

# Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

Celebrating Pride Virtually Leads to Innovative Ways to Connect with the LGBTQ+ Community

## At a Glance

In an effort to continue connecting with the LGBTQ+ community during COVID-19, the Portland Public Health Department let creativity take the reins. Local District Tobacco Prevention Partners collaborated with substance use prevention partners to host month long virtual information dissemination activities and art projects that celebrate healthy-lifestyles free of tobacco and substances.

## Public Health Challenge

Tobacco use is a disparity often overlooked in the LGBTQ+ community. According to the Truth Initiative, adults in the LGBTQ+ community are 2.5 times more likely than heterosexual adults to use tobacco products. Tobacco use is also higher for LGBTQ+ youth. Where 11% of heterosexual youth report smoking cigarettes -- 19% of homosexual, 16.9% of bisexual, and 33.2 transgender young adults report smoking cigarettes according to the Truth Initiative. This is no mistake, big tobacco targeted these communities. The CDC states that in the mid-1990's a marketing campaign, "Project SCUM (Sub-Culture Urban Marketing), was created...by a tobacco company to target LGBT and homeless populations". Today, the LGBTQ+ community is among the hardest hit by the effects of tobacco.

## Approach

Portland Public Health has participated in Portland Pride in years past, but with the cancellation of activities and the parade due to COVID-19 there was an added challenge this year. Knowing how impactful collaboration is, the Portland Public Health Tobacco Prevention team partnered with the local Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Services team to create innovative ways to engage with the LGBTQ+ community. Over the course of the month, Portland Public Health posted on their social media information and resources pertaining to LGBTQ+ health disparities and towards the end they asked the community to participate in a scavenger hunt looking through the information to pick out pertinent information.

On top of this, Portland Public Health wanted to celebrate the healthy habits and lifestyles currently within the community by having people share photos of them doing some of their favorite healthy activities. This virtual event aimed to uplift health for all and show how to de-stress or fill time without the use of tobacco and substances. Lastly, in order to uplift and support the LGBTQ+ community to the best of our ability during these times, we raffled off gift-card incentives to individuals who participated. The gift cards were to LGBTQ+ owned businesses in the greater Portland area and inclusive spaces that support the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ folks.



## Results

We had a successful turnout of virtual participants in each of our activities. Throughout the month, individuals engaged with our information on social media and participated in our Pride activities. Portland Public Health decided to continue running the activities post Pride month and keep promoting educational prevention resources to communities who are at higher risk for these health disparities.

## Sustainability

Although this year pushed us to come up with new ways to celebrate Pride and share information with the LGBTQ+ community, Portland Public Health believes continuing work and community activities of a similar nature are great methods to building relationships and report within the community.

## For More Information Contact Us At:

Eleanor Nazar  
Portland Public Health  
[enazr@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:enazr@portlandmaine.gov)  
(207) 874-8774



Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention  
Department of Health and Human Services