

# More than 20,000 LGBT teens in the U.S. will be subjected to harmful conversion therapy

January 25 2018, by Rachel Dowd

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An estimated 20,000 LGBT youth ages 13 to 17 will undergo conversion therapy from a licensed health care professional before the age of 18, according to a new study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

Also, approximately 57,000 youth will receive the treatment from a religious or spiritual advisor. These are the first estimates of U.S. youth at risk of undergoing conversion therapy before they reach adulthood.

The researchers also found that an approximately 698,000 LGBT adults in the U.S have received conversion therapy at some point in their lives, including about 350,000 who received it as adolescents.

Conversion therapy is treatment intended to change the sexual orientation, [gender identity](#), or gender expression of LGBT people. It is grounded in the belief that being LGBT is abnormal.

"Many professional health associations and the public support ending the use of conversion therapy on LGBT youth," said Christy Mallory, the state and local policy director at the Williams Institute and lead author of the study. "Our research shows that laws banning conversion therapy could protect tens of thousands of teens from what medical experts say is a harmful and ineffective practice."

A number of prominent national professional health associations—including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others—have issued public statements opposing the use of conversion therapy and several have called on Congress and state legislatures to pass laws that ban the practice.

To date, nine states, the District of Columbia and 32 localities have laws protecting youth under age 18 from receiving conversion therapy from licensed [health care providers](#). According to the study, 6,000 youth ages 13 to 17 would have received conversion therapy before they reached adulthood if their state had not banned the practice. Some state bans also apply to anyone who performs the practice in exchange for money. None of them prevent religious or spiritual advisors from providing conversion

therapy as long as they are acting solely in a spiritual capacity.

For more than a century, health care professionals and religious figures have used a range of techniques to attempt to change people's sexual orientation or gender identity. Currently, talk therapy is the most commonly used therapy technique. However, some practitioners have also used "aversion treatments," such as inducing nausea, vomiting, paralysis or applying electric shocks.

This year, several more states will be considering conversion therapy bans and pending federal legislation—the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act—would outlaw the practice nationwide.

"With such a large number of teens at risk of conversion [therapy](#)," said study author Kerith Conron, Blachford-Cooper Distinguished Scholar and research director at the Williams Institute, "we must ensure that families, faith communities and service providers have accurate information about [sexual orientation](#) and gender identity and work to reduce stigma and promote acceptance of LGBT [youth](#) and their families."

**More information:** Conversion therapy and LGBT youth:  
[williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu ... T-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu ... T-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: More than 20,000 LGBT teens in the U.S. will be subjected to harmful conversion therapy (2018, January 25) retrieved 5 May 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-lgbt-teens-subjected-conversion-therapy.html>

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