

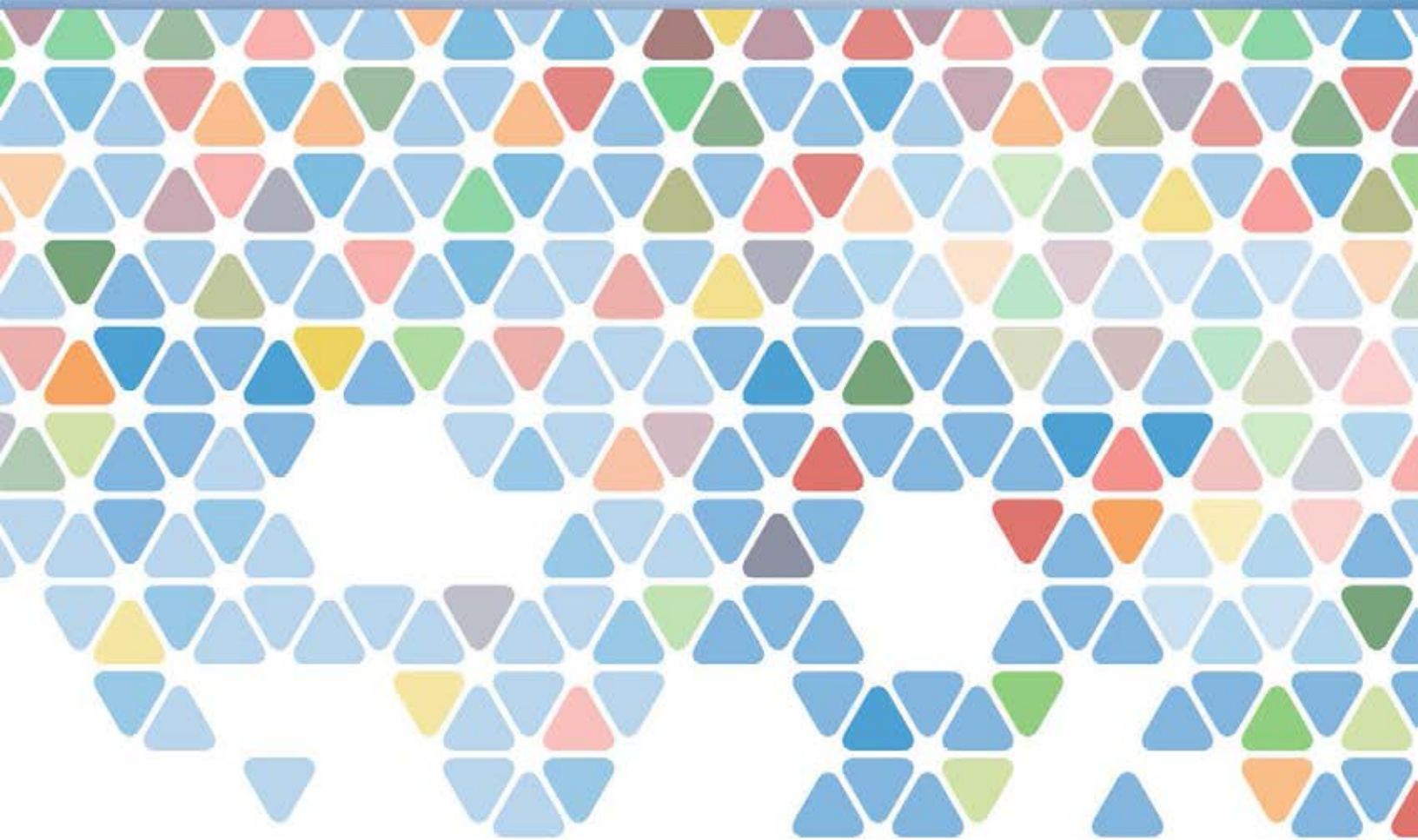


# FACING BARRIERS:

▶ Experiences of  
LGBT People of Color  
in Colorado







All of the photographs in this publication are of LGBT people who live throughout the state of Colorado, and were taken by photographers **STEVIE CRECILIUS** and **MARK MANGER**. The quotes within this report were given by One Colorado members, both people of color and white allies.



## Across the nation, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people face barriers to living happy, thriving lives.

Far too often, these challenges stem directly from the discrimination, harassment, and victimization that LGBT people experience throughout their lives. At home, at school, or at work, on the streets or in restaurants, doctor's offices, churches, and government facilities — LGBT people encounter nearly insurmountable obstacles to fulfilling life's opportunities.

## While the experiences of LGBT Coloradans have been and likely will continue to be studied, little is known about the experiences of LGBT people of color living in Colorado.

Anecdotal understanding of the way racism, homophobia, transphobia, and oppression play out in our world suggests that LGBT people of color face even greater challenges than white LGBT people. But little quantitative research exists to clearly understand how race and sexual orientation or gender identity intersect, or how this intersection influences the discrimination, harassment, and victimization one experiences.

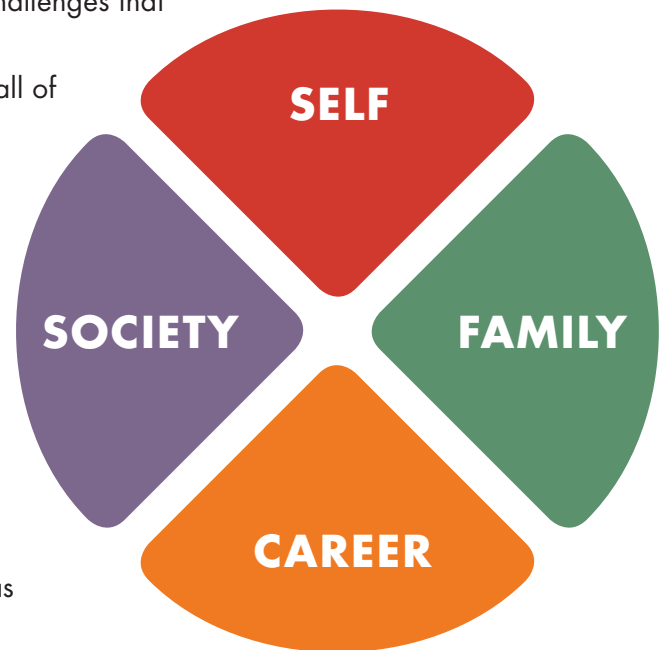
**To begin to close this significant gap in understanding, One Colorado Education Fund analyzed previously collected data from prior studies of LGBT Coloradans to learn more about the unique lived experiences of people of color.** This report aims to create a deeper understanding of the obstacles and challenges that were uncovered in our analysis.

Like all LGBT people, LGBT people of color seek to fulfill all of life's opportunities, including:

- ▶ **SELF:** the opportunity to live healthy, happy lives
- ▶ **FAMILY:** the opportunity to be supported by family and to build a family of one's own
- ▶ **CAREER:** the opportunity to pursue education and earn a living
- ▶ **SOCIETY:** the opportunity to participate in the community

This report considers and documents the ways in which race and sexual orientation and/or gender identity converge to impact and influence LGBT people of color as they seek to achieve these opportunities.

For the context of this report, data have been combined from a large, diverse population of respondents, including African-American people, Latino/a people, Asian-American people, Native American people, and others (e.g., those who identified as mixed race/multi-ethnic). To be sure, this report would be much improved by an analysis of data that didn't blend together groups of respondents with differing needs, ideas, and experiences. Unfortunately, a lack of data prohibits us from deriving understanding by individual racial or ethnic identity — clearly underscoring the need for better data collection in the future.



This report was developed using analysis of previously collected data.

The first data set was collected from January 26, 2010, through February 26, 2010, by Simon Analytics for One Colorado Education Fund.

In early 2010, One Colorado Education Fund conducted a survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people to learn more about the experiences, needs, and priorities of LGBT Coloradans. The survey was provided online and in print as well as in both English and Spanish.

More than 4,600 people responded; 87 percent of respondents identified as white (approximately 4,018 respondents) while 13 percent identified as people of color (approximately 601 respondents).

The second data set was collected from August 1, 2011, through September 2, 2011, by Simon Analytics for One Colorado Education Fund.

In the summer of 2011, One Colorado Education Fund initiated a study of the healthcare beliefs, needs, and experiences of LGBT Coloradans. This LGBT Health Study was composed of an online survey and supplemented by a series of community health dialogues across Colorado.

In total, nearly 1,300 LGBT Coloradans shared their personal healthcare stories and experiences during the study; 87 percent of respondents identified as white (approximately 1,038 respondents) while 13 percent identified as people of color (approximately 155 respondents).

Data from these previous research projects were reviewed and analyzed by N. Eugene Walls, Ph.D., associate professor at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. One Colorado Education Fund requested this analysis to gain insight and understanding into the unique experiences of LGBT people of color living in Colorado.

## Limitations

While both research projects provided a much deeper look at the experiences and needs of LGBT Coloradans than has previously been documented, they are not without some limitations.

A convenience sample was used to reach those LGBT Coloradans open to discussing their experiences. The almost exclusively online methodology of the studies also impacted the sample — skewing toward people with online access; people who are more affluent and educated; people who are white; people who are living in urban areas, especially Denver; people who identify as gay; and people who identify as male.

The development of this report underscored the need for better data collection. Because of small sample sizes, population groups with data had to be combined from a large, diverse population of respondents, including African-American people, Latino/a people, Asian-American people, Native American people, and others (e.g., those who identified as mixed race/multi-ethnic). Additionally, to understand some of the financial challenges faced by people of color, national data had to be used.

To be sure, this report would be much improved by an analysis of data that didn't blend together groups of respondents with differing needs, ideas, and experiences and that allowed for an analysis of key findings by racial and ethnic identity.

## Demographics

The LGBT people of color and the white LGBT people in the study samples are both similar and different in several ways.

- LGBT people of color were significantly younger, with an average age of 35 years — compared to white LGBT people, who had an average age of 40 years.
- Significantly more LGBT people of color were single at 43 percent — compared to white LGBT people at 36 percent. However, fewer LGBT people of color lived alone at 24 percent, compared to white LGBT people at 29 percent.
- Of those who reported being in an intimate relationship, LGBT people of color had been with their current partners an average of 6.0 years, while white LGBT people had been with their current partners an average of 7.9 years, almost 2 years longer.
- While similar percentages of LGBT people of color (21 percent) and white LGBT people (22 percent) reported ever being a parent, significantly more LGBT people of color (55 percent) indicated that they might want to have children in the future, compared to white LGBT people (48 percent).
- Similar percentages of LGBT people of color (5 percent) and white LGBT people (5 percent) reported being the custodian or caregiver of an adult or senior.
- LGBT people of color were less likely (52 percent) to have graduated with a college degree than white LGBT people (75 percent), but were similarly as likely to have served in the armed forces (9 percent for people of color, 9 percent for white people).
- Even though LGBT people of color were more likely to be working fulltime (72 percent) than white LGBT people (64 percent), LGBT people of color had significantly less personal income (average of \$41,622 annually) and significantly less household income (average of \$56,095 annually) than white LGBT people (average of \$48,354 for personal income and average of \$64,538 for household income).
- LGBT people of color were significantly less likely to be homeowners (34 percent) than white LGBT people (56 percent).
- Significantly more LGBT people of color (91 percent) were raised in homes with religious or spiritual practice than were white LGBT people (87 percent). Likewise, significantly more LGBT people of color (43 percent) than white LGBT people (33 percent) reported currently having a religious or spiritual practice.
- On average, LGBT people of color came out at a younger age both to themselves (16.4 years old) and to another person (19.3 years old) than did white LGBT people to themselves (19.5 years old) and to another person (22.7 years old).







## All people want the opportunity to live a happy, healthy life.

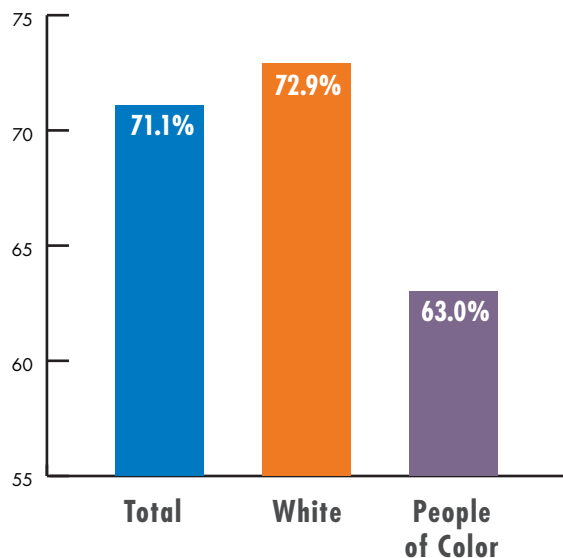
We want to be able to build our lives in supportive communities. We want to be able to care for ourselves by seeking out health services from physicians we trust to understand and take care of us. We want to be able to practice our faith in places of worship that affirm who we are.

But not all of us are able to fulfill this opportunity.

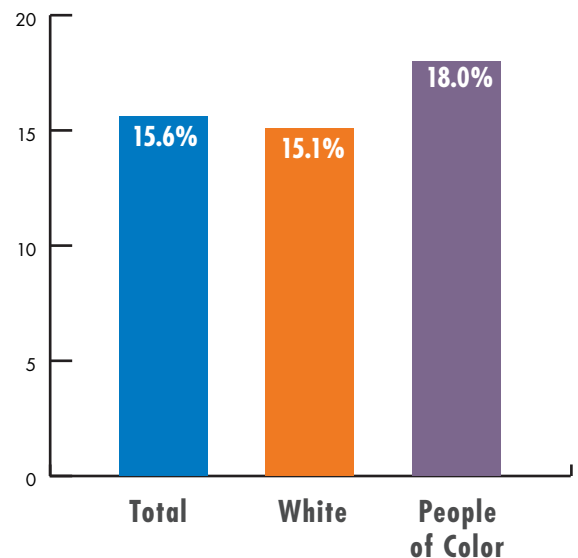
For far too many LGBT people, harassment and abuse throughout the lifespan are the rule, not the exception. And for LGBT people of color, the abuse is even more violent.

- ▶ More than 71 percent of LGBT people report ever experiencing anti-LGBT verbal abuse.
- ▶ LGBT people of color report significantly lower levels of anti-LGBT verbal abuse over their lifetime than do white LGBT people
- ▶ Conversely, LGBT people of color report significantly higher levels of anti-LGBT physical abuse than white LGBT people.

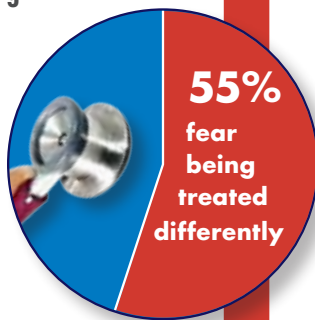
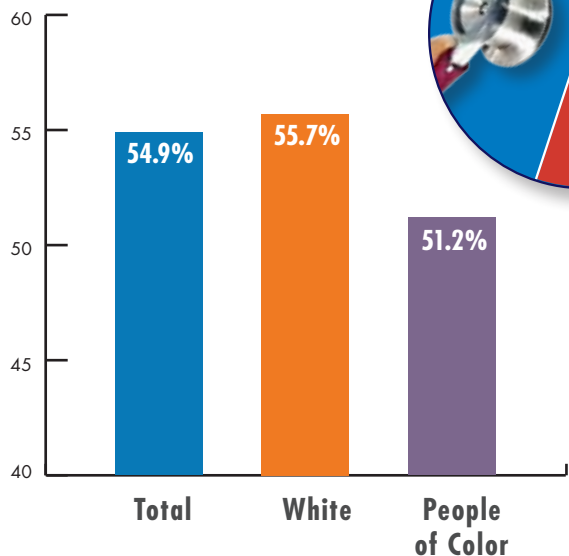
Percentages Reporting Ever Experiencing Anti-LGBT Verbal Abuse



Percentages Reporting Ever Experiencing Anti-LGBT Physical Abuse



**Percentages Reporting Fear of Being Treated Differently by Medical Personnel Because of Being LGBT**



**When we experience harassment or abuse, many of us rely on the care of health professionals.**

But for LGBT people, healthcare settings can be places of fear and rejection, especially for LGBT people of color, who report being refused care significantly more often.

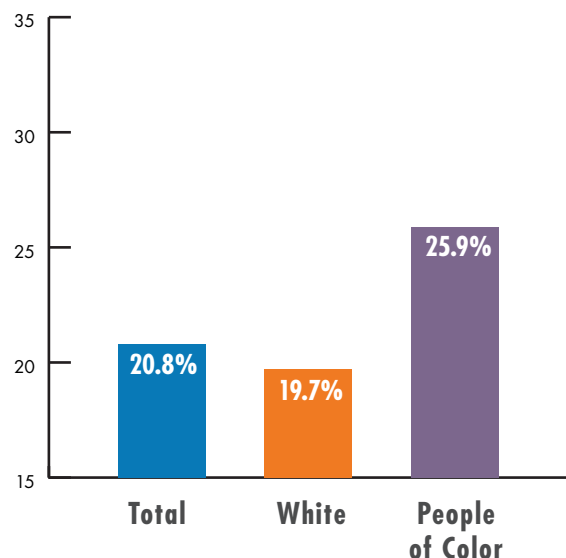
▶ More than half (55 percent) of LGBT people, both people of color and white people, fear being treated differently by doctors and healthcare workers who find out they are LGBT.

“All I want is access to education, employment, and healthcare. Not more than anyone else, just the opportunity to be the best person I can be.”

▶ A shocking 26 percent of LGBT people of color report problems with doctors and healthcare workers refusing to provide services to them — compared to 20 percent of white LGBT people.

“Many “two spirit” individuals and families often go without healthcare because there is no representation or specific services for these individuals. There are many physical health and psychological disparities that are specific to the Native American and “two spirit” communities that are not implemented because of their political and cultural identity. Oftentimes these families and individuals may have to travel many miles to a place that offers free IHS (Indian Health Services), which is entitled to them by the federal government and Native American communities. There are no IHS services set up in the Denver metropolitan area for the Native American community.

**Percentages Reporting Problems with Doctors and Healthcare Workers Refusing to Provide Services to LGBT People**



## When our neighbors reject us, when our coworkers and classmates treat us with disdain, when our doctors refuse us — where do we turn?

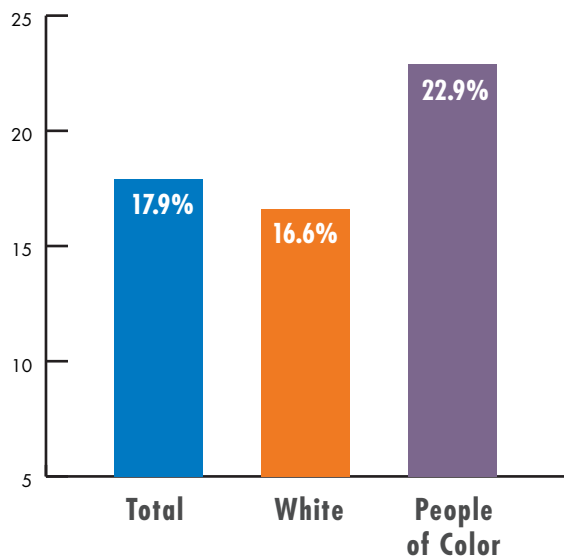
Many of us turn to faith. We reach out to our congregations or to our faith leaders for support.

But for many LGBT people, particularly LGBT people of color who are more likely to report having a current spiritual practice, places of worship bring only further rejection.

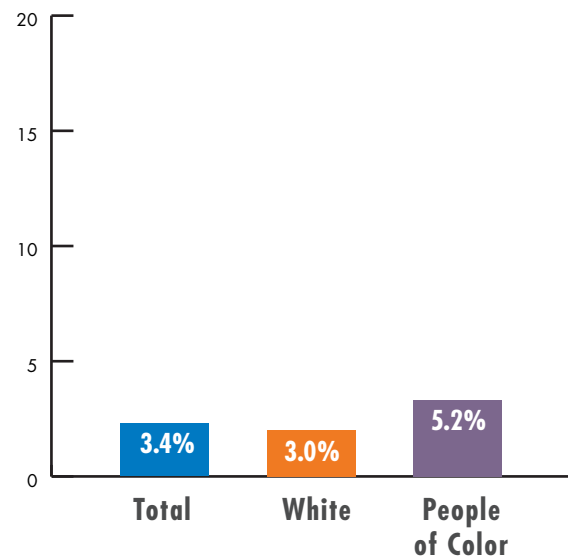
- ▶ More than 17 percent of LGBT people report experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment in their places of worship in the last year.
- ▶ Reports of harassment jump for LGBT people of color — nearly 23 percent, compared to 17 percent of white LGBT people.
- ▶ Although LGBT people of color report a greater prevalence of homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment in places of worship, they do not report more frequent experiences than LGBT white people.

“I am blessed to worship with people who accept me as a transgender Latina, but I had to leave the church of my youth.”

**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment in Their Places of Worship in the Last Year**



**Percentages Reporting Experiencing *Daily or More Frequently* Occurring Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment in Their Places of Worship in the Last Year**



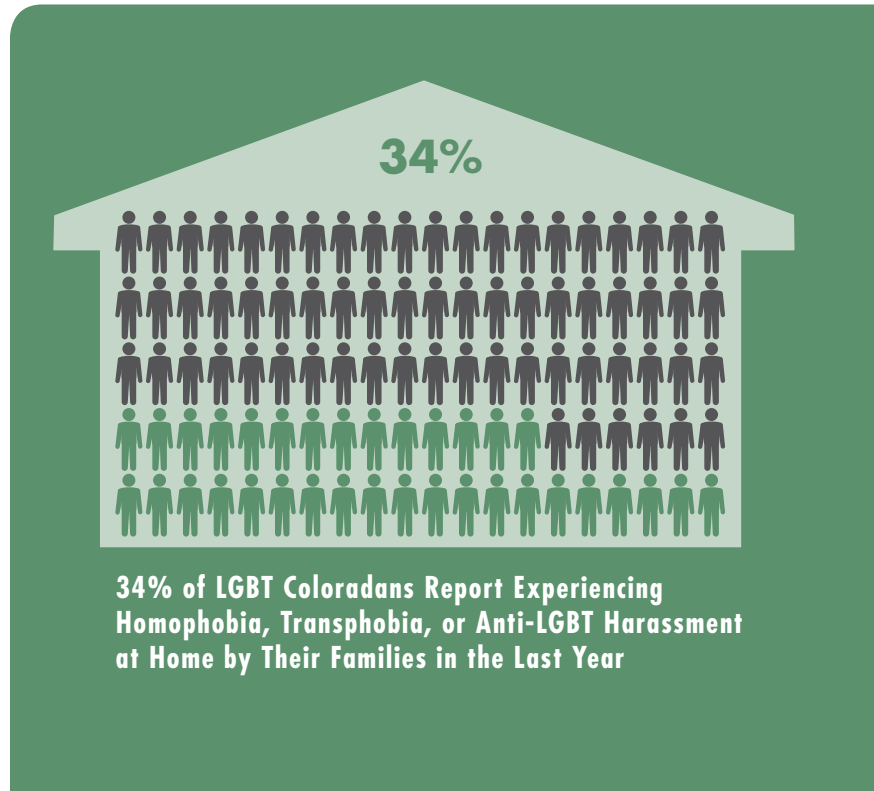


## All of us want and need the support of family.

We all want to be loved and accepted by our families, no matter who we are. We all want to support and provide for the ones we call family.

But not all of us are given the same opportunity to love and to be loved. For most of us, home is a refuge. But for too many LGBT people, home is a place fraught with struggle.

- ▶ More than 1 in 3 (34 percent) LGBT Coloradans report experiencing homophobia, transphobia, or anti-LGBT harassment at home by their families in the last year—while 3 percent report such experiences happening daily or frequently.
- ▶ LGBT people of color and LGBT white people report similar experiences in the prevalence and frequency of harassment at home.



“I’m hopeful that we can break down walls, misconceptions, preconceptions, and stereotypes so that we can authentically be a united community. This is not an easy task, as it requires more than lip service; it requires the ability to seek to understand.

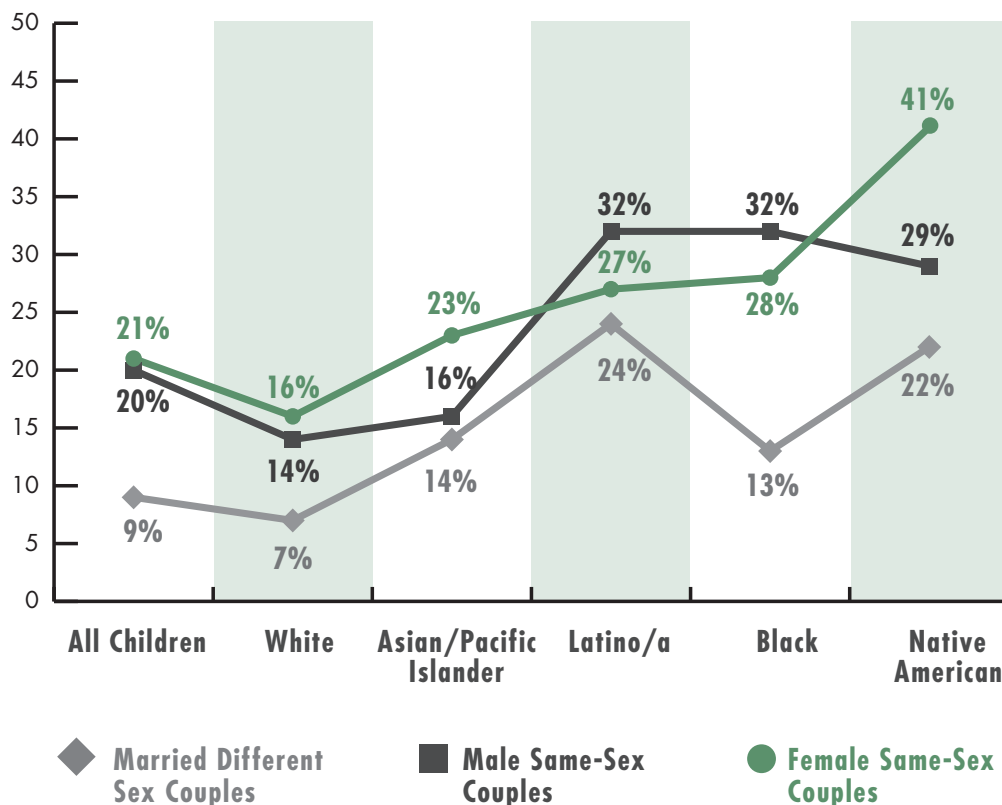


**For most of us, the process of building and raising a family is filled with joy and excitement with moments of stress sprinkled in.** But for LGBT people, especially LGBT people of color, creating and providing for a family means facing obstacles at nearly every turn.

According to a January 2012 report by the Movement Advancement Project (LGBT Families of Color: Facts at a Glance), LGBT families of color across America are more likely to struggle financially.

- ▶ According to the Williams Institute, children being raised in LGBT families of color are more likely to be living in poverty than children being raised in white LGBT families or children being raised by married heterosexual parents.
- ▶ For example, 32 percent of children raised by gay male black couples live in poverty, compared to 13 percent of children raised by married heterosexual black parents and 7 percent of children raised by married heterosexual white parents.
- ▶ Most safety net programs use a narrow definition of family, which often excludes LGBT people. This means that cash assistance, food and nutrition support, housing subsidies, health insurance, child care assistance, educational loans, and other forms of aid may not be available to LGBT families, disproportionately impacting families of color. Additionally, some immigrant families are not eligible for safety net programs, leaving children in low-income immigrant families at increased risk.

**Percentages of Children Living in Poverty, by Family Type**



Source: Randy Albelda, M.V. Lee Badgett, Alyssa Schneebaum and Gary J. Gates, "Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community," The Williams Institute, 2009.

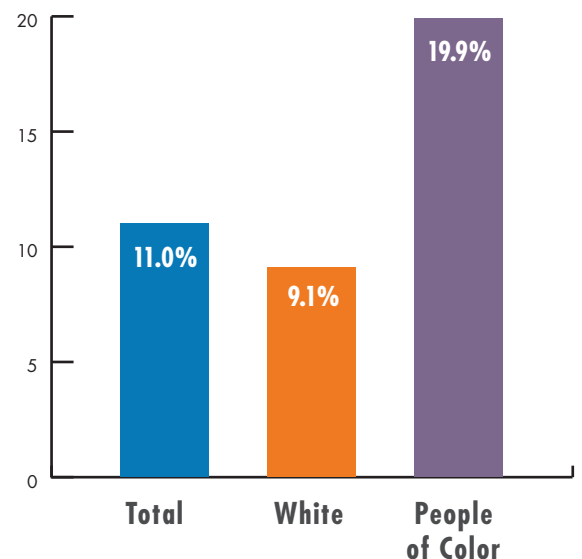


**As we seek to take care of our families, most of us dream of providing a home for our loved ones.**

Whether we rent or own, we want to be proud of the place where we build our lives and families. But for many LGBT people, especially LGBT people of color, creating a home means overcoming discrimination.

- ▶ 11 percent of LGBT Coloradans report experiencing anti-LGBT discrimination in housing.
- ▶ That number significantly increases for LGBT people of color — 20 percent report experiencing housing discrimination, compared to 9 percent of white LGBT people.
- ▶ The rate of housing discrimination for LGBT people of color is twice that for white LGBT people.

**Percentages Reporting Experiences of Anti-LGBT Housing Discrimination**





## All people want the opportunity to pursue education and earn a living.

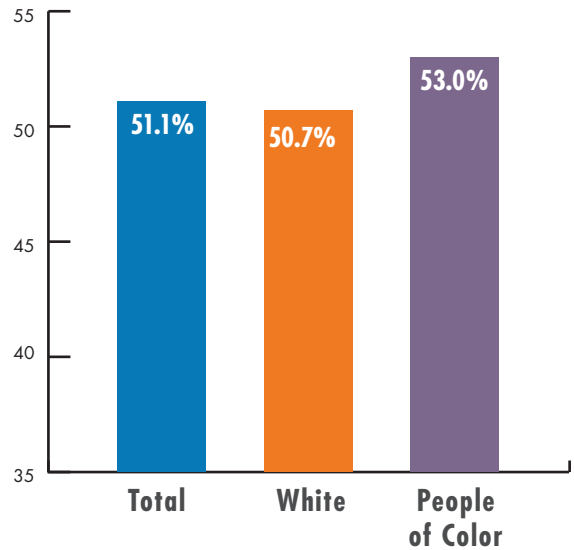
We want to study and learn without fear of harassment. We want to work hard at our jobs without worrying about discrimination. We want the same access to success so we can provide for ourselves and our families.

But not all of us get the same chance to achieve.

For most of us, school provides the foundation from which we can grow into responsible, successful adults. But for many LGBT people, schools are hostile environments, with relentless bullying that negatively impacts academic performance, attendance, and emotional well-being.

► More than 51 percent of LGBT Coloradans report experiencing bullying in middle or high school.

Percentages Reporting Experiences of Bullying in Middle or High School



LGBT  
People of Color  
Who Experienced Bullying  
in Middle or High School

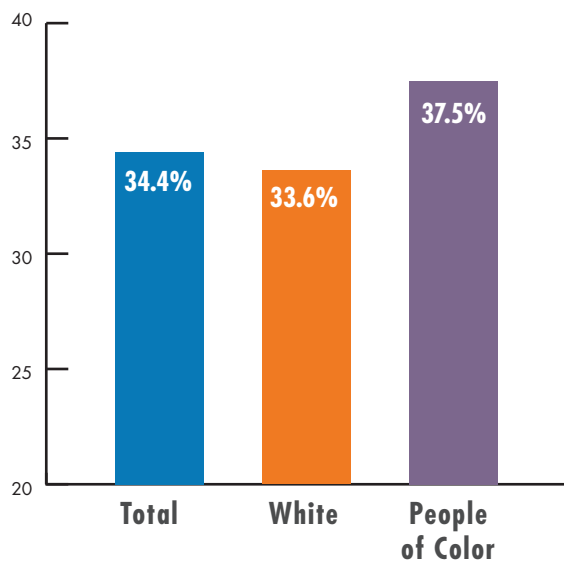
53%



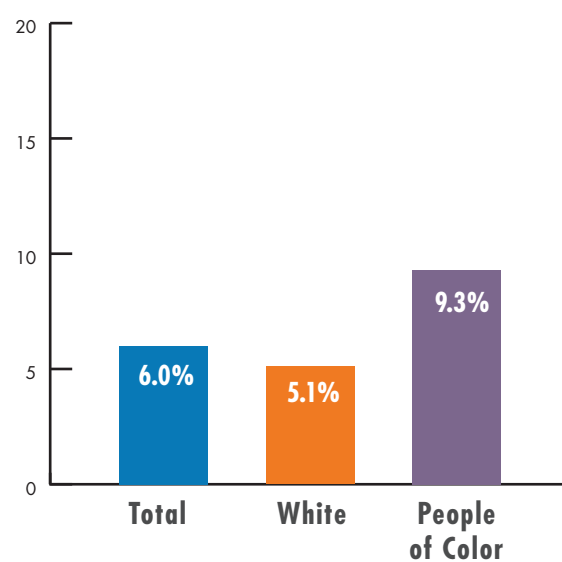
**In addition to bullying, LGBT students experience both latent and outright homophobia, transphobia, and anti-LGBT harassment** with schoolyard chants of “that’s so gay” and “boys don’t cry.” And for LGBT people of color, these experiences are far more likely to be daily or frequent occurrences.

- ▶ More than 34 percent of LGBT Coloradans report experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment in their schools in the last year.
- ▶ These numbers change slightly by race — 34 percent of white LGBT people compared to 38 percent of LGBT people of color.
- ▶ Although LGBT people of color do not report a greater prevalence of homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment in schools, they do report more frequent experiences than white LGBT people — 9 percent of LGBT people of color report daily or frequent experiences compared to 5 percent of white LGBT people.

**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment at Their Schools in the Last Year**

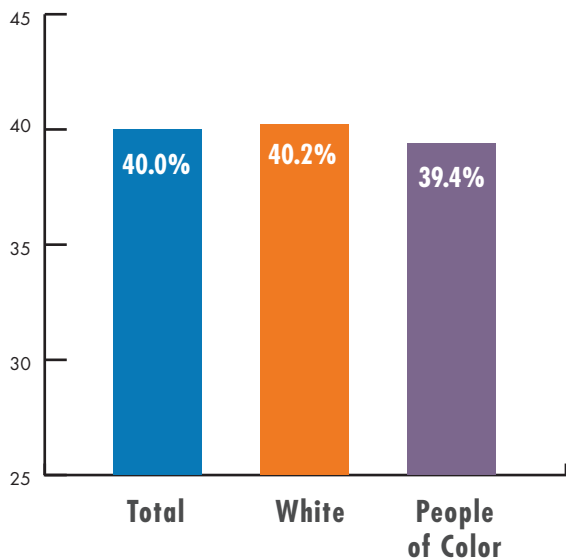


**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Daily or More Frequently Occurring Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment at Their Schools in the Last Year**

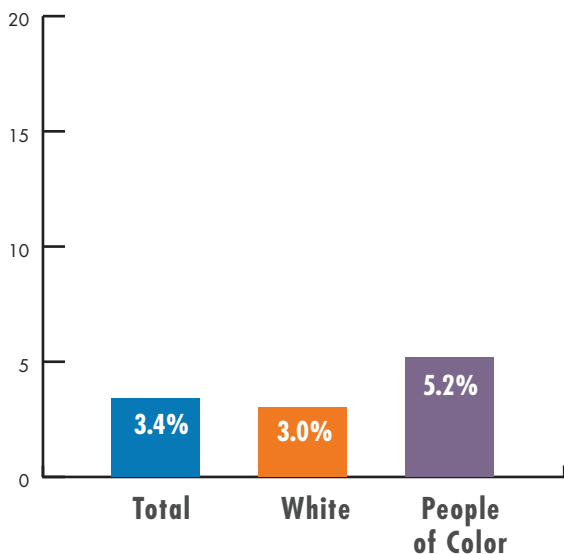


I believe we will truly have progress when we can understand the challenges of all our POC [People of Color] LGBT brothers and sisters and embrace and celebrate each other’s differences.

**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment at Their Places of Employment in the Last Year**



**Percentages Reporting Experiencing *Daily or More Frequently* Occurring Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment at Their Places of Employment in the Last Year**



**Harassment isn't confined to school buses, playgrounds, and locker rooms.**

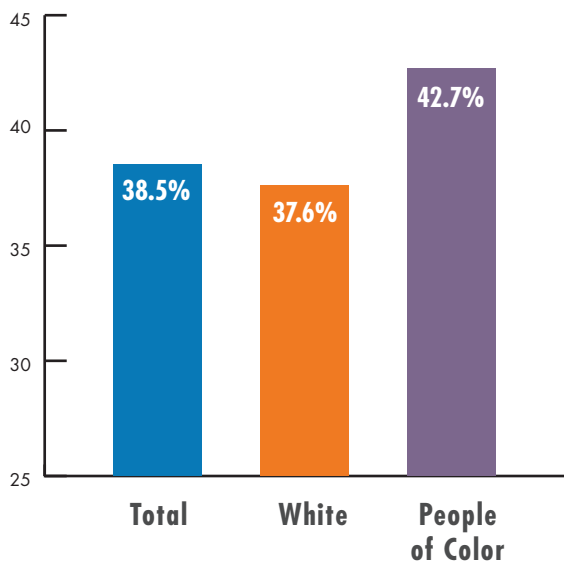
It follows LGBT people throughout their lifetimes and reaches into the workplace.

- ▶ In their places of employment, white LGBT people and LGBT people of color report similar levels of prevalence — around 40 percent — of experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and/or harassment.
- ▶ But as in school settings, LGBT people of color report more frequent harassment in the workplace.
- ▶ In fact, LGBT people of color experience frequent harassment at a rate of 1.5 to 2 times that of white LGBT people.

“As a queer white woman, I get to see lots of faces that look like my own when I am out in the LGBTQ community. Even though this is nice for me, it speaks volumes about who is missing from the table. While there are some more obvious forms of racism visible in the community, I think more pervasive is the lack of space for and inclusion of people of color in our community spaces, groups, and events.



## Percentages Reporting Experiences of Anti-LGBT Employment Discrimination



**For some LGBT people, and for even greater numbers of LGBT people of color, harassment at work becomes employment discrimination.**

▶ A shocking 39 percent of LGBT Coloradans report ever experiencing anti-LGBT employment discrimination (this discrimination may or may not have occurred in Colorado).

▶ That number increases significantly for LGBT people of color, 43 percent of whom report experiencing discrimination, compared to 38 percent of white LGBT people.

“Authentic dialogue can bring about lasting change and be healing. Our community can get there if we all show up.”





## All people want the opportunity to participate in the community.

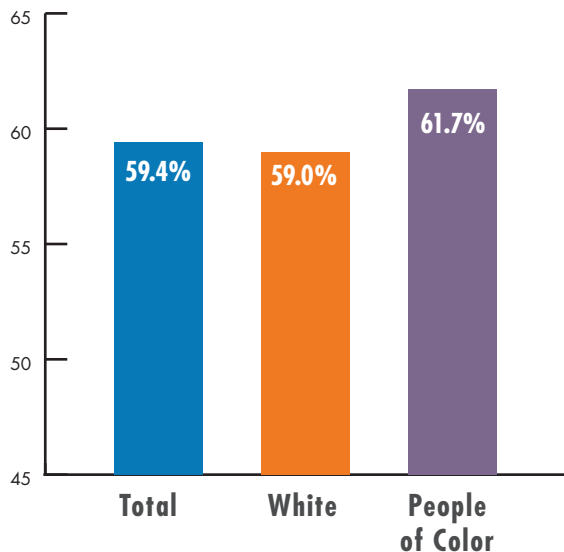
We want to be able to explore the world on safe streets. We want to be able to enrich our lives at public establishments like restaurants and theaters. We want to be able to rely on the public services that we need.

But not all of us are able to fulfill these hopes.

Most of us are able to walk through our communities without fear. But for many LGBT people, a simple stroll through the neighborhood could mean opening oneself up to anti-LGBT harassment.

- ▶ 6 in 10 (59 percent) LGBT people report experiencing harassment on the street in the past year.
- ▶ The prevalence of this harassment is similar for white LGBT people and LGBT people of color.
- ▶ 1 out of 20 (5 percent) LGBT people of color report daily or more frequent homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment on the street — 4 times what white LGBT people report.

**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment on the Street in the Last Year**



“As a queer Latina, I feel like I don’t always fit into the broader non-POC LGBT world. I frequently feel judged and misjudged and can see that in the experience of many of my fellow queer LGBTs of color.”

## One of the great joys of living in one of Colorado's many communities is enjoying all they have to offer —

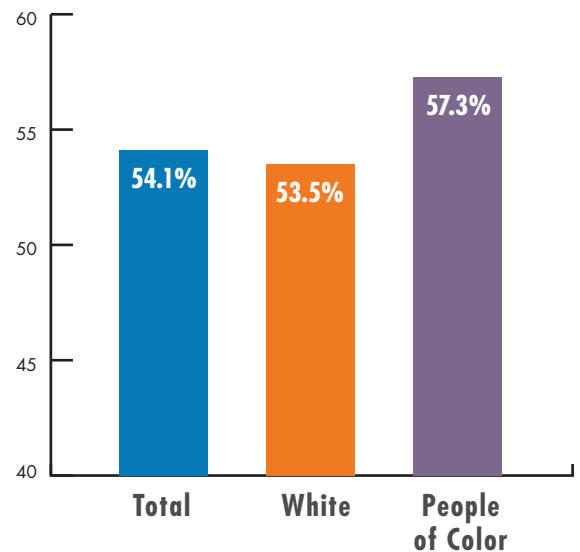
restaurants, stores, bars, theaters, and beyond. But for LGBT people, visiting public establishments can mean facing homophobia and transphobia.

► Slightly more than half (54 percent) of LGBT Coloradans report experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and/or anti-LGBT harassment in public establishments in the past year.

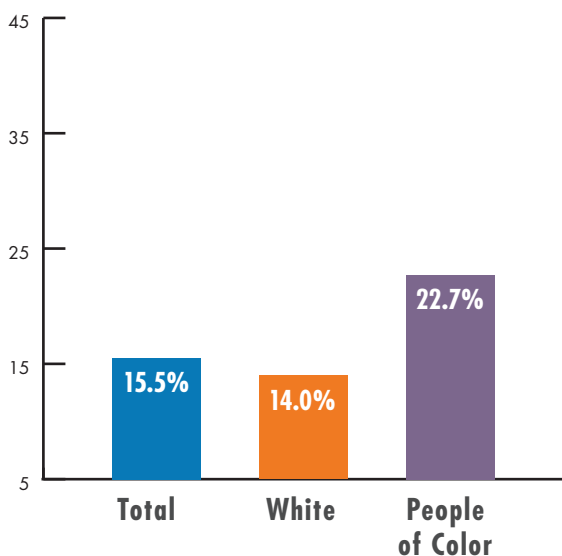
► The number increases just slightly for LGBT people of color at 57 percent, compared to 54 percent of white LGBT people.

► While the prevalence of harassment is similar for people of color and white people, LGBT people of color report a greater frequency of experiences. People of color experience daily or more frequently occurring homophobia, transphobia, and/or harassment at 3 times the rate of white LGBT people.

**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment at Public Establishments in the Last Year**



**Percentages Reporting Experiencing Homophobia, Transphobia, and/or Anti-LGBT Harassment in their Interactions with Firefighters, Police Officers, and Other Civil Servants in the Last Year**



**All of us depend on public servants — from police officers to social workers.** But for many LGBT people, interacting with those who provide public services can be terrifying.

► 16 percent of LGBT people report experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and anti-LGBT harassment in their interactions with civil servants.

► That number skyrockets to 23 percent for LGBT people of color, compared to 14 percent of white LGBT people.

► Although LGBT people of color report a significantly greater prevalence of harassment, they do not report a greater frequency.



## **This report begins to shine light on the often unknown or ignored experiences of LGBT people of color.**

To be sure, the data show that LGBT people of color face overwhelming challenges to fulfilling life's opportunities — self, family, career, society. These obstacles are compounded by the intersection of race with sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

While it can be difficult to fulfill all of life's opportunities as an LGBT person or as a person of color, seeking to fulfill these opportunities as an LGBT person of color can seem impossible. As the data have shown, life as an LGBT person of color is characterized by higher levels of physical abuse, an increased likelihood of raising a family in poverty, and a greater chance of experiencing discrimination and harassment at every turn.

One Colorado Education Fund is committed to working with the community and our partners to address the unique disparities faced by LGBT people of color. As we move forward, we will focus on three core objectives:

### **1 Improving data collection.**

To more fully understand the experiences of LGBT people of color, we need better data. Current data are not representative of Colorado's diverse population — making it challenging to truly comprehend the disparities that exist at the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and race/ethnicity, income, and education.

Current data is also limited by small sample sizes that do not allow for an analysis by racial or ethnic identity groups — so populations with varied needs, ideas, and experiences are combined. As a result, differences between Asian-American people and Latino/a people, African-American people and Native American people are erased. Additionally, current data are particularly lacking for Asian-American and Native American populations; thus, current findings are driven in large part by the blended experiences of African-American and Latino/a people.

It's critical that data collection efforts are improved so that the unique experiences of LGBT people of color — as a whole and by racial or ethnic identity groups — are seen, heard, and understood.

### **2 Educating the LGBT community about racism.**

Anecdotal evidence shows that LGBT people of color have unique experiences living within the LGBT community and living within the broader community. The experiences that have been shared suggest that LGBT people of color experience racism, just as often if not more often, within the LGBT community.

To begin to address the racism that plagues the LGBT community, it's vital that we educate white LGBT people about the experiences of LGBT people of color as they navigate predominantly LGBT spaces.

Training Colorado's LGBT community to understand oppression and privilege, to recognize microaggressions, and to combat racism is our responsibility and commitment. Through town hall meetings and statewide gatherings, these educational efforts have already begun — but to create substantial and sustainable cultural change within our community, we must expand this work to reach a greater number of LGBT people.

## 3 Strengthening partnerships with organizations serving people of color.

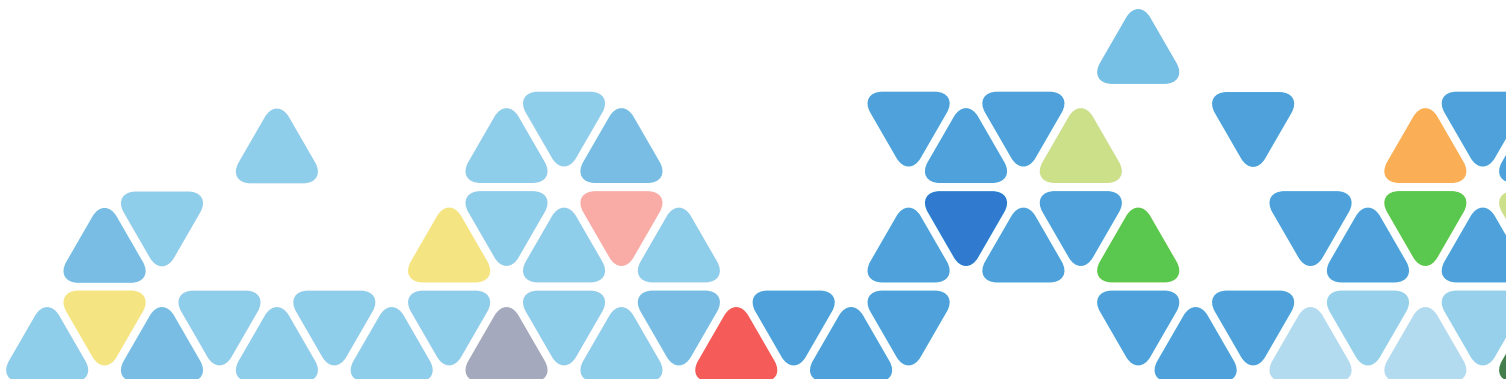
Since its formation, One Colorado Education Fund has been committed to a broad social justice agenda, and the staff has invested significant energy in building partnerships and collaborations with organizations advancing racial justice.

Through these partnerships, One Colorado Education Fund has been challenged to expand its racial justice work and live its values of inclusion. Staff and board members have participated in — and will continue to seek out — educational opportunities to learn effective ways of combating racism and practicing inclusion. These collaborations with other social justice organizations have also pushed these partners to become more inclusive of LGBT people. This shared commitment to allyship has strengthened us all.

Moving forward, One Colorado Education Fund will seek to play a growing role in efforts to advance equality and opportunity for people of color living in Colorado. Continuing to invest in these partnerships will better equip us to intentionally explore policy and advocacy issues impacting LGBT people of color, to create awareness about racism, and to combat it within the LGBT community and the community at large. With the support of COLOR, CLLARO, Two-Spirit Society, and the NAACP, we can make real advances in racial justice.



Our victories will be that much stronger and longer-lasting when our voices and experiences are present and represented as POC LGBTs at every level of our movement.



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