

House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services
 03/15/2022 01:30 PM
 HB22-1267 Culturally Relevant Training Health Professionals
 Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Elizabeth Spoering For Self	<p>I would like to express my strong support for HB-1267.</p> <p>Both in my professional role as a registered nurse and as a transgender woman myself, I have struggled with the lack of adequate cultural competency training for the LGBTQ+ community among healthcare providers.</p> <p>I am the chair of the employee LGBTQ+ coworker network for my hospital organization, and one of the major struggles I have identified in this role is that education for our clinical staff and providers is inconsistent, and in some cases non-existent. What I have found is that some facilities and offices have had an individual champion, or have had a patient incident, that has driven LGBTQ+ competency education, but without this champion, education is often not done. Even in the situations where this education exists, it is often incomplete and not vetted by members of the LGBTQ+ community.</p> <p>By creating state funding for organizations to provide this education, a curriculum can be created following best practices, which can be vetted by member of the communities that it most effects.</p> <p>Please pass this bill.</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>Elizabeth Spoering BS, RN</p>



To: Representative Dafna Michaelson Jenet, Chair House Public & Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee

Members, House Public & Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee

From: Matt Pagnotti, State & Local Government Relations Director, Vivent Health

Re: Support for HB22-1267 Relating to Culturally Relevant Training for Health Professionals

Vivent Health appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB22-1267, concerning culturally relevant training available to healthcare professionals. We support this legislation and believe it will address a critical barrier to care for Coloradans living with HIV and communities disproportionately impacted by the HIV epidemic in our state. By establishing a state grant program to develop culturally responsive and affirming healthcare training programs for providers, HB22-1267 will help ensure that all Coloradans can access the high-quality care that they deserve. ***Vivent Health urges the committee to pass HB22-1267 and help bring Colorado one step closer to ending the HIV epidemic and other health disparities in our state.***

Vivent Health (previously Rocky Mountain Cares) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization serving more than 2,100 Coloradans affected by HIV in the Denver and Pueblo areas each year. Our unique integrated, comprehensive model of care brings together medical, dental, and mental health care; clinical and traditional pharmacy services; food pantry and nutrition services; housing assistance; legal aid; and care management and coordination services for people living with HIV. Vivent Health also provides prevention programs, including Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), testing, and harm reduction services to help reduce the transmission of HIV. All the services Vivent Health provides are available regardless of the ability of the people we serve to pay for them, or their insurance status.

Recent and significant advancements in HIV prevention and treatment mean that people living with HIV can live long, healthy lives, and also that it is realistic to talk about ending HIV as an epidemic by reducing the number and rates of new HIV cases. The two critical pathways for ending HIV as a pandemic are:

- 1.) Ensure that every person living with HIV can access HIV treatment and has the support necessary to remain engaged in care.
- 2.) Ensure that every person at-risk for HIV can access effective prevention services that work best for them, including harm reduction programs (condoms, syringe services, counseling, and education) and biomedical interventions (pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP).

One of the most important HIV-related clinical indicators is viral suppression, also known as achieving an “undetectable viral load” or “being undetectable.” Viral suppression occurs when the level of the virus in a person’s blood is too low to be detected through traditional means, and results from effective and consistent HIV treatment. Viral suppression not only leads to healthy immune system function and overall improved wellbeing for people living with HIV, but also results in an inability for that person to transmit HIV to others - scientifically validated and CDC endorsed phenomenon known as “Undetectable = Untransmittable.” Achieving viral suppression is thus not only a critical personal health outcome for people living with HIV, but also a key HIV prevention strategy.

In addition to ensuring people with HIV can achieve an undetectable viral load, increasing the number of people at-risk for HIV who are able to access HIV prevention programs, especially PrEP, is also critical to ending HIV as a pandemic. PrEP is the use of medications used to treat HIV disease to prevent the acquisition of the virus by people who are exposed to it. PrEP is more than 99% effective at preventing HIV transmission from sex, and at least 74% effective at preventing HIV transmission among people whose main risk factor for HIV is injection drug use.

Today, there are more than 15,000 people living with HIV in Colorado, with approximately 400 new cases of HIV diagnosed annually. Though the state has made much progress toward ending its HIV epidemic, deep disparities remain for communities of color, LGBTQ Coloradans, and people who inject drugs. For example, the rate of new HIV diagnoses among Black Coloradans between 2016 to 2020 was nearly five times higher than for white Coloradans, and the rate was 2.4 times greater for Latinx Coloradans than white Coloradans. Significant HIV-related disparities also exist between Black women or other women of color and white women, and

Coloradans of color are disproportionately more likely to be diagnosed late, less likely to be engaged in care, and less likely to be virally suppressed.

Similar disparate HIV-related health outcomes can be seen for LGBTQ Coloradans, particularly trans women of color and gay or bi men of color. More than 16% of all cumulative HIV diagnoses in Colorado have been associated with injection drug use, and people living with HIV who inject drugs are less likely to be connected to or remain engaged in care. Disparities can also be seen in prevention access, such as lower PrEP uptake rates among communities of color, women, and individuals who use drugs.

Much of these disparities are driven by significant socioeconomic barriers to health, known as social determinants of health. These barriers can include poverty, lack of access to health care services, lack of insurance, transportation challenges, food insecurity, housing instability, racism, discrimination, violence, language barriers and unemployment. These challenges and barriers are often exacerbated in Colorado's rural areas as well as in cities. In addition, pervasive HIV-related stigma and bias contributes to worse physical and mental health outcomes for all individuals living with HIV. Historic and current institutional discrimination within health care has additionally led to generational trauma and mistrust among many marginalized communities.

Given this landscape, it is imperative that health care providers in Colorado understand these disparities and work with patients in these communities to address these barriers. At Vivent Health, we have seen first-hand how providing culturally responsive and affirming care leads to better health outcomes. More than 96% of our Colorado patients living with HIV are achieving viral suppression and we've virtually eliminated racial disparities in viral suppression rates among our patients. Our patients also report excellent dental, mental health, and other health outcomes that contribute to overall improved wellbeing for those we serve. Many of our patients express to us that receiving affirming and patient-centered care at our clinic has even led them to feel more empowered and improved their sense of self-worth.

HB22-1267 will provide comprehensive training for healthcare providers so they can better care for our most vulnerable communities. Properly training health care professionals and staff at all levels and across all specialties will also give patients more confidence and trust in their healthcare teams. The bill additionally requires the Department of Regulatory Agencies to encourage provider participation in the training

courses, establishing the development of skills related to cultural responsiveness as a priority for all health care professionals. ***Vivent Health strongly encourages you to support HB22-1267 and help ensure that all Coloradans receive care that is affirming, culturally appropriate, and treats them with the dignity they deserve.***