Pride and prejudice: Digital healthcare and telehealth solutions for LGBTQ+ health inequities.

Pride month is a celebration of all the cultural and social achievements of the LGBTQ+ community. While times have changed and much of the country's perspectives continue to shift, underlying structural health inequities still affect the LGBTQ+ community. These inequities can differ between the different sub-groups within the community due to the diverse needs of the individual. For example, The Ontario HIV Treatment Network (2017) reported that individuals who don't identify
with their gender assigned at birth may seek gender-affirming hormone therapy and be unable to find, access, or afford it. Those who identify as non-heterosexual may face discrimination for their sexual orientation that pushes them out of the healthcare system altogether.

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals also contributes to an increased experience of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, and suicide while potentially facing violence and victimization. LGBTQ+ youth aged 10-24 are particularly at risk, with a report from the office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion finding that LGBTQ+ youth are 2-3 times more likely to commit suicide than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts (2020).

Those in rural communities face increased health inequity due to lack of care, prejudice, and access to culturally informed healthcare providers. The Trevor Project, a national nonprofit focused on ending LGBTQ+ youth suicide, found that 49% of LGBTQ+ youth in rural communities stated their communities were either somewhat or very unaccepting of LGBTQ+ identities. This prejudice contributes to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals and puts barriers in place that make accessing the care they need far more complex.

"We have this huge need and these huge gaps." Dr. Tori Gleason says, "Within that comes a need to provide resources and services because there's a lot of barriers for care."

Dr. Tori Gleason has spent 16 years as a chiropractor and health provider in rural Kansas and has 10 years of experience in leadership at a critical access hospital. Dr. Gleason is working on her master's in public health studying epidemiology and rural health at the Kansas University School of Medicine in Wichita, working with sex and gender minority populations. Dr. Gleason also collaborates with the center for LGBTQ research at the KU School of Social Welfare and the Wichita LGBT health coalition. Through these two collaborations, Dr. Gleason was able to participate in the first ever baseline test for LGBTQ youth in the state of Kansas.

“I just cold called Kansas and said: ‘hey can we do this?’," Says Dr. Gleason, “We started the grant-writing process and there was no baseline data. So, I’m like, we need to get someone to do this, screw it, I'll do this. So I just decided to go back to school and enrolled in the MPH program."

Dr. Gleason began her master’s program after learning there was no baseline data for LGBTQ+ individuals in Kansas. Dr. Gleason is also a firm advocate for telehealth for the LGBTQ+ community. Whether it be the ability to access and endocrinologist who is culturally competent in caring for gender minorities or having a non-
judgmental space to seek care. In her own personal experience, Dr. Gleason has found telehealth to be lifesaving. At 12 years old, Dr. Gleason was among the number of LGBTQ+ youth who attempted suicide and survived. She believes that telehealth is the reason she is still here today.

“I didn’t know anyone like me, so I just thought I was a glitch. Telehealth connects you; it lets you know you’re not a glitch. It gives you access to care. It gives you access to providers you wouldn’t normally have.” Dr. Gleason says.

Telehealth and digital healthcare can serve as a solution for LGBTQ+ seeking care; more solutions and innovations have come in recent years. Recently, The Trevor Project implemented an AI tool to help train their crisis counselors by modeling conversations with a persona of a youth who might reach out to the nonprofit. The Trevor Project also offers a 24/7 free and confidential crisis line that offers digital crisis services for LGBTQ+ youth. While societal and health inequities will continue to be an issue in the future, telehealth offers hope and expanded options of care for LGBTQ+ individuals who need it the most.

According to a 2022 article from Russell, et. al., telehealth offers a unique opportunity to decentralize gender-affirming care across the lifespan. In addition to access to gender specialists/teams, telehealth patients in the HTRC region report benefits including more comfort in self-presentation in the home environment and decreased stresses associated with varied onsite waiting room, parking, and staff interactions. Hot-off-the-presses findings with transgender/gender diverse youth suggest compared with clinic visits, video visits were more convenient, took less time from other activities, required less travel time, were more acceptable, and participants were more likely to choose video visits in the future.

To learn more about how to serve the LGBTQ+ community and how digital health and telehealth can help, please visit the guidelines for telehealth professionals created by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).
New Episode of Telehealth Unmuted!

**Episode 10** features Dr. Aaron Katz, a pharmacoepidemiologist and health services researcher at the University of Kansas Medical Center. His primary research interests center around understanding the patient, health system, and policy level factors associated with the use and effects of cancer care, including those that underlie cancer disparities.

Listen on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#)!

Check out our full list of episodes on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#)!

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**Updates and Opportunities**

**HTRC's Education Series**

HTRC is proud to present our Education Series, a webinar series centered on important telehealth topics.

Health care providers in KS, MO, or OK: this series is for YOU!

Register [HERE](#).

**SAVE THE DATE** for the upcoming webinar:

July 27 | 12 –1 PM CST

**Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Proposals**

Updates to payment policies, payment rates and provisions for telehealth services will be provided. In addition, this webinar will cover state legislative updates provided by the Center for Connected Health Policy and information related to the Public Health Emergency flexibilities, set to expire July 15, 2022.

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**Call for Abstracts: Telehealth Alliance of**
Oklahoma's Summit
The Telehealth Alliance of Oklahoma (TAO) invites you to submit an abstract for oral and poster presentations at the 2022 TAO Telehealth Summit. This year’s Summit theme is Hybrid Healthcare and will be held on October 4–5 in Oklahoma City and remotely. Click [here](#) to submit today!

Tele-Behavioral Health Center of Excellence Webinars
Webinars are free, but require registration. To attend a live webinar, please click [this link](#) to view full list.

Medicaid & State Telehealth Policy: Summer Webinar Series
Responding to continued requests, CCHP is hosting another webinar series on state telehealth policy. Webinars will take place every Friday over a four-week period in June 2022. The series will cover school-based telehealth, state licensure impacts on telehealth, telehealth private payer laws, and Medicaid telehealth policy & substance use disorder.
This webinar series is FREE of charge for all who wish to attend and each session will be closed captioned.
Register [here](#)!

Telemedicine ECHOs
Missouri Telehealth Network Telemedicine ECHO
The Heartland Telehealth Resource Center and Missouri Telehealth Network wrap up the 2021-2022 Telemedicine ECHO program with "Evaluating your Program" on July 12. The team will begin planning for the upcoming ECHO series beginning in the fall.
Be on the lookout for more information. Archived ECHOs and other webinars can be found on our [YouTube channel](#).

Sign up for HRSA eNews!
HRSA eNews is a free, twice-monthly publication that provides updates on HRSA’s programs, funding opportunities, events, and other timely information. Subscription includes updates on grant opportunities, rural health, telehealth, and any information you are interested in. Subscribe [here](#)!

COVID-19 ECHOs
Missouri Telehealth Network COVID-19 ECHO will meet via Zoom video conferencing every Monday from noon to 1 p.m. Anyone interested in learning how to protect,
diagnose and treat Missouri patients with COVID-19, as well as how to protect their overall community, are encouraged to join. A multidisciplinary expert team led by Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Director Randall Williams, MD, will share the latest developments, answer questions, and discuss management of patient cases presented by participants. Register and learn more here.

You can access the resources, here. Please share with others who could benefit from the information. We will continue to add and update resources as they come available.