Student Mental Health Program
Training and Technical Assistance for California Community Colleges

EachMind MATTERS
California's Mental Health Movement

FOUNDATION for CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CalMHSA

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

Background

Since 2000, the number of college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) has roughly doubled. In a Fall 2012 nationwide survey of 90,000 students by the American College Health Association (ACHA), 8.4% identified as gay/lesbian (2.6%), bisexual (3.8%), or unsure (2.0%), which is almost twice as many as the 4.4% who identified as gay/lesbian (1.4%), bisexual (1.5%), or unsure (1.5%) in the ACHA Spring 2000 survey.[1,2] The percentage of students who identified as transgender similarly doubled from 0.1% in Spring 2000 to 0.2% in Fall 2012. Identifying as a sexual or gender minority may carry associated stressors. In another recent survey of 10,000 youth, LGBT youth were nearly twice as likely as non-LGBT youth to report having been excluded by peers at school, twice as likely to have been verbally harassed at school, three times as likely to feel that they do not fit in, and one-third less likely to report having an adult they can turn to for help.[3] Such stigmatization can lead to psychological distress and school failure.

➤ Risk Factors. The two factors known to be most detrimental to LGBTQ student mental health are hostile school climate and family rejection. Both are associated with increases in rates of homelessness, substance abuse, suicide, and unsafe sexual behavior among LGBTQ youth.[4] Being bullied at school doubles the risk of suicide and is associated with increased depression, decreased self-esteem, increased substance use, and increased school dropout.[5,6] Being rejected at home increases the risk of depression more than six times and increases the risk of suicide more than eight times.[7]

➤ Protective Factors. Other factors at school and home are known to be protective against adverse outcomes in mental health and academic success.[7] Protective factors at school include:

- o At least one supportive adult
- o LGBTQ-inclusive policies and social groups
- o Anti-bullying education
- o Safe Zone programs to educate peers, faculty and staff

Protective factors at home include exposure to fewer rejecting behaviors and experiencing more accepting behaviors, such as:

o Talking openly about sexuality and gender with the youth (thus removing secrecy)
o Expressing affection so the youth knows they are loved
o Supporting the youth's identity even if you feel uncomfortable
o Advocating for the youth when society mistreats them
o Joining Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) or other support groups
o Welcoming the youth's LGBTQ friends into the home

Resources and Support

Several strategies can decrease risk and build resiliency among LGBTQ students, and resources are available to carry them out:

➤ Institutionalizing welcoming and inclusive policies and practices, and setting standards for appropriate behavior inside and outside the classroom.

o **"LGBTQ On Campus" Online Training.** Provided free of charge through the California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP), two online suicide prevention training modules focused on LGBTQ students are available from Kognito Interactive, upon request, to all California Community Colleges. The trainings use avatars and role playing simulations to educate students, faculty, and staff on

the challenges faced by LGBTQ students, and on methods to create a more supportive environment for LGBTQ students at the collegiate level. Three interactive practice conversations are included so learners are better able to manage situations when students are using biased language, understand the complexities of talking about sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and offer assistance and/or referrals to appropriate support services when LGBTQ students exhibit signs of distress.

In order to offer Kognito training, colleges need to participate in a one-hour consultation call to review overall readiness. If your California Community College has not yet participated in a consultation call, please apply online at www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org or call (855) 304-1647. If you already have one or more Kognito trainings implemented, please contact Blake Baldwin at blake@kognito.com. Learn more about Kognito trainings available through the CCC Student Mental Health Program at http://resources.kognito.com/ccc/trainings.

o **Safe Zone Training.** An essential contributor to positive youth development is access to a school environment that is safe, supportive, and does not tolerate the types of harassment and bullying that can cause long-lasting harm. Many campuses offer regularly scheduled, two- to three-hour sessions of "Safe Zone" training to raise awareness and understanding among faculty, staff and administrators about ways to become visible allies to LGBTQ students by

making their living and learning environments more welcoming and safe. Complete Safe Zone training manuals can be downloaded for free at numerous campus websites and can be located in a simple web search under "Safe Zones Training Manual." The Advocates for Youth website provides an extensive online toolkit for creating Safe Zone workshops, complete with lesson plans and training elements, at www.advocatesforyouth.org/component/content/article/608-creating-safe-space-for-glbtq-youth-a-toolkit. Topics frequently covered in Safe Zone trainings include terminology, coming out, confidentiality, being an effective ally, and local resources. Participants who complete the training and choose to become an ally have the option of displaying a sign to designate their space as a Safe Zone, a first step in building resiliency among LGBTQ students on campus.

o **Transgender Law and Policy Institute.** In addition to the stigma and harassment frequently experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual students, transgender and gender-nonconforming students face additional legal and healthcare needs which need to be addressed for college campuses to be fully welcoming and inclusive. The Transgender Law and Policy Institute provides a useful summary of relevant considerations and data at www.transgenderlaw.org/college/index.htm, including:

- Colleges that prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or expression
- Colleges that provide gender-inclusive housing
- Colleges that cover transition-related medical expenses under student health insurance
- Colleges that cover transition-related medical expenses under employee health insurance
- Colleges that allow students to change their name and gender on campus records

The website also publishes a "Transgender Checklist for Colleges and Universities" that covers additional vital concerns, including:

- Can students add a preferred name on university documents such as ID cards and class rosters?
- Do forms asking about gender allow students to identify as transgender or something other than either male or female?
- Does the campus provide access to gender-inclusive restrooms (single-stall, lockable, unisex), changing facilities, and single-person showers?
- Does the campus require gender-segregated organizations and programs to have policies and practices that enable transgender students to join, where appropriate and not limited by national organizational policies?
- Does the campus hire therapists and medical personnel who are knowledgeable about transgender concerns, and train existing staff to understand and be sensitive to the needs of transgender students?
- Does the campus require all Student Affairs staff, Public Safety officers, and other front-line personnel to attend a training session on transgender issues?
- Finally, "Best Practices to Support Transgender and Other Gender-Nonconforming Students" are provided to address nondiscrimination policy wording, gender data collection, name and gender changes, housing, bathrooms, and insurance coverage for transsexual-related psychotherapy, hormone replacement therapy, and gender confirmation surgeries.

➢ Providing comprehensive mental health referrals and support.

   o **Trevor Project Training Resources.** For mental health service providers, educators, student leaders and other adults, the Trevor Project offers monthly webinars and cost-free face-to-face trainings. Similar to Safe Zone trainings, the **Trevor Ally** webinar creates dialogue around what it means to be an ally for LGBTQ youth by discussing appropriate terminology, coming out, and the environmental challenges LGBTQ youth frequently face. **CARE** webinars (**C**onnect, **A**ccept, **R**espond, and **E**mpower) provide more advanced training for providers, faculty and staff focused on suicide risk reduction, building resiliency, and best practices for creating positive environments for all youth. The CARE training is also available face-to-face by request across most of California at no cost to recipients. **Trevor Lifeguard Workshops for Youth** are available face-to-face by request to most areas in California, and provide basic education on sexual orientation and gender identity, the impacts of language and behavior, and suicide prevention skills to empower youth to respond as lifeguards to friends with suicide warning signs. For areas where Lifeguard Workshops are not available face-to-face, "Survival Kits" can be ordered for campus staff to facilitate building their own Lifeguard Workshops, and free quarterly webinars are provided on how best to use the Survival Kits. www.thetrevorproject.org

➢ Reducing social isolation.

   o **LGBTQ Student Support Groups and Clubs.** Many colleges host a variety of groups designed to help LGBTQ students connect with others, find support in the community, and engage in organizational and leadership development. Some are generally inclusive of all LGBTQ students, while others are organized around common areas of interest such as religion, activism, sports, or area of study. LGBTQ alumni clubs may also offer scholarships and mentoring services to current students. Check your local campus for available options, or visit www.campuspride.org for assistance.

   o **LGBTQ Programs, Resource Centers, and Housing.** Campuses also may offer LGBTQ-specific programs of study, resource centers, and housing options that provide students interested in LGBTQ studies opportunities for academic and personal growth, and immersion in welcoming and inclusive environments.

   o **Trevor Project Student Resources.** Focusing on suicide prevention and crisis intervention services, the Trevor Project website at www.thetrevorproject.org provides LGBTQ college students direct access to multiple trustworthy tools and resources online and via telephone. Students in crisis or contemplating suicide can call the **Trevor Lifeline** 24/7 at 866-488-7386. For students not in crisis but still seeking assistance with concerns related to sexuality or gender, **Trevor Chat** is an online messaging service providing live help from trained volunteers. Also provided through the Trevor Project Website, **Ask Trevor** is an online, confidential Q & A forum for questions about sexual orientation and gender identity that are not time-sensitive. Finally, for students looking to make friends or find support, **TrevorSpace.org** is a safe, monitored online social networking community for LGBTQ youth ages 13-24, friends and allies.

[1] American College Health Association. (2012). *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment   II: Reference Group Executive Summary Fall 2012.* Hanover, MD: American College Health Association.

[2] American College Health Association. (2000). *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment: Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2000.* Hanover, MD: American College Health Association.

[3] Human Rights Campaign. (2012). *Growing up LGBT in America: HRC Youth Survey Report Key Findings.* Retrieved from http://www.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Growing-Up-LGBT-in-America_Report.pdf   on 4/15/13.

[4] Toomey, R.B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R., Card, N.A., & Russell, S.T. (2010). Gender nonconforming lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: School victimization and young adult psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 46,* 1580–1589.

[5] Fedewa, A.L. & Ahn, S. (2011). The effects of bullying and peer victimization on sexual minority and heterosexual youth: A quantitative meta-analysis of the literature. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7(4),* 398-418.

[6] Russell, S.T., & Toomey, R.B. (2010). Men's sexual orientation and suicide: Evidence for developmental risk. *Social Science and Medicine.* Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1016=j.socscimed.2010.07.038

[7] Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R.M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics, 123,* 346–352.

California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP)

Toll-free: (855) 304-1647 ~ www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org