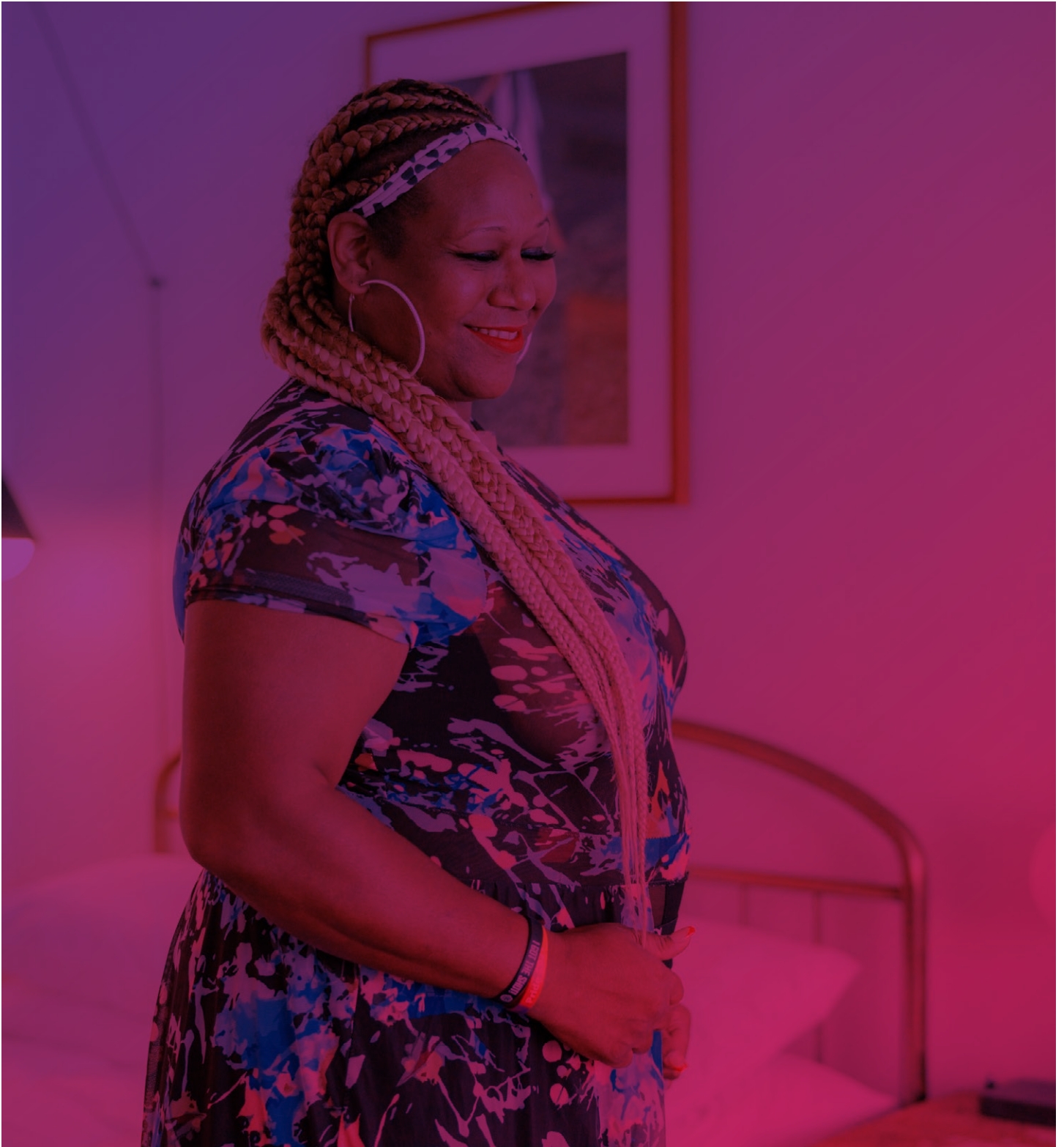


A PLACE TO BE SAFE:

Housing Solutions for LGBTQ+ Survivors



National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence

A PROJECT OF THE LOS ANGELES LGBT CENTER

In partnership with the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and In Our Own Voices, Inc.

CASE STUDY:

This case study focuses on expert key informant interviews by LGBTQ+ housing and homelessness experts. The goal of the project is to identify housing interventions offered for LGBTQ+ survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), what models work most effectively for this population, identify the existing housing gaps, and what are housing providers and policy experts recommending for policy solutions. Key takeaways will be discussed for providing stable and safe supportive LGBTQ+ inclusive housing to significantly improve the survivors' lives impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV).

EXPERTS INTERVIEWED:

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INTRODUCTION

LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV face significant challenges in accessing and maintaining safe and stable housing due to discrimination, lack of inclusive services, and societal stigma. Federal legislation and rules such as the Equal Access Rule (EAR) and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) prevent discrimination for LGBTQ+ survivors when accessing federally funded services or HUD and victim services related housing programs. EAR was published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2012. The 2012 EAR rule prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or marital status. Since the 2013 passage of VAWA, the legislation prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in VAWA funded programs, ensuring LGBTQ+ survivors have access to services. VAWA and EAR marked a significant step in recognizing and addressing the specific needs of the LGBTQ+ survivors at the federal level. Even with federal housing protections, fair housing laws, and state and local housing protections in many places, LGBTQ+ survivors face many barriers. Very little national data is collected or exists at the intersection of LGBTQ+ housing and IPV, making it difficult to measure the depth of the issue.

At the time this report is published, hard won federal protections hang in the balance as LGBTQ+, and in particular transgender survivors, are experiencing civil rights rollbacks. While [EAR](#) is still technically in effect, HUD Secretary Scott Turner has stopped all federal enforcement actions. Increased housing resources for LGBTQ+ survivors experiencing homelessness are needed now more than ever.

“...There’s going to be a lot of policies overturning rights and policies barring people from and policies allowing people privacy, homeowners, employers, to openly discriminate against gay people and trans people.”

Through a series of administrative executive orders, passage of federal, state, and local legislation, and supreme court decisions, we are seeing civil rights protections and the social safety net being dismantled overall, with harm targeted for survivors, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities. We expect the administrative and legal changes to reinforce housing discrimination as we have seen increase since the pandemic. There is a lack of federal legal remedy responsiveness when discrimination occurs. Discrimination can lead to higher rates of homelessness and health disparities. Because LGBTQ+ survivors are at greater risk for isolation and violence, access to safe housing and health care is even more [crucial](#). Following the end of certain pandemic-era rental and legal assistance programs, evictions across the country

“With a lot of immigrant people I work with, coming from a country where your basic human rights are violated and not respected...I think that understanding of what being in an abusive relationship is not clear. We have to take a step back and do education about what it means to have someone use violence against you and what a healthy relationship looks like. Especially for people who speak Spanish...there’s this belief that because I transitioned from male to female, and females in my hometown are not treated well, this is how I deserve to be treated. This idea that no this is not what you deserve and you deserve support and resources.”

have increased at staggering rates. The minimal federal funding that exists for LGBTQ+ survivors is threatened along with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and HUD language explicitly naming sexual orientation and gender identity federal legal protections are being removed from HUD forms and VAWA websites.

However, we know there are effective program models like flexible financial assistance, Domestic Violence Housing First, Housing Choice Vouchers, transitional housing, and LGBTQ+ specific survivor housing programs designed to address the dual isolation faced by LGBTQ+ survivors. Continued advocacy for stronger state and local legal protections, protecting federal rollbacks, increased housing resources, and building the capacity for victim services and homeless service providers will ensure that all LGBTQ+ survivors have access to safe and LGBTQ+ affirming housing and supportive services. This case study will provide an in-depth analysis of housing model recommendations from key informants in the field.

BACKGROUND

The National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence (The Institute) is a program within the Los Angeles LGBT Center (The Center). The Institute is a national project whose mission is to significantly enhance the safety, well-being, support, and health of LGBTQ+ IPV and DV survivors throughout the United States. The Institute collaborates in close collaboration with the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and In Our Own Voices. The Center collaborates with various academic institutions, and federal funders, to conduct evaluations, research and share expertise in public health, intervention development, and policy initiatives. The Center is actively involved in LGBTQ+ national policy advocacy to

advance equality and justice for LGBTQ+ survivors. The goal of the LGBTQ+ survivor housing case study is to identify what intervention(s) assisted LGBTQ+ survivors in maintaining or finding safe housing free from their harm doer(s). By identifying effective housing solutions for LGBTQ+ survivors, we can build the case for the same interventions in similar situations in the future and advocate for additional resources needed to take services to scale.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Case Study is to Interview Key Informant Experts in the field of LGBTQ+ Survivor Housing to Evaluate the LGBTQ+ Survivor Housing Landscape and Identify Solutions. The Institute held a total of six interviews with 15 key informant experts in 2024. Qualitative data was collected through these key informant interviews that were one hour in length each. For the Case Study we identified three key objectives for inquiry with key informants.

Objective 1: To identify what housing models work best for LGBTQ+ Survivors.

Objective 2: Determine what is needed on the ground to address housing for LGBTQ+ Survivors.

Objective 3: Investigate what is needed to respond effectively to LGBTQ+ Survivors housing needs vs what is currently available.

PROBLEM

Historically and rapidly increasing since the pandemic, LGBTQ+ individuals and particularly LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented at the intersections of domestic and sexual violence, and housing and homelessness. LGBTQ+ survivors face additional barriers of family ostracization, violence, and being disowned by their family of origin due to being LGBTQ+ and harm doers only increase isolation from family and community to gain power and control. LGBTQ+ survivors from historically marginalized communities including 2 Spirit, Black, Latine and other people of color have increased vulnerabilities due to structural and systemic issues due to wage gaps, ableism, racial prejudice, homophobia, transphobia, legal gaps, heteronormativity, discrimination in housing, and less community support that decreases their economic opportunities and limits their safe housing options.

Home prices and sharp increases in rent in many LGBTQ+ friendly cities and states are causing increased evictions and limiting survivor options away from their harm doer. Many LGBTQ+ survivors are juggling increased costs of food, healthcare, basic needs, and housing while facing external discrimination and harm in employment and

“Black queer and trans survivors often have fear with working with LGBTQ+ services—afraid services are only for white people”



housing. In comparison to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts who own their homes at a rate of 70%, LGBTQ+ adults have a homeownership rate of 50% (West, 2021). A lack of homeownership stability causes increased risks as LGBTQ+ survivors are vulnerable to the housing market when renting. The increased housing instability and IPV related stressors are causing physical and mental health impacts that create serious burdens for LGBTQ+ survivors. Even IPV LGBTQ+ survivors with career stability experience employment discrimination and fewer options than their non-LGBTQ+ survivors (West, 2021). As West states in their research, *surviving IPV provides no guarantee of safety outside of the situation, especially not for feminine-identifying people, queer or otherwise, who have nowhere else to go* (p. 8). Overall there is a lack of survivor specific LGBTQ+ housing programs to assist survivors in rebuilding their lives in a safe and welcoming [environment](#).

KEY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

- LGBTQ+ survivors face further isolation due to a lack of family of origin support
- LGBTQ+ survivors of intersecting racial, ethnic and 2 Spirit identities need specific outreach strategies to increase access to housing resources
- Transgender survivors experience harm at a higher rate than cisgender survivors, and are going to be more greatly impacted regardless of income or wealth. Transgender survivors experience high rates of discrimination in housing and shelter programs
- Those providing housing to LGBTQ+ survivors, particularly transgender survivors are personally impacted and in community with LGBTQ+ survivors. The intimate partner violence and general violence and hate crimes directed at LGBTQ+ survivors are also impacting the LGBTQ+ staff offering services. They are also targeted and impacted by the systemic issues facing LGBTQ+ survivors.
- Many LGBTQ+ organization are not addressing IPV and many mainstream DV and culturally specific provider are not inclusive of LGBTQ+ survivors

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Domestic violence (DV) shelters historically have been the main shelter and housing intervention for survivors fleeing violence. DV shelters provide safety and confidential services and immediate respite from harm upon shelter entry. Survivors who identify as LGBTQ+ report a lack of responsive services in these spaces. In one flexible funding study, BIPOC LGBTQ+ survivors reported seeking services at mainstream providers only to experience discrimination, misgendering, and a lack of LGBTQ+ specific program services (Ayeni & Scarpelli, 2024). There are promising practices being researched and evaluated on housing models beyond shelter. Innovative models are seeing positive outcomes in the LGBTQ+ communities. Even though key informants interviewed are reporting the tangible benefits of flexible funding and IPV programs for and by the LGBTQ+ community noted in emerging research, more resources and research is needed to make the case.

"A lot of TGI people have been seen as a number or a case that we can study. That creates a lack of trust with organizations and TGI survivors don't feel that they can trust those organizations. When you work with people it's important to build rapport."

BIPOC LGBTQ+ and transgender individuals grapple with significant challenges in accessing inclusive services, particularly from emergency shelters. Even with the protections for transgender individuals with VAWA, many shelters and housing programs continue to perpetuate biases that contribute to the many challenges to help-seeking experienced among transgender survivors. They report fear of discrimination, rejection, and ostracization from shelters historically designed for binary genders, and many times only for cisgender women. LGBTQ+ and particularly transgender survivors report staying in harmful relationships over the perceived or actual harm they have experienced at mainstream domestic violence programs.

"There's a lot of short term [housing], but no plan B, no long term plan with wrap around services so that they can get back on their feet and adapt to normal society."

Transgender survivors in particular report support and connection with shelter staff while at the same time experience micro and macro aggressions from other residents and gender policing from women shelter residents. In Leat's research they discuss how they (*transgender survivors*) felt safe from their abusive partners but, due to comments from other residents (in shelter), felt

"I think that something we've observed and experienced ourselves is that as an LGBTQ survivor, going into, like, survivor spaces that are not for you, there's a level of, like, labor. There's a level of, like, it not being an entirely safe and comfortable space. Like, you have to educate the people around you or experience harm from them. Like, a lot of the LGBTQ folks in our shelter have had negative experiences with other people in the shelter, and so having a space that is just for queer survivors has been, like, a real haven for people where they can go and just, like, know they're understood."

increasingly unsafe within the shelter (p. 249). In addition to increasing the capacity of shelter advocates to provide culturally inclusive services to LGBTQ+ survivors, culturally responsive and anti-oppression practices and policies are needed to create safer environments. If discrimination is occurring in shelter and housing programs, clearly outlined policies to address harm need to be explicit and addressed as they arise. In addition to building more inclusive and safer shelter spaces there are housing options beyond shelter to offer for LGBTQ+ survivors.



PROMISING PRACTICES: FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO ADDRESS HOUSING AND SAFETY RELATED GAPS FOR LGBTQ+ SURVIVORS

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) completed a flexible funding pilot project in 2023 to build on the promising practices and expand the emerging research to be inclusive of LGBTQ+, and in particular

BIPOC LGBTQ+ survivors. The qualitative and quantitative data collected mirrors the anecdotal recommendations that key informants provided in their interviews. In NRC DV's research, survivors identified many financial needs beyond housing to include supportive services and basic needs like groceries and food. BIPOC LGBTQ+ survivors reported needing food and with the high food costs contributing to this. As a result of this flexible funding pilot project, BIPOC LGBTQ+ survivors reported increased options, safety, and positive harm reductions where high-risk behaviors such as survival sex decreased. Notably survivors reported they were able to pursue their career dreams. *Receiving flexible funds also increased their ability to save money* (p. 11).

PROGRAMMATIC SOLUTIONS

There are many effective housing models like Domestic Violence Housing First and flexible funding streams that are designed to address the unique housing needs of survivors. Offering housing and shelter related IPV housing services for LGBTQ+ survivors can provide safety from relationship violence and additional societal targeting from discrimination to hate crime related violence. LGBTQ+ survivors often experience additional targeting and risk of violence, especially transgender women of color, while living on the streets. Continued advocacy for stronger LGBTQ+ legal housing and employment protections and anti-discrimination broadly is needed. Greater awareness among victim service providers and homeless agencies are crucial steps in ensuring that all LGBTQ+ survivors have access to the safe and affirming housing they deserve.

"The more marginalized identities that we layer on top of one another, the harder it is for someone to just live in this world and the harder it is for them to gain resources."

Key informants identified housing and shelter program solutions that are effective for LGBTQ+ survivors. They provided solutions that they developed in their programs that could be taken to scale. LGBTQ+ leaders and survivors interviewed are active in organizing at the intersection of LGBTQ+, IPV, and housing fields with lived expertise of homelessness due to IPV and/or LGBTQ+ discrimination and ostracization from their family of origin.

- Offer direct cash assistance/flexible funding to prevent homelessness and provide autonomy to the LGBTQ+ survivor as they rebuild their life. Direct cash assistance for LGBTQ+ survivors provides flexibility for survivors to determine their financial needs and the ability to address crisis that arise from harm whether caused by the harm doer or systemic barriers. Flexible funding increases financial stability, improves health outcomes, and encourages help seeking behaviors and rebuilding trust with their advocates and social service providers.

"People know best what they need to do with their money and how they're going to spend it, what's going to keep them safe. And so for me, when you think, ask about a specific housing model, my model is just give them cash."

- Provide immediate emergency shelter options through hotel/moteling. Private hotel options offer a safer alternative than traditional emergency DV and homeless shelters where LGBTQ+ report often facing additional harm from shelter staff and residents. Motel/hotel vouchers are a very effective stop gap emergency housing shelter intervention and a critical first step for LGBTQ+ housing and healing journey.
- Meet LGBTQ+ survivors where they are at—at LGBTQ+ community centers and community events to offer housing and supportive services resources.
- Many LGBTQ+ survivors are in community with their harm doers and no contact is not always an option. LGBTQ+ survivors are encouraged to receive services at whatever stages of engagement they might be with the harm doer.

"They're gonna use [flex funding] to go and pay their cell phone, to go and pay for the couch where they spend in the night, buy a whole, go to the, you know, the freedom that they can have to make those decision is very important."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are key solutions, strategies, and recommendations proposed to address the housing needs of LGBTQ+ survivors

1. Create specific survivor lead and creative outreach strategies with LGBTQ+ communities based on community identities.
2. Build LGBTQ+ for and by survivor specific housing solutions that provide safety, representation, and level of comfort where they do not have to explain themselves or their LGBTQ+ relationship.
3. Preserve and increase funding for culturally specific and LGBTQ+ inclusive housing services. Culturally inclusive services are needed for LGBTQ+ BIPOC communities to receive holistic and inclusive services.
4. LGBTQ+ survivors provide lived expertise and are critical leaders and partners in addressing and preventing LGBTQ+ IPV. LGBTQ+ survivor housing programs that are intentionally for and by the community provide much needed space for representation and healing.
5. LGBTQ+ people are highly resilient and yet still need

"You have to educate the people around you or experience harm from them. Like, a lot of the LGBTQ folks in our shelter have had negative experiences with other people in the shelter, and so having a space that is just for queer survivors has been, like, a real haven for people where they can go and just, like, know they're understood."

comprehensive services that include community support, civil and legal remedies, and services to prevent homelessness and mitigate the harms caused by IPV and systemic violence such as housing and employment discrimination.

6. Capacity building is needed for LGBTQ+ organizations, mainstream DV providers, and culturally specific providers to effectively cross system collaborate and create lasting partnerships.

"Trauma-informed care is like coming into a queer LGBTQ space where you can let your guard down just a little bit more. And I've seen that when I was working in programs where we might have one or two LGBTQ survivors and how they would have to navigate the situation so much differently. Being in support group looked different, wanting to be out or not look different, typically, people keep more to themselves and be very protective and be very cautionary. So I think my belief is, like, as much as possible either just paying for people's housing, giving them money, flex funding, rapid rehousing, so they avoid this shelter system together or avoid eviction altogether. But if there is any where somebody needs community, needs more support to rebuild their lives, like, I think for and by is like, is my favorite model, for sure."

CONCLUSION

Based on expert key informant interviews by LGBTQ+ IPV, and housing and homelessness experts and a review of emerging housing practices for LGBTQ+ survivors research, key takeaways were identified to inform policy and practice. Key informants recognized the systemic barriers facing LGBTQ+ survivors from their own lived expertise and from working alongside LGBTQ+ survivors impacted by housing insecurity, displacement, and micro/macroaggressions in the traditional DV emergency shelter system. The research and anecdotal stories shared highlighted how people with disabilities, African Americans, two spirit, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, immigrants, and femme presenting transgender survivors of color are disproportionately impacted by the systemic barriers outlined in the case study.

Key informants and research studies demonstrate how a range of strategies can address the housing and supportive services survivors need to rebuild their lives. Key takeaways include funding community-based LGBTQ+ affirming organizations; offering flexible funding/direct cash assistance; building capacity of LGBTQ+ organizations and victims service agencies to effectively service LGBTQ+ survivors; creating LGBTQ+ survivor advisory committees to inform policy and practice; preserving VAWA and EAR federal protections, state and local housing protections, and passing new legislation with protections to ensure that sexual orientation and gender identity covered; and responding with culturally inclusive and welcoming services for BIPOC LGBTQ+ survivors.

Going upstream and preventing housing discrimination and high rates of IPV and hate crimes directed at LGBTQ+ people will require the DV movement to undo heteronormativity and transphobia that continues to persist in nearly every aspect of programmatic and policy decision making. To be truly inclusive, the DV movement needs to embrace radical acceptance of survivors of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and various consenting relationships and familial make-ups. The current public dialogue at the highest level of leadership encourages discrimination, criminalization, and harm against the most vulnerable groups of people in our country, those experiencing homelessness and also those who are LGBTQ+. The DV movement are leaders in preventing and addressing violence and can be a voice of inclusivity, love, and healing for LGBTQ+ survivors in their communities and across the country.



"I have... a lot of nonbinary people that I work with, when I'm dealing with, like, federal or state agencies, they actually prefer me to use gendered language, even if it's misgendering them because they're like, 'I don't want to stand out. I don't want anything that's gonna give them pause. I wanna blend in. So use my government name'...some people, if they haven't had their name [legally] changed, we can fill out [documents] with your [lived] name and just let them know that it's the name that you use. I might have to write an extra letter, but that's not a problem. And very often clients are like, 'Nope. Don't do that. They're gonna think I'm a problem.'"

APPENDIX

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