

Estimate of U.S. Transgender Population Doubles to 1.4 Million Adults

By JAN HOFFMAN JUNE 30, 2016



Representatives of several groups stood on the steps of the State Capitol in Pierre, S.D., for Trans Kids Support Visibility Day in February. Jay Pickthorn/The Argus Leader, via Associated Press

About 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender, double a widely used previous estimate, [according to an analysis](#) based on new federal and state data.

As the national debate escalates over accommodations for transgender people, the new figure, though still just 0.6 percent of the adult population, is likely to raise questions about the sufficiency of services to support a population that may be larger than many policy makers assumed.

“There’s a saying: ‘You don’t count in policy circles until someone counts you,’” said Gary J. Gates, a demographer and former research director of the group that did the analysis, the Williams Institute at the U.C.L.A. School of Law, which focuses on law and policy issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

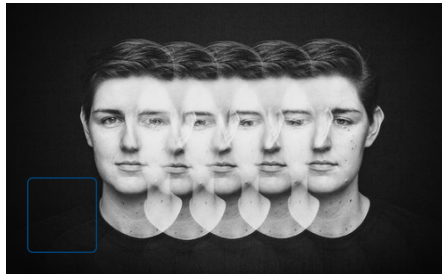
The Williams Institute is the research group that produced a [widely accepted estimate five years ago](#). Its new number was drawn from a much larger federal database than it used to reach the earlier projection of 0.3 percent, or 700,000 people.

Noting that younger adults ages 18 to 24 were more likely than older ones to say they were transgender, researchers said that the new estimates reflected in part a growing awareness of transgender identity.

The analysis may also reflect the limits of self-reporting in obtaining definitive data. In some states seen as more accepting, more adults identified themselves as transgender. In some states perceived as more resistant, fewer adults did so, even though the surveys were anonymous.

Transgender Today

A series about transgender experiences and the challenges ahead.



The percentage of adults identifying as transgender by state ranged from lows of 0.30 percent in North Dakota, 0.31 percent in Iowa and 0.32 percent in Wyoming to highs of 0.78 percent in Hawaii, 0.76 percent in California and 0.75 percent in Georgia.

In some states the results at first glance seemed surprising. In New York, for example, the percentage was 0.51; in Texas it was 0.66.

“From prior research, we know that trans people are more likely to be from racial and ethnic minorities, particularly from Latino backgrounds,” Jody L. Herman, a scholar of public policy at the institute, said. “And they are also younger.”

“So state demographics on race and age can impact the percentage of trans people in those states,” she added.

A comparable [estimate for transgender youth](#) in the United States does not yet exist. As elusive as the adult numbers are to track, figures for adolescents, who are already in a molting process of identity, are harder still. Researchers have not yet concurred on a reliable method to tabulate transgender teenagers, much less younger children, though they are at the center of the debates over school bathroom policies.

The new figures were drawn from a question that 19 states elected to pose in 2014 as part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#), a comprehensive telephone health survey. The researchers also used Census Bureau data to develop population estimates in the remaining 31 states.

Mara Keisling, the executive director of the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#), an advocacy and education organization based in Washington, welcomed the new estimates and predicted that in time, they would continue to rise. As she looked at the state figures, she pointed to North Carolina, currently ground zero for contested legislation about bathroom accessibility and anti-discrimination policies. Researchers estimated that state's population of transgender people to be 44,750.

“Even if it’s 40,000 or 30,000, that’s a lot more than they thought,” Ms. Keisling said. “That helps us to say, ‘Don’t use us politically — you have to do something right by us. There are a lot of us living in your state.’”

Kerith Conron, a social epidemiologist at [The Fenway Institute](#) in Boston, which develops health programs for gay, lesbian,

bisexual and transgender people, among others, said that the new numbers could affect planning support services more effectively.

“This shows trans elders who need gender-affirming services in [nursing homes](#),” she said. “Trans adults will need good health care. And, looking ahead, there will be more trans youth who are economically vulnerable and required to be at school.”

Getting an accurate count of transgender people remains a persistent challenge for researchers. In the question posed by interviewers for the 2014 C.D.C. survey, people were asked whether they considered themselves transgender. If they replied yes, they were asked whether they considered themselves to be male-to-female, female-to-male, or gender nonconforming.

But as awareness of gender identity grows, definitions themselves are becoming even more nuanced and fluid. For example, people listed on a birth certificate as male but who as adults identify as female may not consider the term transgender to apply to them.

To capture a more complete portrait of the population, newer surveys are beginning to frame the transgender question in two steps, first asking about gender assigned at birth, and then about current gender identity.

Those results would include people who call themselves transgender, and those who identify as a gender that differs from the one on their original birth certificate.

Andrew R. Flores, a public opinion and policy fellow at the Williams Institute, said that in time, the available data would become richer still. At least five more states have added the optional transgender question to their C.D.C. telephone health surveys, he said.

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