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## On Zero Discrimination Day, Every LGBTQ+ Member Needs to Count

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VNSNY,Community Contributor

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By Chandra Wilson

Today is [Zero Discrimination Day](#), and this year's theme is "Remove laws that harm, create laws that empower." [UNAIDS](#), the organization that launched Zero Discrimination Day in 2014, created the campaign to highlight the urgent need to take action against discriminatory

laws and celebrate the right of everyone to live a full and productive life with dignity and free of discrimination.

Arthur Fitting, BSN, RN, LGBTQ+ Program Manager at [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#), stresses the importance of Zero Discrimination Day when it comes to the LGBTQ+ population.

"The LGBTQ+ community continues to experience harassment, discrimination and stigma in daily life in obvious ways like [the alarming increase in physical attacks](#) against the community, and more subtle ways like the fact that after hundreds of years the U.S. census still doesn't have an accurate count of the LGBTQ+ population."

For the first time since the census began in 1790, the [2020 Census](#) offered individuals the option to identify a relationship as same sex for couples living together. It did not, however, inquire about sexual orientation or gender identity.

"While this is a step in the right direction, there still exists a tremendous lack of opportunity for those LGBTQ+ community members who are not in same sex relationships and living together or alone in a household to be counted," said Fitting. "What does this mean for populations like LGBTQ+ community members who are single, homeless, students, incarcerated, undocumented, or living in assisted living or skilled nursing facilities? It means that they just aren't counted, creating an invisible population."

The findings of the [census](#) are key determinates about how federal funding is allocated for a decade, so the numbers have long-term ramifications on federal and local levels. Hundreds of billions of dollars are distributed to states, counties and communities based on population totals and breakdowns by sex, age, race and other determinants. On the federal level, the results impact how funding is earmarked to more than 100 programs, including Medicaid, Head Start, block grant programs for community mental health services, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP.

"Important funding decisions are being made without an accurate count of the LGBTQ+ population, leaving entire demographics of people out of consideration when determining vital services that could improve their health and wellbeing," said Fitting. "It's stunning to me because at VNSNY great efforts are made throughout the enterprise every day to ensure a healthcare experience for the LGBTQ+ population that is free of discrimination."

Last spring, under Fitting's guidance, VNSNY introduced the [LGBTQ+ Care Type](#), which takes to the next level the organization's promise to deliver safe, effective and patient-centered care to the LGBTQ+ community. VNSNY continues to be committed to providing [SAGECare](#) training to all employees, including education on LGBTQ+ cultural issues and sensitivities and best practices around sexual orientation and gender identity.

Use of the Care Type, which is an internal VNSNY resource, can help care providers better understand health and social needs, tailor care and assess outcomes. For example, a Care Type can help to designate which kinds of health screening and health education should be targeted for the best health outcomes. Care Types can also help to identify a person's lived experience, patients who need further LGBTQ+ health education, and to evaluate patients' support systems as well as the ability to link them to LGBTQ+ community resources.

"I'm so proud of the LGBTQ+ Care Type as another example of the tremendous work VNSNY continues to do to provide outstanding patient centered care to the LGBTQ+ community, not just on Zero Discrimination Day, but every day," said Fitting.

For more information about Home Health Care services from the not-for-profit Visiting Nurse Service of New York, please visit [www.VNSNY.org](http://www.VNSNY.org) or call 1-800-675-0391.