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**NATIONAL news**

# HEALTHY HOKEYPOKEY

Getting queer health issues mentioned in an important government blueprint is no easy task by Bob Roehr

The federal Department of Health and Human Services has taken a major step backward from including gay men and lesbians in the government blueprint for health services over the next decade.

*Healthy People 2010* is the blueprint's name. Gay men and lesbians were virtually ignored in the initial draft of the massive 800-plus-page document when it came out in December 1998.

The word *gay* was used twice, while *lesbian* and *transgender* did not appear at all, according to an analysis by the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, a San Francisco-based organization of 2,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans physicians and medical students.

Founded in 1981, GLMA works to combat homophobia within the medical profession and in society at large and to promote quality health care for sexual minority patients.

GLMA and its allies bombarded HHS with more than 400 suggestions for changes during the public comment period, and the effort prompted a unit of HHS, the Health Resources and Services Administration, to commission a report from GLMA and Columbia University's Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health.

"This report is not just about what we know," said Dr. Darren Carter, a GLMA board member, when the document—titled *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health: Findings and Concerns*—was released in January. "Because LGBT issues are rarely researched and frequently not included in the training of medical professionals, the report discusses what we don't, but absolutely should, know."

The paper outlines how "stigma and prejudice are powerful forces that adversely impact" the health of sexual minorities.

"As is the case for many minorities, there are health-related challenges facing lesbians. There are another set of challenges for gay men, still others for bisexuals, and even more for transgender people," Carter added. "However, many mainstream health care providers have no idea what specific health concerns there might be relative to these populations. Often they do not know what questions to ask or how to ask them."

The lobbying effort by GLMA and others paid off when, in the second draft of *Healthy*

*People 2010*, queer concerns were mentioned in 20 different places in the document.

Patricia Dunn, GLMA's policy director, was optimistic that the third version, released Jan. 25, would be even better.

But Dunn was shocked when she finally plodded through the three-volume tome. The 20 references had been pared to just four.

"We never dreamed that they would take things out," she says.

"We've tried to talk to everyone that we



GLMA Policy Director Patricia Dunn

could, and we've heard very different things" by way of an explanation, she adds. Some argued that it was simply an editorial abridgment of the massive document.

"In a few of the places where they took out the references, they took out all references to special populations," Dunn concedes. "But in most of them it goes into all of the ethnic and racial breakdowns, and nothing about sexual orientation."

Dunn says Marsha Martin, HHS Secretary Donna Shalala's liaison to the sexual minorities community, told her: "It is not a big deal."

GLMA's board of directors met in San Francisco in early February and said restoring an increased queer presence in *Healthy People 2010* is its No. 1 policy priority over the next few months.

There still may be time to add more inclusive language before the final version of the blueprint is published this summer.

■ BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.

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