

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual telephone survey of adults developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and several US Territories. The New York BRFSS is administered by the New York State Department of Health to provide statewide and regional information on behaviors, risk factors, and use of preventive health services related to the leading causes of chronic and infectious diseases, disability, injury, and death.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Demographics and Health Indicators New York State Adults, 2019-2020

Introduction and Key Findings

An estimated 7.1% of United States adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender according to data collected in 2021.¹ LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. These terms are among several used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, and the terminology continues to become more inclusive and culturally responsive. Although defining the size and characteristics of this population is complicated by overlap and intersectionality between identity, behavior, and attraction, collecting information on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) is a key step towards understanding the LGBTQ+ community⁵ and their health needs. Moreover, as the number of Americans who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ population increases, it is increasingly important for public health surveillance systems like the BRFSS to measure SOGI, enabling health disparities of LGBTQ+ populations to be measured and reflected in health recommendations.²

SOGI questions were first asked on the New York State (NYS) BRFSS in 2014. In this report we used pooled BRFSS data from 2019 and 2020 to estimate the size, demographics, and select chronic disease health indicators for the LGBTQ+ community in NYS. We have purposefully separated sexual identities from gender identities in our analyses as lived experiences, health behaviors, and health outcomes can differ between these communities.

The NYS Department of Health is committed to reducing the unique health disparities experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community. Stigma and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities can lead to chronic stress and cause stress responses (e.g., high blood pressure, anxiety) that accrue over time, eventually leading to poor mental and physical health.³ Fear of discrimination in the health care setting and lack of providers who are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ health needs are barriers to accessing quality health care for members of this community.³ Studies suggest the impacts of stigma and discrimination begin early in the life course. LGBTQ+ youth (specifically, adolescent teens and young adults in their early 20s) may be at increased risk for attempted suicide and depression, and sexually expansive youth may have higher rates of substance use than heterosexual youth.³ Moreover, the LGBTQ+ community is a known target of tobacco industry advertising and marketing and have higher rates of tobacco use compared to heterosexual and cisgender peers.⁴

Key Findings

In NYS, over one million adults identify as LGBTQ+. An estimated 7.9% of the adult population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or something else/other sexual orientation (LGBO), with 3.4% of NYS adults identifying as bisexual, 2.2% identifying as lesbian or gay, and 2.2% identifying as other sexual orientation. An estimated 0.5% of NYS adults identify as transgender or gender non-conforming (Table 1, Figure 1). Demographic indicators are presented in Table 2. LGBTQ+ adults represent a larger segment of certain demographic groups including adults who are younger (below the age of 34), adults without a high school education, adults living in households earning less than \$25,000 a year, adults who are currently unemployed, adults living with disability, and adults who identify as Hispanic. Adults who identify as LGBO make up a higher percentage of residents in New York City compared to the rest of the state.

Health indicators for the LGBTQ+ population are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. Binge or heavy drinking is more common among LGBO (22.9%) adults when compared to the general NYS population (17.4%). LGBTQ+ adults report higher rates of ever being diagnosed with a depressive disorder (LGBO: 31.7%; Transgender: 37.8%) when compared to the general NYS population (16.0%). LGBTQ+ adults also report higher rates of self-reported frequent mental distress, defined as reported problems with stress, depression, or emotions on at least 14 of the previous 30 days (LGBO: 24.8%; Transgender: 30.0%) when compared to the general NYS population (12.3%). LGBO adults and Transgender adults are less likely to have a regular health care provider (24.4%, 27.5%, respectively) compared to the general NYS population (14.9%).

§ LGBT/LGBT+/LGBTQ+/LGBTQIA+ are all acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied. In NYS, we prefer the acronym LGBTQIA+ as the most inclusive way to acknowledge and respect the diversity of bodies, genders, and relationships. In 2019 and 2020, the BRFSS did not capture data on intersex ("I"), asexual or allied ("A"), so for this report we are using LGBTQ+ to best reflect the data we have available to us.

BRFSS Questions 2019-2020

- Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself? 1) Lesbian or Gay; 2) Straight, that is, not gay; 3) Bisexual; 4) Something else
- Do you consider yourself to be transgender? 1) Yes, Transgender, male-to-female; 2) Yes, Transgender, female-to-male; 3) Yes, Transgender, gender non-conforming; 4) No

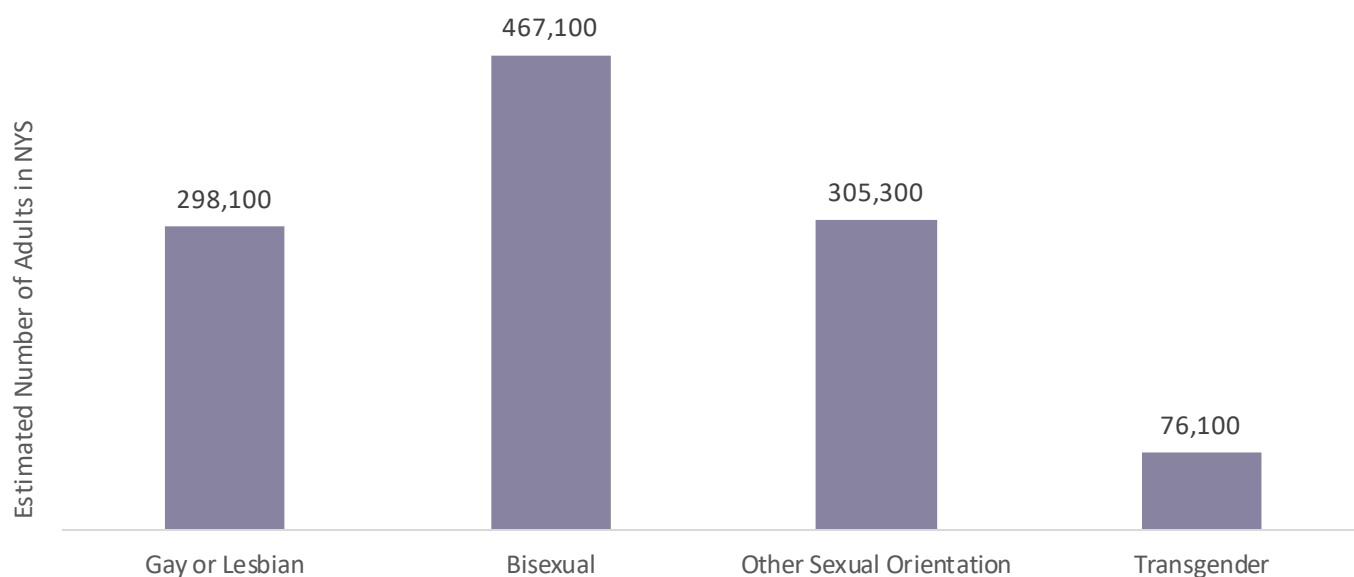
Note: Respondent can answer with either the number or the text/word. Definition of transgender is provided if asked by participant. In 2019 and 2020, in the screening section that establishes survey eligibility, participants are asked, "Are you male or female?" If the respondent indicates "Don't know/Not Sure" or "Refused" the survey terminates.

Table 1. Percent of Adults Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation, or Transgender in NYS, BRFSS 2019-2020*

		Percent	95% CI	Estimated Weighted N**
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation (LGBO)	7.9	(7.4-8.4)	1,070,500
	Lesbian or Gay	2.2	(1.9-2.4)	298,100
	Bisexual	3.4	(3.1-3.8)	467,100
	Other Sexual Orientation	2.2	(2.0-2.5)	305,300
Gender Identity	Transgender	0.5 [^]	(0.4-0.7)	76,100 [^]

* Includes pooled BRFSS survey data years 2019-2020. **Note: since the LGBO groups and Transgender groups overlap and are not mutually exclusive. [^] A portion of respondents who identify as transgender will also identify as LGBO (~73.7%), and a portion will identify as straight (~26.3%).

Figure 1. Estimated Number of Adults Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation, or Transgender in NYS, BRFSS 2019-2020*



* Includes pooled BRFSS survey data years 2019-2020.

Table 2. Percent of Adults Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation, or Transgender in NYS by Demographic Indicators, BRFSS 2019-2020*

	LGBO**		Transgender	
	Percent who Identify as LGBO	95% CI	Percent who Identify as Transgender	95% CI
New York State [n=29,001]***	7.9	(7.4-8.4)	0.5	(0.4-0.7)
Region				
Rest of State (NYS excluding NYC)	7.0	(6.4-7.5)	0.5	(0.3-0.6)
New York City	9.2	(8.3-10.1)	0.6	(0.4-0.9)
Sex at Birth				
Male	7.2	(6.5-7.9)	0.5	(0.3-0.7)
Female	8.5	(7.8-9.2)	0.5	(0.3-0.7)
Race/Ethnicity				
White, Non-Hispanic	7.1	(6.5-7.7)	0.4	(0.3-0.6)
Black, Non-Hispanic	7.2	(5.8-8.5)	0.5	(0.1-0.8)
Hispanic	10.0	(8.6-11.4)	0.9	(0.5-1.4)
Other Race or Multiracial, Non-Hispanic ^a	9.3	(7.5-11.2)	-s-	-s-
Age				
18-24 Years Old	15.6	(13.4-17.8)	1.5	(0.7-2.3)
25-34 Years Old	11.3	(9.8-12.7)	0.8	(0.4-1.2)
35-44 Years Old	8.0	(6.7-9.3)	0.4	(0.1-0.7)
45-54 Years Old	6.0	(5.0-7.0)	0.4	(0.1-0.7)
55-64 Years Old	5.7	(4.8-6.7)	0.2	(0.0-0.3)
65+ Years Old	4.5	(3.8-5.2)	0.3	(0.1-0.5)
Educational Attainment				
Less than High School	10.0	(8.1-11.9)	1.3	(0.6-2.0)
High School or GED	7.2	(6.2-8.1)	0.4	(0.2-0.6)
Some College	8.1	(7.1-9.0)	0.5	(0.3-0.8)
College Graduate	7.5	(6.8-8.2)	0.3	(0.2-0.5)
Annual Household Income				
Less than \$25,000	10.0	(8.8-11.3)	1.3	(0.8-1.8)
\$25,000 - 49,999	7.3	(6.1-8.5)	0.4	(0.1-0.6)
\$50,000 and greater	6.9	(6.2-7.5)	0.3	(0.2-0.5)
Missing	8.5	(7.3-9.7)	0.3	(0.2-0.5)
Employment Status				
Employed/Self-Employed	7.6	(6.9-8.2)	0.5	(0.3-0.7)
Unemployed	11.7	(9.6-13.9)	1.3	(0.6-2.0)
Not in Labor Force	7.3	(6.5-8.1)	0.4	(0.2-0.6)
Disability Status^b				
Yes	10.7	(9.5-12.0)	1.0	(0.6-1.4)
No	7.0	(6.4-7.5)	0.3	(0.2-0.5)

S = Suppressed. Missing: category included because more than 10% of the sample did not report income. * Includes pooled BRFSS survey data years 2019-2020. ** LGBO is an acronym used to reference adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other sexual orientation. *** Total number of observations in the pooled analysis.

a) Other race is defined as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Other race not specified, or Multiracial.

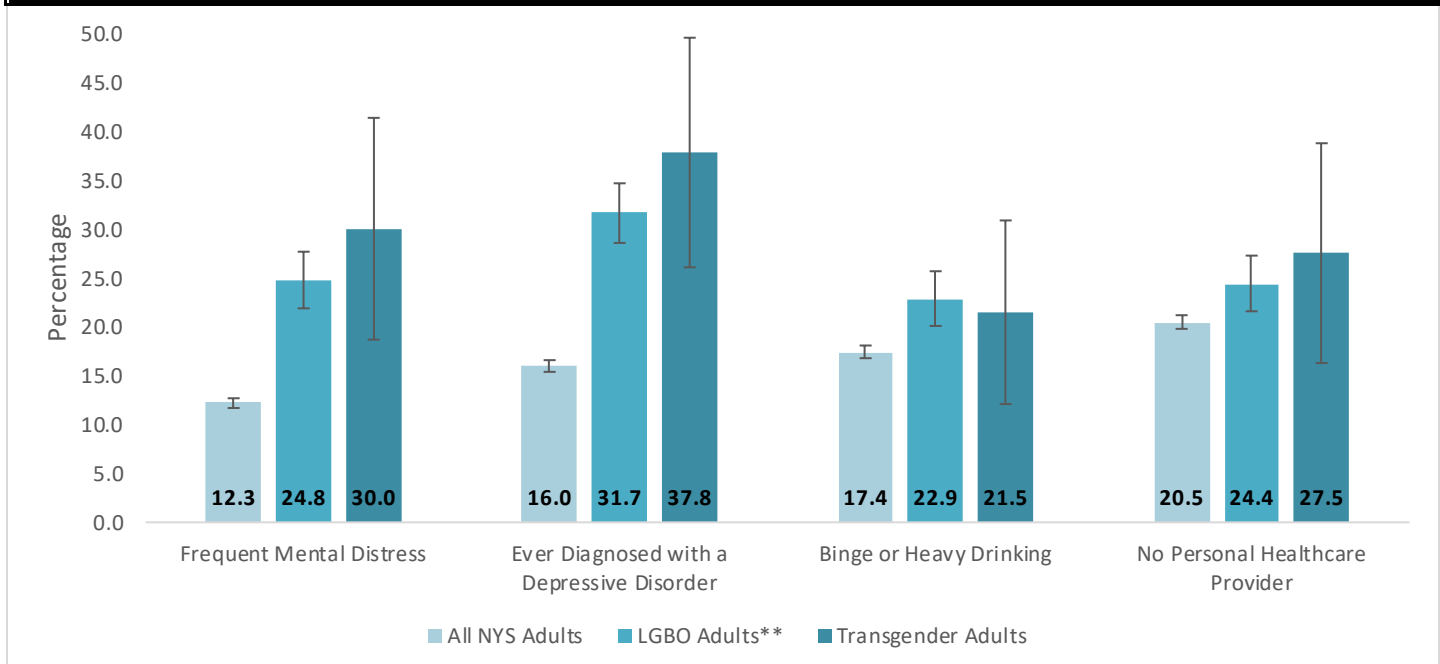
b) Living with any disability is defined as having at least one type of a disability (cognitive, ambulatory, vision, self-care, hearing, or independent living)

Table 3. Prevalence of Select Health Indicators among Adults Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation, or Transgender in NYS, BRFSS 2019-2020*

Health Risk Behaviors								
	Current Smoker ^a		Binge or Heavy Drinking ^b		Sugar-sweetened Beverage Consumption 1+ Times per Day		No Leisure Time Physical Activity ^c	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
All NYS Adults	12.3	(11.7-12.9)	17.4	(16.8-18.1)	19.8	(18.8-20.8)	26.4	(25.6-27.1)
LGBO Adults**	14.6	(12.3-16.9)	22.9	(20.1-25.7)	21.5	(17.7-25.2)	25.5	(22.5-28.4)
Transgender Adults	15.8	(7.5-24.2)	21.5	(12.1-30.9)	34.6	(15.9-53.4)	28.9	(16.5-41.2)
Health Conditions								
	Fair or Poor Self- Assessed Health		Obese ^d		Frequent Mental Distress ^e		Ever Diagnosed with a Depressive Disorder ^f	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
All NYS Adults	14.9	(14.3-15.5)	26.7	(25.9-27.5)	12.3	(11.7-12.8)	16.0	(15.4-16.6)
LGBO Adults**	16.8	(14.4-19.2)	27.4	(24.3-30.4)	24.8	(21.9-27.8)	31.7	(28.6-34.7)
Transgender Adults	20.6	(11.1-30.2)	21.5	(11.5-31.4)	30.0	(18.7-41.4)	37.8	(26.1-49.6)
Health Care Indicators								
	No Personal Doctor or Health Care Provider			No Health Insurance				
	%	95% CI		%	95% CI			
All NYS Adults	20.5	(19.8-21.2)		12.3	(11.6-12.9)			
LGBO Adults**	24.4	(21.6-27.3)		14.3	(11.8-16.8)			
Transgender Adults	27.5	(16.3-38.8)		18.9	(8.6-29.2)			

Technical Notes: Estimates are deemed unstable where a confidence interval has a half-width or greater than 10, use caution when interpreting. ** LGBO is an acronym used to reference adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other sexual orientation. a) Current smoker is defined as an adult who has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and currently smokes on at least some days. b) Binge drinking is defined as consuming four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men on a single occasion in the past month and heavy drinking is defined as eight or more drinks per week for women and fifteen or more drinks per week for men. c) No leisure time physical activity is defined as having no regular physical activity, other than a regular job, in the past 30 days. d) Obese is defined as having a body mass index of 30 kg/m² and higher. e) Frequent mental distress (formerly Poor Mental Health) is defined as reported problems with stress, depression, or emotions on at least 14 of the previous 30 days. f) A depressive disorder includes depression, major depression, dysthymia, or minor depression.

Figure 2. Prevalence of Select Health Indicators among Adults Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other Sexual Orientation, or Transgender in NYS, BRFSS 2019-2020*



* Includes pooled BRFSS survey data years 2019-2020. ** LGBO is an acronym used to reference adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other sexual orientation.

Appendix: Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity^{5,6}

Sexual orientation: How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

Lesbian – describes women who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to other women.

Gay – describes people who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to the same gender as themselves.

Bisexual – describes people who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to women/females and men/males. Some people define bisexuality as attraction to all genders.

Something else, or other orientation – is an option for people who identify their sexual orientation as something other than the categories provided (e.g., asexual, pansexual, queer).

Gender identity: A person's inner sense of being a boy/man/male, girl/woman/female, another gender, or no gender.

Transgender – describes a person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not correspond based on traditional expectations.

Sex assigned at birth: is the sex (female or male) assigned to an infant.

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