Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Communities and Tobacco

“A growing body of evidence indicates that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals are considerably more likely to use tobacco than the general population, with some studies estimating smoking rates as much as double the national average. Although it’s difficult to verify, it’s estimated that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals represent roughly 3 percent of the total population of the United States. They live in every state and county in the nation, and are part of every racial, ethnic, religious, age and socioeconomic group.” ¹

Community Use

- Smoking is a health issue of major concern in the LGBT community. Between 25%-44% of LGB adults smoke. The prevalence of smoking is about 2 times higher in gay, bisexual, transgender men and about 1.5 times higher in lesbian, bisexual, transgender women than heterosexual men and women, respectively. ¹,²,³,⁴,⁵
- Lesbian and/or bisexual female youth are about 9.7 times more likely to smoke cigarettes on a weekly basis than "straight" females of the same age. Male youth who are “mostly heterosexual” are about twice as likely to smoke than heterosexual boys. ⁶,⁷
- LGBT adolescents are taking up smoking at an alarming rate, in a recent national study 45% of females and 35% of males reporting same-sex attraction or behavior smoked. In comparison, only 29% of the rest of the youth smoked. ⁸
- Studies have shown that LGBT youth are more likely to experience risk factors that contribute to substance use, such as low self-esteem, alienation, and depression. ⁹
- The LGBT National Tobacco Control Network estimates that the LGBT community is 50% to 200% more likely than others to be addicted to tobacco. ³,¹⁰

Age of Initiation

- LGBT youth start smoking at a younger age than other youth. In one survey, the median age that LGBT girls started smoking was 13.¹¹
Tobacco’s Effect on the Community

- An estimated 17,630 of GLB adults die of tobacco use each year. However, this may be underestimated because it assumes the same tobacco use rate as the general public.  
- Smoking weakens the immune system of those infected with HIV, and makes it hard to fight off opportunistic infections like hairy leukoplaikia, candidiasis, cryptococcus, and bacterial pneumonia.

Attitudes about Cessation

- In one study, 70% of LGBT individuals preferred smoke-free bars and clubs and were willing to pay more to get into these establishments. Only 52% of “straight” respondents were willing to pay more.
- Many LGBT smokers believe that smoking increases their risk of lung cancer and heart disease, but they tend to make fewer attempts to quit than other smokers (75% compared with 80% of all adults).
- Even though the rate of smoking among LGBT individuals is one of the highest in the U.S., only 24% of LGBT community leaders interviewed between 2002 and 2004 said that tobacco use was a major concern within the LGBT community.

Marketing and Targeting Information

- The tobacco industry has now focused on lesbian and gay youth as an important target market.
- Some members of the LGBT community view tobacco marketing as a sign of social acceptance and inclusion. Instead of viewing tobacco marketing as exploitative, they believe the attention of the tobacco industry is evidence of the LGBT community’s influence.
- The tobacco industry knows that the LGB community has higher smoking rates and has used marketing tactics to exploit the community. They have placed targeted advertisements in gay magazines, events, and bars.

Demographic Information

- Gay and lesbian married and unmarried partners occupied 1% of all North Carolina households in 2000.
- Northampton County in NC was among the top 25 counties outside of metropolitan statistical areas with the highest percentage of gay or lesbian married/unmarried couples.
- Three North Carolina metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) with a million-plus populations are ranked as part of the top 36 MSAs with the highest percentage of gay or lesbian coupled households: Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill (1.1% of all households), Charlotte (0.97%), and Greensboro-Winston Salem-High Point (0.90%).
References


