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Amida Care Releases Report on Transgender Health

“Breaking Barriers to Transgender Health Care” addresses challenges facing the transgender community and offers recommendations to improve health outcomes

Download a copy of the report [here](#)

New York, NY (April 1, 2019) - Today, Amida Care, a specialized health plan for people living with or at elevated risk for HIV, released a report detailing the barriers to care faced by Americans of transgender experience. Titled *“Breaking Barriers to Transgender Health Care,”* the report outlines recommendations to address the health care needs of transgender individuals and social factors such as housing and employment that influence health outcomes. Amida Care has a long history of advocating for transgender health.

“Health care is a right, not a privilege, and people of transgender experience need and deserve access to comprehensive, culturally competent, gender-affirming health care,” said **Doug Wirth, President and CEO of Amida Care**. “To improve health outcomes, we need to break down the barriers that keep health care out of reach for so many in the transgender community—barriers like discrimination, transphobia, lack of employment opportunities, and housing instability. Amida Care is committed to being an innovator in advancing access to care and services for transgender individuals.”

Transgender Americans face systemic discrimination at nearly every turn: from family members, at school and work, in the justice system, and in access to housing. Discrimination in health care settings has left an entire segment of the population without reliable access to competent health care. For instance:

- In a recent survey, **1 in 4 transgender respondents reported having to teach health care professionals**, including their medical providers, about transgender care;
- Among transgender Americans living with HIV, **19% reported being refused treatment** due to their gender identity, and **28% report they have been harassed in a doctor's office**;
- There are **36 U.S. states** where insurance companies can exclude coverage of gender-affirming services.

Given this, it's no surprise that many transgender individuals suffer from poor physical and behavioral health. For example:

- Transgender women are **49 times more likely to be living with HIV** than the general population;
- **40% of transgender individuals report attempting suicide** (~9X the rate of the general U.S. population);
- Nearly **1/3 of transgender individuals report using drugs** (~3X the rate of substance use among the general U.S. population).

“At Amida Care, we believe in caring for the whole person, which means providing access to primary care, hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries, sexual health services, HIV treatment and prevention, substance use treatment, and mental health services for our transgender members,” said **Kevin Steffens**, RN, MBA, Vice President of Clinical Services and programs at Amida Care. “There is a great need for increased community resources for transgender people, particularly for those who don’t have a strong network of supportive family and friends.”

The report outlines several recommendations to address the health care, housing and employment needs of transgender individuals. They include:

- Implementing cultural competency trainings for all health provider staff, including physicians, individuals in administrative and support roles, and individuals who work at insurance plans;
- Affirmatively hiring transgender individuals as staff in living-wage jobs;
- Updating forms, surveys, and other materials to include gender markers that allow people to self-identify;
- Mandating health insurance coverage for gender-affirming care for transgender employees in private and public sector jobs; and
- Passing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies in housing and employment, such as the Equality Act of 2017.

“There are simple things that health care providers can do to create a truly inclusive, welcoming, and gender-affirming setting, where people of transgender and gender non-binary experience feel supported,” said **Zil Goldstein**, NP, Associate Medical Director for Transgender and Gender Non-Binary Health at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center and former Program Director at the Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery at Mount Sinai. “By taking the time to provide cultural competency training to all staff, hiring transgender people, and updating documents to reflect someone’s true identity, we slowly break down some significant barriers that have kept people out of care for too long.”

“An important part of being a culturally competent health care provider is including people of transgender experience as an integral part of your staff and health care team. As a transgender woman, I understand the barriers that keep health care out of reach for many in our community, and I’m able to use my lived experience to advocate for our members and ensure they’re getting the care they need and deserve,” said **Octavia Lewis**, Community Ambassador at Amida Care.

About Amida Care

Amida Care Inc. is a not-for-profit health plan that specializes in providing comprehensive health coverage and coordinated care to New Yorkers with complex chronic conditions, including HIV and behavioral health disorders; and people who are of transgender experience or who are homeless, regardless of HIV status. Amida Care has a wide network of health care providers throughout New York City and is the largest Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP) in New York State. For more information, visit www.amidacareny.org.