



A Spotlight on Two Spirit (Native LGBT) Communities

Over the course of the past year, Two Spirit (Native LGBT) communities have garnered a great deal of attention with respect to the status of their civil rights, health and personal safety, employment opportunities, and more. This is a synthesis of current research reflecting their realities.



The NCAI Policy Research Center wanted to highlight the status of Native LGBT and Two Spirit communities by sharing data and reports that show where we are gaining ground and where further support is needed.

Please click the statistics & resources to be directed to their source. We hope these resources will be of value to your work.

Glossary:

LGBT: Shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people.

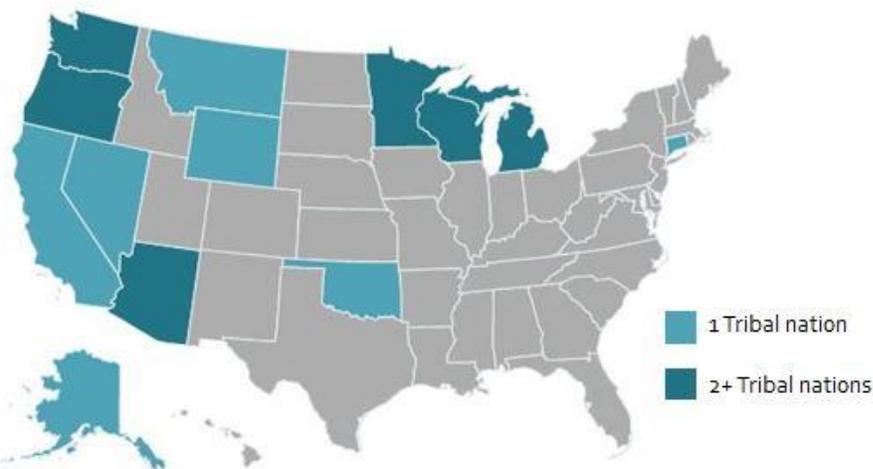
Two Spirit: Contemporary umbrella term that refers to the historical and current First Nations people whose individual spirits were a blend of female and male spirits. This term has been reclaimed by Native American LGBT communities in order to honor their heritage and provide an alternative to the Western labels of gay, lesbian, or transgender.

CIVIL RIGHTS

- ***Recognizing our Two Spirit relatives:*** The NCAI passed a [resolution](#) at our 2015 Mid Year Conference in St. Paul titled, "Standing in Support of our Two Spirit Relatives in our Communities and Nations."
- ***And supporting them in different venues—Native and non-Native:*** The Human Rights Campaign has been a strong ally and advocate for LGBT and Two Spirit Natives. They have collaborated with several Native leaders and advocates to share their stories [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).
- ***There are comprehensive resources available:*** The [Two Spirit Resource Directory](#), which was updated this month, features community information on Two Spirit societies and groups in the United States and Canada, organizations, online resources, and Two Spirit films and books.

- **Tribal nations can also access guidance:** With the [Tribal Equity Toolkit 2.0](#), tribal governments have access to examples of comprehensive resolutions and codes that support Two Spirit and LGBT justice in Indian Country.
- **And many have made strides for marriage equality:** With the Supreme Court striking down the Defense of Marriage Act, this year has brought attention to the legalization of same-sex marriage among states and tribes. The map below shows the extent to which marriage equality exists on tribal lands in the U.S.:

Tribal Nations with Legalized Same-Sex Marriage, 2015



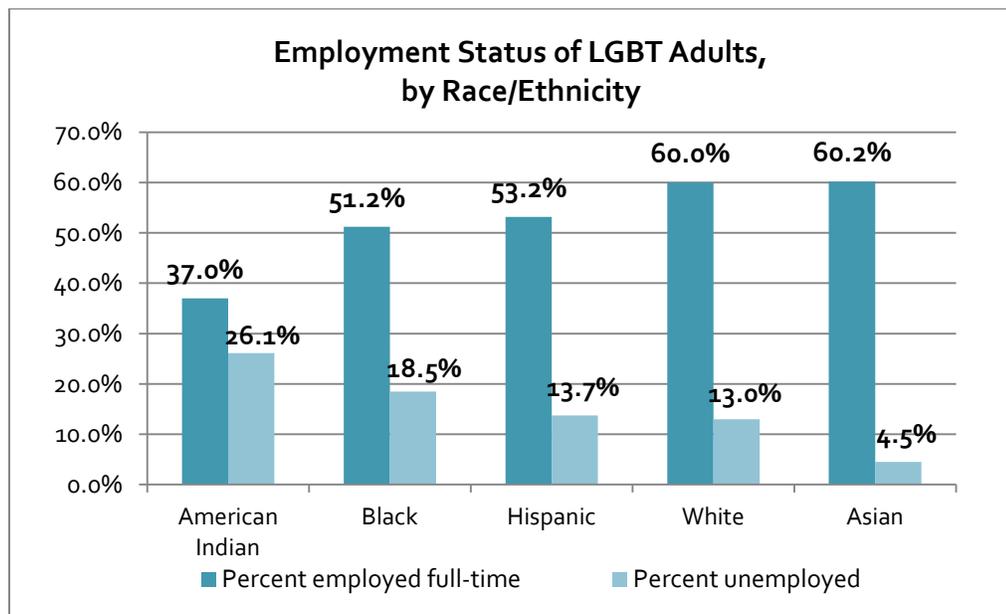
Listed below are the 24 tribes whose laws now allow same-sex marriage within their jurisdictions (please notify us of additions or errors):

- [Coquille Tribe](#) in Oregon (2009)
- [Mashantucket Pequot Tribe](#) in Connecticut (2010)
- [Squamish Tribe](#) in Washington (2011)
- [Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe](#) in Washington (2011)
- [Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians](#) in Michigan (2013)
- [Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians](#) in Michigan (2013)
- [Santa Ysabel Tribe](#) in California (2013)
- [Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation](#) in Washington (2013)
- [Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes](#) in Oklahoma (2013)
- [Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe](#) in Minnesota (2013)
- [Grand Portage Band of Chippewa](#) in Minnesota (2013)
- [Puyallup Tribe of Indians](#) in Washington (2014)
- [Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community](#) in Arizona (2014)
- [Wind River Indian Reservation](#) in Wyoming (2014)
- [Blackfeet Indian Reservation](#) in Montana (2014)
- [San Carlos Apache Tribe](#) in Arizona (2014)

- [Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes](#) in Oregon and Nevada (2014)
- [Fort McDowell Yavapai Community](#) in Arizona (2014)
- [Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#) in Wisconsin (2014)
- [Pascua Yaqui Tribe](#) in Arizona (2014)
- [Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes](#) in Alaska (2015)
- [Oneida Nation](#) in Wisconsin (2015)
- [Keweenaw Bay Indian Community](#) in Michigan (2015)
- [Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians](#) in Oregon (2015)

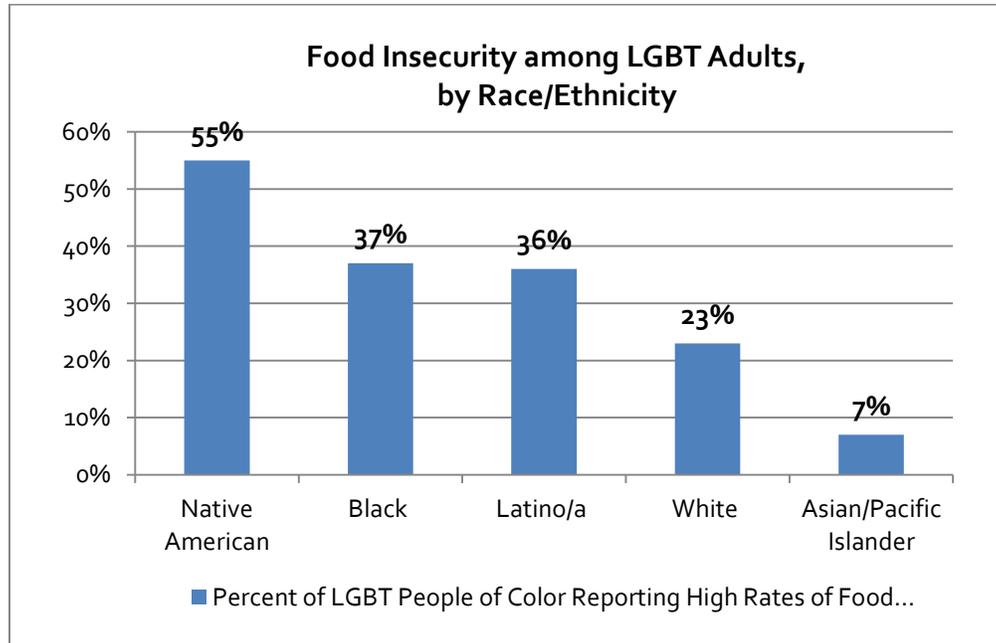
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

- **Many transgender Natives are facing workplace discrimination:** [36 percent](#) of Native American transgender respondents reported losing a job because they are transgender (Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project, 2015, p. 10).
- **Even when employment is maintained, it is far less likely to be full-time:** In a state survey of LGBT and Two Spirit people, American Indians reported the lowest rate of full-time employment at [37 percent](#) (Frazer and Pruden, 2010, p.5).



- **And these trends affect household incomes and the ability for same-sex couples to provide for their families:** A 2008 national survey of transgender and gender-nonconforming people revealed that [23 percent](#) of AI/ANs were in extreme poverty—earning less than \$10,000 per year (Harrison-Quintana et al., 2012, p. 1). More than [1 in 3](#) children (35.2 percent) being raised by Native same-sex couples are living below the federal poverty level (Albelda et al., 2009, p. 13).

- ***So much so, that it is hard to put food on their tables:*** [More than half](#) of LGBT Native Americans (55 percent) are food insecure—having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods (Gates, 2014, p. 2).

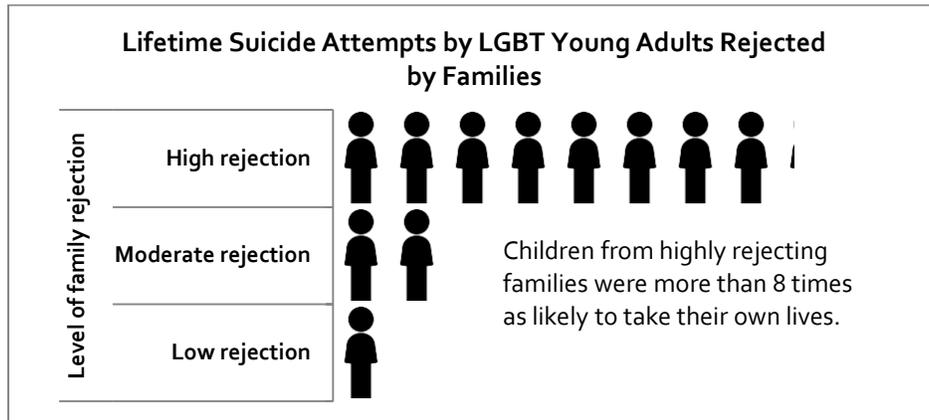


- ***Fortunately, some federal programs provide equal access to LGBT families:*** [SNAP, WIC, and School Lunch](#) programs do not narrowly define “families” or require that applicants for these services be related legally or by blood (Center for American Progress, Movement Advancement Project, and Family Equality Council, 2011, p. 4).

FAMILY ACCEPTANCE

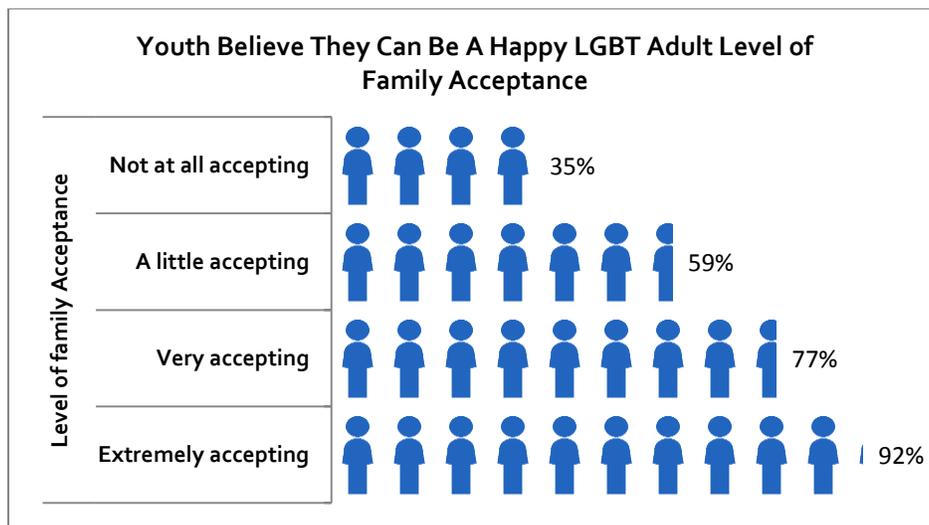
- ***Family acceptance is essential to the well-being of LGBT children:*** [research](#) shows that family acceptance promotes well-being and helps protect LGBT young people against risk, while family rejection has a serious impact on a gay or transgender young person’s risk for health and mental health problems. Family rejection includes trying to change a child’s orientation. While some parents consider this a caring reaction, gay children experience these behaviors as rejection and can cause LGBT youth to feel like they have to hide who they are.
- ***Families want to help LGBT youth, but often don’t know how.*** While some parents are trying to protect their children from harm, they can put a child at very high risk for suicide, depression and other health problems. Some types of rejecting behaviors, like blocking access to gay friends and resources or preventing a child from attending family events, are just as harmful as physically beating a gay or transgender child ([Family Acceptance Project, 2009](#), p. 8).

- Risks from rejection are severe:** LGBT young adults who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence were: more than 8 times more likely to have attempted suicide; about 6 times more likely to report high levels of depression; more than 3 times more likely to use illegal drugs compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection. ([Ryan et al, 2009](#))



Source: [Family Acceptance Project, 2009](#)

- Families love their LGBT children, but sometimes must learn how to protect and support LGBT children:** When parents and family communicate that they value and love their LGBT child, children also learn to value themselves.



Source: [Family Acceptance Project, 2009](#)

- More resources:** *Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children* by Caitlin Ryan, Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University, 2009.

HEALTH STATUS AND SUICIDE RISK

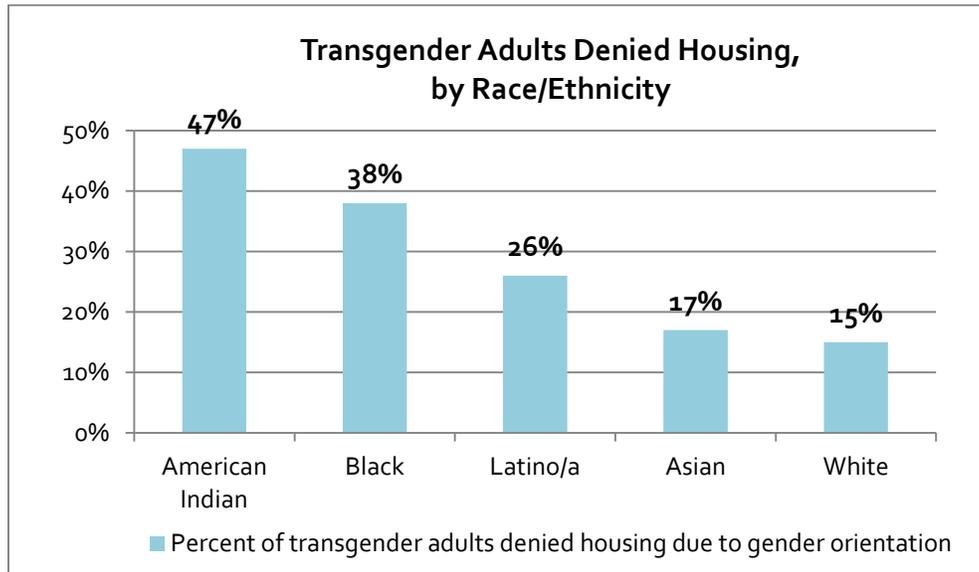
- ***Culturally-appropriate health education and services are critical:*** Native gay and Two Spirit men are at higher risk for HIV transmission and infection. In 2013, [71 percent](#) of new HIV diagnoses (120 of 169) among AI/AN men were attributed to homosexual (M2M) contact (CDC, 2015).
- ***As is building resilience in the face of suicidal risk:*** [56 percent](#) of Native transgender and gender nonconforming respondents in a national survey had attempted suicide, as compared with 41 percent of all other transgender groups (Harrison-Quintana et al., 2012, p. 1).
- ***But being rooted in one's identity heals:*** Research has revealed that urban LGBT and Two Spirit Natives' experiences of discrimination *decreases* their self-rated health and *increases* self-reported [physical pain and impairment](#). However, this trend was diminished if the individual felt high levels of *actualization*, which is positive integration between self-identity and racial group identity (Chae and Walters, 2009).
- ***That's why we need to support more conversations internally:*** This year, both NCAI and the United National Tribal Youth (UNITY) hosted some of their first-ever dialogues on Two Spirit and LGBT identity and issues. Find resources [here](#) and [here](#).
- ***As well as policy conversations at the federal level:*** In 2013, SAMHSA issued new guidance concerning [standards of care](#) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and Two Spirit AI/AN youth. SAMHSA has also published several online resources through its Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center [Two Spirit Learning Community](#). And in July 2015, the Indian Health Service hosted a [listening session](#) on LGBT Native health issues.

SAFETY AND SHELTER

- ***Many LGBT and Two Spirit Natives struggle to find safety:*** In one state survey, nearly [1 in 3](#) LGBT Natives (29.4 percent) reported experiencing hate violence—a higher rate than any other LGBT group (Frazer and Pruden, 2010, p.10). Research with Native lesbian, bisexual, and Two Spirit women revealed high prevalence of both sexual ([85 percent](#)) and physical ([78 percent](#)) assault (Lehavot et al., 2009).
- ***Too frequently, schools are venues for violence against youth:*** [54 percent](#) of Native gay or lesbian students experience physical violence because of their sexual orientation (Diaz and Kosciw, 2009, p. 13) and more than [1 in 3](#) reported missing class at least one month for fear of being bullied or harassed (Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project, 2015, p. 25).
- ***And safe homes may also be hard to find:*** It is estimated that between [20 and 40 percent](#) of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBT, questioning, intersex, or Two Spirit. [26 percent](#) of

LGBT youth were forced from their home upon revealing their sexual identity to their parents (Ray et al., 2006, p. 11-14; 4).

- **For transgender Natives, housing discrimination is not uncommon:** [47 percent](#) of AI/ANs have been denied a home or apartment because they were transgender or gender non-conforming (Grant et al., 2011, p. 113).



- **However, there has been some movement to eradicate these trends:** SAMHSA hosted a Listening Tour in 2010 and produced a [report](#) with promising practices for supporting homeless LGBT youth. In June 2015, the Obama Administration and HUD announced plans to roll out [new housing protections](#) for LGBT Natives on tribal lands.

DATA RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Improving research and science:** The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law published a ["Best Practices for Asking Questions about Sexual Orientation on Surveys"](#) report in 2009. We encourage our partners engaged in collecting tribal data that includes sexual minorities to consult this guide for detailed recommendations.
- **Recommendations for the Indian Health Service:** Representatives from the NCAI and its Policy Research Center attended the IHS listening session and presented [recommendations](#) for improving: cultural competency with AI/AN LGBT individuals; measures of culturally relevant services; data collection measures; intake processes; LGBT health education; referrals; among other areas.

*If you have further resources to share, please email research@ncai.org.