

April 16, 2021

Maria McKenna
Office of Data Management and Outcomes Assessment
MA Department of Public Health
250 Washington St., 6th floor
Boston, MA 02108-4619

Dear Maria McKenna,

I am writing on behalf of Fenway Health. Since 1971, Fenway Health has been working to make life healthier for the people in our neighborhood, the LGBTQIA+ community, people living with HIV/AIDS and the broader population. Fenway was founded as part of the free clinic movement by students who believed that “health care should be a right, not a privilege.”

We understand that as the BRFSS representative in our state, this week you have the opportunity to vote on whether the sexual orientation/gender identity (SOGI) module will become part of the BRFSS core survey. You, along with the other BRFSS coordinators across the country, have an unprecedented opportunity to affect the health of LGBTQ+ people with this vote.

COVID has thrown the issue of health disparities in the U.S. population into high relief. But unfortunately the lack of routine SOGI data collection on health documents means the impact of this catastrophic health issue has been largely masked for LGBTQ+ people. In fact, some of the only data available about how this affects our communities has come from the 31 states who chose to collect SOGI on BRFSS in 2017-19. Through [this recent CDC analysis](#) we learn that sexual minorities have higher reported rates of every single COVID-19 related underlying condition the researchers examined. This is just one example of what is learned when data are collected.

SOGI data collection also helps us in our work; it helps us understand what the important health issues are for our communities and helps us write successful proposals to help eliminate our health disparities.

We urge you to consider your vote this week, we would be happy to talk further about how this can help a particularly vulnerable group of people in our state and hope that after close consideration, you vote to add SOGI to the BRFSS core.

Sincerely,

Carl Sciortino
Executive Vice President of External Relations
Fenway Health

Sean Cahill
Director of Health Policy Research
The Fenway Institute

Carrie Richgels
Manager of Policy and Advocacy
Fenway Health