Action Plan for Affirmative and Inclusive LGBTQ+ Health Care in the City of Toledo

NW Ohio LGBTQ+ Coalition
Equality Toledo
Solace Health and Wellness

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Background

Currently, there are an estimated 1.4 million adults who identify as transgender living in the United States, roughly 0.6% of the population (Ding). Despite an increase in the number of people who identify as transgender and non-binary, a 2018 Human Rights Campaign Foundation study found that 1 in 4 transgender people report having avoided medical care in the past year out of fear of being disrespected or mistreated (Human). Furthermore, a 2015 national study found that 33% of transgender survey respondents who saw a health care provider in the last year reported one or more negative experiences related to being transgender, including being refused treatment, being harassed or assaulted, or receiving incompetent care (Ding).

Although few studies have been published on the quality of care provided for trans and non-binary persons, the studies that do exist agree that national barriers to care include few accessible providers who are trained in gender-affirming health care as well as inconsistent use of chosen name and pronouns (Gridley). Conclusions from these studies suggest that training individual providers and their office staff to provide culturally competent care can help to decrease barriers and increase care. Dr. Ding and others write, “These efforts are vital, as they ensure the availability of a limited number of providers who are well prepared to treat trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) patients in a culturally competent, affirming matter” (Ding).

No studies or community needs assessment have been performed locally in the Toledo area with respect to the LGBTQ+ population and their health disparities, and there are no programs in place to train and incentive health care providers to perform gender affirming care. Some individual providers promote their practice as LGBTQ+ affirming, yet trans and non-binary residents of Toledo are left wondering if they truly are affirming for the entire community or if they only cater to gay and lesbian patients. In addition, any provider is currently able to promote their practice as LGBTQ+ affirming, but they are not required to ensure staff are appropriately trained and that their paperwork is inclusive for all gender identities.

A 2019 study in Canada demonstrated that trans youth and gender diverse children report an improvement in their wellbeing since switching providers to a trained specialty clinic that focuses on gender-affirming care (Pullen). LGBTQ+ residents of greater Toledo deserve a clear roadmap for their health care needs,

navigating them to trusted and trained providers who are willing to learn and practice inclusive, affirming care.

Program Overview

This initiative's three overarching aims include: 1) To identify and train healthcare professionals and agencies that are seeking to or are currently providing affirmative and inclusive care for the LGBTQ+ community of Toledo, 2) To create an advocacy line to screen concerns from community members experiencing discrimination while seeking services in the Toledo area, and to 3) utilize the data collected as a community needs assessment for public use to improve policy and the care provided. At the conclusion of this 3 year plan, the Toledo area will have acquired an accessible roadmap to care encompassing physical, mental, and social well-being.

Affirming Vetting Process

In some healthcare fields, there are multiple providers locally who promote themselves as providing inclusive care for queer people. In other fields, even the most connected individual often struggles to find one reputable provider. Furthermore, while some providers accept lesbian and gay clients without judgement, trans and non-binary people frequently encounter stigma and receive inadequate care. This is preventable through proper training and vetting, followed by accountability.

In year 1 of this initiative, providers who currently promote their offices as LGBTQ+ safe spaces will be identified and informed of the opportunity to become accredited by Equality Toledo, the NWOhio LGBTQ+ Coalition, and Solace Health and Wellness. Additionally, this initiative will be marketed so that providers newer to the concept and practice of affirming care and who seek to become a verified safe space can undergo the necessary training and adopt the appropriate policies.

This affirming healthcare initiative aims to adopt the standards set by the Humans Right Campaign, Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality, and the Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People Version 8 (Coleman) in evaluating and training local providers. While the LGBTQ+ community deserves that every healthcare facility is accepting, this initiative aims to only recommend and accredit those institutions that have

adopted the appropriate policies and are willing to undergo staff training and follow up.

Best practices as set by the standards above consist of a comprehensive checklist within four core areas:

1. Patient Non-Discrimination Policies
2. Visitation Policies
3. Employment Non-Discrimination Policies
4. Training in LGBTQ+ Patient Centered Care

In addition to these core criteria, this initiative will consider supplemental best practices that fall within six focus areas. As this initiative is further developed, the criteria for accreditation, while rigid, will allow room for the provider to develop a solid plan of action over a reasonable time frame. While some providers may already meet the mark, this project will guide willing and passionate providers to reach this mark.

The six supplemental focus areas include:

1. LGBT Patient Services & Support
2. Transgender Patient Services and Support
3. Patient Self-Identification
4. Medical Decision-Making
5. Employment Benefits & Policies
6. Community Engagement

Branding

Agencies and providers who reach accreditation through this initiative will be provided with marketing tools including an *affirmative provider insignia* to be brandished at key points of contact within their practice. Examples of this include window stickers at the front entrance and at the door of an exam room. This symbol will serve as a recognizable brand for LBGTQ+ people seeking non-judgemental and identity-affirming care, understanding that the provider or agency has been vetted and meets the stringent standards.

LGBTQ+ Healthcare Resource Guide

Accredited providers will be promoted and recommended for queer people through a resource guide. A digital version will be forefront on the websites of

Equality Toledo and Solace Health and Wellness, as well as social media sites. An easy to interpret physical resource guide will also be created and distributed to local LGBTQ+ safe spaces, such as Toledo's queer coffee shop, bar, public library, etc. This product will be designed so that any individual regardless of education status will be able interpret and find the healthcare resources they seek.

Accountability and Community Needs Assessment

To ensure provider/practice accountability, the insignia/seal of accreditation will also include a feedback mechanism so that any patient can report on compliments and complaints they experienced throughout their care. Current ideas for this mechanism include use of a QR code or a designated email and phone number.

This feedback mechanism will be designed for patients to choose to either remain anonymous or request direct follow up through the project leaders. All information collected will remain confidential and aggregated so that no provider will be able to ascertain which patient submitted which comment. HIPAA compliance will be fully enforced. This key information allows for one method of accountability to this initiative, providing feedback data on lived experiences.

Aggregate data will provide an opportunity to conduct a community needs assessment around LGBTQ+ experiences in healthcare in Toledo, the first of its kind. Community needs assessments are crucial for providing baseline data for public use.This non-identifying aggregate data will be published and shared with stakeholders and community organizations, providing an opportunity to reassess policy and for any non-profit to apply for future grants to fill identified gaps.

Upon completion of accreditation, each individual provider will sign an affirming pledge (Appendix 1) as a symbol of their promise to provide high-quality, inclusive care. The pledge also becomes a reference document in the case that non-affirming experiences are reported. This initiative will actively work with each vetted provider on this feedback process.

Media Outreach: Destigmatization and Education

An important piece of this initiative will include de-stigmatization campaigns that will educate the greater Toledo area on LGBTQ+ rights and the reality of their lived experiences. Possible options include using billboards, radio, television,

newspaper and social media. Additionally, these campaigns will empower trans and non-binary people, and will promote this initiative so that medical and mental health providers who may want to receive trainings and accreditation will be informed of the opportunity.

Promotion of this initiative will occur in frequently visited LGBTQ safe spaces. Allied businesses who are interested will also be able to promote this initiative. A similar insignia will be placed inside willing locations that link to LGBTQ+ resources, information on how to start the vetting process, and the intake process for complaints and compliments on care that will contribute to the community needs assessment.

Provider Vetting Process

The pathway for the vetting process is the following:

1. First Point of Contact: Provider fills out the intake form
2. Intake form is sent to the project lead, a member of the Coalition
3. Lead follows up with healthcare provider regarding their responses
4. Coordinate a site visit and training(s)
5. If they meet the standards of care and are deemed affirming, they will be accredited through our agencies and given materials with the insignia demonstrating they are an affirming provider and added to our resource roadmap.
6. If they do not reach the standards of care, a partnership plan will be established over a reasonable period of time for the provider to reach the accredited mark. Once met, they will be accredited as stated in number 5.
7. Reaccreditation will take place yearly, wherein the provider/practice will have another site visit and any additional training selected in order to keep accreditation.
8. If the project lead notices or is notified through the feedback mechanism that a provider is not upholding the standard of care, they will engage with the provider on the concerns. They may lose accreditation, but may apply again if willing to re-train their staff and enforce affirming policies.

Sustainable 3 Year Timeline

This information is summarized in a GANTT chart (Appendix 3).

Year 1

- Establish and maintain a framework to receive information on providers/agencies interested in being vetted as providing LGBTQ+ affirming services.
- Establish and maintain a framework to receive community feedback, experiences, and concerns.
- Create training/trainer database for Toledo area and establish standards of training/roadmap for what trainings providers will need to have to be considered LGBTQ+ affirming/competence
- Develop media/outreach plan as well as outreach materials including the following: press release, public talking points, outreach materials for LGBTQ+ spaces including businesses, gathering places, and healthcare providers.
- Create and maintain LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare/provider list for those that have been properly vetted.
- Establish a financial plan to ensure sustainability
    - Charge for accreditation based on a sliding scale to ensure accessibility for any interested providers
    - Identify key community partners and other possible funding sources including county, municipal, and private/organizations funds.
    - Apply for additional LBGTQ+ relevant grants
    - Seek support from University of Toledo, BGSU, and other local institutions
- Create a job description for a contracted employee to maintain the list and perform the trainings in the future

Year 2

- Create, implement, and maintain a process for re-accreditation including what training will be required to maintain accreditation.
- Utilize data gathered in year 1 for quality assurance and improvement. This data will also be used to generate a community needs assessment.
- Identify service gaps, and create proposals for future initiatives.

Year 3

- Continue to maintain an affirming provider list while working to expand and identify new LGBTQ+ affirming providers, providing training as needed.
- Continue to receive concerns and compliments from community members.
- Host a Learning Day Conference & Provider Recognition Banquet
    - Full day of educational opportunities, CEUs for various professions, and vendor tables for providers of LGBTQ+ affirming services.
    - Registration tickets to be sold to fund this initiative.

Proposed Expenses

In order to support this initiative on LGBTQ+ health care, Equality Toledo, Solace Health and Wellness, and the NWOhio LGBTQ+ Coalition humbly requests $50k from the City of Toledo. Both Solace and Equality Toledo are registered 501(c)3 nonprofit. Below are the proposed expenses to support this initiative.

- $20,000 - to contract a 1099 health educator who will perform trainings and site visits
- $10,000 - Media campaigns focusing on empowerment, destigmatization, and promotion of the initiative
- $11,850 - Directed towards initiatives and potentially other organizations that directly eliminate barriers to care for LGBTQ+ peoples.
- $5,000 - to purchase materials
    - Accreditation Insignia
    - Banners and posters
    - Printed resource guide
- $2,000 ($50 per month) - Intake process system and data analysis through Formstack
- $650 ($18 per month) - Google Suite Account to provide formal emails for communication as well as a space to house the Community Needs Assessment
- $500 ($15 per month) - Phone line housed at Solace

Three Core Goals

Goal One:
Accredit medical, mental health, and social well-being providers through organized training and policy support as providers of affirming and inclusive LGBTQ+ health care.

Goal Two:
Create and promote a roadmap and resource guide for residents to find accredited providers for all health and wellness needs.

Goal Three:
Perform a community needs assessment on health care experiences and outcomes for the LGBTQ+ community of greater Toledo and direct funding to programs or organizations that combat identified barriers to care.

Outcomes
Through this process a comprehensive resource guide of LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare providers will be created and promoted. Providers will be incentivized through the accreditation process to enact policies and training that justly serve LGBTQ+ residents. Feedback from the community will be encouraged and promoted so that the initiative can continue to evolve and ensure accountability. Additionally, data collected through the needs assessment will serve as a baseline that will direct future goal and objective setting by the Coalition. By the end, LGBTQ+ Toledoans for the first time will be able to ensure access to healthcare equity and will be able to make informed decisions about their own health.

The following community agencies are expressing the need and support for this initiative:

- Toledo-Lucas County Health Department
- Equitas Health
- The Zepf Center
- Lucas County Trauma-Informed Coalition
- The Cullen Center
- Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition
- Fuse Recovery
- Georgjz419
- Toledo Pride and Pride of Toledo Foundation
- Grindhrs Coffee and Community
- Community Cares Clinic - UTMC

Appendix 1

Affirming Agreement to be signed by the provider at the conclusion of the accreditation process.

- I welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and families into my practice and offer all health services to patients on an equal basis, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and other non-medically relevant factors.
- I believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities are within the spectrum of normal human experience and are not in themselves pathological, "unnatural," or sinful. I therefore do not promote or support attempts to change patients' sexual orientation or gender identity.
- I respect the visitation and healthcare decision-making rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients/clients, their unmarried partners, their non-biological children, and any others they may define as family for the purposes of visitation and healthcare decision-making.
- I commit to taking steps to make my practice fully inclusive of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons as reflected in written forms, policies and procedures, appropriate on-going training for all clinical and administrative staff, and standardized assessments.
- I commit to continuing to learn and affirm regarding the unique health concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and families so that I can provide the highest quality care to them.
- I commit to ongoing continuing education for myself and my staff to optimize quality affirming for the LGBTQIA+ community.
- I commit to being open to compliments and complaints through direct feedback from patients, a hotline number, or feedback cards that can be mailed to the NWO LGBTQ+ Coalition.

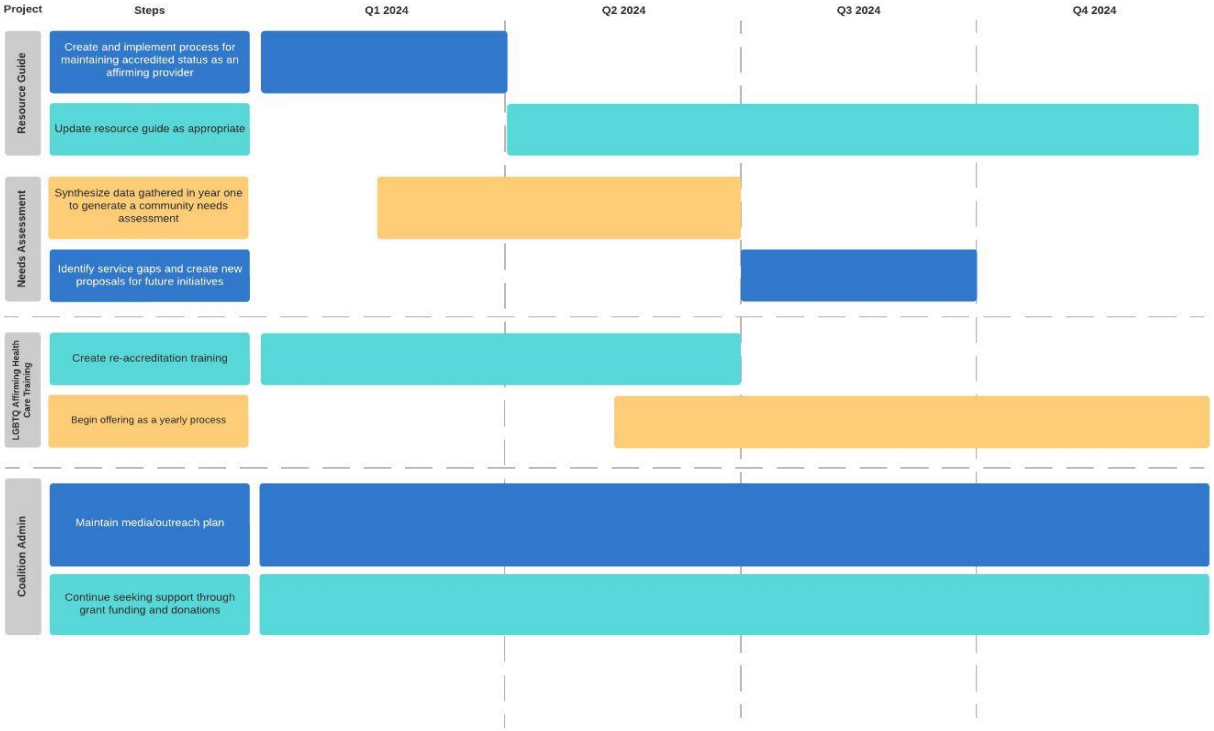
By signing below, I affirm my commitment to nondiscrimination and creating a welcoming environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in my practice, and I agree to the Terms of Use.

Signature_____ Date_____

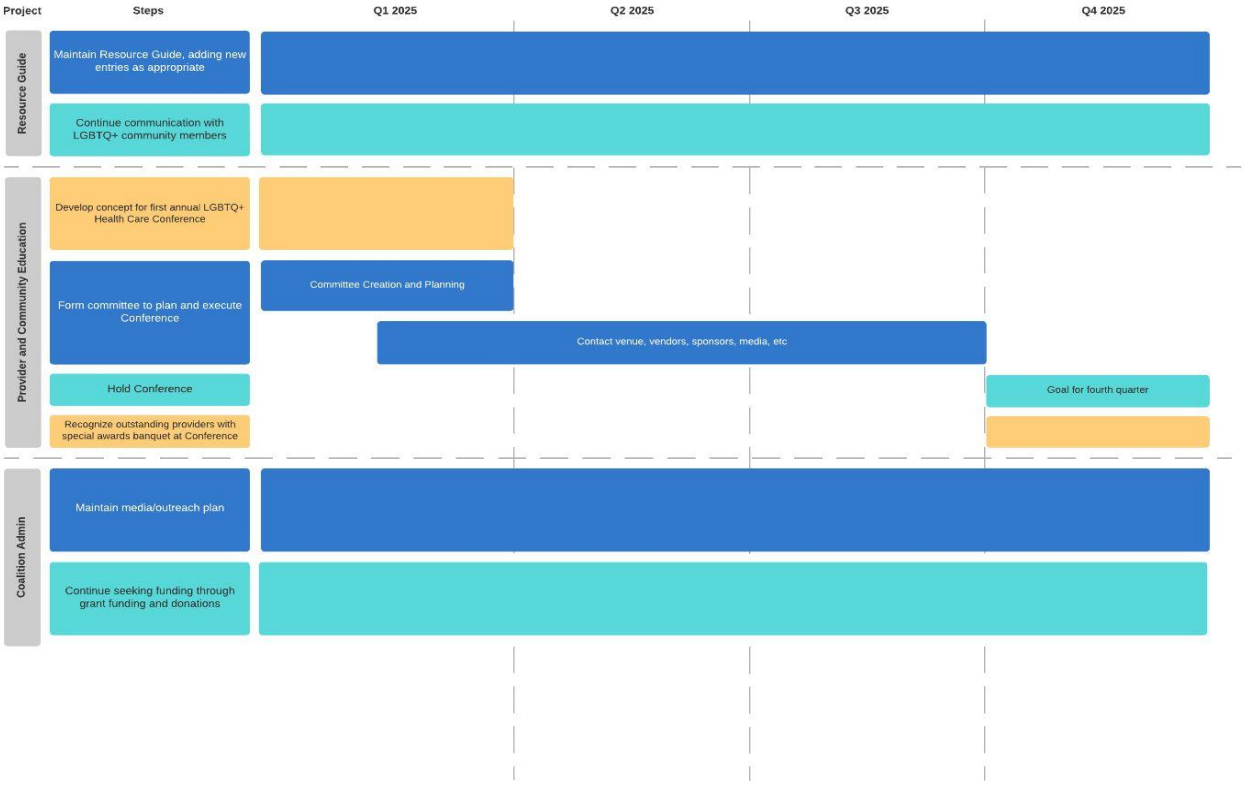
Appendix 2 - Gantt Chart



Year Two



Year Three



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