

2023 2SLGBTQ AI/AN Policy and Mental Health Survey

Results and Summary



PATHS
(RE)MEMBERED
PROJECT
Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board



NPAIHB
Indian Leadership for Indian Health



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Overview

In 2023, legislation across multiple US states either aims to limit or has successfully limited gender expression in various realms of public life (i.e. criminalization of drag performances, limiting access to restrooms and locker rooms on the basis of sex assigned at birth, and preventing trans girls from accessing girls' sports teams).[1] Additionally, in several states, access to gender-affirming healthcare (GAC) is either restricted or GAC is entirely banned for minor or adult patients. In some states, including Idaho, clinicians and/or parents seeking to provide that care to minors may face felony charges.[2] As this legislative movement is current, little research has been done to understand the ways that such laws (proposed or enacted) are affecting the lives of Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, or Queer (2SLGBTQ+) people, with even less research specific to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people.

The data presented here represent seventy-five completed survey questionnaires with 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults, collected by the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPIAHB). Survey responses were collected between June and October 2023. AI/AN Adults who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ were asked about their awareness and opinions of legislation in various states which would limit the rights of trans and queer people. Survey respondents were also asked questions measuring depression and anxiety both in general and compared to one year ago. Finally, respondents were asked to share their thoughts and feelings on how laws similar to those passed in other states would affect them were they to pass in their own states. Fifty-five percent of respondents live in WA, OR, or ID most of the year, and 21% belong to tribal Nations whose territories overlap with those states (5% live in Idaho where such legislation has been passed). The results are presented below. The average age of respondents was 33 years old, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest being 55 years old.

[1] <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights?impact=>

[2] <https://apnews.com/article/transgender-health-care-ban-kids-idaho-d17ca5b1549509bb4b21ec26e2691968?>

Context for Survey

The NPAIHB has been a champion in defending the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ AI/AN people to have access to quality healthcare that meets their needs. The Paths (Re)Membered Project works to provide the information and resources needed for tribal Nations in the PNW and nationally to provide gender-affirming care. This work has been supported by the NPAIHB tribal delegates representing PNW tribes in a few resolutions, the latest of which names the ability to provide and access gender-affirming care as a sovereign right of tribal Nations regardless of state attempts to limit it.

NPAIHB staff have recently fielded questions and concerns from tribal citizens, clinical providers at tribal and IHS facilities, and other caregivers over access to vital and life-saving GAC for AI/AN patients, especially young people. This survey was created to better understand the ways that state-based legislation is impacting AI/AN 2SLGBTQ+ people of voting age regardless of the state they are located in. This builds on a 2020 study conducted at the NPAIHB that demonstrated 2SLGBTQ+ people experienced several barriers to accessing adequate healthcare and that was prior to much of the recent legislative efforts to limit that further.

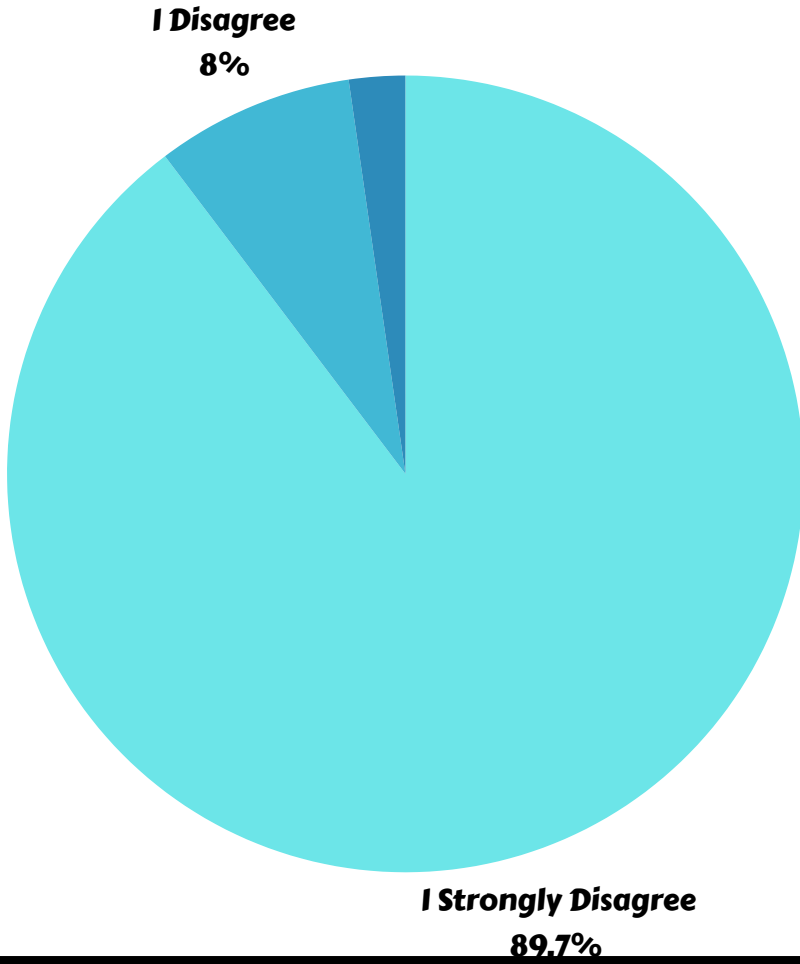
Results

Agreement and Perceptions

Results of the survey show that respondents have an overwhelmingly negative view of legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans and queer individuals. The majority (between 72 and 89%) of respondents strongly disagree with each law, and almost all respondents (between 83 and 97%) at least disagree with each law. The outlier is the law that would prevent trans girls from participating in girls' sporting events. Respondents were more likely to merely disagree (14.7%) with this law or to express that they “neither agree nor disagree” with this law (13.3%).

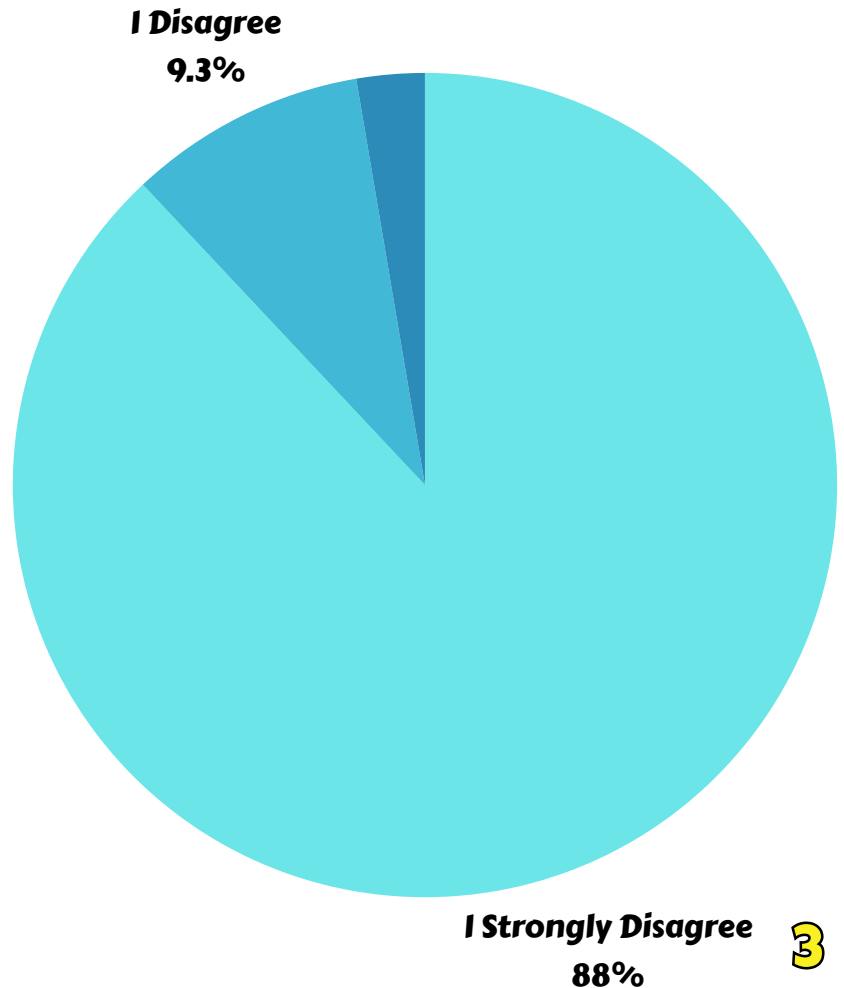
Respondents were also asked how they believed similar legislation would impact their lives if passed in their own state. Sixty percent of respondents believed similar legislation would make their lives “much worse,” while an additional 24% believed it would make their lives “a little worse.” Only sixteen percent reported that such legislation would “not affect my life much at all.”

Perception of Anti-2SLGBTQ+ Legislation



Agreement with proposed legislation in Idaho banning gender-affirming hormone-replacement therapy for minors

Agreement with proposed legislation in Georgia banning trans people from using gender-aligned bathrooms



I Neither Agree nor Disagree

13.3%

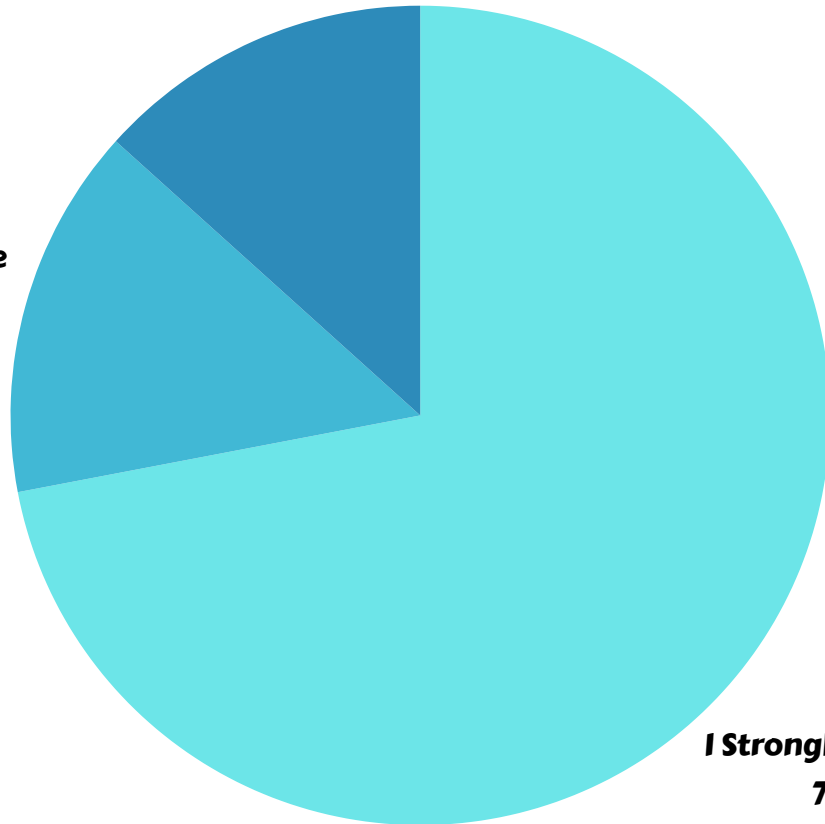
I Disagree

14.7%

Agreement with proposed legislation in Maine banning trans girls from participating in girls' sports.

I Strongly Disagree

72%



Perception that similar legislation would make respondent's life worse if passed in respondent's state.

It would not affect my life much at all

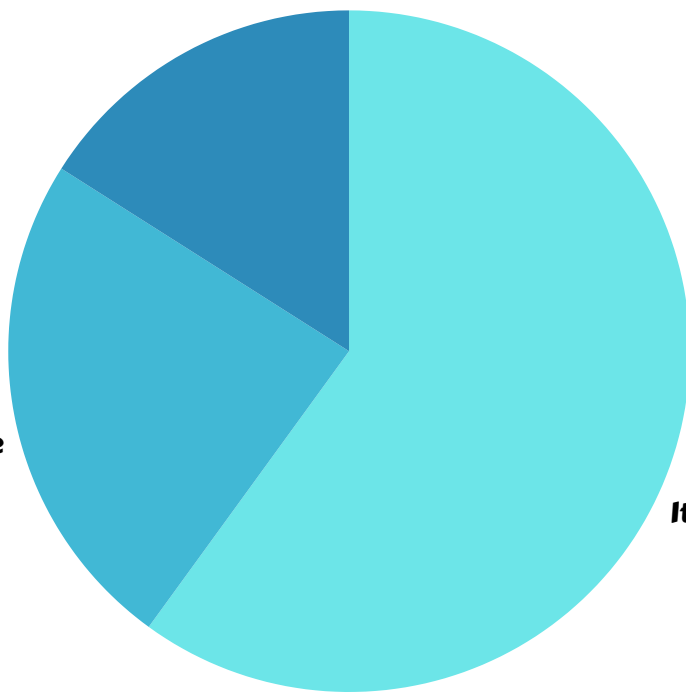
16%

It would make my life a little worse

24%

It would make my life much worse

60%



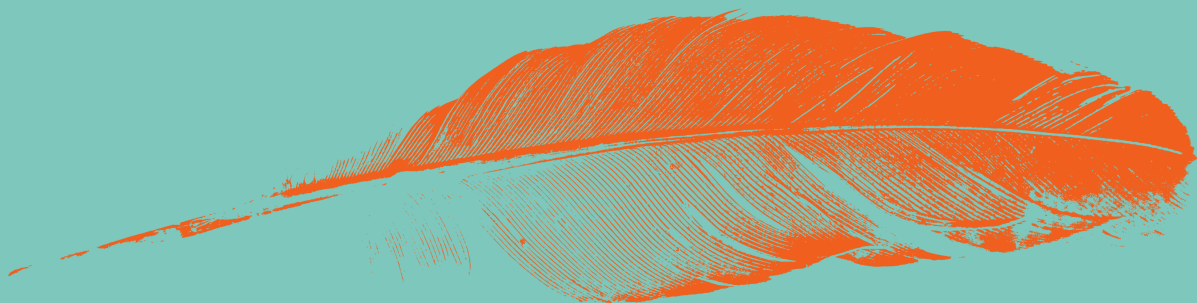
Awareness of anti-trans legislation and 2SLGBTQ AI/AN mental health

The results of the survey showed that 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults who were aware of laws that would limit the rights of trans and queer individuals - compared to those who were not aware - had several differences in mental health. First, 2SLGBTQ+ AI/AN who were aware of the legislation had worse mental health overall, based on a composite measure composed of nine questions measuring depression and anxiety. In addition, 2SLGBTQ+ AI/AN adults who were aware of the legislation felt sad, worried, unmotivated, and stressed more often compared to 2SLGBTQ+ AI/AN adults who were not aware of the legislation.

Awareness of anti-trans legislation and year-over-year mental health

Because this study is concerned with how national policy may be impacting mental health, the survey also included retrospective measures of year-over-year mental health, in which respondents were asked to compare their mental health now to their mental health one year ago across several measures. Results show that 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults who were aware of legislation have worse mental health than they did one year ago. and to a higher degree, based on a composite measure composed of nine questions measuring depression and anxiety who were not aware of the legislation. They also felt more irritable and frustrated than they did a year ago, to a higher degree than those who were not aware of the legislation.

In addition to quantitative questions, respondents were also asked to share their thoughts and feelings on legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals. After systematically coding each response, several themes emerged. Below, the emergent themes are outlined, along with illustrative quotations from respondents.



How is awareness of anti-trans legislation associated with mental health compared with one year ago?

Compared to those who are not aware, those who are aware of anti-trans legislation...	Regression Coefficient (N=75)	Significance level
Have worse mental health overall	B= 1.48*	p= .008
Feel sad more often	B= .204*	p= .029
Feel worried more often	B= .267*	p= .012
Feel irritable more often	B= .216*	p= .028
Feel unmotivated more often	B= .243*	p= .032
Feel stressed more often	B= .263*	p= .014

How is awareness of anti-trans legislation associated with mental health?

Compared to those who are not aware, those who are aware of anti-trans legislation...	Regression Coefficient (N=75)	Significance level
Have worse mental health than they did one year ago	B= 1.619*	p= .036
Feel irritable more often than they did one year ago	B= .243*	p= .036
Feel frustrated more often than they did one year ago	B=.223*	p= .026

Respondents' Thoughts and Feelings about Anti-2SLGBTQ Legislation

In addition to quantitative measures, respondents were also asked to share their thoughts and feelings on legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals. After systematically coding each response, several themes emerged. Below, the emergent themes are outlined, along with illustrative quotations from respondents.

Several respondents feel that legislation targeting trans and 2SLGBTQ individuals reflects colonialism and white supremacy.

"I am a cisgender Indigequeer woman who is in a community with Two-Spirit, trans, gender expansive, and gender nonconforming people; the passage of these oppressive laws would make life worse for everyone, and those proposing them are on a neo-colonial mission to police people's bodies."

"These laws are hateful reactions to far-right fearmongering and scapegoating of trans people. Trans and gender-expansive people have always lived on this land, and beliefs that we are to be hated or discarded are rooted in colonial white supremacy."

"It is hard to get [u]p, go to work, and go about everyday life when all of this is going on. It feels like we are being hunted. For Native folks, this is just continued colonialism and terrorism."

Many respondents shared how proposed legislation targeting trans and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals made them feel personally fearful and targeted.



“If these laws were put in place in my state, I would feel oppressed and very afraid to be who I am.”

“It is hateful and makes me feel like I am not accepted, loved, or human.”



“If laws prohibit me from being free to be me, that is a scary life to live on top of being an Indigenous person who is transgender. I feel scared to live in that kind of world. I would feel the anxiety every time I step out of the home.”

“Not only would these laws negatively impact me, but many of my friends, family and community members as well, which feels like it would compound my feelings and impact on me even more.”



Several other respondents took the position that, while the proposed legislation may or may not affect them personally, it would be harmful to 2SLGBTQ+ AI/AN communities in general.

“Although they technically would not affect me directly, these types of laws would be very harmful to our communities in general and would impact overall well-being, access to care, etc.”



“I'm not Trans, I am Indigiqueer but I know one thing- none of us are liberated unless all of us are liberated. We are all interconnected- these laws affect everyone.”

“Even though the laws in Washington are not following the trend of the rest of the country, I'm affected by them [because] I worry about the violence that is more acceptable towards people like me. I worry about Indigiqueer people especially.”



“This is harmful to the entire community.”



Finally, several respondents addressed legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals in terms of policymaking.



Many of the transphobic laws being passed in the last few years are so terrifying and are going to get trans people killed. Existing as a trans person is already difficult and the additional violence these laws will create will ultimately create [even] more barriers on various levels.

These laws are dangerous, life threatening and based on fear and hate as opposed to research and facts.



States need to be more pro active and come up with solutions rather than just shutting it down

I am glad to live in a state like Washington that protects trans people.



Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults who are aware of U.S. policies that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals overwhelmingly disapprove of such legislation. Results also demonstrate that respondents believe similar legislation, if passed in their own states, would make their lives worse.

Preliminary quantitative analyses suggest that awareness of legislation that would limit the rights of trans individuals is associated with worse mental health for 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults. These results should be interpreted cautiously because the sample size is small and the sample is likely not representative of the overall national population.

Finally, respondents expressed their perceptions that legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals was rooted in colonialism and White supremacy, makes them feel personally targeted and unsafe, and/or is harmful to the 2SLGBTQ AI/AN community in general. Respondents also expressed opinions on legislation that would limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals in terms of policymaking, calling on lawmakers to protect the rights of 2SLGBTQ people.

Recommendations

Based on these results, it is apparent that policymakers should carefully consider the impact of legislation intended to limit the rights and freedoms of trans individuals would have on 2SLGBTQ AI/AN adults and take action to protect the rights and interests of this multiply-oppressed population. Additionally, these results speak to the power of the stance taken by NPAIHB tribal Delegates that 2SLGBTQ+ tribal citizens, including those who are trans and gender diverse, deserve access to quality healthcare including gender-affirming care. These results also speak to the need to provide affirming mental health services to members of this population who are currently experiencing negative impacts due to awareness of efforts across the states to limit the rights and freedoms of 2SLGBTQ+ people broadly. They also communicate the urgency of finding ways to legally protect the provision of 2SLGBTQ+ affirming healthcare and best practices in IHS, tribal, and urban Indian care facilities. Lastly, we recommend that all Indian Health Service federally-administered service units, tribal PL-638 clinical facilities, urban Indian healthcare centers, and all community spaces across Indian Country incorporate strategies to affirm 2SLGBTQ+ tribal members and ensure access to quality, consistent and affirming care.

**All data in this report was analyzed, prepared, described, and presented by Stephanie M. Hansard, Ph.D.
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