

The State of Trans-Inclusive Healthcare at UNC System Universities

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the current status of trans-inclusive health care at the University of North Carolina (UNC) System Universities and the advocacy work required to improve these services. Trans-inclusive health care regards the ease with which transgender and gender-nonconforming students can access their on-campus student health services and counseling centers with respect to their gender identity. Transgender people are people whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth. This report analyzes the quality of trans-inclusive care at on-campus student health resources and the variation in care and challenges between predominantly white institutions (PWIs) versus minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Based on data gathered from universities and relevant affiliates, this paper provides policy recommendations for the UNC System Universities. These policy recommendations are directed toward improving the retention of transgender and gender-nonconforming students, as the mental health of these students may improve by having easier access to trans-inclusive healthcare and help to work towards the greater goal of intersectional health equity.

INTRODUCTION

With the rise in bathroom bills like HB2¹, transgender issues have become more common in the political sphere. However, these spaces neglect to talk about the trans-inclusivity of healthcare systems, particularly on college campuses. For this paper, trans-inclusive health care will be defined as the ease that transgender and gender-nonconforming people can access their medical and counseling care with respect and dignity towards their gender identity. Transgender people are people whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is how an individual perceives themselves and can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

This report examines the current status of trans-inclusive health care at the University of North Carolina (UNC) System Universities and the advocacy work required to improve these services. This report analyzes the quality of trans-inclusive care at on-campus student health resources and the variation in care and challenges between predominantly white institutions (PWIs) versus minority-serving institutions (MSIs).

Barriers to Transgender People Accessing Quality Health Care

The main barriers to transgender people accessing quality health care are lack of provider knowledge, harassment and violence in medical settings, being refused medical care, and lack of health insurance. Though at least 4.5% of the American public identify as LGBT, most medical schools only dedicate five hours to LGBTQ-specific training (Cohen 2019). These sessions also tend to ignore transgender-specific issues resulting in medical professionals who are ill-equipped to treat their transgender patients properly. In 2018, around eighty percent of medical students in New England felt either "not competent" or "somewhat not competent" with treating gender and sexual minority patients (Zelin et al. 2018). Uninformed doctors place the burden of educating their provider on the patient, which can discourage patients from seeking medical care in the future. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that half of the surveyed participants had to educate their medical providers about transgender care (Grant et al. 2011).

Another barrier to accessing health care for transgender patients is the mistreatment transgender patients may endure after their medical providers become aware of their transgender identity. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 28% of their participants report being verbally harassed in a medical setting and that 19% of their respondents had medical professionals refuse to provide them care due to their

¹ House Bill 2/The Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act which requires people to use public bathrooms that match their birth gender and excludes gay and transgender people from discrimination protections

gender identity (Grant et al. 2011). This discrimination is a significant deterrent as one-third of transgender people surveyed in the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey had had at least one negative health care experience due to their gender identity and around one in four transgender people has declined to seek health care when they need it out of fear of mistreatment (James et al. 2016).

The last prominent barrier to transgender health care access is lack of health insurance. For this paper, this factor has not been focused on as there is the assumption that students either remain on their parent's health insurance plan or will partake in their universities' student health insurance plan. As all non-UNC System University insurance plans differ, any reference to insurance coverage in this paper is focused on the UNC System's Student Blue health insurance which all 16 Universities are required to opt into.

These barriers and negative experiences with transphobia have caused many transgender patients to postpone their medical care. This is significant as LGBTQ people specifically transgender people are at higher risk for illnesses like HIV, so addressing this disparity can reduce disease transmission and progression, reduce health care costs, and increase longevity and mental and physical well-being of the patient and their support system.

The University of North Carolina System Universities

This report focuses on the UNC System Universities because the 16 Universities represent different geographies, racial backgrounds, and LGBT friendliness levels, yet all abide by the same laws at the state, federal, and UNC Board of Governors (BOG) level. Because these schools are so diverse, they provide tremendous insight into how to examine trans-inclusive healthcare in other environments. The University of North Carolina School System is comprised of 17 institutions. This paper will be focusing on the 16 Universities as the seventeenth is a residential 2-year high school and thus will be difficult to compare to the other schools.

Though there isn't a survey of the experience of transgender or gender-nonconforming students across the UNC System, UNC-Chapel Hill conducted a Campus Climate Survey in 2011 that focused on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Some of this study's findings can be found in the below Table 1 to help show the differences in experiences based on one's gender identity and expression.

Table 1. UNC Chapel-Hill 2009 Campus Climate Survey Statistics

	Transgender, Genderqueer or Intersex	Female	Male
Experiencing fear for their physical safety due to their gender identity or expression	36.4%	15.2%	15.4%
Experienced verbal harassment due to their gender identity or expression	36.4%	9.1%	20.2%
Concealed/modified their gender identity or gender expression when interacting with their campus health practitioner	33.3%	4.8%	5.9%

There are many policies that impact students in the UNC School System, but the following specifically impact the health of transgender and gender-nonconforming students: House Bill 2/House Bill 142 (HB 2/HB 142), UNC BOG policy 700.8.1., Title IX, the US Constitution's equal protection clause, and the Affordable Care Act's Section 1557.

House Bill 2/House Bill 142

In March 2016, HB 2 was a state law that would force people to use the bathroom that matches the sex they were assigned at birth instead of their gender identity and removed municipal anti-discrimination protections for transgender or gender-nonconforming people. In North Carolina, people can only change the sex on their birth certificate if they have sex reassignment surgery. This bill has been partially repealed with House Bill 142(HB 142), HB 142 continues to ban municipalities from passing nondiscrimination policies for LGBTQ people and North Carolinians are still unable to use a bathroom that matches their gender identity. The UNC system chose to follow HB 2 and hasn't repealed this despite criticisms from the campus community and beyond. In response, many UNC System Universities have maps where students can find gender-inclusive restrooms, but this isn't universal. Also, bathroom bills can lead to negative health outcomes in transgender and gender-nonconforming people. In a survey of transgender/gender non-conforming adults, researchers found that 54% of the sample group experienced a health problem due to avoiding using public gender-segregated restrooms (James 2013). The most common health problems were

urinary tract, kidney infections, and dehydration and these outcomes were caused by participants holding it or not consuming water to avoid using public restrooms. These bills can also lead to a barrier in healthcare access as this study found that 9% of participants wouldn't go to a medical facility because the restrooms were gender-segregated (James 2013). House Bill 515 is currently going through the NC state legislature to repeal the rest of HB 2.

UNC System Schools Policy 700.80.1

In 2013, the UNC System Schools passed a policy 700.80.1 which bans gender-inclusive housing. This policy prohibits students from living in housing that matches their gender identity. This is instrumental as students must live on-campus for some or all of their time in college at twelve of the seventeen institutions within the UNC system. This can burden transgender or gender nonconforming students financially as many will have to pay extra to stay in private dorm rooms or affect their mental health as living with someone who matches the sex they were assigned at birth could put their safety at risk.

Federal Legislation

Lastly, there are many pieces of federal legislation that advocate against gender-based discrimination in health care namely Title IX, the US Constitution's equal protection clause, and the Affordable Care Act's Section 1557. Recently, using these laws has been quite difficult under the current presidential administration as they have rolled back many federal protections for transgender and gender-nonconforming people. These include a draft rule that would let health care providers and insurance companies discriminate against their patients based on their gender identity and working to redefine sex and gender to match the sex that one is assigned at birth instead of one's gender identity. Transgender and gender-nonconforming North Carolinians don't get sexual orientation and gender identity protections at the state level, but House Bill 514 hopes to add sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more to state anti-discrimination laws.

While the above policies might paint a picture that North Carolina wouldn't have trans-inclusive healthcare, the Human Rights Campaign has found the opposite to be true. The Human Rights Campaign rated 680 healthcare facilities based on their commitment to LGBTQ equality and inclusion and found that North Carolina has 24 "leader" hospitals which means that these hospitals received a perfect score in the 2019 Healthcare Equality Index (Human Rights Commission 2019). The study also found that North Carolina had the fourth-highest number of health care institution "leaders" out of the fifty states (Human Rights Commission 2019). However, this research neglected to analyze on-campus health resources.

There is currently very little research on campus-based health services for transgender students. This is very important because many students are unable to afford to access off-campus health care and off-campus health care centers are not necessarily trans-inclusive. Also, many transgender and gender-nonconforming youth choose to come out in college, so this is an important time to ensure that they access quality trans-inclusive care and coverage so that they won't be deterred from seeking medical care in the future.

METHODOLOGY

The findings in this study are based upon analysis of the results of the Campus Pride Index Questionnaire for LGBTQ Counseling and Health. The Campus Pride Index is a tool for universities to assess their LGBTQ-friendliness and guidelines that can aid these universities in their improvement in this area. Using self-assessment questions, the Campus Pride Index rates a University from a scale of one to five with five being the highest. Instead of using the overall Campus Pride Index score, this study is utilizing the scores for one factor: LGBTQ Counseling & Health. Campus Pride Index has listed the thirteen questions that are used to provide a score for this factor and these questions can be found below in Appendix A.

Currently, seven of the sixteen UNC system universities have completed this assessment, so a "grade" has been tabulated for the other universities based on publicly available information from their respective websites. The grades were calculated by adding the total yeses to the LGBTQ Counseling & Health Questionnaire in Appendix A, dividing that number by the total number of questions and multiplying by five. These numbers were then rounded to either a full or half number. The grades of all the universities can be found in Table 2. The Campus Pride Index scores for each UNC System University and the rationale for the tabulated ones can be found in Appendix B.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire was beneficial in seeing what changes need to be implemented as a system and the areas for improvement at the institutional level. Giving institutions a grade provided valuable insight into how easy it is for a transgender and gender-nonconforming student to learn about the trans-inclusivity of their university's health resources.

Table 2. The Campus Pride Index scores for each UNC System University

University Name	Campus Pride Index Rating (/5)
Appalachian State University	3.5*
East Carolina University	4.5
Elizabeth City State University	2.0*
Fayetteville State University	2.0
North Carolina A&T University	3.5
North Carolina Central University	4.0
North Carolina State University	4.0
University of North Carolina at Asheville	2.0*
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	3.5
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	4.0*
University of North Carolina at Greensboro	5.0
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	3.0*
University of North Carolina School of the Arts	2.0*
University of North Carolina at Wilmington	2.0*
Western Carolina University	4.0*
Winston-Salem State University	2.0*
Median Score	3.5

* schools with an asterisk were assessed by the principal investigator

Insurance

Campus Pride, a nonprofit that annually rates how well institutions of higher learning serve the needs of LGBTQ students, estimated that around 110 out of 4,700 universities in the US cover hormone replacement therapy (HRT) despite its relatively inexpensive cost and that it is easy to prescribe or monitor. Student Blue -UNC System student health insurance- covers hormone replacement therapy and other gender affirming treatment making the UNC System a leader in this area. However, more research needs to be done to see the accessibility of HRT and other treatments at each university. The Campus Pride Index questionnaire does not go into depth to see the accessibility of acquiring these gender affirming treatments. For if these resources are inaccessible such as students being unable to get this treatment on-campus, then they are not a resource.

The Campus Pride Index Questionnaire inquires about employee health plans and their trans-inclusivity. This paper chose to not delve deep into that area as student and employee health insurance are advocated differently as employees work for the State Government.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI) vs Minority-Serving Institution (MSI)

The UNC System Universities are comprised of 6 minority serving institutions (MSIs) and 10 predominantly white institutions (PWIs). This is an important factor to analyze in this study as the universities who tended to have higher Campus Pride Index scores were predominantly white institutions (PWIs). One reason there may be this difference is that MSIs are less likely to have formal University-run LGBTQ Centers. These centers are focused on LGBTQ programming and advocacy, are staffed by University employees, and are not dependent on student labor to function. It is crucial for these centers to be run this way to show the campus community that the institution values this population and is committed to efforts that will retain and educate about this group and their issues and to enable the Center to plan for the future by having continuous employees instead of constant turnover. These centers are crucial in making student health resources more trans-inclusive by assisting in training for health care providers and advocating for trans-inclusive health insurance plan.

Ten out of sixteen UNC System Universities do not have formal University-run LGBTQ Centers- Appalachian State, Elizabeth City State University, NC Agricultural & Technical University, UNC Asheville, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, UNC Pembroke, UNC School of the Arts, Western Carolina University, and Winston-Salem State University. This was found by investigating institutional websites online in an attempt to explain the differences in Campus Pride Index scores between MSIs and PWIs.

This search revealed that MSIs in the UNC System are less likely to have formal University-run LGBTQ Centers. This comes as no surprise as only three historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in America have formal University-run LGBTQ Centers (Bauer-Wolf 2017). Two of the three happen to be in the UNC System - North Carolina Central University and Fayetteville State University. This issue can affect health outcomes as college-aged Black Americans are at a higher risk of acquiring HIV than the general population (Johnson et al. 2018). This is occurring despite the fact that HIV infection rates are declining in the US.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

The Campus Pride Index scores were quite similar with most institutions ranging from 2-4. The median Campus Pride Index score was 3.5. This median number isn't negative, but it shows that there is a long list of improvements needed to ensure that the student health resources at the UNC System Universities are trans-inclusive and that a lot of good work has already been done in this area. The tabulating also revealed that this high median score is due to many progressive system-wide decisions related to insurance instead of each institution working to be trans-inclusive.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 41% of their respondents, who all identify as transgender or gender-nonconforming, had attempted suicide versus 1.6% of the general population (Grant et al. 2011). So the first priority should be removing policies or barriers that are detrimental to the mental health of transgender or gender-nonconforming students. Key ways that this could be done is by requiring all faculty and staff particularly health and counseling professionals to undergo trans-inclusive training, removing the UNC BOG ban on gender-inclusive housing, and for Universities to release non-discrimination statements that include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

The second priority should be increasing and improving LGBTQ resources on campus such as requiring every UNC System University to have a formal University-run LGBTQ Center, adding LGBTQ-inclusive training to service-based degrees such as medical school or social work, creating a diversity training for incoming students similar to Alcohol Edu to increase LGBTQ-acceptance, creating an easy way for students to change their names and gender identity on university records and documents, actively seeking to employ diverse faculty and staff including visible, out LGBTQ people, and implementing an LGBTQ-inclusive Fan Code of Conduct.

The third priority should be researching future development in this area. This should be done by surveying students anonymously through a Campus Climate Survey focused on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression similar to the one conducted at UNC Chapel-Hill in 2009, requiring UNC System Universities to assess themselves at Campus Pride Index, and analyzing the accessibility of hormone replacement therapy at each institution.

FUTURE STUDIES

Future research should look into the overall experience of transgender and gender-nonconforming students at the UNC System Universities through student surveying. This study focused on this experience through proxy resources instead of the population directly affected and these interviews focused on health resources. This limited understanding whether students are aware of the trans-inclusivity of their campus health resources and what policy recommendations this population desires. Future studies on the health of transgender and gender-nonconforming college students should also look into the intersection of health and athletics by communicating with University Athletics or Recreation departments. This is relevant as some UNC System Universities require students to participate in physical education courses.

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Appendix A
Campus Pride LGBTQ Counseling & Health Questions

Does your campus offer a support group(s) that assists individuals in the process of acknowledging and disclosing the following identities and their related concerns?

Does your campus offer LGBT-supportive counseling services, with a staff that is knowledgeable of the needs and experiences of the following identities and their related concerns?

Does your campus regularly offer a specific training for students and staff to identify at-risk students inclusive of LGBT individuals for depression, suicide and mental health issues?

Does your campus actively distribute condoms, dental dams, and LGBT-inclusive information on HIV/STI services and resources?

Does your campus offer free, anonymous, and easily accessible HIV/STI testing on a regular basis?

Does your campus offer specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students on the following...

Does your campus provide annual training for health center staff to increase their awareness of and sensitivity to the health care needs of...

Does your campus offer a student health insurance policy which covers ongoing counseling services for Transgender students who need such counseling, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Does your campus offer at least one employee health insurance or HMO plan which covers ongoing counseling services, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Does your campus offer a student health insurance policy which covers the initiation and maintenance of hormone replacement therapy for Transgender students who need such therapy, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Does your campus offer at least one employee health insurance or HMO plan which covers the initiation and maintenance of hormone blockers and/or hormone replacement therapy, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Does your campus offer a student health insurance policy which covers gender confirmation ("sex reassignment") surgeries for Transgender students who need such surgeries, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Does your campus offer at least one employee health insurance or HMO plan which covers gender confirmation ("sex reassignment") surgeries for Transgender employees, Transgender partners of employees and dependent Transgender children of employees (18 and over) who need such surgeries, as consistent with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's Standards of Care?

Appendix B:
Rationale Behind Rated Campus Pride Index Scores

University	Generated CPI Score	Rationale
Appalachian State University	3.5	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance
Elizabeth City State University	2.0	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance, lack anonymous, free, hiv/sti testing on a regular basis, lacking specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students related to health, lack annual training for health center staff
University of North Carolina at Asheville	2.0	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance, lacking specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students related to health, lack annual training for health center staff
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	4.0	Lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	3.0	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance, lacking specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students related to health
University of North Carolina School of the Arts	2.0	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance,

		lacking specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students related to health, lack annual training for health center staff
University of North Carolina at Wilmington	2.0	Lacking specific training to identify-at risk students, lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance, lacking specific awareness and educational programs for LGBTQ students related to health, lack annual training for health center staff
Western Carolina University	4.0	Lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance
Winston-Salem State University	2.0	Lacking trans-inclusive employee health insurance, lack anonymous, free, hiv/sti testing on a regular basis, lack annual training for health center staff