

HEALTH BEAT

2017 brings progress on LGBTQ health*Affordable Care Act helps to cover more LGBTQ individuals*

by Dr. Pamela Roshell, Health & Human Services Region IV Director :: guest contributor

More than one year after marriage equality became the law of the land nationwide, President Barack Obama, Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell and my colleagues and I at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services continue to seize opportunities to improve the health and well-being of LGBTQ Americans.

We do so because the sad reality is that LGBTQ people still face discrimination in many areas of life, including healthcare. This discrimination exacerbates very real health disparities and societal challenges LGBTQ people face, including higher rates of depression, smoking, HIV, stigma, violence, rejection by family and community, as well as inequity in the workplace and insurance sectors.

The Obama Administration has made historic advancements for the LGBTQ community, and as we celebrate that progress, we know there is still more to do. We've proudly required all hospitals receiving Medicare or Medicaid funds (nearly every hospital in America) to allow visitation rights for LGBT patients, funded the first national resource center for older LGBT individuals, and released the nation's first comprehensive National HIV/AIDS Strategy, among many other initiatives.

But when I'm asked about the most important thing we've done for LGBTQ health in North Carolina, the answer is always the same: the *Affordable Care Act*.

You may know some of the law's benefits — like financial assistance to help eligible consumers afford health insurance, certain recommended preventive care like cancer and HIV/STI screenings without cost sharing and coverage for pre-existing medical conditions.

Still, many do not realize just how much the law offers for LGBTQ in North Carolina. That's

because LGBTQ people are more likely than their straight, cisgender peers to be uninsured. In fact, because of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), the uninsured rate nationwide for low- and middle-income LGBT people dropped from 34 percent in 2013 to 26 percent in 2014. For LGB people, the uninsured rate was nearly cut in half from 2013 to 2015.

Thanks to the ACA, more LGBTQ people have health insurance than ever before. And even more have the opportunity to get covered by visiting HealthCare.gov beginning on Nov. 1.

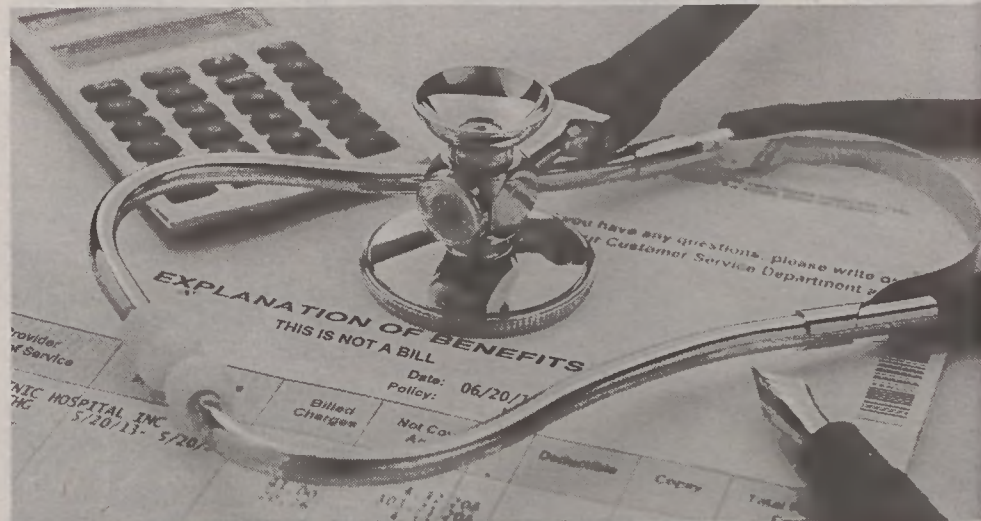
As a result of new enhancements to the law, the ACA providers increased protections for LGBTQ communities. In May, the HHS Office for Civil Rights spelled out significant new non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ.

The new rules mean that all LGBTQ people — whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, or intersex — are protected from discrimination just for being who they are. These protections apply in every state and mean that:

- Health insurance plans sold through HealthCare.gov can no longer have categorical exclusions for services related to gender transition.
- A hospital or clinic that receives federal funds cannot turn you away because you are transgender or in a same-sex relationship.
- You have the right to be placed in a hospital room or ward based on your gender identity.
- You should not face harassment from a healthcare provider, such as a doctor or nurse, intentionally refusing to use your correct name and pronoun.

This means that even more LGBTQ people have the opportunity for more meaningful health insurance coverage starting Jan. 1, 2017.

If you face this or any other type of



discrimination, we urge you to file a complaint online with the regional Office for Civil Rights at bit.ly/2fPNI2L.

We know more can be done to improve LGBTQ health and we will continue to build upon the strides we have already made together. But now we need your help to make these protections a reality for millions of LGBTQ people across the country.

Visit HealthCare.gov to enroll and talk to your loved ones about doing the same. If you pick a plan by Dec. 15, 2016, your coverage may begin as early as Jan. 1, 2017. Financial help is available for those eligible to make insurance more affordable: in 2016, nearly 7 in 10 people could have selected a plan for less than \$75 per month. And you can sit down or call to make a free appointment with an LGBTQ-friendly expert who can help you understand your options.

With financial help, new non-discrimination protections and better quality coverage, there's

never been a better time to be out, be healthy and get covered. For more information, call 404-562-7888 or visit hhs.gov/ocr.

— Dr. Pamela Roshell was appointed by the Obama Administration as regional director of Region 4 of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) in July 2012, bringing nearly 20 years of experience in healthcare policy, public administration and gerontology. She is the first African-American woman to hold this position in Region 4 which covers Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee, as well as six federally recognized tribes. Dr. Roshell is a graduate of Columbia College and received a master's of social work degree with a specialty in administration from the University of South Carolina. She has built on that specialty with the completion of a Ph.D. in social policy analysis, planning and administration from Clark Atlanta University.

South remains hotspot for HIV

From the vindication of "Patient Zero" to the discovery of an antibody that neutralises 98 percent of HIV strains, 2016 ushered in significant breakthroughs in HIV research. HIV has reached every corner of the country and continues to affect 1.2 million Americans.

The likelihood of becoming infected with HIV in the U.S. is 1 in 99, but the lifetime risk of becoming infected increases greatly for those living in the South and in some areas of the East Coast. The risk is even greater for men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women of color. If current trends continue, one out of two African-American MSM and trans women are estimated to contract HIV at some point in their lifetimes; for Latino MSM and Latina trans women, the risk is one out of four.

With World AIDS Day still recent, GetTested.com, the makers of a start-up at-home STD testing kit, released a map highlighting the continued risks of the HIV epidemic in the South. Using publicly available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a new map shows where the risk of becoming infected with HIV is greatest in the United States.

Using different color designations, the map shows the varying degrees of lifetime risk of HIV infection in each state. Although only a third of the population reside in the region, 44 percent of Americans diagnosed with HIV live in the South. The map outlines this area as the riskiest for HIV infection.

Nine of 10 cities with the highest rates of new HIV diagnoses are in the South, with Baton Rouge, Miami and New Orleans top-

ping the list. In the Carolinas, Columbia ranked eight with nearby Memphis and Atlanta edging the Palmetto State capital city out as numbers six and seven, respectively. GetTested.com included cities with a population of 50,000 people or more, infection rates reflect per 100,000 population, and include data from surrounding counties.

"Testing is a vital step to stemming the spread of HIV in our country. Approximately one in eight of those infected with HIV don't know, causing them to spread the virus unknowingly to their partners," says Hannah Dela Cruz, spokesperson for GetTested.com. "All sexually active individuals should take charge of their health by testing regularly and talking to their partners about screening."

Launched in September 2016, GetTested.com is a new service that delivers at-home STD test kits nationwide. GetTested.com makes screening for seven of the most common STDs easy and convenient. Kits can be ordered online for a flat rate of \$199, and are delivered in discreet, unmarked packaging. Samples can be collected within 15 minutes and mailed directly to a CLIA certified and CAP accredited laboratory for testing. Results are made available within three to five days and are accessible through a HIPAA-compliant portal.

For more information on GetTested.com, visit get-tested.com.

For more local and regional World AIDS Day coverage, be sure to check out our last print edition and our "Life, Positively" special section at goqnotes.com.

— Compiled by *qnotes* staff from press release.

America's

by GetTested.com

Places for HIV

WORLD AIDS DAY

Where you live can impact your risk of becoming infected with HIV. On average, the chance of becoming infected with HIV is 1 in 99, however, risk increases dramatically for those who live in the South and East Coast region of the country.

Top 10 Cities with Highest Rate of

- 1 Baton Rouge, LA - 44.7
- 2 Miami, FL - 42.8
- 3 New Orleans, LA - 36.9
- 4 Jackson, MS - 32.2
- 5 Orlando, FL - 23.8
- 6 Memphis, TN - 27.6
- 7 Atlanta, GA - 25.9
- 8 Columbia, SC - 25.4
- 9 Jacksonville, FL - 25.1
- 10 Baltimore, MD - 24.3

Lowest Risk - Highest Risk

GetTESTED.com