



03/16/2024

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National LGBTQ+ Health Awareness Week Spotlights LGBTQ+ Health Disparities in Sussex County and the Delmarva Region

This year's National LGBTQ+ Health Awareness Week, taking place from March 18 to March 22, 2024, will focus attention on the health disparities facing the LGBTQ+ community. The awareness week is an annual event designed to help educate the public about the unique health challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community and promote greater access to healthcare services.

The 2024 theme, "Vital, Vibrant Voices" emphasizes the vital role of vibrant and diverse voices in raising awareness about the health challenges facing the LGBTQ community. Through a series of educational and advocacy efforts, the National Coalition for LGBTQ+ Health, along with Sussex Pride & 600+ partner organizations, will work to uplift the voices of LGBTQ+ professionals, and advocate to foster informed dialogue and drive meaningful engagement in LGBTQ+ health care.

LGBTQ+ individuals face significant health disparities compared to their straight and cisgender counterparts. LGBTQ+ people are at a higher risk of developing certain health conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, and cancer. They are also more likely to experience mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, and are at a greater risk of suicide.

The recently released Delmarva Climate Survey underscores the healthcare challenges LGBTQ+ individuals face in our region. The survey, conducted by Dr. Nicole A. Professor Buzzetto-Hollywood at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, was conducted in 2023. Two hundred eighty three individuals completed the survey representing multiple counties including the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Southern Delaware.

The Delmarva LGBTQIA+ Climate Survey assessed the social, cultural, and environmental factors affecting LGBTQIA+ individuals in the region.

Key Findings:

- *Mental Health:* LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to grapple with mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, which are often linked to discrimination and social stigma.

- *Healthcare Access:* While access to LGBTQIA+-friendly healthcare services has improved, barriers to quality care remain a concern.
- *Support Networks:* The survey revealed a growing network of LGBTQIA+ support organizations and advocacy groups across Delmarva, offering vital resources and a sense of community to those in need.
- *Youth and Education:* LGBTQIA+ youth face unique challenges, such as bullying and a lack of comprehensive sex education. Schools were identified as crucial areas for improvement.
- *Legal Protections:* Progress has been made in LGBTQIA+ rights and legal protections. However, respondents emphasized the need for continued advocacy, particularly in areas like housing and employment.

Respondents from Sussex County, Delaware emphasized both a lack of LGBTQ+ affirming providers, and a lack of medical providers overall. The biggest barriers involved access to gender affirming care. Respondents emphasized concerns about discrimination, as well as experiencing long waits and long travel times to find the care they need.

“LGBTQ+ Health Awareness Week is an important opportunity to highlight the challenges LGBTQ+ Delawareans experience accessing health care” stated David Mariner, Executive Director of Sussex Pride.

“This is an important opportunity for us to recommit to working toward Health Equity in Delaware. “The Sussex Pride Health Committee meets monthly on the second Wednesday of every month. The community brings together medical providers, community advocates, and government representatives working together to advance LGBTQ+ Health Equity in our state.”

Delaware’s first health equity summit will take place April 18th to 19th at the Chase Center on the Riverfront in Wilmington Delaware. Speakers will include Dr. Rachel Levine, a pediatrician who currently serves as the 17th Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). She is the nation’s highest-ranking openly transgender official.

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About Sussex Pride

Sussex Pride works to celebrate, strengthen, and support the LGBTQ+ community in Sussex County and the state of Delaware, working through a social justice lens. We focus on arts & culture, health & wellness, social and support groups, and advocacy for our community.

About Dr. Nicole A. Buzzetto-Hollywood:

Dr. Nicole A. Buzzetto-Hollywood is a distinguished Professor at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and serves as the President of the Board for Salisbury PFLAG. She is dedicated to advancing LGBTQ+ rights, mental health advocacy, and community development in the Delmarva region.

About National LGBTQ+ Health Awareness Week:

National LGBTQ+ Health Awareness Week is an annual event designed to promote greater awareness of the unique healthcare challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. The event is organized by the National Coalition for LGBTQ+ Health