serve LGBTQ elders
- Develop and fund community engagement programs specifically for older LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ youth
- Support Parks Department efforts to designate an official Seattle LGBTQ community space

Federal LGBTQ Protections - While Seattle is a much better city than most with regards to LGBTQ issues, that does not render its citizens immune from the effects of a federal agenda that is decidedly anti-LGBTQ. Seattle can still push back on these efforts, especially around:

- Immigration issues for LGBTQ individuals who do not fall under new stricter family member definitions
- The rollback of Title IX protections on college campuses
- Potential repeal of health care protections guaranteed in the ACA
- Proposed discrimination against trans military personnel

We appreciate your time and consideration of these pressing issues, and we look forward to working on tangible steps forward with your help.

Sincerely,

Seattle LGBTQ Commission