

# STATE OF TRANSGENDER CALIFORNIA

MARCH 2009

California's transgender community is experiencing overwhelming discrimination and marginalization despite protective legislation barring discrimination in employment, insurance, public education and government programs. A startling number of transgender and gender non-conforming community members have dealt with discrimination, harassment and unemployment directly linked to their gender identity. The community also faces high rates of homelessness and difficulty accessing health care. While California's laws have done much to protect the transgender community, further education, investment and legislation is needed to make the spirit of those protections a reality.

## What is the state of the economic health of transgender Californians?

During the spring and summer of 2008 the Transgender Law Center (TLC) conducted a study of the economic health of the transgender community in California. We gathered 646 responses from transgender adults living in the state, and found alarmingly high rates of discrimination in employment, housing and healthcare.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Good News

Transgender Californians have been legally protected from discrimination and harassment in employment since 2004.



Transgender respondents are almost twice as likely to hold a bachelor's degree as the general California State population.



Transgender Californians have been legally protected from discrimination and harassment in housing since 2004.



California prohibits discrimination in public accommodations, including medical care, based on gender identity.



### Bad News

Seventy percent of the transgender community reports experiencing workplace harassment or discrimination directly related to their gender identity.

Transgender respondents are twice as likely to be living below the poverty line of \$10,400 when compared to the general population.

1 in 5 respondents have been homeless since they first identified as transgender.

Thirty percent of the community reports postponing care for illness or preventive care due to disrespect or discrimination from doctors or other health care providers.

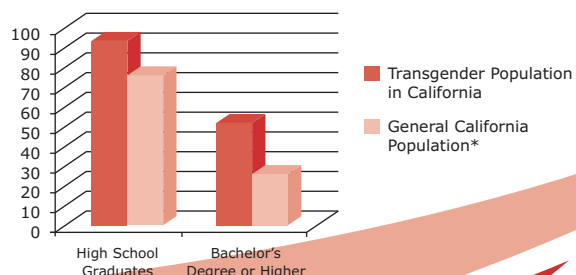
## Income

Transgender survey respondents are twice as likely to be living below the poverty line of \$10,400 per year when compared to the general population. Approximately 23% of the transgender community earned wages below the national poverty level last year. Survey respondents report a 14% unemployment rate; during the months that the survey was distributed the statewide unemployment rate averaged 7%.

## Education

Transgender Californians who responded to the survey are almost twice as likely to hold a bachelor's degree as the general California State population. Ninety-four percent of the transgender population sampled in California over the age of 25 holds a high school diploma or equivalent.

Among transgender respondents, racial background strongly impacts levels of education. Over 40% of white respondents hold a Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral degree. Just 14% of Hispanic and non-white respondents hold a Bachelor's degree or higher.



## Workplace Harassment

Seventy percent of the transgender community reports some form of workplace harassment or discrimination directly related to their gender identity.

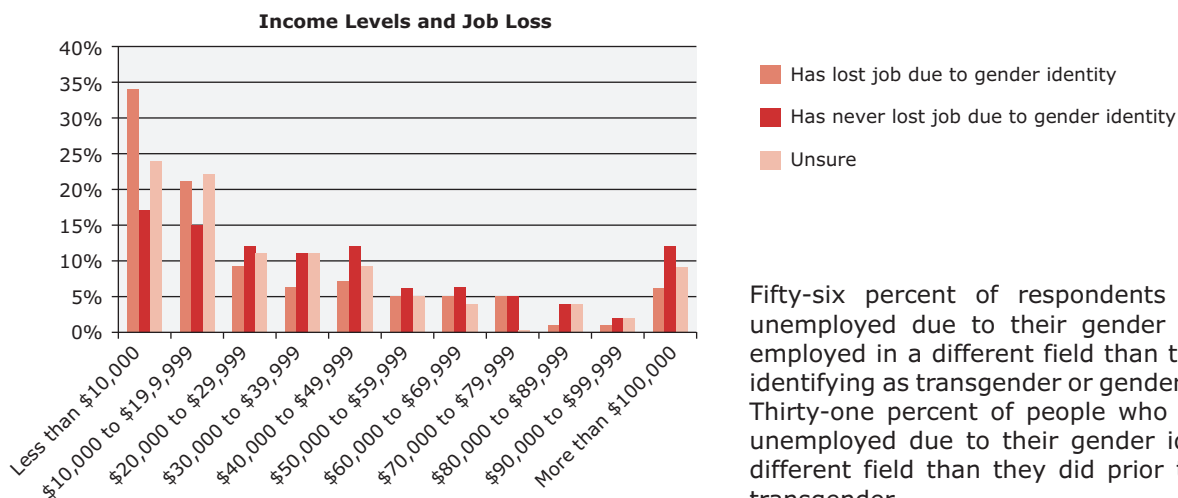
- 27% experienced verbal harassment
- 22% experienced unfair scrutiny and/or discipline
- 22% were harassed by coworkers
- 17% were harassed by supervisors
- 15% experienced sexual harassment
- 11% were denied access to restrooms that matched their gender identity
- 9% had their access to customers or clients restricted or eliminated

**Despite widespread employment discrimination, only 15% of those who reported some form of discrimination or harassment filed a complaint.** Of those who did not file any complaint, 44% did not think they could get the assistance they needed or prove their case. **Thirty percent did not know if transgender people have any legal protections against discrimination.** Of those who did not file a complaint, 27% did not know how or where to file a complaint and 26% were afraid to lose their job. Thirteen percent of those persons were afraid to come out in order to file a complaint.

## Job Loss and Career Changes

**Almost half of all respondents report experiencing some loss of employment either as a direct or possible result of their gender identity.** Thirty percent of respondents reported that they have been unemployed as a direct result of being transgender or gender non-conforming. Fourteen percent report that they were fired because of their gender identity. Another 13% were denied a promotion, 12% were laid off, and 10% were reorganized out of a job due to their gender identity.

**People who have lost a job due to their gender identity are more likely to have a lower income.** For example, with even one incidence of losing a job due to gender identity, 34% of respondents make less than \$10,000 per year. This is twice the rate of those persons who have not lost a job due to their gender identity.



Fifty-six percent of respondents who have been unemployed due to their gender identity are now employed in a different field than they were prior to identifying as transgender or gender non-conforming. Thirty-one percent of people who have never been unemployed due to their gender identity work in a different field than they did prior to coming out as transgender.

***"I was fired at my last job, where I worked as a model employee ... because I asked for a month off for surgery. I was passed up for promotions given to those less qualified."***

## Health Care Access

Transgender Californians report alarmingly high rates of denial of basic health care services.

- 33% were denied surgery
- 27% were denied hormones
- 21% were denied counseling and mental health services
- 15% were denied gender-specific care (such as pap smears for transmen and prostate exams for transwomen)
- 10% were denied primary health care

When members of the transgender community do seek out medical care, the options for competent care are limited and patients often have to educate their healthcare providers. Thirty-five percent of respondents recount having to teach their doctor or care provider about transgender people in order to get appropriate care. Eleven percent had a provider refuse to treat them because they are transgender.

**Some 30% of the community reports that they postponed care for illness or preventive care due to disrespect or discrimination from doctors or other health care providers.** Forty-two percent of respondents delayed seeking care because they could not afford it. Twenty-six percent report health conditions that have worsened because they postponed care.

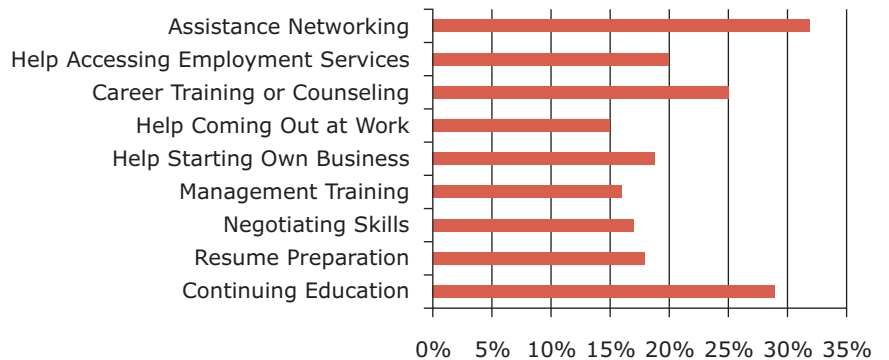
## Housing

A startling percentage of the transgender community reports being homeless since identifying as transgender or gender non-conforming. **Over 20% of survey respondents indicated that they have been homeless since they first identified as transgender.** Community members who are homeless face high levels of discrimination within the shelter system. **Thirty-one percent of transgender people who have tried to stay at shelters report that they have been denied access to a shelter.** Fifteen percent of those who attempted to stay in a shelter were thrown out after shelter staff found out they were transgender. Forty percent of those respondents were harassed by other shelter residents and 31% were harassed by shelter staff. Almost 40% of those who had spent time in a shelter report being afraid of being attacked by shelter residents. Ten people reported being attacked by other residents, and four people reported being attacked by shelter staff. Ultimately 33% decided to leave the shelter system due to poor treatment and unsafe conditions.

As a whole, the transgender community reports frequent discrimination in the housing market. Nineteen percent of respondents indicate that they have faced housing discrimination because of their gender identity or presentation.

## Employment Resources Needed

Given the high rate of discrimination against transgender community members, there is a significant need for resources appropriate to creating trans-friendly workplaces and providing transgender persons with the tools they need to transition in the workplace. Over three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that they were interested in some form of workplace assistance.



***"After beginning transition, I was asked/forced to leave a high paying management job after years of successive promotions."***

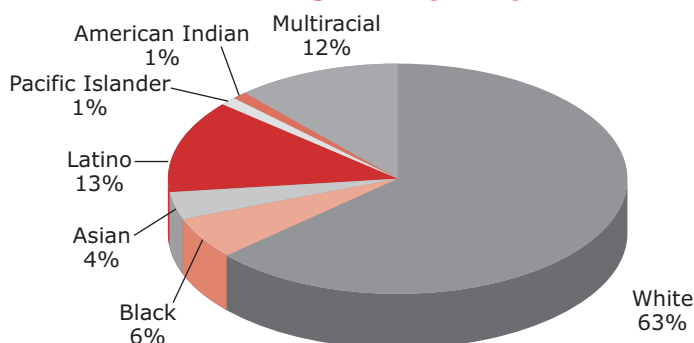
## Limitations to Data

There are several limitations to the data provided by this study. To begin with, respondents are likely to be people already connected to the transgender community. Also, it is difficult to know which parts of the population are over and under represented based on this study alone, because relatively little is known about the demographics and size of the transgender population as a whole in California. Finally, the survey used to collect the data was comprised of 53 questions, making it likely that highly literate and educated respondents are over-represented.

## Demographics of Respondents

All respondents reside in California and are over the age of 18. Respondents were disproportionately white, with 63% of responses coming from white transgender community members. The survey was available in Spanish and English. Thirty-two of the 646 surveys were completed in Spanish. Approximately 34% of respondents identify as transgender women (male-to-female) and 32% identify as transgender men (female-to-male). Respondents also identify with other terms, such as: gender non-conforming (13%), transsexual (38%), feminine male (5%), genderqueer (18%), two-spirit (9%), masculine female (3%), and transgender (46%). These categories are non-exclusive, so that people may identify with more than one category.

### Race Among Survey Respondents



The surveyed individuals were residents of 33 of the state's 58 counties. Seventy-two percent of the surveyed transgender population are residents of five counties with large urban centers: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Alameda, San Diego and Santa Clara. These counties account for some 57% of the total population of California.

***"My company is transitioning too. I don't live in a vacuum. My company employees are trying to accommodate the changes. Some do it very well, some very poorly. The management has done a poor job and still continues two years later to call me by the wrong names and pronouns."***

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Improve implementation and enforcement of existing non-discrimination laws.**

**Promote state and local government investment in transgender-specific workforce development programs.**

**Organize "know your rights" trainings for community members regarding employment law, health care access and housing rights.**

**Train employers on best practices and comprehensive policies to support transgender employees.**

**Increase commitment to the provision of comprehensive healthcare for transgender patients, including training for health care professionals and students on the rights and needs of the transgender community.**

**Train homeless shelters and other social service and government benefits providers on best practices and comprehensive policies to support transgender clients.**

**Remove exclusions of transition-related and gender-specific care for transgender people from health insurance policies.**