



## **AMHCA Statement on Reparative or Conversion Therapy**

Adopted by the Board of Directors

July 10, 2014

"Reparative" or "conversion" therapy, are practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices include efforts to change behaviors or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions and/or feelings toward individuals of the same sex.

Reparative therapy does not include psychotherapies that aim to provide acceptance, support, and understanding of clients or the facilitation of clients' coping, social support, and identity exploration and development including sexual orientation-neutral interventions to prevent or address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices. Nor does reparative therapy include counseling for a person seeking to transition from one gender to another.

There is virtually no credible evidence that any type of psychotherapy can change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and, in fact, these efforts pose critical health risks to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including depression, shame, decreased self-esteem, social withdrawal, substance abuse, risky behavior, and suicidality.

As mental health advocates, AMHCA knows that sexual and gender minorities seeking therapy can benefit from interventions that reduce and counter internalized stigma, and increase active coping.

We are concerned that reparative therapy has been documented to do exactly the opposite by increasing internalized stigma and potentially resulting in numerous negative side effects. Additionally, some treatment programs using reparative therapy may provide inaccurate scientific information on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and may be fear-based, again with the potential to increase distress in treatment participants. Moreover, reparative therapy is scientifically flawed since it is based on the notion that homosexuality is not a normal sexual expression.

AMHCA recommends that counseling around sexual orientation or gender identity follows the framework of an "affirmative therapeutic intervention." This approach means that the therapist addresses the stress-inducing stigma experienced by sexual and gender minorities with interventions designed to reduce that stress, including helping the client overcome negative attitudes about themselves.

Reparative therapy reinforces negative attitudes about sexual minority status and has been shown to increase stress by reaffirming stigma.

Existing law provides for licensing and regulation of various mental health professionals. Additionally, many state laws already prohibit certain types of controversial psychological therapies, including psychosurgery, convulsive therapy, and experimental treatments or behavior modification programs that involve aversive stimuli or deprivation of rights.

AMHCA supports initiatives that will curb harmful practices that have documented iatrogenic effects, and will thus help ensure the overall health and safety of LGBT youth.

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