



**SALUD MENTAL Y TRATAMIENTO
DEL USO DE SUSTANCIAS**
AGENCIA DE SERVICIOS DE SALUD

Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative Standing with Our LGBTQ+ Community

Santa Cruz County,

The Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative declares its steadfast support for the LGBTQ+ community. This declaration aligns closely with [Santa Cruz County's equity statement](#), emphasizing unwavering support, dignity, and compassion for individuals of every orientation, identity and expression. Both efforts aim to create inclusive environments where everyone can thrive and belong, reflecting a shared commitment to equity and access for all community members regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

What Behavioral Health Equity Means to Us

Behavioral health equity refers to ensuring that all individuals have fair and just opportunities to access mental health and substance use services, resources, and support. It entails addressing disparities and barriers to care based on factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin, preferred language, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, education level. Behavioral health equity means recognizing and addressing the diverse needs and experiences of individuals and providing them with the necessary support, dignity, and resources to achieve optimal behavioral health and well-being.

Our belief in the fundamental principles of compassion, empathy, and understanding drives our advocacy for accessible and equitable behavioral health services for all, free from discrimination, stigma, or bias. We acknowledge the unique behavioral health challenges faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community and each organization within our membership is committed and dedicated to addressing these disparities by providing comprehensive support, resources, and care.

As we champion behavioral health equity, we are resolute in creating safe, and inclusive environments within our practices, organizations, and communities. We advocate for policies and practices that protect the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals and affirm them through inclusive evidence-based care.

We call upon our fellow organizations, community leaders, and individuals to join us in this collective effort to build a society where everyone can live authentically, free from discrimination and prejudice. Together, we can make a profound difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals, forging a future of genuine equity and inclusion.

In our commitment to providing outstanding care to the LGBTQ+ community, we recognize the significance of adopting a culturally responsive and inclusive approach. As signatories, we are proud to affirm that the following recommendations encapsulate practices that our agency is implementing or striving to implement, and we wholeheartedly encourage others to join us in this pursuit.

Our Vision:

1. Inclusive Language and Welcoming Environments:

- Foster a welcoming environment using inclusive language that respects diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.
- Ensure physical spaces are safe and affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals. Such as incorporating visible symbols of acceptance like posters or rainbow flags, gender-neutral restrooms, and staff name badges/office name plates that include pronouns.

2. Person-Centered Approach:

- Adopt a person-centered approach, emphasizing individualized care plans that consider the diverse experiences and identities of each LGBTQ+ person.
- Offer LGBTQ+ specific support groups for individuals to share experiences and receive support.

3. Intake, Assessments and Evidence-Based Care:

- Develop intake procedures sensitive to LGBTQ+ identities, including gender-inclusive forms and respectful inquiries about pronouns and names. County Behavioral Health provides Therapeutic Name Change training to support the use of chosen names in client charts.
- Conduct comprehensive and culturally sensitive assessments considering societal and familial attitudes' impact on LGBTQ+ mental health.
- Provide affirmative therapy that validates and supports individuals exploring their gender identity and sexual orientation without judgment.

4. Inclusive Policies:

- Establish and communicate policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

5. Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Training:

- Provide behavioral health professionals with LGBTQ+ cultural humility training to understand the unique challenges and needs of the community.
 - NAMI Santa Cruz continues to offer LGBTQIA+ training to the public and staff.
- Stay informed about current LGBTQ+ related issues, terminology, and healthcare advancements for more relevant and up-to-date care. In 2023, County Behavioral Health provided three free live training sessions to enhance behavioral health providers' capacity in clinical care for transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Relias, Encompass, and the Health Services Agency's Learning Management System provide on-demand and up-to-date LGBTQ+ training modules accessible to all Health Services Agency staff.

6. Awareness of Mental Health Disparities:

- Understand mental health disparities affecting the LGBTQ+ community, adjusting interventions accordingly.

7. Collaborations and Advocacy:

- Advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and act as allies in the broader community to reduce stigma and discrimination.
- Collaborate with local LGBTQ+ organizations and support groups, such as partnerships with LGBTQIA2S+, Youth Allyship & Wellness Promotion Workgroup, and the Diversity Center.

These strategies are designed to foster an environment where the unique needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals are acknowledged, respected, and effectively addressed within the realm of behavioral health care.

The Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative welcomes collaboration and partnership with organizations and individuals who share our vision. We invite you to contact us to explore initiatives, events, or collaborations to further support the LGBTQ+ community. Please contact us at: BHEC@santacruzcountyca.gov.

In unity and solidarity, we affirm our commitment to a brighter, more inclusive future for all.
-Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative



About the Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative (BHEC):

The Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative is dedicated to increasing Behavioral Health equity for our community by bringing together community representatives to identify, address, and reduce behavioral health disparities for cultural groups represented in the county. Our mission is to promote inclusivity and equitable access to quality services for individuals of all backgrounds. We work to advocate for policies that support behavioral health equity and provide resources to empower communities. Together, we strive to create a society where every individual's behavioral health is valued and respected. The BHEC is composed of individuals, some of whom represent agencies that have endorsed these statements.