

DATA FOR INDIGENOUS JUSTICE LGBTQ2SIA+ DATA FORUM REPORT 2022

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PREVENTION NOW





BACKGROUND

Data for Indigenous Justice (DIJ) homes the database for missing, murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, plus peoples in Alaska. With our community, we have been able to reclaim the data and advocate for justice. In addition to reclaiming data for the benefit of Indigenous peoples, we know it is necessary to advocate for systemic change. The current inequitable data systems which have not accurately represented Indigenous peoples have also left many gaps as well for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, two-spirit, intersex, asexual, plus (LGBTQ2SIA+) peoples.

At the center of the MMIWG2S crisis is the genocide of Indigenous cultures where women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples are targets of violence. Colonization both historical and ongoing has targeted Indigenous systems and lifeways which kept us healthy and well. Fluid gender spectrums where all genders hold power were replaced with restrictive binary constructs in an effort to justify colonial extravism and promote white, hetero-patriarchal values. Sexual and gendered violence is a tool of dispossession that we still live through and experience today. Seeking justice for the MMIWG2S crisis then is inherently linked to gender justice and the strengthening of Indigenous knowledge systems that support and uplift all genders. The invisibility of MMIWG2S and LGBTQ2SIA+ data are direct risks to health. The lack of accurate representation in data systems directly impacts the allocation, availability, and accessibility of resources across sectors.



PURPOSE

The forum purpose was to listen to LGBTQ2SIA+ community members, service providers, data system managers, and advocates to start a conversation on how we can better serve LGBTQ2SIA+ people in data systems not only within DIJ but across organizations, in programming, and in advocacy. In 2021 more than 180 community and allied organizations wrote a letter to health leaders with a clear charge, “End the invisibility, collect LGBTQI+ health data now!”

Additionally, the National Academy of Sciences released a comprehensive report (2022) for improving data collection beyond the binary and with improved measures. This report provides information specific to important discussions for the context of Alaska. We invited folks within our existing ally network who have rich life experiences, stories, technical training, skills, and various expertise from local, state, and national sectors to share their perspectives, insights, and advice. DIJ hosted two virtual, 2-hour forums. Participants chose which forum they would attend based on their schedules and availability. Recording and notes were used with permission to write this report.

SUMMARY

These two forums provided incredible insight and a wide scoping range of opportunities to improve data for LGBTQ2SIA+ peoples. This summary section shares three synthesized areas heard and discussed from participants; the intention of data information, interactions with data systems, and narrative and identity. This is a summary intended to provide starting points for improved data that serves the well-being of LGBTQ2SIA+ peoples. There was incredible nuance and many complexities that may not be fully captured here; DIJ is thankful for the generous sharing from participants. Recommendations are provided in the next section.

INTENTIONS OF DATA INFORMATION

The first overarching theme were often attempts to back track and answer questions such as what data? And for what purposes? From local, state, and national organizations, the current collection of data isn't always clear what data is being collected and for what intentions. It was noted that this gap is sometimes created by the discrepancy of what funding sources require for data collection versus the community which programs serve. Certainly folks aimed to have data that informed their work and create better outcomes for those they serve. For some, like non profits for example, ideally informing prioritization of services and programming. However, overwhelmingly there is little resource for specific and intentional creation, analysis, and adaptations of systems to implement. Therefore, the information that is being collected is not always useful. Specifically, the balance of having enough information while acknowledging that more data isn't necessarily helpful either. Answering who and what the data collection is for are essential starting posts. However, many find themselves either inheriting data information systems or simply having no available data information; both having to navigate the utility from there. The issue of useful data is closely related to the second theme found, interactions with data systems.

INTERACTIONS WITH DATA SYSTEMS

Participants described personal and paid work interactions with LGBTQ2SIA+ data collection. It's known that the science of data is endless; from the way, questions are asked, interpreted, and answered. Gathering LGBTQ2SIA+ data especially requires safety; safety of who is asking, where one is being asked, and if they are informed why they are being asked. Without safe spaces for data collection, folks may feel uncomfortable answering honestly or not want to answer at all. Participants also shared complexities of cultural norms of asking questions or forms of appropriate inquiry. For example, being direct, age differences and dynamics, awareness of consequences to answers, small community relations, and relating as people of color. In short, the reality of disclosure through data collection poses real issues of safety, regardless of western and technical protections. Variables of factors regarding safety- (if they felt safe with the person asking, if it was electronic questionnaires if they were in crisis or not, if they felt the need to 'code switch', if they thought their answers would impact their services, etc.) were all acknowledged as possibly impacting the answers and hence the accuracy of data around identifying as LGBTQ2SIA+.

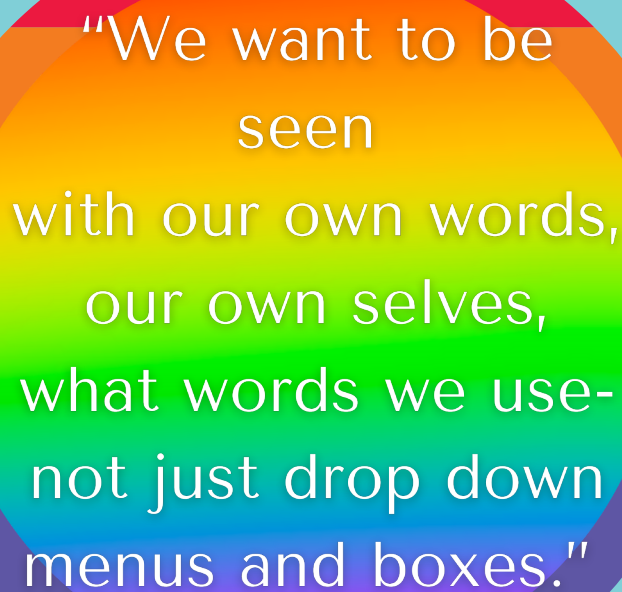
Examples specifically from interactions and observation of law enforcement had glaring gaps where no information is being asked regarding gender to inform incidents. Misgendering and lack of questioning around gender can mean large amounts of missing context and information that impacts cases from missing persons, hate crimes, and determining case classification such as homicide or suicide.

Discussion on filling out LGBTQ2SIA+ information highlighted many opportunities as well. Sometimes being asked about gender seemed to have nothing at all to do with some surveys. In one example, where the options were 'male, female, or other'- the limiting options were 'archaic' and begged the question of why ask at all? The 'other' box is especially troubling when no further explanation or expression is offered. In situations of health care, the concern of poor LGBTQ2SIA+ data collection leads to concerns about inadequate information to provide care; how are providers making important recommendations of care without an understanding of their patient's identity? The notion of identity is discussed more in-depth here in the third and final theme reported here.



NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

A large part of the discussions with forum participants were expressions of identity within data systems and how folks could best be represented within these. As one participant stated: "We want to be seen with our own words, our own selves, what words we use- not just drop down menus and boxes."



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The previously discussed balance of accurate representative data with useful data remains the goal. The question being, "How can we best see you?" Fluid notions of identity were discussed in data collection as well. This was indicated through participants sharing how one may identify inherently changes, evolves, and answering once for example, at the start of receiving services, may not suffice later on. The temporal and time situatedness of LGBTQ2SIA+ identities is an important point to consider in navigating data systems.

Participants spoke to the direct connection of identity with health and wellbeing. Though this forum emerged to address missing and murdered peoples, the discussion of suicide was close in topic. Building societal awareness and acceptance of a spectrum of gender identities seemed to be a high priority of the usefulness of collecting LGBTQ2SIA+ data. Many sectors from local, state, to national lack basic information on gender spectrums and those who identify in those spectrums to adequately inform any work being done. Therefore the larger narrative is incomplete without these voices, stories, and lived experiences. The created invisibility leads to gross underestimates of what LGBTQ2SIA+ experience; both in way of violences such as missing and murdered persons, but also in way of what is being done well and identifying assets and strengths of LGBTQ2SIA+ identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PATHWAYS FORWARD

Although this forum is a starting point in better understanding and serving LGBTQ2SIA+ peoples in data, there were specific recommendations that emerged from the forums, bulleted here.

- Include processes and procedures that include why the information is being asked and what it will be used for. This can contribute to safe spaces as well as better and more accurate answers/data.
- Do not use force choice options. An example would be having the options of: 'female', 'male', or 'transgender'. A better option would have gender-inclusive options to select in addition to a tiered question such as 'do you identify as transgender' with options queued from a yes response.
- In regard to fluidity, have language indicators built into questions such as 'at this time' if recurring questions are not an available or appropriate option.
- It was recommended as an alternative to 'other' boxes without explanation, that write-in options may help define what 'other' includes. Systematically and regularly reviewing the write-in option could then be used to shape further development of data collection and these data points of identifiers.
- Ensure the collection and use of LGBTQ2SIA+ data goes beyond articulating the risks, targeting, un-health, and 'vulnerabilities' of these persons. Look expansively to analyze how the identities of LGBTQ2SIA+ peoples are assets and protective factors of identity of self and community.

CONCLUSIONS

Disparities and inequities through erasure in data need to stop. Justice can begin with creating visibility, accountability, and inclusiveness in data systems. The crisis of MMIWG2S through missing data is interconnected to the issue of LGBTQ2SIA+ invisibility in data. There is a lot of work to be done in advocating for data systems change. There is a great need to create visibility for underserved populations that would greatly increase accessibility to resources. Data is an essential step to ensuring that populations are represented to improve services across sectors. Growing awareness and proposed solutions are gaining momentum across the nation and here in Alaska. Improved data not only better serves community members but helps organizations capture the quality work they are doing.

GRATITUDE:

Data for Indigenous Justice and Prevention Now are grateful for the participants who gave their time and thoughts on this important topic. We recognize the lived experience of expertise that many shared so generously. We hope to continue the important work of creating just systems for the health and benefit of all genders in our community.



PREVENTION NOW



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