



# Lesbian Health: Current Assessment and Directions for the Future

*Committee on Lesbian Health Research Priorities, Neuroscience and Behavioral Health Program, Health Sciences Policy Program, Health Sciences Section, Institute of Medicine*

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Women's health, as a field of study, is a developing discipline. Health theories in general have been based on studies of men. However, in recent years, more attention has shifted to women's health, realizing the disparities between men and women in relation to their health. During the last two decades, a similar shift has occurred for a group of women--lesbian women--to further identify and specify their health needs.

Over the past decade, lesbians have organized to call for attention to the health issues of this community, resulting in several federally funded research initiatives. This book offers a comprehensive view of what is known about lesbian health needs and what questions need further investigation, including:

How do we define who is lesbian?

Are there unique health issues for lesbians?

Are lesbians at higher or lower risk for such health problems as AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, breast cancer, mental disorders, and substance abuse?

How does homophobia affect lesbian health and the funding of research on lesbian health?

How do lesbian health needs fit into the health care system and the larger society?

What risk and protective factors shape the physical and mental health of lesbians?

The book discusses how to determine which questions to ask about sexual orientation, the need to obtain information without violating privacy, the importance of considering racial and ethnic diversity in the study of lesbians, strategies for exchanging information among researchers and disseminating findings to the public, and mechanisms for supporting greater numbers of researchers.

**Lesbian Health** takes a frank look at the political pressures, community attitudes, and professional concerns uniquely affecting the study of lesbian health issues. The book explores many other issues including the potential for transferring findings in this field to other population groups, including other rare populations and women in general.

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