## SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALIN

## PROMOTING LGBTQ+ STUDENT-ATHLETE WELL-BEING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

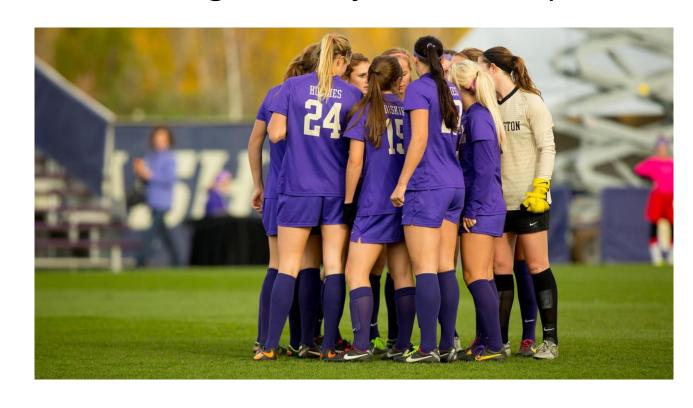
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#### **BACKGROUND**

Collegiate sports can foster body dissatisfaction and in turn, may contribute to disordered eating and impact mental well-being. Marked health disparities have been identified among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ+) populations, including a greater prevalence of eating and mental health disorders. At the intersection of these identities, LGBTQ+ student-athletes may incur elevated risks for negative health outcomes. However, there is limited data investigating health and nutrition concerns in this population.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

This project sought to assess the needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ athletes at the University of Washington (UW), understand successes and barriers they have experienced in healthcare settings, and identify how providers at UW can support their well-being. In addition to a literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former LGBTQ+ student-athletes of UW in order to bring visibility to their experiences.





#### **METHODS**

#### **Literature review:**

- Created a strategy for reviewing peerreviewed and grey literature
- Health and nutrition needs of studentathletes and LGBTQ+ populations
- Healthcare competency for LGBTQ+ populations and provider perceptions

#### **Semi-structured interviews:**

- Generated an interview guide
- Conducted with current and former LGBTQ+ student-athletes at UW
- Discussed identity, well-being, and experiences in healthcare settings at the UW and beyond

#### Analysis:

- Recommendations were informed based on the findings from the literature review and themes from the interviews
- The needs and assets of the site were considered to ensure the recommendations would be appropriate and feasible

#### **FINDINGS**

- Eating and mental health disorders are prevalent in collegiate athlete and LGBTQ+ populations
- With the infrastructure of interdisciplinary care teams currently in place at UW, there is space for additional learning opportunities to improve health outcomes for LGBTQ+ student-athletes
- Students revealed positive experiences with UW Sports Medicine staff
- Students identified ways in which the climate of UW athletics has negatively impacted their mental well-being

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM INTERVIEWS**

- "Being a college athlete means you are under a microscope and at times I felt I had to hide my sexual identity to outsiders because of the platform I was on."
- "My last year at UW I experienced severe depression which partly came from accepting and realizing my sexual identity."
- "There are times I find myself finding comfort in food when experiencing my phases of down times."
- "There was casual homophobia on my team. I did not experience homophobic comments directly and I would brush them off. Comments such as, 'that's so gay' are still common in sports culture at the UW."
- "Providers at UW Medicine asked for my pronouns, which was great."

# UW SPORTS MEDICINE INTERDISCIPLINARY CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

- Registered Dietitians
- Athletic Trainers
- Clinical Psychologists
- Medical Doctors

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion within the UW Athletics community were twofold:

- 1) Internally: Establish an interdisciplinary LGBTQ+ inclusion committee, involving staff and students, focused on advancing LGBTQ+ health and inclusion initiatives within the UW Athletics community.
- 2) Externally: Form partnerships with local organizations to conduct recurring educational trainings for staff, coaches, students, and other members of the UW Athletics community.
  - University of Washington Q Center
  - Gay City
  - Seattle Counseling Services
  - Ingersoll Gender Center

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