



LGBTQ+ Youth Health & Well-Being

Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, and supported, regardless of race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or zip code. Yet systemic racism and other forms of discrimination continue to deny that opportunity to too many California children, shaping where they live, the schools they attend, the air they breathe, and their access to resources. At the same time, our communities are not defined by these challenges, but by their resilience, cultural strength, and power—assets to be honored and built upon as we work toward a California where every child can just be a child.



POPULATION

- **California is home to more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) teens ages 13–17 than any other state**—almost a quarter million young people, according to 2020 estimates.
- In a 2023–2025 survey of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders statewide, 16% of students who responded identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual/straight (lesbian or gay, bisexual, something else, or not sure) and/or as either transgender or not sure if they were transgender. No one racial/ethnic identity captured in the survey made up a majority of this group.



- Latine: 50%
- White: 23%
- Asian: 14%
- Black: 5%
- Multiracial: 7%
- Another Race/Ethnicity: 1%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: <1%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: <1%

UNDERSTANDING KEY TERMS

A guide to terminology used in this snapshot.

The way these concepts are defined, distinguished, and measured varies across data sources.

- **LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning identities, plus other diverse sexual orientations and experiences of gender.
- **Sexual Orientation:** The emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others.
- **Gender Identity:** The internal sense of gender.
- **Cisgender:** When a person's gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** When a person's gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Nonbinary:** When a person's gender is outside the categories of exclusively male or exclusively female.
- **Questioning:** When a person is exploring or unsure of their sexual orientation or gender.

MASKED HEALTH INEQUITIES

California must do more to collect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data specific to youth. This includes asking about and reporting sexual orientation separately from gender identity to better understand the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ subgroups. Without consistently collected youth SOGI data, we cannot see beyond broad categories with the depth and detail needed to fully illuminate and address health disparities.

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS

- Numerous harmful policies and rhetoric—from the federal government to local school districts—contribute to hostile environments for LGBTQ+ youth.
- **In a 2025 national survey of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13–24, 90% said recent anti-LGBTQ+ laws, policies, and debates had caused them stress or anxiety.** More than 3 in 4 (76%) said their mental health had been negatively impacted, and almost 1 in 4 (23%) reported feeling unsafe going to a doctor or hospital. Rates were even higher among transgender and nonbinary LGBTQ+ youth.

MENTAL HEALTH

- ▶ **Almost two thirds (64%) of California LGBTQ+ young people ages 13–24 reported recent symptoms of anxiety, and more than half (52%) reported recent symptoms of depression.** Among those who wanted mental health care, only half (50%) received it.
- ▶ 63% of LGB 7th graders and 55% of LGB 11th graders experienced chronic sadness or hopelessness in the previous year—more than double the rates of their straight peers. **The share of LGB students in these grades who seriously considered suicide in the previous year (36% of 7th graders and 23% of 11th graders) was more than triple that of straight students (9% and 7%).**
- ▶ **Around 4 in 10 transgender students in grades 7 (39%) and 11 (40%) seriously considered suicide in the previous year,** compared with around 1 in 10 non-transgender students (11% and 8%). More than 5 in 10 transgender 7th graders (54%) and 11th graders (68%) experienced chronic sadness or hopelessness in the previous year.

DISCRIMINATION

- ▶ **Over half (56%) of California LGBTQ+ youth ages 13–24 surveyed in 2024 reported experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in the previous year.** Over the same period, 1 in 5 (20%) were physically threatened or harmed because of these reasons.
- ▶ National data from 2025 show almost 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ young people of color (32%) reporting discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin in the previous year. Among racial/ethnic groups with available data, Native/Indigenous and Middle Eastern/Northern African LGBTQ+ young people had the highest rates of being physically threatened or harmed in the previous year due to their sexual orientation (over 22%) or gender identity (over 35%).

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- ▶ **Nationally, 40% of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13–24 surveyed in 2024 reported at least one type of economic insecurity**—being unable to make ends meet, experiencing food insecurity in the previous month, or having ever experienced homelessness—and 16% reported two or more. Nearly half of Native/Indigenous LGBTQ+ youth (48%) had experienced food insecurity in the previous month.
- ▶ In a nationally representative survey of high school students in 2023, rates of housing instability in the previous month—lacking a usual place to sleep, staying in transitional or temporary housing, or doubling up with friends or relatives—were twice as high for LGBTQ+ students (4%) as for their straight, cisgender peers (2%).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are community-defined strengths, cultural assets, and resilience that can mitigate risks to well-being. These factors are critical in addressing health inequities, guiding interventions that meet the unique needs of LGBTQ+ youth, and building solutions that center community power.



ADULT ACCEPTANCE

Environments and relationships with adults that foster LGBTQ+ acceptance, affirmation, advocacy, belonging, connectedness, and understanding are associated with positive well-being for LGBTQ+ youth.



PEER SUPPORT

Support from peers with shared identities and life experiences can help LGBTQ+ youth increase self-esteem and mental well-being, develop resilience and coping strategies to deal with stigma and discrimination, and reduce isolation, anxiety, and depression.



GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, gender-affirming health care delivered through gender-affirmative care models (GACMs). In a GACM, providers work together to understand and appreciate a young person's gender experience, destigmatize gender variance, promote self-worth, educate families, and advocate for community spaces where youth are free to develop and explore their gender.

SCHOOL SUCCESS & SAFETY

- ▶ **Over 3 in 5 California 7th graders who identified as LGB (73%) or transgender (64%) experienced bullying or harassment at school in the previous year,** compared with under 2 in 5 of their straight (35%) and non-transgender (38%) peers.
- ▶ In California, 32% of LGB 7th graders and 38% of transgender 11th graders report feeling safe at school, compared with 59% of their straight 7th-grade peers and 62% of their non-transgender 11th-grade peers.
- ▶ **Over half of LGB 7th graders in California (51%) were afraid of being beaten up at school in the previous year—more than double the rate for straight 7th graders (21%).** The rate for transgender 11th graders (22%) was more than triple that of non-transgender 11th graders (7%).
- ▶ Nationwide, 19% of LGBTQ+ high school students did not go to school at least once in the previous month because they felt unsafe either at school or on the way to or from school, compared with 10% of straight, cisgender high schoolers.