

NOV | DEC 2025

# B O S T O N SPIRIT

**FREE!** DELIVERED SUBSCRIPTION  
BostonSpiritMagazine.com

## Defending DEI

MA LGBT Chamber of  
Commerce stands strong

## Season of Sparkle

LGBTQ+ holiday fun

## Raising the Bar

Reinventing New England's  
queer club scene

## Protest Before Tea Dance

Remembering  
Larry Basile

## Biblical Bias

New documentary  
on mistranslations

## Challenging Times

2025 in review

Boston Spirit, 398 Columbus Ave #395  
Boston, MA 02116

CHANGES  
NEEDED

PRESORT MKT / US POSTAGE PAID  
PLATTSBURGH, NY / PERMIT NO. 235





# Visibility = Action

## New report maps out urgent LGBTQ+ needs in the Bay State

In Massachusetts, a state often celebrated for its LGBTQ+ progress, a new report reveals a stark paradox.

“We live in a state where there is simultaneously hyper visibility of the LGBTQ community—and real invisibility, whether that’s trans individuals and their lived experiences or aging adults going into elder care facilities,” says Scott Knox, executive director of the Equality Fund at The Boston Foundation.

Knox is referring to the newly released report he coauthored, “LGBTQ+ People in Massachusetts: Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities in a Diverse Community,” a joint effort between the Equality Fund and the Fenway Institute. The report, an update to a landmark 2018 study, offers one of the most comprehensive statewide portraits of LGBTQ+ life in the country.

Echoing Knox’s sense of urgency is Sean Cahill, director of health policy research at the Fenway Institute and report coauthor, along with colleague Whitney Crebase, a former health policy analyst at the Institute.

“We’re a large, growing and diverse community,” Cahill says, but too many people are still being left behind. This report, he

says, can be work as a roadmap for how we can do better.”

### A community in growth and at risk

Drawing from state-level data, the report documents rapid demographic shifts. In just a few years, the number of Massachusetts adults identifying as LGBTQ+ jumped from 7.2 percent to 9.1 percent—a 26 percent increase.

Among 18- to 24-year-olds, nearly one in four now identify as LGBTQ+, and at the high school level, 23 percent of students report being LGBTQ+ or questioning.

“All of a sudden, we’re looking at a community where one in five young adults are LGBTQ,” says Knox. That has huge implications—for schools, health care providers, the workforce and civic engagement.

Equally important, the data dismantle the assumption that LGBTQ+ life in Massachusetts is concentrated solely in Greater Boston. Counties like Franklin, Hampshire and Barnstable—and cities like Fall River, New Bedford and Worcester—have vibrant and growing LGBTQ+ communities.

“We’re all over the state—not just in Boston and Cambridge,” says Cahill. And thus, so is the need to make sure culturally competent services reach everyone across the state.

The LGBTQ+ population also mirrors the racial and ethnic diversity of the broader state population—a fact that underscores the need for intersectional approaches to public health, education and economic justice.

The report also highlights the Bay State’s national leadership in LGBTQ+ data collection and public health infrastructure. Through partnerships with organizations like Fenway Health, GLAD Law and Manet Community Health Center, for example, the state has expanded access to affirming care.

Knox and Cahill also point to increasing diversity in leadership. One notable example is Boston Pride for the People, which relaunched a few years ago under the guidance of BIPOC LGBTQ+ leaders committed to community accountability.

Still, the picture is far from rosy.

Behavioral and physical health disparities are among the most troubling findings. LGBTQ+ youth are three times more likely to consider suicide than their straight, cisgender peers. Nearly 40 percent report recent self-harm—a rate triple that of non-LGBTQ+ students.

Among adults, LGBTQ+ people are twice as likely to report being diagnosed with depression and four times more likely to experience suicidal ideation.

Rates of asthma, COPD, smoking and binge drinking are also significantly higher among LGBTQ+ adults. And despite Massachusetts’ near-universal health care coverage, LGBTQ+ adults are almost twice as likely to delay or skip care due to cost, notes Cahill.

Economic insecurity further compounds these health risks. According to the Greater Boston Food Bank, LGBTQ+ households report food insecurity at a rate 20 percent higher than the general population. More than half say they struggle to pay for groceries.

Many food pantries and social service providers are faith-based, and, notes Knox, they haven’t historically always been welcoming. “We need to think about how LGBTQ+ individuals and families are accessing food—and who’s being left out.”

LGBTQ+ adults are also 48 percent more likely to report difficulty affording housing and utilities. Homeownership rates are significantly lower for LGBTQ+ people, particularly those who are trans, nonbinary or living outside Boston.

“A lot of people assume LGBTQ+ folks are middle class or wealthy,” says Cahill. But the data tells a different story.

## Turning research into action

The Equality Fund and the Fenway Institute aren’t just compiling data—they’re using it to shape funding, research and policy.

The Equality Fund has already aligned its five 2025 grantmaking priorities with the report’s findings, emphasizing LGBTQ+ aging, trans rights and behavioral health. A \$1 million grant from the Boston Foundation to the Greater Boston Food Bank—one of the Foundation’s largest food access investments ever—is a direct response to the food insecurity data.

This is what philanthropy should be doing, Knox explains. The data tells shows where we’re falling short; where we need to respond—not just with statements, but with initiatives, programs and resources.

The Fund and its partners are also planning follow-up reports with a deeper focus on trans and nonbinary residents, LGBTQ+ youth, elders and people of color.

And of course the report is geared to inform not only the policymakers and advocates, but also health care professionals and business leaders, everyone statewide and beyond.

Several initiatives sparked by the report are already underway. The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy is launching a study of in-school supports for LGBTQ+ students in Greater Boston, focusing on retention and well-being.

A second initiative will explore “food as medicine” models through the LGBTQ Health Center of Excellence, looking at how nutrition interventions can support physical and mental health.

To engage the public, the Equality Fund is co-hosting events like a book talk in September on “Raising Trans Kids,” by Rebecca Minor to help equip families and educators navigating today’s political backlash against trans youth.



Scott Knox, director of the Equality Fund at the Boston Foundation

“It’s a call to action for practitioners, policymakers, certainly other funders who may not be prioritizing the LGBTQ community.”

*Scott Knox, Equality Fund*



Equality Fund and Boston Institute's 2025 report release event

At the same time, the report is gaining traction among civic leaders. Harvard Medical School has invited Cahill to present findings to educators and students. Boston City Council members, including Councilor Liz Breadon, are seeking further briefings.

But Knox and Cahill emphasize that sustained progress will require more than visibility.

There’s a real fear that if federal support for LGBTQ+ research and services dries up, states will be left to fill the gap, Knox notes. And the truth is, many states won’t or can’t. Another reason what we do here in Massachusetts matters so much.

Ultimately, the report is a call to act with intention.

“Research like this helps us understand both our commonalities and our unique needs,” says Knox. When we know better, we have an obligation to do better.

Cahill agrees—and invites the public to engage.

“We want this report to be useful to community members, too,” he says, adding that he welcomes feedback. (Community members can send feedback to [scahill@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:scahill@fenwayhealth.org).)

As the LGBTQ+ population in Massachusetts grows—and as national protections are threatened—local action becomes even more critical. ■

[tbtf.org.fenwayhealth.org](http://tbtf.org.fenwayhealth.org)