

# PROMOTING HEALTH, JUSTICE AND WELL-BEING OF MINNESOTA'S LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

## Banning Conversion Therapy

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THERAPY SHOULD BE AFFIRMING AND HEALING, NOT SHAMING, NOT HARMFUL, NOT LETHAL.

### Issue Statement

There are 853 cities in Minnesota, and only two have enacted protections for LGBTQ+ people from the harmful practice of conversion therapy. All Minnesotans deserve access to safe, ethical, affirming, and evidence-based mental health care.

### Understanding the Problem

**Conversion therapy** is a “range of dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing a person’s sexual orientation, or efforts to change a person’s gender identity or expression”.<sup>12</sup>

These practices are often carried out within settings that use misleading language to describe conversion therapy practices which leads individuals to believe that it is less harmful, including titles such as “**reparative therapy**”.<sup>7</sup> Research indicates that LGBTQ+ individuals who have undergone conversion therapy experience debilitating consequences including:

- Decreased emotionally satisfying relationships.
- Lowered self-esteem.
- Loss of family and religious affiliations.
- Elevated depression and anxiety.
- Increased aggression and hostility.<sup>3</sup>

Conversion therapy even has lethal consequences for youth who are subjected to this form of so-called treatment. Increased suicidality resulting from self-hatred caused by inability to change sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1<sup>14</sup> to the right provides statistics on the rates of suicidality in 2018.

Common practices associated with conversion therapy are in direct breach of the professional ethics of mental health professionals.

These practices include telling patients that homosexuality is a disorder simply because of practitioner beliefs, abandoning clients for coming out as LGBTQ+, and pressuring clients to



Figure 1: Effects of Conversion Therapy<sup>14</sup>

change their sexual orientation.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, without enacting a ban on conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ youth, they are at risk of being forced into conversion therapy.

## Response by the Medical Establishment

### Affirming Homosexuality

In December 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Board of Trustees ruled to remove homosexuality as a mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) II.<sup>5</sup> In 1990 the World Health Organization (WHO) followed this by removing homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10).<sup>5</sup> These actions affirm that homosexuality is an identity and not an illness.

### Denouncing Conversion Therapy

**Dr. Robert Spitzer, the author leading the study used to support conversion therapy, retracted the findings of his study and apologized to the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>8</sup>**

The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) denouncement of conversion therapy practices is clear. In a 2013 statement, the APA affirmed that "no credible evidence exists that any mental health intervention can reliably and safely change sexual orientation; nor, from a mental health perspective does sexual orientation need to be changed."<sup>1</sup>

There are many other professional and advocacy organizations that have joined the APA in denouncing conversion therapy, including the National Association of Social Workers and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).<sup>11</sup> NAMI Minnesota has included in its legislative agenda for 2020 enacting a ban on conversion therapy for minors.<sup>9</sup> Figure 2 provides a listing of some of the many organizations that have joined in the [denouncement of conversation therapy](#) and are working to ban this practice with LGBTQ+ minors.



Figure 2: List of organizations that have denounced Conversion Therapy

## Personal Story: Jack Richter, LGBTQ+ Rights Activist

### “HEALING IS A DAILY PROCESS FOR ME”—JACK RICHTER

Conversion therapy negatively impacted nearly every facet of his life. Using bible passages to ostracize him and to push him to conversion therapy, Jack’s stepsister proclaimed he would go to hell and never see his mother. For Jack, this message led to his twelve-year nightmare with conversion therapy. Jack’s sexual orientation has not changed, however, his attitude towards conversion therapy has. For Jack, conversion therapy resulted in depression, suicidal ideation, conflict with family members, night terrors, vocational issues, and intense shame. Richter also lost friends who completed suicide after enduring conversion therapy efforts. One of the ways Jack finds healing is through education and advocacy efforts to spread awareness about the harmful impacts of conversion therapy.<sup>6</sup>

## The Status of Efforts to Ban Conversion Therapy

Without laws to protect them, LGBTQ+ youth are vulnerable and at risk for being forced to participate in conversion therapy.

### Nationwide

52% of LGBTQ+ minors reside within states where there are no laws or policies protecting them from conversion therapy.<sup>10</sup> There are currently 19 states within the United States that have state laws banning conversion therapy for minors. Additionally, North Carolina has a partial ban that prohibits taxpayer dollars to be used to pay for conversion therapy with a minor.<sup>10</sup>

### Minnesota

It is legal in Minnesota for licensed mental health professionals to practice conversion therapy. Duluth and Minneapolis have recently passed ordinances banning conversion therapy for minors within their city limits. In Minnesota only 9% of the LGBTQ+ youth population is protected against conversion therapy.<sup>10</sup>

The ban on conversion therapy is a controversial topic. Those in opposition of the ban on conversion therapy have stated the following:

- Banning conversion therapy would violate constitutional rights including right of therapist to free speech, the right of religion freedom, and parental rights to make decisions for their children.<sup>2</sup>
- LGBTQ+ individuals’ sexual orientation is a lifestyle choice as opposed to an actual sexual orientation and individuals who want the therapy should have access to it.<sup>8</sup>
- Individuals who undergo conversion therapy are provided with an informed consent form, therefore the clients are aware of the possible harms and benefits of treatment.<sup>4</sup>
- Banning conversion therapy takes away an individual’s right to self-determination.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that multiple court cases have determined that states have the right to regulate licensed professionals providing therapy in order to protect the public’s health and safety.<sup>2</sup> Conversion therapy regulates professional’s conduct, not their right to free speech and does not prevent religious individuals or leaders from providing religious guidance.

## Policy Recommendation

### ALL MINNESOTANS DESERVE ACCESS TO SAFE, ETHICAL, AFFIRMING, AND EVIDENCE-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE.

Conversion therapy is not mental health care, it is cruel and unusual punishment. Lawmakers are responsible for protecting the citizens of the cities and state they represent. Minnesota lawmakers must denounce practices that target and harm marginalized people. Two cities in Minnesota have taken steps to ban conversion therapy, but most of the state remains an oasis for this abusive practice. Minnesotans must challenge the unethical and destructive narrative that drives conversion practices.

- Enact a statewide ban on conversion therapy, protecting children and other vulnerable populations from conversion therapy practices. Enact repercussions for therapists found practicing illegally such as legal fees and removal of licensure.
- The 853 municipalities in Minnesota must join Duluth and Minneapolis in banning the practice of conversion therapy of LGBTQ+ minors within their city limits to show solidarity with a statewide ban.
- Conversion therapy is often disguised by other names. Prevent the conversion therapy industry from providing services under misleading guises.
- Invalidate distorted scientific data used to promote conversion therapy practices. Most data and research used to validate conversion therapy has been deemed insufficient or flawed. In fact, there is significant research documenting numerous negative long-term outcomes from such therapies.

### WE CANNOT WAIT FOR THE NATION OR OUR STATE TO BAN CONVERSION THERAPY. ASK YOUR LOCAL CITY COUNCIL TO BAN CONVERSION THERAPY IN YOUR COMMUNITY NOW.

To access this document online go to: [sbs.mnsu.edu/social-work/policy-briefs](https://sbs.mnsu.edu/social-work/policy-briefs)

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