



# Stand Up and Be Counted

LGBTQ+ Service Use and Needs in Westchester County:  
A Report from the Westchester County LGBTQ+ Survey, 2018

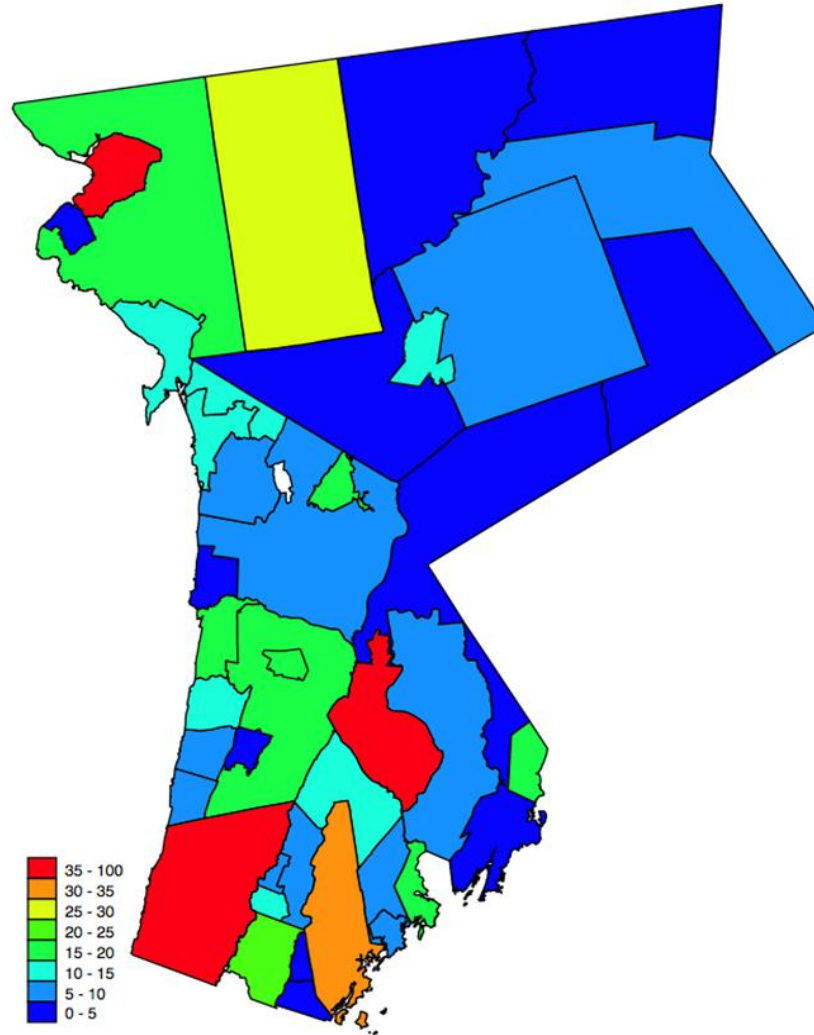


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## Survey Respondents



Ardsley	<5	Harrison	10	New Rochelle	34	Rye Brook	5
Bedford	8	Hastings-on-Hudson	8	North Castle	5	Rye City	5
Briarcliff Manor	6	Irvington	15	North Salem	<5	Scarsdale	15
Bronxville	11	Larchmont	9	Ossining Town	11	Sleepy Hollow	5
Buchanan	<5	Lewisboro	7	Ossining Village	12	Somers	<5
Cortlandt	20	Mamaroneck Town	10	Peekskill	42	Tarrytown	17
Croton-on-Hudson	12	Mamaroneck Village	17	Pelham	<5	Tuckahoe	6
Dobbs Ferry	10	Mount Kisco	15	Pelham Manor	<5	White Plains	88
Eastchester	8	Mount Pleasant	7	Pleasantville	17	Yonkers	94
Elmsford	<5	Mount Vernon	21	Port Chester	19	Yorktown	28
Greenburgh	16	New Castle	<5	Pound Ridge	<5	All Other	41

## Executive Summary

### FINDINGS

**LGBTQ+ people live throughout Westchester County.** They are diverse in age, gender identity and expression, and race and ethnicity.

While many say that they need or **have used services** such as individual mental health counseling, support groups and benefits navigation, many, especially those who are living in poverty, still experience barriers to accessing these important services. They need **local, LGBTQ+ - friendly services** and support.

Only about one-third of the respondents were **familiar with the Westchester County Human Rights Commission**, suggesting that further outreach may be needed in order to increase awareness among LGBTQ+ people who need help accessing the full range of their human rights.

The highest priorities for Westchester County in terms of improving government responsiveness and strengthening community were support for additional **LGBTQ+ spaces** for social activities and increasing **understanding and awareness of county services** to meet needs.

About two-thirds of respondents had experienced at least one **microaggression** occasionally or more often. Youth, people of color, transgender people and those with nonconforming gender identities were more likely to have reported high numbers of microaggressions in the last year.

The most uplifting finding may be that when the young people who responded say they feel connected to support — **adults, friends, allies, and organizations** — they are thriving.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### POLICY NEXT STEPS

Reinstate and support the **LGBTQ+ liaison** position within Westchester County government. **Conduct effective LGBTQ+ sensitivity training** for county employees, businesses, and service providers, and follow up to assure that best practices are followed. Empower the county's **LGBTQ Advisory Board**.

Advertise and explain the role of the **Westchester County Human Rights Commission** to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly those who are not familiar with it.

Build **housing** that will meet the needs of **LGBTQ+ older adults**. Provide effective, **evidence-based training for homecare workers** to provide services to LGBTQ+ older adults who wish to remain in their own homes.

#### COMMUNITY NEXT STEPS

**Maintain and grow funding for LGBTQ+ services in Westchester County.** Fund community-based organizations to provide effective LGBTQ+ - friendly benefits navigation for people living in poverty. **Increase support** for current services.

Attract businesses and organizations that offer **social spaces** for LGBTQ+ youth and LGBTQ+ adults.

Continue and strengthen support groups for **LGBTQ+ people of color and those for whom English is a second language**. Expand options for tutoring and homework help for LGBTQ+ youth in underserved communities.

## Introduction

Nearly one million people live in Westchester County. According to population-based surveys, 4.1% of the population identify as LGBT, meaning that it is likely that at least 40,000 people who are LGBTQ+ live in Westchester County.<sup>1</sup> This document describes the findings of a groundbreaking survey of 654 LGBTQ+ people from Westchester County. While population-based data sources about LGBTQ+ people are increasing in number, very few communities have been able to assess the needs of their local population. This survey was designed to collect information specific to LGBTQ+ people in Westchester, and the report describes their service use and needs, relationship to county government, experiences of microaggressions and the climate for LGBTQ+ people in Westchester and concerns of specific interest to seniors and young adults.

This document is designed not only to describe these experiences, but also to provide information for advocates, service providers and local and county government to help them plan and execute programs and services that will increase the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ people across gender, age, race, income and other axes of diversity within the community.

## Glossary

The **LGBTQ+** community is made up of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, as well as sexual and gender minorities who use other labels or no labels at all to describe themselves.

**Transgender** is a word commonly used to describe people who live in a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth. People often use this word to describe not only people who have changed their gender through surgery or cross-gender hormone therapy, but also people who have non-medical gender transitions or identify as transgender but do not seek to change their gender legally or medically. *Transfeminine* usually refers to people were assigned male at birth and now identify as female or feminine. *Transmasculine* similarly refers to people who were assigned female at birth and now identify as male or masculine.

**Gender nonconforming** people are people who express their genders differently from society's expectations, reject "male" and "female" as the only gender possibilities and/or blend genders.

**Pansexual** people are attracted to people based upon features other than gender and are open to attraction across various genders, including those beyond the traditional binary of "male" or "female."

**Gender identity** is often distinguished from "sex assigned at birth," in that gender identity refers to people's internal sense of themselves as male, female, transgender or something else.

**Gender expression** is the outward manifestation of gender, often shown through appearance, dress and behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Gates, G. J. (2017). LGBT Data Collection Amid Social and Demographic Shifts of the US LGBT Community. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(8), 1220–1222. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303927>

## Methods

The areas of inquiry for the survey included demographic information, service use, barriers and preferences, experiences and priorities for Westchester's local government and climate, housing and retirement plans for LGBTQ+ seniors (55+) and service needs and social experiences for youth (16-21). Prior to survey design, the collaborating partners contributed input, as did nine other experts in the subject and six focus groups of community members (totaling 47 people).

The survey was conducted from March 8<sup>th</sup> - April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The survey was distributed by the Westchester Community Foundation's LGBT Task Force, a partnership of the Foundation, The LOFT: LGBT Community Services Center, WJCS's Center Lane, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, and Yonkers City Councilman Michael Sabatino, and through social media.

The survey used Qualtrics software and was available online in English or Spanish. In order to take the survey, participants had to:

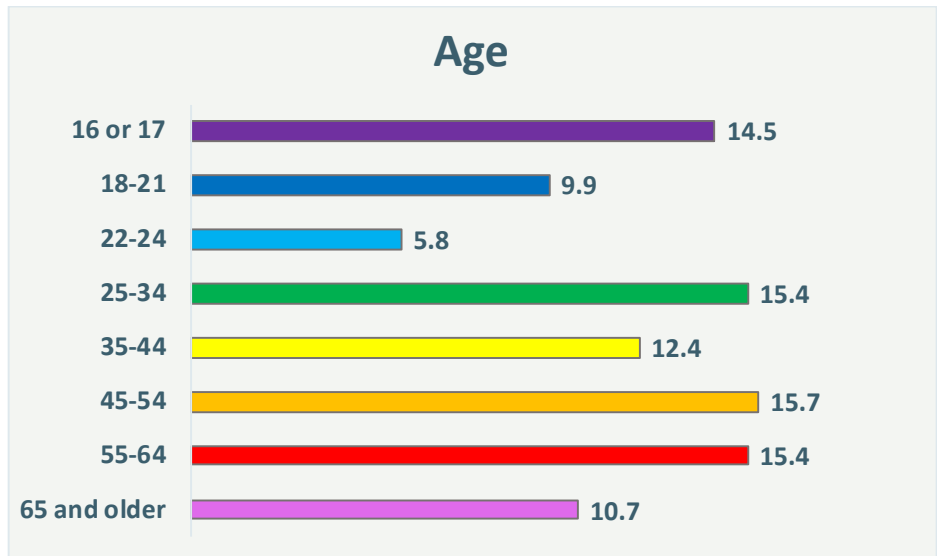
- Be age 16 or older
- Live in Westchester County
- Identify as LGBTQ+

Participants could select as many race, gender and sexual orientation identities as applied to them. A total of 654 valid respondents took the survey, with 86.2% completing it.

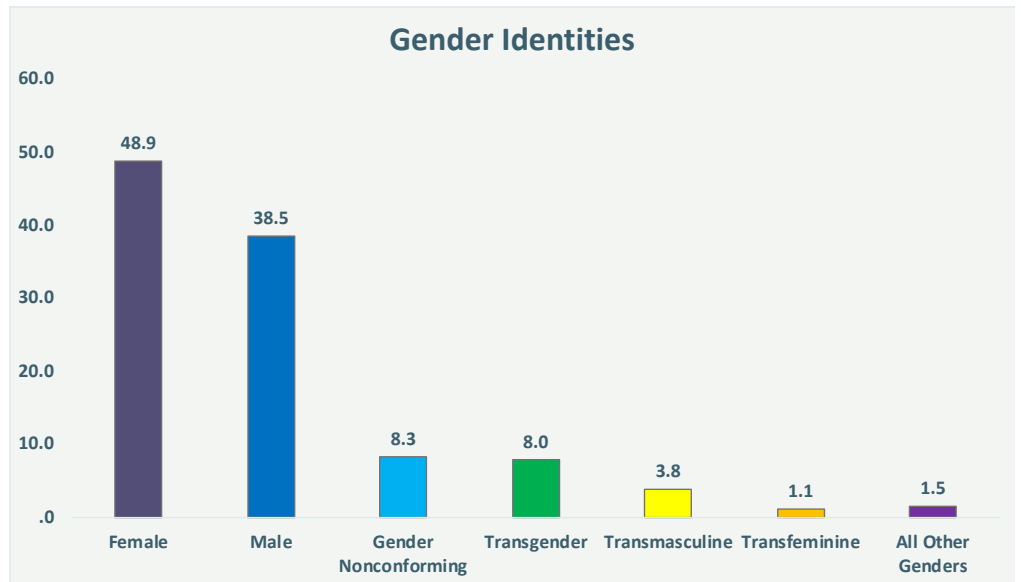
Survey data were analyzed in Stata; all differences remarked upon in the text are statistically significant at least at the .1 level unless otherwise noted.

## Who took the Survey?

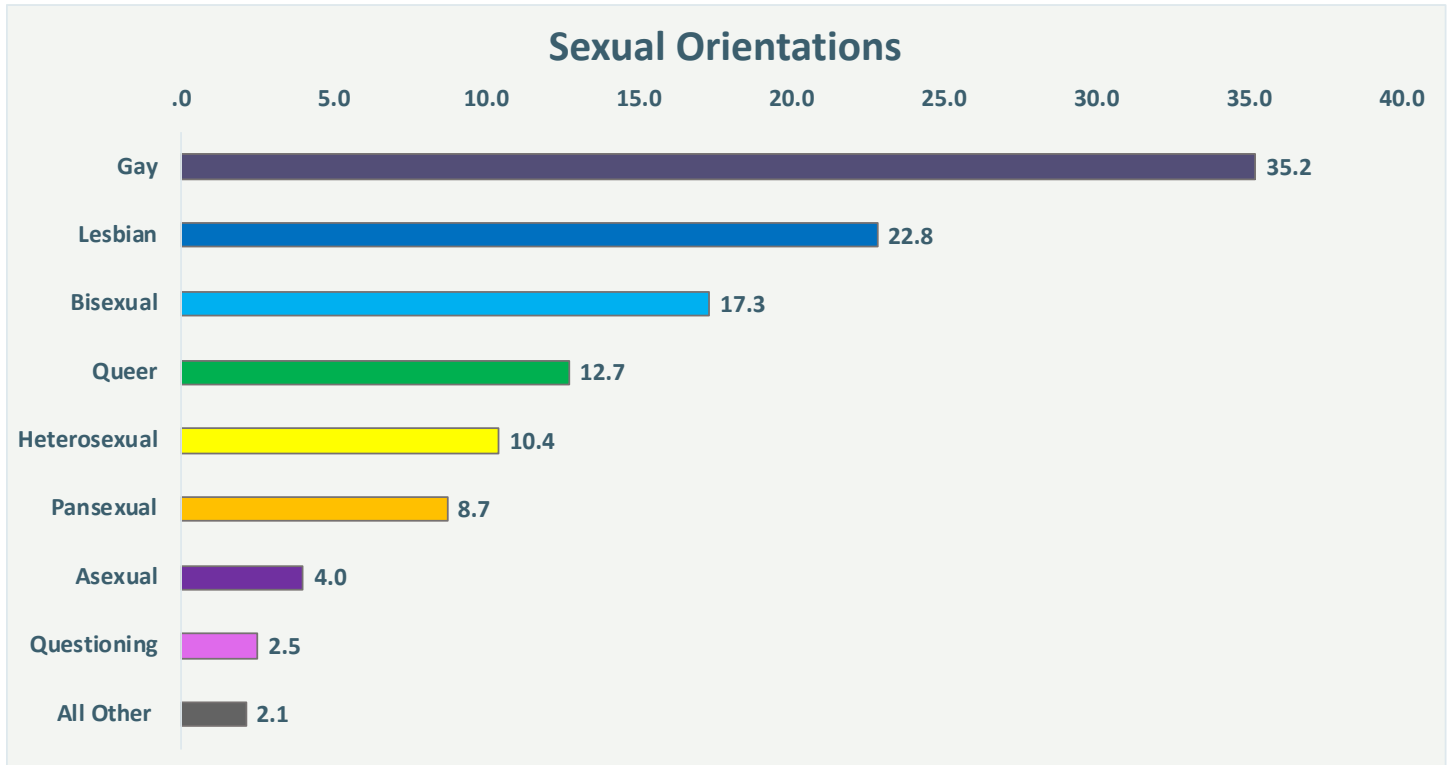
There were large numbers of respondents across the age spectrum, with young people well represented (14.5% were 16 or 17, while almost one in ten, 9.9%, were ages 18 to 21) as well as older adults. More than one in ten (10.7%) were over age 65.



Respondents were also asked about their gender identity or identities and could select all that applied to them (e.g.: a transman may select male, transgender and transmasculine). There were more female respondents (48.9%) than male respondents (38.5%). About one in six respondents (15.6%) were trans or gender nonconforming (TGNC), with respondents under age 35 more likely to be TGNC (26.1% vs. 6.8%).



Respondents were asked about their sexual orientation(s) and could select all that applied to them. The most common sexual orientation selected was gay (35.2%), with lesbian (22.8%) and bisexual (17.3%) following. Smaller numbers identified as queer (12.7%), heterosexual (10.4%), pansexual (8.7%), asexual (4.0%) or questioning (2.5%).<sup>2</sup>

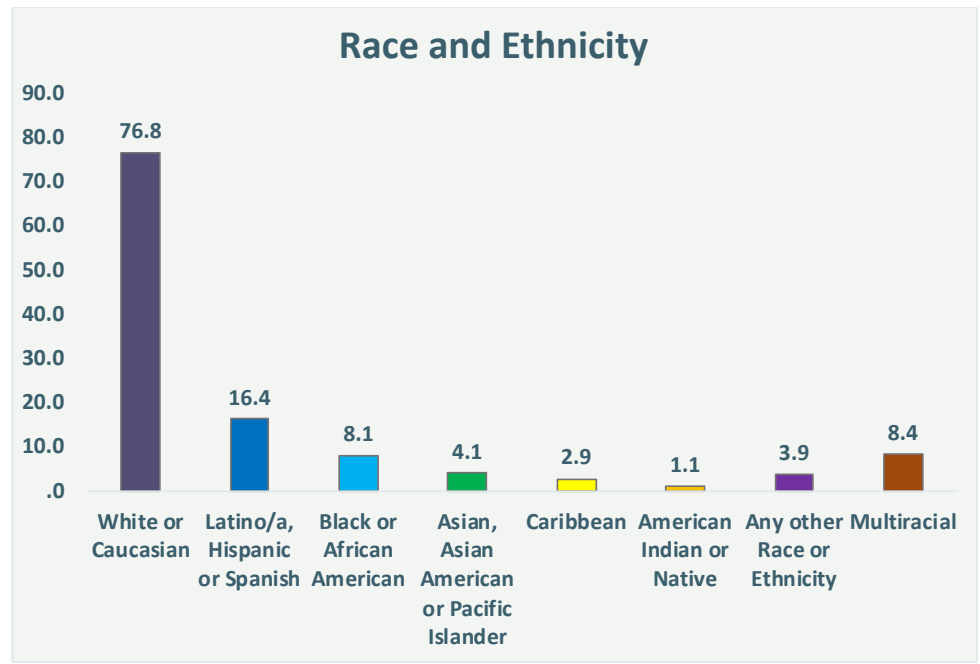


<sup>2</sup> Because this was a survey of the LGBTQ+ community, rather than a survey with criteria defined strictly by identity or behavior, heterosexual respondents were not excluded, even if they did not identify as trans or gender nonconforming.



## RACE AND ETHNICITY

Just over one in four (28.5%) respondents were people of color. About one in six (16.4%) were Latino/a, Hispanic or Spanish, while 8.1% were Black or African American. Smaller numbers identified as Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander (4.1%) or American Indian or Native (including Native Hawaiian) (1.1%). Many respondents selected more than one race and/or self-identified as biracial or multiracial (8.4%).



## EDUCATION

Among respondents age 25 and over, 73.9% had at least a four-year college degree. Just under one in twenty, 5.7% had a high school degree/GED or less. Among those who were over age 25, 62.3% were employed full time and 13.6% were employed part time. About one in six (15.0%) among this age group were retired, with 66.0% of those age 65+ saying they were retired. Among all respondents, about one in six (15.6%) said they were in high school, while slightly fewer (13.2%) said they were in college or university. About one in six (15.5%) participants reported having a mental health disability, while 6.2% reported a physical disability and 2.6% reported an intellectual disability.

## FAMILY LIFE

About one in five (19.0%) had at least one child under 18 living with them. Just under one-third, or 31.9%, were legally married or domestically partnered, while slightly fewer were living with family other than a romantic partner (29.5%), and 28.2% were single and living alone or with unrelated roommates. One in ten (10.3%) were living with a partner but were neither married nor domestically partnered.

## POVERTY

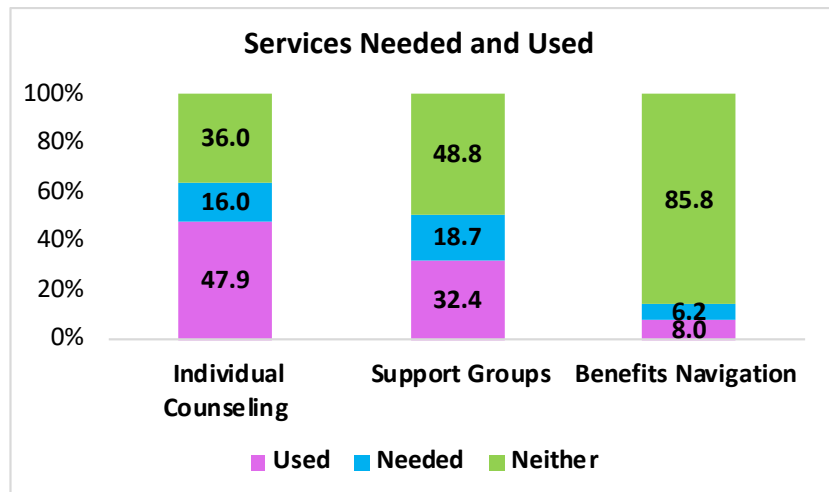
Among adults (age 18+), 12.1% lived under the poverty line in 2017 (defined as \$12,060 for one person or \$24,600 for a family of four)<sup>3</sup>. More than one in five (22.5%) participants lived under 200% of the federal poverty line, which is often used to determine benefits eligibility. Of young people (age 16-21) who were in school and did not answer the questions about their family income, about one in five (20.6%) had received free lunch at school in the current school year.

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<sup>3</sup> The official U.S. Census definition of poverty calculates the cost of food for a given family size and multiplies it times three. That is the official poverty line. The poverty line does not vary geographically and many people consider it to be very low compared to the actual cost of living, especially in high cost areas such as Westchester. In order to reduce the burden on respondents, this survey asked how many people lived in the household in 2017 and then used this information to customize subsequent questions to determine the poverty bracket where the individual's household fell. For more information see [census.gov](https://www.census.gov) and [aspe.hhs.gov](https://www.aspe.hhs.gov).

## Service Use, Barriers and Preferences

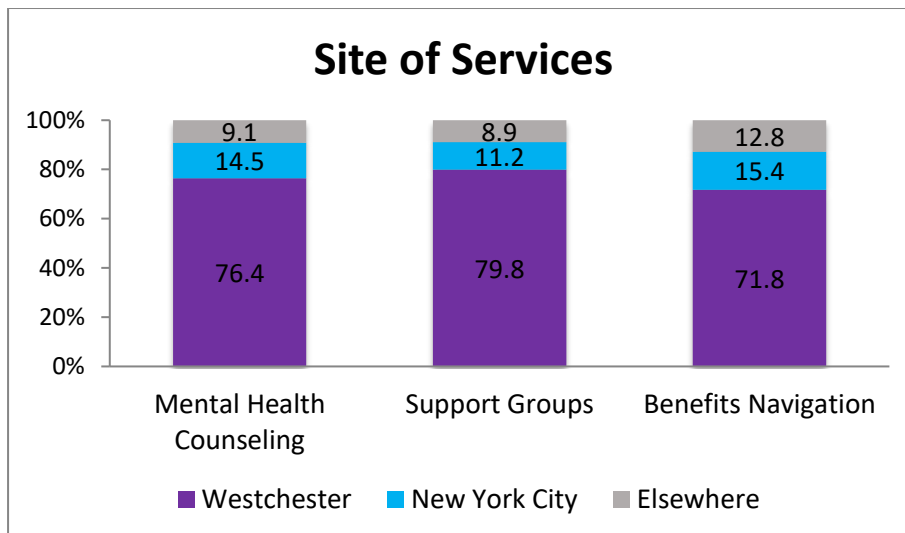
The survey asked about whether respondents had used or needed three important types of services of interest to the LGBTQ+ community: individual counseling, support groups and benefits navigation, such as help obtaining benefits or public assistance, such as food stamps, subsidized housing, or cash assistance. Of those, the largest number of survey respondents indicated they had used individual counseling (47.9%), followed by support groups (32.4%). While only 8.0% of all survey respondents said they had used benefits navigation, 27.7% of those who were under the poverty line had, and nearly the same number said that they had needed but been unable to access such services (25.5%).

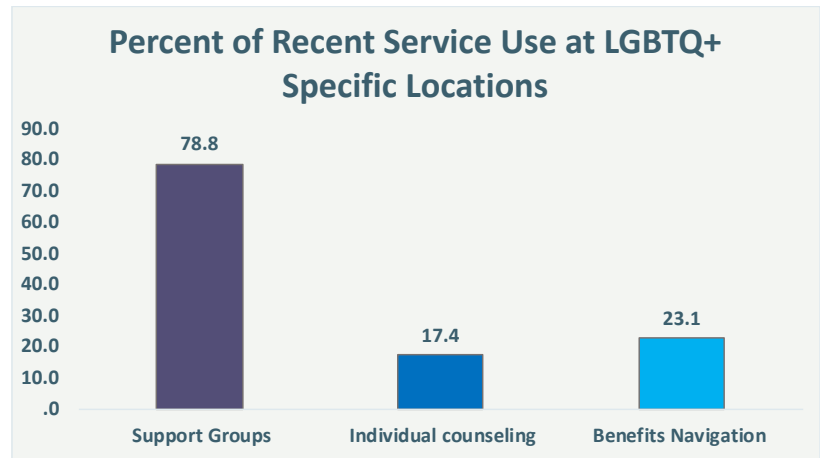
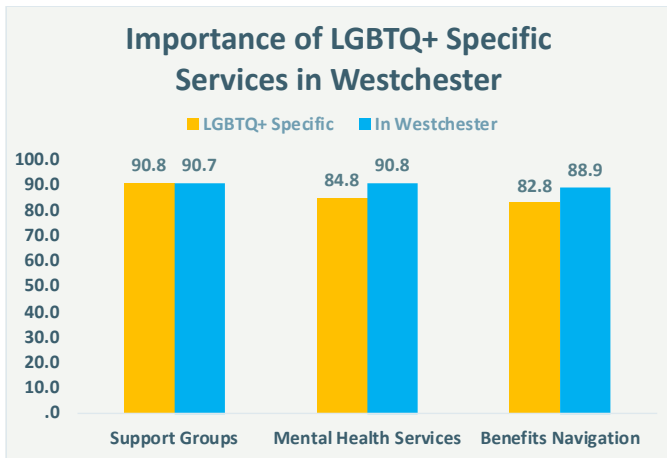


Trans and gender nonconforming respondents were more likely to have used support groups (46.9% vs. 29.4%) and individual counseling (60.4% vs. 45.3%). They were also more likely to need and say they could not find support groups (26.5% vs. 17.1%) and individual mental health services (20.8% vs. 15.0% (not significant)).

Both Asian/Pacific Islander (50.0% vs. 31.2%) and Black/African American (47.9% vs. 30.5%) were significantly more likely than other respondents to say they used support groups in the past three years. Black/African American (19.1% vs. 7.1%) and Latinx (14.9% vs. 6.9%) were also more likely to say that they used benefits navigation.

More than three-quarters of participants reported receiving services for support groups (79.8%), mental health counseling (76.4%) and benefits navigation (71.8%) in Westchester County. The remainder reported getting these services in New York City or somewhere else.

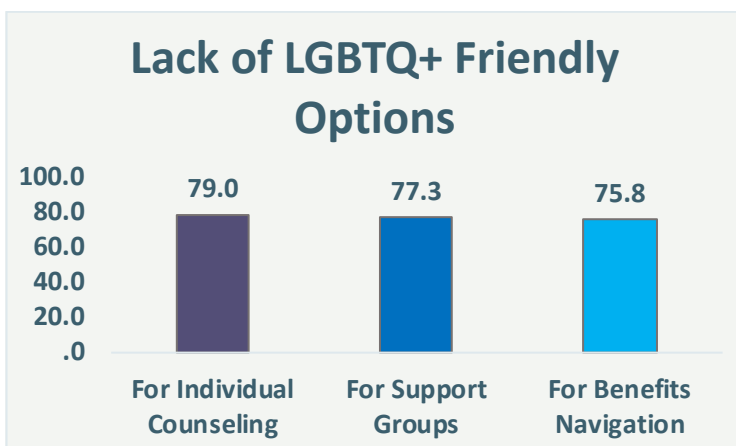




Many more participants said their most recent time attending a support group had been at an LGBTQ+ - specific (78.8%) location compared to those who said that individual counseling (17.4%) or benefits navigation (23.1%) had been LGBTQ+ - specific. Respondents were also asked about whether they preferred support groups, mental health services and benefits navigation to be LGBTQ+ specific and, separately, whether they preferred these services be located in Westchester. Nearly nine in ten agreed across each of the service categories that having LGBTQ+ - specific services was “important” or “very important.” Similar numbers agreed this was true for having these services locally, that is, in Westchester County.

Survey participants were asked how satisfied they were with each service the last time they received it. Overwhelmingly, they were very satisfied with the services they received, regardless of whether those services were LGBTQ+ - specific or not and regardless of where those services were offered (data not shown), with the exception of benefits navigation, with which **30.8% reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.**

Participants who used, or needed but have not used, support groups were asked about preferences for support group topics. Options for LGBTQ support groups included: a substance use/recovery group not specific to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous; a Spanish-language support group; a trauma-specific mental health group; a people of color group; and a parenting group. **The largest proportion of participants said they were “likely” or “very likely” to attend support groups on trauma or mental health (41.1%),** a group specific to people of color (26.2%) or a group on parenting (24.2%). A support group on substance abuse or recovery (20.9%) and a Spanish language group (13.0%) were also requested by some participants.

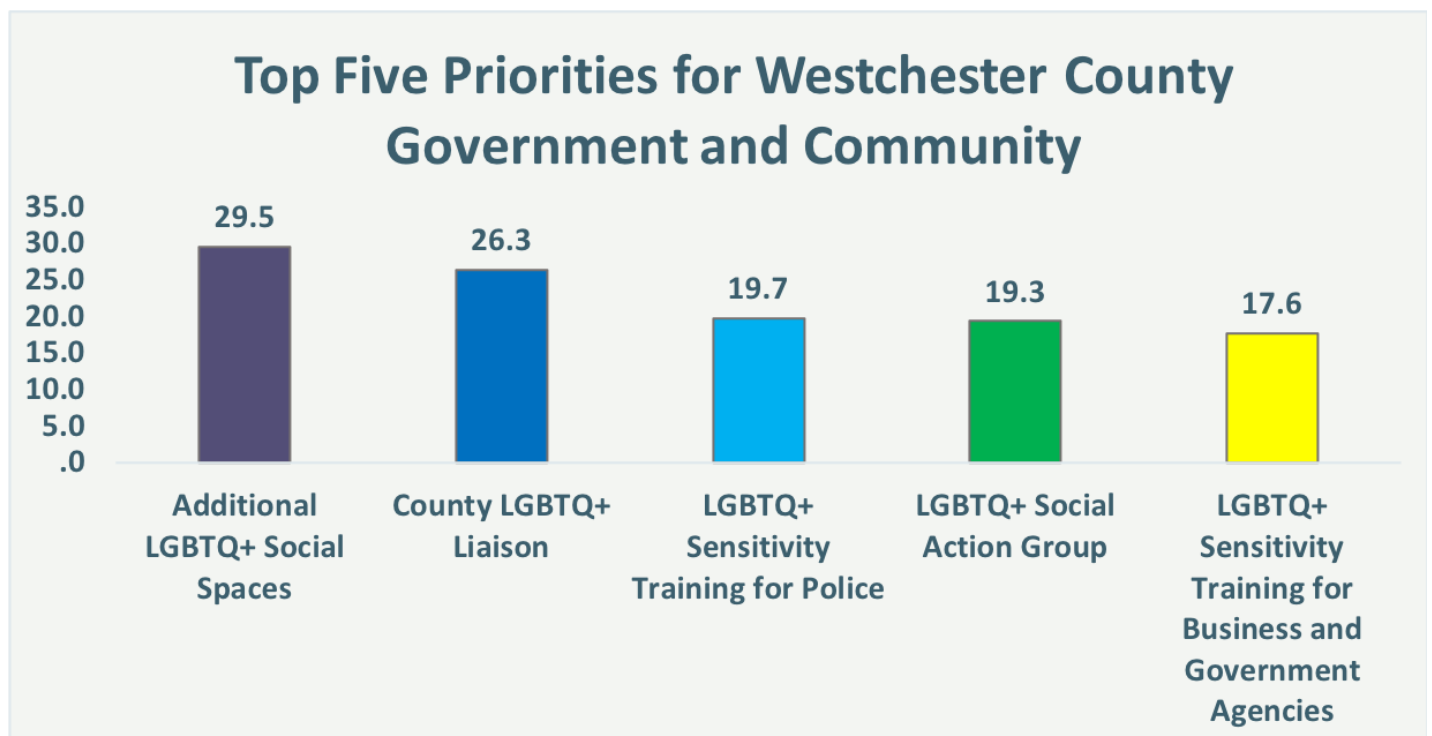


Participants who indicated that they needed but did not receive each of these services were asked about the important reasons they were not receiving needed support groups, individual counselling, and benefits navigation. **Respondents indicated that lack of LGBTQ+ - friendly options was a top barrier for all three services.** Four in five (79.0%) agreed that lack of LGBTQ+ - friendly options for individual counseling was an “important” or “very important” barrier, while over three-quarters agreed this was the case for support groups (77.3%) and benefits navigation (75.8%). Lack of affordable options was one of the top

reasons among those measured that survey participants were not able to access services (e.g. 84.3% of those who did not access needed benefits navigation agreed that affordability was a barrier), although distance (selected by an average of 59.5% of respondents across the three service categories) and lack of transportation (41.4%) were also important to many respondents.

### Experiences of Local Government and Community for LGBTQ+ People in Westchester

Survey respondents were asked how familiar they were with the Westchester County Human Rights Commission. Just under one-third (31.4%) indicated that they were “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with it. Respondents from White Plains (45.1%) and Yonkers (41.2%) were significantly more likely to be familiar with the Commission. Nearly all respondents said that it was important to them that “if a serious bias crime against an LGBTQ person were committed,” the “local government of your town, city or village respond in a way that openly supports the LGBTQ+ community,” with 96.2% saying it was “very important” or “somewhat important” to them.



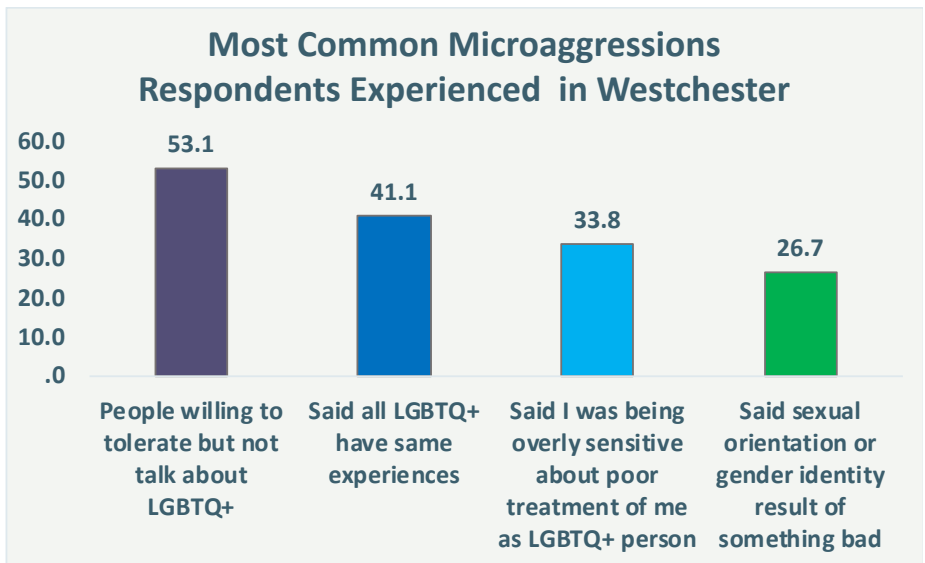
Survey respondents were also asked to rank three of seven possible county services for LGBTQ+ people and communities<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the five listed above, respondents were given the option of selecting an LGBTQ+ history and culture discussion group (4.1%) and sponsorship of an additional pride event (4.9%). The top priorities include the following: **Additional LGBTQ+ social spaces (29.5%), reinstatement of an LGBTQ+ county liaison (26.3%), sensitivity training for police (19.7%) and government, businesses, and agencies (17.6%) and creation of an LGBTQ+ social action group (19.3%).**

<sup>4</sup> Respondents who ranked more than three selections were weighted so that each answer counted proportionally less. For example, someone who gave six answers was weighted one-half for each answer.

## MICROAGGRESSIONS

A microaggression is a comment or action that reflects a prejudiced attitude toward a marginalized group, in this case LGBTQ+ people. In order to better understand the sense of community for LGBTQ+ people in Westchester, survey respondents were asked how frequently certain microaggressions had occurred in the past year (12 months).<sup>5</sup>

About two-thirds of respondents (65.0%) had experienced at least one microaggression “occasionally” or more often. Among the microaggressions measured, the most common microaggression to occur “occasionally” or more often was people being willing to tolerate but not talk about being LGBTQ+ (52.1%), followed by people saying LGBTQ+ people all have the same experiences (41.1%). Less common but more severe microaggressions included being harassed about gender expression (13.5%) or sexual orientation (12.4%). Almost one in ten (8.4%) had been mistaken for a sex worker at least once (“very rarely”), disproportionately among those who were under 35 and TGNC, over one in four of whom had been mistaken for a sex worker (25.7%).



Controlling for other significant factors, reports of microaggressions were highest among those age 18-21.<sup>6</sup> Experiences of microaggressions decreased steadily among older groups. People who identified as queer, those who were transgender and those who were gender nonconforming according to the gender expression index<sup>7</sup> were also much more likely to have experienced higher numbers of microaggressions, as were people of color.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Balsam, K. F., Molina, Y., Beadnell, B., Simoni, J., & Walters, K. (2011). Measuring multiple minority stress: the LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale. *Cultur Divers Ethnic Minor Psychol*, 17(2), 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023244>

<sup>6</sup> The microaggressions questions asked respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale from “never” to “very frequently”. In order to assess the overall vulnerability to microaggressions. The individual items were used to create a scale including all measures (except for the one relating to sex work) (mean=2.4, sd=1.12, alpha=0.85).

<sup>7</sup> A seven-point scale asking participants to place themselves on a spectrum from very feminine to very masculine, with neither in the middle, based on how others perceive their gender expression.

<sup>8</sup> Regression methods and table available upon request of the author. All demographics reported here were tested for bivariate association with the microaggressions scale; significant variables were added to a regression analysis and then eliminated until all variables were significant in the regression.

## Youth

The majority (63.9%) of youth participants in this survey, age 21 and under, were currently in high school, while a smaller number were in university or college (32.0%). All youth age 21 and under were asked how likely they would be to use services in an LGBTQ+ - specific space, such as help with homework or tutoring, help with college applications or finding a job, help finding health care and making social connections with other LGBTQ+ people. The most prevalent selection among youth respondents was opportunities to make social connections (83.3%). About half said they would use help finding a job (55.5%) and help finding health care (45.8%), while smaller numbers said they would use help with college applications (35.8%) and homework or tutoring (27.4%).

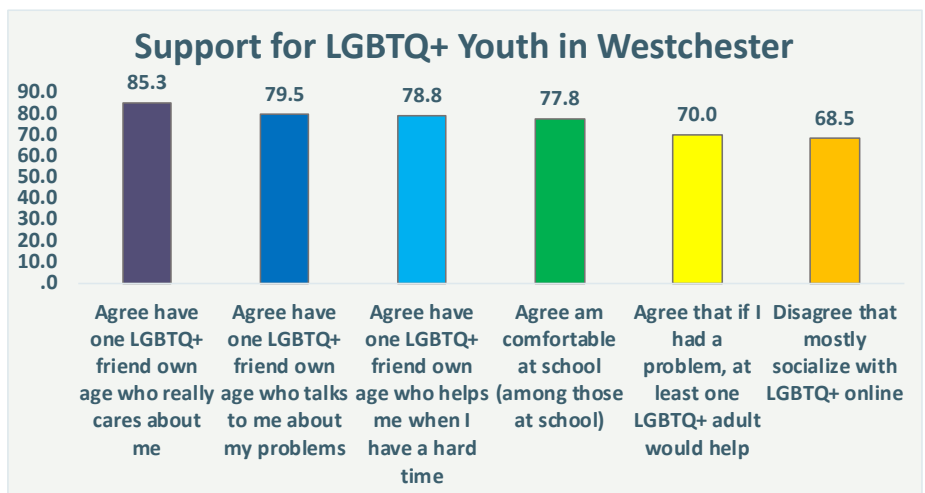
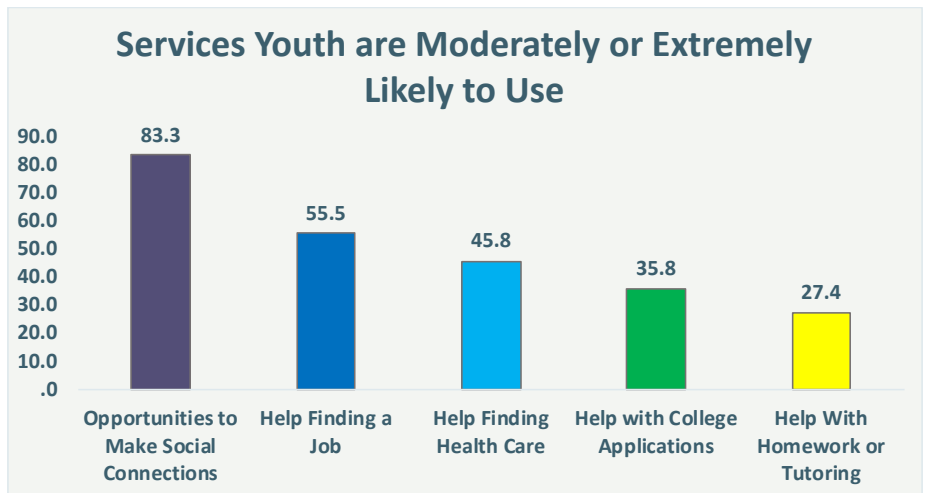
**The majority of LGBTQ+ youth respondents indicated that they have friends their own age who care about them (85.3%), and agree that they can get help with problems from both peers (79.5%) and those older than themselves (70.0%).**

Young people living in the north county (70.5%) and in Peekskill (65.7%) were significantly less likely to agree they have one LGBTQ+ friend their own age who talks to them about their problems and those in Peekskill were also less likely to agree they have an LGBTQ+ friend their own age who really cares about them (75.0%).

Most are comfortable in school (77.8%) and socialize in person more than online with other LGBTQ+ youth (68.5%). Results were similar for youth of color and youth receiving free lunch.

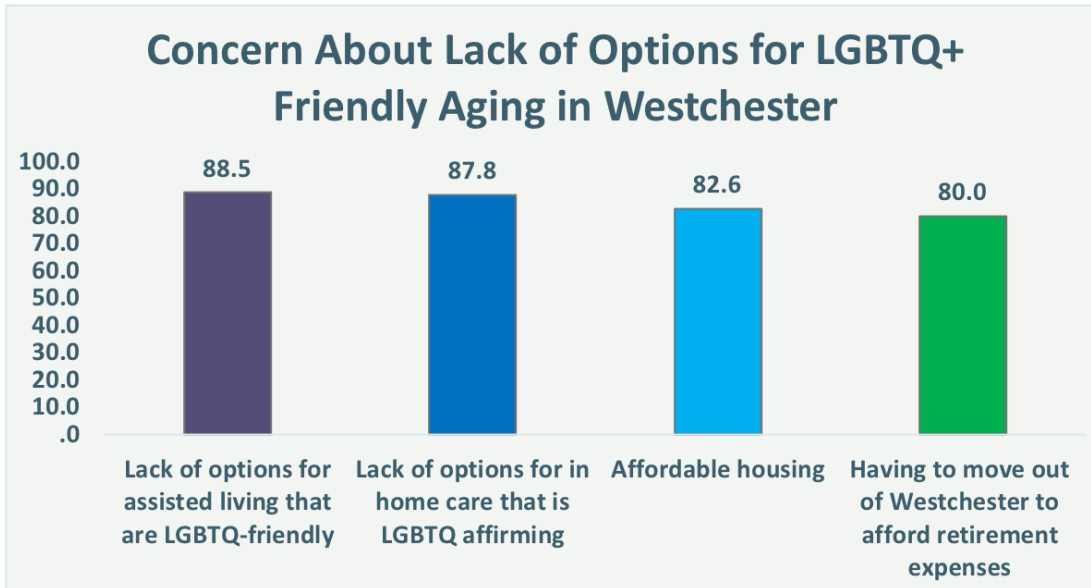
Trans and gender nonconforming youth were about as likely as other youth to agree that they have LGBTQ+ youth and adults who are friends and would help them (data not shown), but are more likely to agree that they socialize mostly online with LGBTQ+ people (51.1% vs. 27.0%).

Although there were small samples of youth of color in this survey, Latinx youth were more likely to say they wanted help with homework or tutoring (44.0% vs. 23.3%) and college applications (52.0% vs. 32.3%) than were youth of other races/ethnicities. Black LGBTQ+ youth seem to have strong social ties with LGBTQ+ adults, as they were more likely to say that they had an adult to help them with problems (82.1% vs. 68.7%), while Latinx youth said that they were more likely to have an LGBTQ+ friend who really cares about them (91.9% vs. 84.0%).



## Older Adults

Older adult participants were asked to rate their level of concern about affordable housing, lack of options for in-home care that is LGBTQ-affirming, having to move out of Westchester to afford retirement expenses and lack of options for assisted living that are LGBTQ+ - friendly. Older adults who responded to this survey were very concerned about lack of options for aging with LGBTQ+ - friendly care in Westchester. They were particularly concerned about lack of options for assisted living (88.5%) and home care (87.8%) that are LGBTQ+ - friendly.





## Conclusions and Recommendations

LGBTQ+ people in Westchester County expressed a variety of needs and preferences for local, LGBTQ+-friendly services and support. In some cases, fulfilling these needs will require increased investment in infrastructure and social service provision; while in other cases, action by county government would make a significant difference in responding to LGBTQ+ people's needs and fostering an environment of inclusion. Finally, local community-based organizations and businesses play a role in creating a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ people in Westchester County. The following are specific recommendations in each of these areas, that came directly from survey data:

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### POLICY NEXT STEPS

Build **housing** that will meet the needs of **LGBTQ+ older adults**. Provide effective, **evidence-based training for homecare workers** to provide services to LGBTQ+ older adults who wish to remain in their own homes.

Reinstate and support the **LGBTQ+ liaison** position within Westchester County government. Work with experts in training police, business and government agencies to conduct effective LGBTQ+ sensitivity training and follow up to assure that best practices are followed.

Publicize and explain the role of the **Westchester County Human Rights Commission** to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly for those who are not familiar with it.

#### COMMUNITY NEXT STEPS

**Maintain and grow funding for LGBTQ+ services in Westchester County.** Fund community-based organizations to provide effective LGBTQ+ - friendly benefits navigation for people living in poverty.

To address isolation, attract and create social spaces for LGBTQ+ youth and LGBTQ+ adults.

Continue and strengthen support groups for **LGBTQ+ people of color**, particularly those for whom English is a Second Language and those who only speak Spanish. Expand options for tutoring and homework help for LGBTQ+ youth in underserved communities.

While some recommendations require additional resources, many can be accomplished with political will and coordination. The data in this report is intended to guide priorities for community stakeholders and public officials. Working together, we can make Westchester County a better place for LGBTQ+ people.



## Limitations

This survey uses a community-based sample, meaning that it does not necessarily represent the underlying population distribution of LGBTQ+ people in Westchester. As with all surveys of the LGBTQ+ community, individuals self-identify and all data are self-reported.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the collaborating team of Christopher Oldi, Scott Havelka, Michael Sabatino, Lisa Scott, and Judy Troilo, and Westchester Community Foundation Executive Director Laura Rossi and Program Officer Robin Melén for their tireless support for the report's production and for the LGBTQ+ community in Westchester and beyond.

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