

Increasing Colorectal Cancer Screening Among LGBTQ+ Communities

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States.¹ For people at average risk, regular screening starting at age 45 can help prevent colorectal cancer or catch it early when it is easier to treat. However, only 59% of age-eligible people are up to date with these recommendations.²

You have the power to make a difference in your community to help individuals detect, treat, and prevent colorectal cancer.



Why Focus on LGBTQ+ Communities?

People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or other diverse sexual orientations or gender identities (LGBTQ+) face barriers that make them less likely to get screened for colorectal cancer than the general population.³

Connect LGBTQ+ Individuals at High Risk for Colorectal Cancer With Screening Opportunities

Systemic discrimination may stress individuals in LGBTQ+ communities, leading to higher prevalence of colorectal cancer risk factors, such as:

-  Tobacco use
-  Alcohol consumption
-  Excess body weight among certain subgroups

It is important to know how these risk factors affect LGBTQ+ people and to support screening at age 45 or earlier if needed.

1 in 6 LGBTQ+ adults avoid health care due to previous discrimination.³



Providing resources for LGBTQ+ people to access culturally sensitive care is essential.

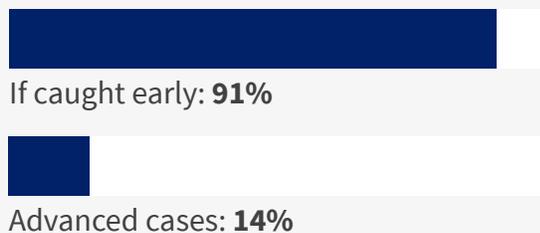
Early Detection Is Crucial

Colorectal cancer screening can prevent cancer through the detection and removal of precancerous growths on the inner lining of the colon or rectum called polyps.

Additionally, screening can help detect colorectal cancer early when it may be easier to treat.



5-year relative survival rates for colorectal cancer.¹



With early detection, the 5-year relative survival rate for colorectal cancer is much greater than when it's found after the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

However, only 20% of Americans ages 45 to 49 are getting screened for colorectal cancer.⁴

Be Aware of Colorectal Cancer Symptoms in Younger People

Approximately 43% of colorectal cancer diagnoses before age 50 are in people aged 45 to 49 years.⁵ People younger than 45 years are more likely to be diagnosed after symptoms develop and they seek out testing.

Anyone who experiences symptoms should undergo an appropriate diagnostic workup.

Signs and symptoms include:⁶

- A change in bowel habits that lasts for several days, including diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing stools
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that is not relieved
- Rectal bleeding with bright red blood
- Blood in the stool, which might make the stool look dark brown or black
- Cramping or abdominal pain
- Weakness and fatigue
- Unintended weight loss
- Low iron level or low blood counts (anemia)



You can help ensure everyone starts regular screening as soon as they become eligible—at age 45 for people at average risk or earlier for people at increased risk of the disease.

Actions to Support Colorectal Cancer Screening in LGBTQ+ Communities

Work to save lives from colorectal cancer by taking action to increase colorectal cancer screening in LGBTQ+ communities.

Form partnerships between LGBTQ+ communities and health care providers

- Use LGBTQ+ patient navigators as community liaisons.
- Educate LGBTQ+ communities on [screening options](#) and local resources.
- Find opportunities to increase colorectal cancer screening through your state cancer coalition, colorectal cancer roundtable, or local or state health departments.
- Promote colorectal cancer screening at LGBTQ+ events such as Pride, or in community centers.
- Seek partnering opportunities with five local LGBTQ+-allied groups or businesses to promote screening over the next six months.

Promote LGBTQ+ specific messaging and resources

- Share information on where and how to get screened with a listing of culturally sensitive providers.
- Make use of local news channels to share information about screening or care programs.
- Feature members of LGBTQ+ communities in media campaigns.

Engage local primary care offices

- Educate providers about specific research findings about [LGBTQ+ health disparities](#) and colorectal cancer prevention.
- Discuss best practices for screening LGBTQ+ adults, especially transgender individuals.
- Provide training for [cultural sensitivity](#) and advocate [for sexual orientation and gender identity \(SOGI\) information collection](#) along with other demographic information.
- Best practice is to have culturally trained patient navigators to assist patients with financial costs and scheduling appointments.
- Share how to make the office a safe space for members of LGBTQ+ communities.

Identify spokespeople

- Trusted clinicians can engage LGBTQ+ communities and their colleagues to find the best ways to increase screening in the area.
- Find or create LGBTQ+ colorectal cancer survivor panels. Help the survivors find their voice and advocate for screening with their own personal story.

Focus on messages supporting colorectal cancer screening

- Colorectal cancer is often a silent disease with no symptoms. Screening is for people with no symptoms.
- Nearly all major guidelines recommend that screening for average-risk individuals start at age 45 and continue through at least age 75.
- Colorectal cancer screening is covered by insurance under the Affordable Care Act and should be available with little to no out-of-pocket costs. For those without insurance, other financial assistance options may be available in the community.

Where You Can Find More Information



- Learn more about the [80% in Every Community](#) campaign to achieve colorectal cancer screening rates of 80% or higher in communities across the country.
- For more information about colorectal cancer and screening information visit the [American Cancer Society](#) or [CDC](#) website.
- The [National LGBT Cancer Network](#), [Cheeky Charity](#), the [Colon Cancer Coalition](#), and other organizations provide resources on colorectal cancer screening in LGBTQ+ communities.
- View the [American Cancer Society's prevention and screening resources](#) to find cancer facts for gay and bisexual men and cancer facts for lesbian and bisexual women as well as other resources.
- The Colorectal Cancer Alliance provides a [quiz for personalized screening recommendations](#).
- Visit the [National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable website](#) to find market research-based guidance on reaching unscreened individuals and other helpful resources.

Resources

1. Siegel RL, Giaquinto AN, Jemal A. Cancer statistics, 2024. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2024;74(1):12-49. doi:10.3322/caac.21820
2. American Cancer Society. *Colorectal Cancer Facts & Figures 2023-2025*. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/colorectal-cancer-facts-and-figures/colorectal-cancer-facts-and-figures-2023.pdf>
3. American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2024*. Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2024/2024-cancer-facts-and-figures-acf.pdf>
4. Star J, Siegel RL, Minihan AK, Smith RA, Jemal A, Bandi P. Colorectal cancer screening test exposure patterns in US adults 45 to 49 years of age, 2019-2021. *J Natl Cancer Inst*. 2024;116(4):613-617. doi:10.1093/jnci/djae003
5. Siegel RL, Wagle NS, Cercek A, Smith RA, Jemal A. Colorectal cancer statistics, 2023. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2023;73(3):233-254. doi:10.3322/caac.21772
6. Colorectal cancer signs and symptoms. American Cancer Society. Updated January 29, 2024. Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/colon-rectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-and-symptoms.html>



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