



## Effect of Same-Sex Marriage Laws on Health Care Use and Expenditures in Sexual Minority Men: A Quasi-Natural Experiment

Since the federal Defense of Marriage Act was passed in 1996, 29 states have passed constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage, with an additional 12 states instituting laws restricting marriage to heterosexual couples. On November 18, 2003, Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize same-sex marriage.

Researchers sought to determine whether health care use and expenditures among gay and bisexual men reduced following the enactment of same-sex marriage laws in Massachusetts in 2003. The study concludes that policies that confer protections to same-sex couples may be effective in reducing health care use and costs among sexual minority men. Key study highlights include the following:

» On the basis of previous research indicating that constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage have deleterious health consequences, researchers hypothesized that the legalization of same-sex marriage would reduce environmental risk factors, such as discrimination, that contribute to health disparities among sexual minorities.

» The researchers used quasi-experimental, prospective data from 1211 sexual minority male patients in a community-based health center in Massachusetts.

» In the 12 months after the legalization of same-sex marriage, sexual minority men had a statistically significant decrease in medical care visits (mean=5.00 vs mean=4.67;  $P=.05$ ; Cohen's  $d=0.17$ ), mental health care visits (mean=24.72 vs mean=22.20;  $P=.03$ ; Cohen's  $d=0.35$ ), and mental health care costs (mean=\$2442.28 vs mean=\$2137.38;  $P=.01$ ; Cohen's  $d=0.41$ ), compared with the 12 months before the law change. The effects described above were not modified by partnership status, indicating that the health effect of same-sex marriage laws was similar for partnered and nonpartnered men.

» Among HIV-positive men, there was no reduction in HIV-related visits, suggesting that the observed reduction in health care visits did not affect routine and other HIV-related care.

» Researchers examined which ICD-9 diagnostic codes doctors billed after the visits and found a reduction in several medical and mental health disorders—including hypertension, depression, and adjustment disorders—that are all associated with stress. This result suggests a reduction in stress may be one mechanism through which same-sex marriage policies translate into improved health.

This research brief is based on: 2012, Hatzenbuehler, Mark L., Conall O'Cleirig, Chris Grasso, Kenneth Mayer, Steven Safren, and Judith Bradford. "Effect of Same-Sex Marriage Laws on Health Care Use and Expenditures in Sexual Minority Men: A Quasi-Natural Experiment". *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol 102. No2. (View the full study: <http://bit.ly/ajph102-2>)

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