

Same-sex marriage laws reduce doctor visits and health care costs for gay men

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Gay men are able to lead healthier, less stress-filled lives when states offer legal protections to same-sex couples, according to a new study examining the effects of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. The study, "Effect of Same-Sex Marriage Laws on Health Care Use and Expenditures in Sexual Minority Men: A Quasi-Natural Experiment," is online in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"Our results suggest that removing these barriers improves the health of gay and bisexual [men](#)," said Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, PhD, lead author of the study and a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholar at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

In the 12 months following the 2003 legalization of same-sex [marriage](#) in Massachusetts, gay and [bisexual men](#) had a significant decrease in medical care visits, mental [health care](#) visits, and mental health care costs, compared with the 12 months before the law change. This amounted to a 13-percent reduction in health care visits and a 14-percent reduction in health care costs. These health effects were similar for partnered and single gay men.

Among HIV-positive men, there was no reduction in HIV-related visits, suggesting that those in need of HIV/AIDS care continued to seek needed health care services.

For the study, researchers surveyed 1,211 patients from a large, community-based health clinic in Massachusetts that focuses on serving sexual minorities. Examining the clinic's billing records in the wake of the approval of Massachusetts' same-sex marriage law, researchers found a reduction in hypertension, depression, and adjustment disorders—all conditions associated with stress.

"These findings suggest that marriage equality may produce broad public health benefits by

reducing the occurrence of stress-related health conditions in gay and bisexual men," Dr. Hatzenbuehler said.

Previous studies have documented that excluding lesbian, [gay](#), and bisexual individuals from marriage has a stressful impact on this population. Dr. Hatzenbuehler's study is the first study to examine whether same-sex marriage policies influence health care use and health care expenditures among sexual minorities. Lesbians were not included in the survey due to insufficient sample size among the patients who visit the clinic.

"This research makes important contributions to a growing body of evidence on the social, economic, and health benefits of marriage equality," Dr. Hatzenbuehler said. The research findings presented here are those of the researcher and are not necessarily the views of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Provided by Columbia University

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