

Gay-straight alliances in schools reduce suicide risk for all students

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Canadian schools with explicit anti-homophobia interventions such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs) may reduce the odds of suicidal thoughts and attempts among both sexual minority and straight students, according to a new study by University of British Columbia researchers.

Gay-straight alliances are student-led clubs that aim to make the [school](#) community a safer place for all students regardless of their sexual orientation. Their members include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) youth and their straight allies.

"We know that LGBTQ students are at higher risk for suicide, in part because they are more often targeted for bullying and discrimination," says Elizabeth Saewyc, lead author of the study and professor with the UBC School of Nursing. "But heterosexual students can also be the target of [homophobic bullying](#). When policies and supportive programs like GSAs are in place long enough to change the environment of the school, it's better for students' mental health, no matter what their orientation."

LGBTQ youth and heterosexual students in schools with anti-homophobia policies and GSAs had lower odds of discrimination, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, primarily when both strategies were enacted, or when the policies and GSAs had been in place for three years or more.

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Studies and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the study drew on data from the British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey to test the link between school policies and programs, discrimination due to perceived [sexual orientation](#), and [suicidal thoughts](#) and attempts.

The researchers previously found that Canadian high schools with GSAs in place for three years or more have a positive effect on both gay and straight [students'](#) problem alcohol use.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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