

Name: Brandon Wollerson

Commission: LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission

Title: Increasing Mental Health Resources for LGBTQ Population

Describe the issue facing your community or stakeholder group. In your role as Commissioner, what have you heard from your community about the issue?

In a variety of listening sessions and other discussions hosted by the LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission as early as January 2018 and continuing through this budget cycle, community members have noted consistently that the City of Austin invests \$0 in LGBTQ-focused mental health services.

What does the data tell us about the issue? Is there data on who is most impacted by the issue?

In 2015, the Austin/Travis County Community Advancement Network reported that 19% of Travis County adults (over 165,00 people) reported poor mental health (five or more days of the last 30 with depression, stress anxiety or other issues).

The Community Health Improvement Plan recognizes the lack of mental health providers and resources in the community and has identified mental health as a key priority for Travis County. This Plan recognizes the need for providers who make patients from marginalized communities, including the LGBTQ community, feel safe.

The average cost of a single psychotherapy session in Austin is \$90-\$150 per session.

A local LGBTQ affirming counseling organization in Austin currently has a waitlist of almost 100 people due to the demand for these services.

According to polling conducted by Greater Austin has the third largest LGBTQIA+ population per capita in the USA.

QWELL Community Foundation's recent "LGBTQ+ Wellbeing Survey of Greater Austin," conducted in collaboration with Dr. Phillip Schnarrs, Associate Professor of Community-Based Participatory Research at Dell Medical School, collected data on more than 2,200 local adult LGBTQIA+ respondents.

Of the 2,200+ respondents, 400 were ages 18-25. Nearly a third of these respondents felt anxious every day during the past week, and just under half reported feeling depressed the majority of the days of the week. 26% of the respondents reported experiencing suicidal thoughts in the week preceding the survey.

Suicide is the second most common cause of death among 18 – 25-year-olds in the United States and research has consistently shown higher rates of suicidal ideation, self-harm, and suicide attempts among sexual and gender minority youth compared to heterosexual peers.

The LGBTQIA+ community's risk of suicide is 6-8x the general population, with transgender people, LGBTQIA+ elders, and people of color at highest risk.

QWELL's survey also found that only 17% of Austin respondents feel like valued members of the community. Studies show that lack of community connections is a direct cause of depression and other mental health issues.

What is your recommendation for addressing this issue? Recommendations should focus on increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and equity

City Council to fund, at \$100,000 annually, to support the stability and growth of organizations and businesses with:

- Existing services that provide LGBTQIA-affirming mental health counseling in Austin;
- Programs to increase the number of LGBTQIA-competent mental health care providers in Austin
- Projects that would expand access to LGBTQIA+ mental health therapy.

Strategic Outcome Area: Health and Environment

Within the HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT outcome, which indicator does your recommendation address?

Accessibility to quality health care services (physical and mental)