Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

2026 Maryland LGBTQIA+ Community Needs Assessment Preliminary Findings Report

Introduction

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs conducted this statewide Community Needs Assessment to fulfill its statutory mandate to assess challenges facing LGBTQIA+ Marylanders, collect data, and inform the Executive and Legislative branches of State government. While Maryland is often recognized for its LGBTQIA+-inclusive laws and policies, this assessment demonstrates that legal protections alone do not guarantee equitable access, safety, or well-being in practice.

This report presents preliminary findings from the Commission's first comprehensive, statewide survey of LGBTQIA+ adults living in Maryland. The assessment was designed to capture the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across key areas, including health and mental health, safety, access to services, and interactions with state systems. Findings are intended to inform policy development, agency action, and budget decisions.

This assessment was conducted without dedicated funding and relied on the Commission's statutory authority, staff capacity, volunteer leadership, and research partnership with the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES). Future phases of this work would benefit from dedicated resources to expand outreach, analysis, and implementation support.

A full report with deeper analysis and expanded recommendations will be released in a subsequent report.

Content Notice and Support Resources

This report discusses suicide ideation, discrimination, hate crimes, and barriers to care. Readers who may be impacted are encouraged to seek support.

Support Resources:

- Veterans Crisis Line (988 + Press 1 or text 838255)
- The Trevor Project (866-488-7386 | text 678678)

- Trans Lifeline (877-565-8860)
- SAGE Lifeline (877-360-5428)
- GLBT National Hotline (888-843-4564)

Commission Authority and Mandate

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs was established in 2021 and expanded in 2023 to assess challenges facing LGBTQIA+ communities, collect and analyze data, establish best practices, and inform state leadership. Conducting a statewide community needs assessment directly fulfills these statutory responsibilities.

Methodology

The Maryland LGBTQIA+ Community Needs Assessment was administered anonymously in partnership with the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and conducted under the approval of its Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol #09-2025-007). Participation was voluntary, no identifying information was collected, and no compensation was provided to participants.

The survey was distributed statewide using multiple outreach methods to reach LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across diverse communities. Distribution included email outreach, social media, and paper flyers shared in LGBTQIA+-affirming spaces and at LGBTQIA+ community events.

The survey utilized a community-based, non-probability sampling approach. While the findings are not intended to estimate population prevalence, this methodology is well suited to capturing lived experiences, identifying service gaps, and elevating the voices of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across varied identities and regions. The survey was open from October 1, 2025 through December 14, 2025.

Survey Overview

- **1,280** surveys completed
- **1,217** usable responses included in analysis
- Respondents represented diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, races and ethnicities, geographic regions, and lived experiences across all 24 jurisdictions in Maryland.

Key Findings

Community Connection and Access

- Only **20%** of respondents feel *extremely connected* to an LGBTQIA+ community in Maryland.

- Over **37%** report that LGBTQIA+ resources are only *slightly available* or *not available* to them.
- Respondents living in rural areas and those with multiple marginalized identities report significantly lower access.

Health Care Access and Discrimination

- Over **47%** of respondents experienced obstacles or delays in receiving health care in Maryland.
- **36%** sometimes avoid medical care due to anticipated discrimination; **13%** always avoid care for this reason.
- Barriers are most pronounced in **mental health care**, **gender-affirming care**, and **specialty care**.
- Respondents report discrimination most frequently based on **gender identity**, **sexual orientation**, **body size**, **disability**, and **mental health condition**.

Safety and Hate Violence

- Nearly **27%** of respondents experienced a hate crime while living in Maryland.
- **Verbal assault** was the most common incident, followed by vandalism and sexual assault.
- **These experiences far exceed the number of incidents captured in the Maryland State Police Hate Bias Incident Report**,[1] indicating substantial underreporting and pointing to gaps in trust, access, and survivor support systems.

Mental Health and Well-Being

- Past research has consistently found that violence and discrimination are consistently associated with negative mental health outcomes.[2] When we examined these outcomes in this needs assessment, over **22%** of respondents reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months.
- Over **61%** reported lifetime suicidal ideation.

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[1] Maryland Department of State Policy. (2025, October). *State of Maryland 2024 Hate Bias Report*. https://mcac.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2024-Hate-Bias-Report.pdf

[2] Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2023). Minority stress theory: Application, critique, and continued relevance. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 51(101579), 101579. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2023.101579

- Despite these figures, many respondents rated their mental health as “good” or “fair,” suggesting unmet needs masked by resilience.

Mental Health and Crisis Support Resources:

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- The Trevor Project (866-488-7386 | text 678678)
- Trans Lifeline (877-565-8860)
- SAGE Lifeline (877-360-5428)
  GLBT National Hotline (888-843-4564)

Navigating State Systems

- Nearly one-quarter of respondents changed their legal name while living in Maryland; many reported the process as difficult.

- Transgender and nonbinary respondents face disproportionate barriers navigating identity documents, affecting access to employment, housing, health care, and safety.

Knowledge of Rights and Protections

- Fewer than **17%** of respondents reported being very familiar with LGBTQIA+ state policies and legal protections.

- Over **91%** want more information about their rights and available protections.

What These Findings Show

Maryland’s LGBTQIA+ residents experience persistent gaps between policy intent and lived reality. Challenges are not isolated; they compound across health, safety, economic stability, and access to state systems, particularly for transgender and nonbinary people, LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities, people of color, rural residents, and younger adults.

Preliminary Recommendations

The findings of this Community Needs Assessment reinforce the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs’ longstanding recommendations that advancing equity for LGBTQIA+ Marylanders requires not only inclusive laws, but sustained infrastructure, coordination, and investment. The gaps identified in this report are systemic and cross-cutting, and they cannot be addressed through isolated programs or ad hoc efforts.

1. Establish Dedicated State Infrastructure to Implement LGBTQIA+-Inclusive Policies and Best Practices

The breadth and consistency of the findings underscore the need for a dedicated **Office of LGBTQIA+ Affairs** within State government to operationalize policy, coordinate implementation, and ensure accountability across agencies. While the Commission is mandated to assess challenges and make recommendations, these findings demonstrate that Maryland lacks sufficient executive infrastructure to translate recommendations into sustained action.

A dedicated office would support:

- Cross-agency coordination and implementation of LGBTQIA+-inclusive policies
- Ongoing data collection, evaluation, and reporting
- Centralized education and navigation of LGBTQIA+ rights and services
- Strategic partnership with local governments and community-based organizations

2. Expand Affirming Health and Mental Health Capacity and Access Statewide

Findings related to health care access, discrimination, and mental health outcomes point to urgent gaps in affirming care, particularly for transgender and nonbinary Marylanders and those living in rural areas.

The State should:

- Invest in expanding access to affirming primary, mental health, and gender-affirming care
- Address insurance and coverage barriers for gender-affirming treatment
- Support workforce development and provider training to reduce discrimination and care avoidance

3. Invest in Community-Based LGBTQIA+ Organizations and Service Providers

The uneven availability of LGBTQIA+ resources across Maryland highlights the critical role of grassroots and community-based organizations in providing culturally competent services, crisis support, and community connection.

The State should:

- Provide sustained funding to LGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits, with particular attention to rural and underserved regions

- Recognize community-based organizations as essential service partners in health, safety, and outreach efforts
- Reduce administrative burdens that limit small organizations' ability to access State funding

4. Improve Education and Navigation of LGBTQIA+ Rights and State Systems

The strong demand for information about state policies and legal protections demonstrates that existing rights are not sufficiently accessible or understandable to those they are intended to protect.

The State should:

- Develop centralized, accessible tools to help LGBTQIA+ Marylanders navigate rights, services, and state systems
- Ensure materials are inclusive, plain-language, and responsive to diverse identities and needs
- Coordinate education efforts across agencies to avoid fragmentation and duplication

5. Reduce Administrative and Cost Barriers in Name and Gender Marker Changes

Barriers to identity document changes create cascading impacts on employment, housing, health care access, and safety.

The State should:

- Simplify and standardize processes for name and gender marker changes
- Reduce or eliminate fees and unnecessary documentation requirements
- Ensure consistent implementation across agencies and jurisdictions

6. Strengthen Hate Crime Prevention, Reporting, and Survivor Support

The prevalence of hate violence and underreporting identified in this assessment points to the need for stronger, more accessible systems of prevention and support.

The State should:

- Improve access to reporting mechanisms and survivor services
- Strengthen coordination between law enforcement, victim services, and community organizations
- Invest in prevention, education, and community-based safety initiatives

7. Ensure LGBTQIA+ Needs Are Reflected in the State Budget

Across all findings, the absence of dedicated resources emerged as a recurring barrier to progress. Addressing the needs identified in this assessment will require intentional and visible investment.

The State should:

- Incorporate LGBTQIA+ needs into the State budget in a sustained and transparent manner
- Align funding with the Commission's findings and recommendations
- Support the long-term capacity of agencies and community partners to deliver results

Acknowledgements

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs extends its sincere appreciation to the individuals and institutions that made this Community Needs Assessment possible.

The Commission thanks **Dr. Nicole Hollywood**, Principal Investigator, and the **University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES)** for their research partnership, methodological guidance, and oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process that ensured the ethical and responsible conduct of this assessment.

The Commission also acknowledges the **Washington State LGBTQ Commission** for sharing its LGBTQ+ community survey instrument, which was adapted and modified for use in Maryland. The opportunity to build upon established best practices in statewide LGBTQIA+ data collection strengthened the design and implementation of this assessment.

Finally, the Commission recognizes the LGBTQIA+ Marylanders who took the time to share their experiences. Their voices are the foundation of this work and are essential to advancing equity, safety, and inclusion across the State.

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Adopted on: February 9, 2026

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