

The Right to Care for Those We Love

**A Report of the
2024 TGNC Families
Think Tank**



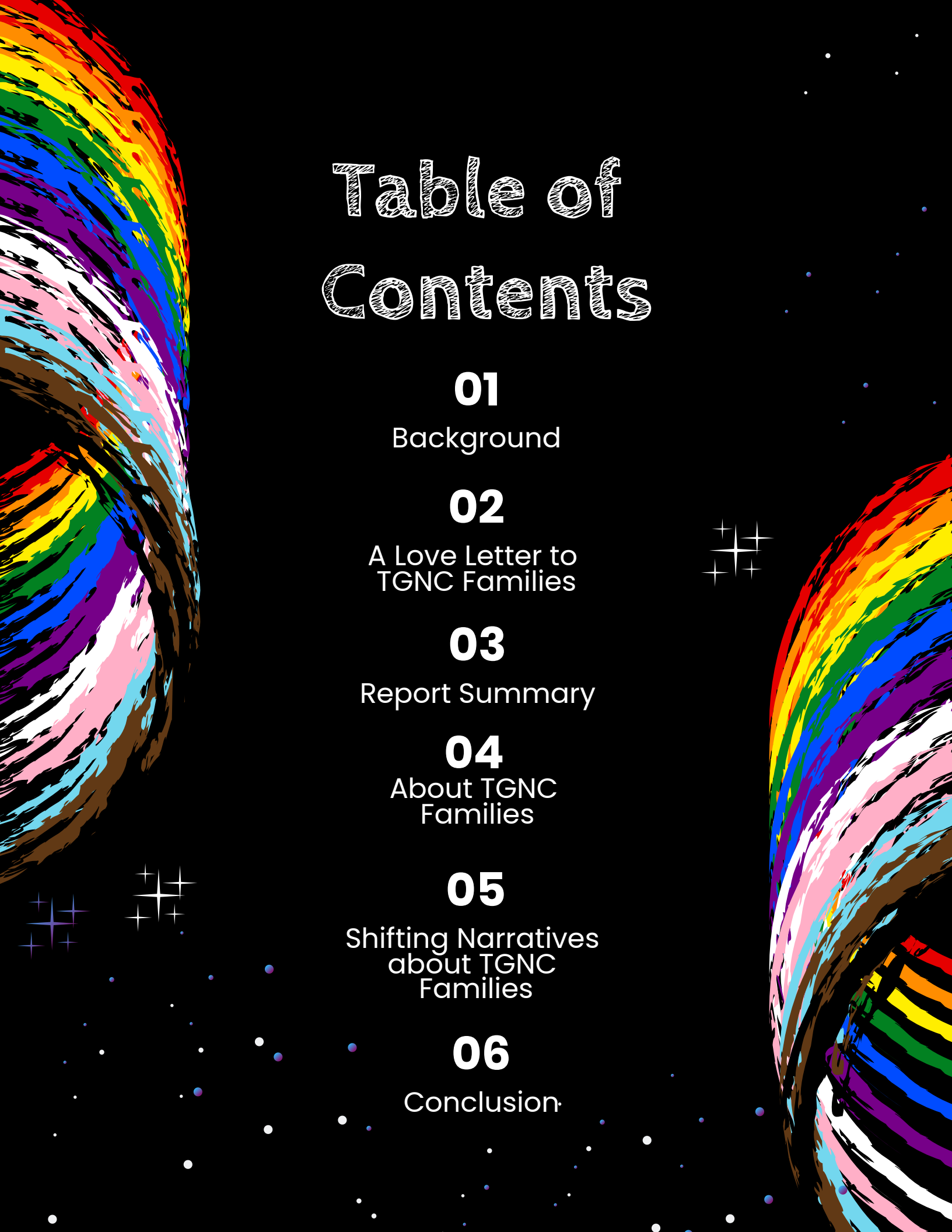


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Background

In 2022, the Transgender Strategy Center recognized the need for an in-depth exploration of the needs of trans and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) families. Portrayals of TGNC families in media and other spaces have led to misconceptions about TGNC families and our needs, have reinforced racism and stereotypes, and have made it difficult to engage in collective and liberatory practices regarding resourcing and supporting our families and communities. We sought to look at TGNC families through multiple lenses, with the understanding that "TGNC families" include cisgender individuals and that "traditional families" include TGNC individuals.

We convened a Think Tank to discuss the needs of TGNC families. All Think Tank members identified as members of TGNC families and the majority identified as TGNC. In addition to expertise based on lived experience, Think Tank members brought a diversity of professional expertise to the table. Think Tank members are community organizers and advocates, birth workers, political strategists, physicians and health professionals, consultants, educators, influencers, and more.

This report synthesizes the key learnings from this Think Tank.

A Love Letter to our TGNC Family

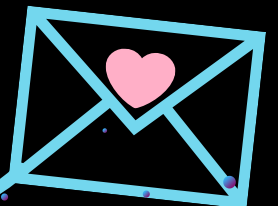
First and foremost, know that this report is for you. Our intention is to validate, uplift, and affirm you in all your glorious existence.

We know that the world can be a cruel place for people like us who don't fit the mold. This cruelty can be even more intense when we come together to form families. They demonize our love as though it is a threat to them, and they're right to worry. Our love shines light on the hatred in their hearts.

Nothing can dim the brilliance of TGNC people coming together. We create family everywhere we go, possessing the ability to forge powerful and intentional bonds. All of the joy, fury, fear, grief, and love we carry with us serve as tools for connection through the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Through our realness, our moxie, and our capacity for change, we embody what it means to be family. Thank you for being part of our family.

We love you!

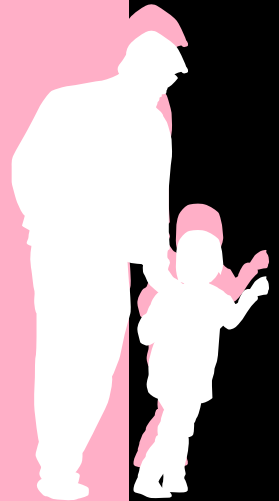




Report Summary


This report seeks to:

- **REDEFINE** and expand what it means to be a TGNC family.
- **ARTICULATE** both the strengths and challenges encountered by TGNC families.
- **HIGHLIGHT** and center the needs, desires, and experiences of BIPOC TGNC families and other TGNC families that have been afforded less power both in mainstream spaces and within LGBTQ+ spaces.
- **PROVIDE** action steps that can be taken in various contexts (by community members, funders, allies, service providers, policymakers, etc.) to support the needs of TGNC families.

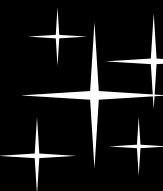


Most importantly, we sought to bring together our knowledge of both the strengths and challenges experienced by TGNC families and to reframe these into broad and liberatory invitations for new directions of support for TGNC families.





This report explores the challenges, strengths, and futures of TGNC families through the following structure:



- **WE LOOK** at how we define and understand TGNC families, including exploring how TGNC families can be positioned in relationship to other families—understanding that some needs and strengths of TGNC families are unique, and some are universal to all families.
- **WE EXPLORE** and dismantle inaccurate media portrayals of TGNC families, with an emphasis on the ways in which some of these portrayals actively perpetuate racism and misogyny.
- **WE AFFIRM** and explore the ways in which TGNC individuals and families shape the broader culture, in contrast to a common, inaccurate, and disempowering portrayal of TGNC families as lacking agency within society.
- **WE DISCUSS** the unique ways in which intergenerational ties exist within TGNC communities and families and affirm these as a key part of our community's resilience, one that must be actively and creatively resourced.
- **WE DEFINE** our standards for allyship and institutional support, calling on allies and funders to “raise the bar” and innovate their approaches to best resource TGNC communities.
- **WE CLOSE** by affirming our right to care for those we love—ultimately, resourcing and infrastructure to support TGNC families is about ensuring that we all have what we need to care for our loved ones, no matter how our families were formed or chosen.

LET'S GET STARTED!



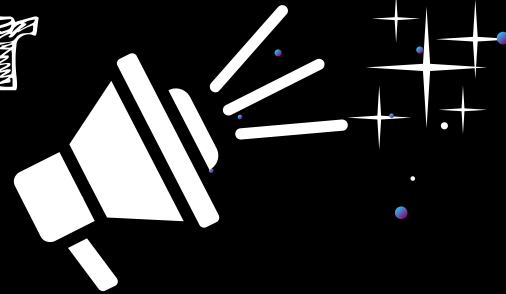
About
TGNC Families

Our Definition of Family

We identify **families** as groups with strong emotional bonds inclusive of birth families, adoptive families, chosen and found families, gay families, ballroom and drag families and houses, and other structures that break traditional narratives of the term. Families transcend hereditary bonds, cultures, species, planets, galaxies, space, and time, stretching back to our earliest ancestors and forward to future descendants.



Share About Your TGNC Family!



This report is an invitation to share about your TGNC family. Taking our definition of TGNC families, we want to invite our TGNC community into the conversation about families. As we will reinforce throughout this report, chosen and found families, gay families, drag families, and ballroom families serve as critical social and survival support structures in TGNC people's lives, but these stories of family often go unheard. We encourage our community to share stories about your families and the importance of those bonds in our capacity to thrive.

Who are

TGNC Families?

TGNC families are any family that include TGNC people. Just like "traditional" families often include TGNC people, TGNC families can include cisgender people.

Many issues facing TGNC families are the same as those facing all families -- economic justice, access to high quality education and childcare, access to healthcare, housing, green space, and healthy food for our children. At the same time, TGNC families face some unique challenges, particularly in the current political environment.

For this reason, we find it helpful to use multiple lenses to look at TGNC families:

- Taking one view, TGNC families have many of the same needs as all families.
- Taking another, TGNC families may be viewed as different or special, both in terms of our family structures, our culture, our resilience, and the unique challenges we face.

One way to hold these two views together might be that all families are different from one another or special, so TGNC families, like all other families, have some needs that are common among all families and some unique needs related to being TGNC families.

Key Points

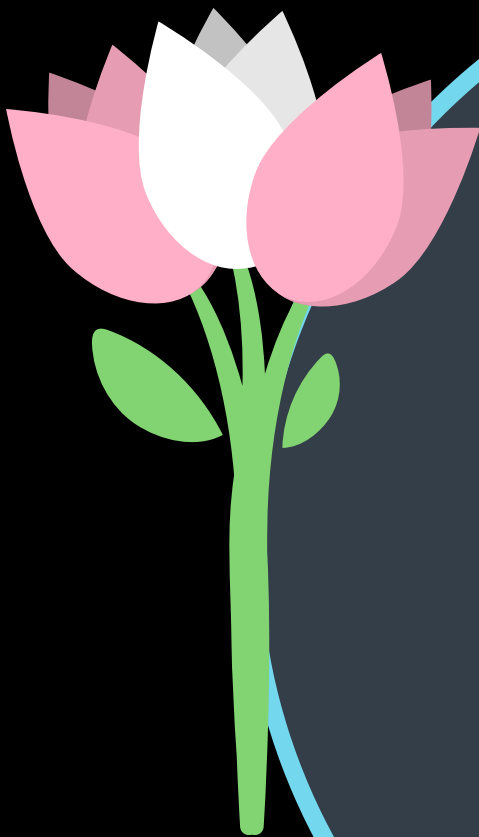


·TGNC families are everywhere--in contrast to the portrayal of TGNC families as primarily existing in large coastal US cities.

·Many TGNC families are BIPOC families--in contrast with portrayals of white families with cisgender parents and TGNC children, or white families with TGNC parents.

·TGNC families include chosen families, drag families, ballroom families, and many other forms of kinship.

Solidarity with TGNC Families



TGNC families may find strong allies and potential for coalition work among a variety of other families that resist cultural norms, for example, immigrant families, polyamorous families, divorced or blended families, single-parent families, families headed by teen or young parents, and many more.

We see examples of this solidarity when TGNC people are able to blend their chosen families with their birth families. Though not always possible for TGNC people, having this level of support from can be life-changing.

While TGNC families have many of the same needs as any other families, many TGNC families may be more impacted by these needs due to decreased access to intergenerational wealth, challenges regarding employment and housing discrimination, and intersecting impacts of racism, classism, misogyny, ableism, and other forms of discrimination.

Supporting TGNC families inherently means working to dismantle racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression and working in support of economic justice.

TGNC Families are Resilient



Many mainstream portrayals of TGNC families focus on our vulnerabilities, for example, highlighting disparities in income or healthcare access, or highlighting instances of discrimination. While these experiences are common among TGNC families, discussion of these challenges and vulnerabilities must be contextualized with an exploration of the resilience of the TGNC community and the individual and community-driven solutions that TGNC families have developed in order to survive and thrive.

TGNC families need resourcing and further support for the solutions developed within our families and communities, not “saviors” from outside our communities.

Think Tank members identified the need to raise the bar on allyship toward TGNC families and to shift from a focus on disparities and challenges (particularly when such a focus suggests that cis professionals are the answer and/or drives resources toward cis-led organizations) and to instead affirm, uplift, and resource the solutions brought forward by TGNC community leaders.

We also noted that TGNC families have unique strengths and resources, including lessons and cultural reframes that may be helpful for all families.



TGNC Families

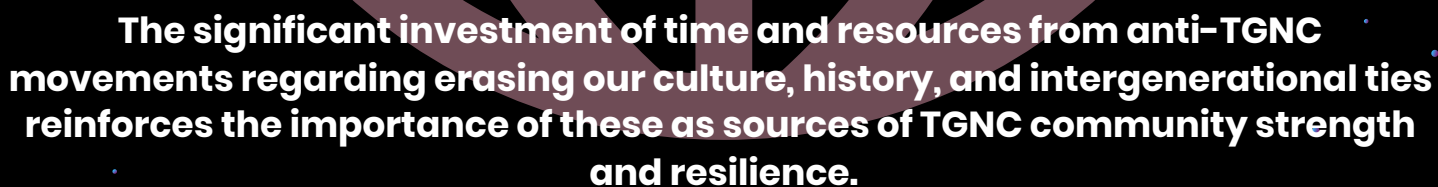
Shape Culture

We identified many different examples of mainstream culture picking up TGNC and LGBTQ+ culture, easily finding examples that ranged from pop culture, fashion, and dance to the increased use of the word "partner" within heterosexual relationships, to the increased presence of gender-neutral options on documents and forms.


Despite frequent portrayals of TGNC families and individuals as uniquely vulnerable or erased within mainstream culture, we found it very important to acknowledge the ways in which TGNC lived experiences have actively reshaped mainstream culture.

Further, we specifically noted the ways in which community care among TGNC and LGBTQ+ chosen families has actively reshaped numerous aspects of healthcare and social services delivery. For example, during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s, LGBTQ+ community members and activists made significant contributions to the development of harm reduction approaches, community-centered hospice care, and comprehensive sex education, which have reshaped the delivery of these services within the mainstream.

We found this particularly important to note because many anti-TGNC initiatives explicitly attempt to erase TGNC history. Although historical records demonstrate that TGNC individuals have existed since antiquity, and even gender-affirming hormone care has been provided for a century, many anti-TGNC media portrayals seek to position TGNC existence as a modern identity that is mediated or encouraged by online influencers and the healthcare system.



The significant investment of time and resources from anti-TGNC movements regarding erasing our culture, history, and intergenerational ties reinforces the importance of these as sources of TGNC community strength and resilience.



Shifting
Narratives ✨
About
TGNC Families



Dismantling Conventional Narratives of TGNC Families

In exploring our observations of publicly constructed narratives of TGNC families, we observed a number of themes regarding the ways in which these publicly constructed narratives fit into broader, often problematic, narratives of TGNC individuals.

Despite the fact that TGNC families are impacted by many of the same cultural forces as all families, and are not immune to perpetuating racism, patriarchy, misogyny, and other forms of oppression, the many different family structures of TGNC families, including chosen families, polyamorous families, ballroom families, drag families, adoptive families, and families in which a masculine partner is the birthing parent, mean that TGNC families have developed many strategies for communication, resilience, and community care. These strategies can be of potential benefit to all families that are navigating these forms of cultural oppression.

Politicized narratives that harm TGNC communities

Unfounded concerns about TGNC communities "grooming" children to identify as TGNC are often raised by those in opposition to our families. This talking point is often raised by individuals or organizations whose other actions might be characterized as grooming children to lead cisgender, heterosexual lifestyles by banning access to LGBTQ+ knowledge, encouraging children to imitate adult heterosexual relationships, and supporting conversion therapy.



Significant media and political attention has been paid to issues affecting TGNC youth, particularly with regard to gender-affirming medical care. We affirm that medical decisions for TGNC youth should not be legislated and should be decided by youth, their parents, and qualified medical professionals. While these issues are extremely important, a hyperfocus on TGNC youth can lead to the infantilization and erasure of TGNC adults, TGNC parents, and TGNC elders in the discussion of TGNC families. Even more disturbingly, the focus on limiting access to medical care for TGNC youth appears to be a gateway to limiting access to this care for TGNC adults. States that began with bans on medical care for TGNC youth have begun making efforts to ban access to this care for TGNC adults as well.



Politicized narratives against TGNC parenthood

Accusations of grooming include harmful claims that TGNC people groom our own family members. Our opposition uses this falsehood to assert, without any factual basis, that our community members are unfit to be parents. This discourages TGNC people from pursuing family-building avenues such as fostering and adoption. These claims are clear-cut attempts to lock us out of parenthood and hinder our community's growth.

The assumption that TGNC people are uninterested or incapable of reproduction has led to a significant knowledge gap in trans-inclusive sexual education. This lack of knowledge is on the side of both patients and providers, often leading to misinformation around the effects of hormone therapy on health and fertility and exacerbating challenges trying to conceive. With infertility being a relatively common issue among the general population, an overall investment in researching TGNC fertility will have the benefit of advancing infertility research for all people.

Our parental and fertility rights must be protected in line with our right for bodily autonomy.



Narratives of TGNC families that reinforce racism

We noted that an overportrayal of white TGNC families within media and professionalized advocacy spaces has led to erasure of BIPOC TGNC families of all kinds.



Specifically:

- **Media often portrays** white nuclear TGNC families as advocates while portraying Black trans femmes as victims, erasing stories of resilience and the frequent role of drag and ballroom families in building that resilience. Stories of other BIPOC TGNC people are rarely ever mainstream.
- **Erasure of drag families**, ballroom families, and other kinship structures common in BIPOC communities leads to a lack of resourcing and acknowledgement of these families and their needs. One impact of this erasure is that the already-limited funding for TGNC family issues is driven toward white-led organizations that focus on families with legal and/or biological ties.
- **Erasure of BIPOC TGNC families**, including those with BIPOC TGNC parents, harms BIPOC TGNC youth by limiting their ability to envision potential futures and to make meaningful intergenerational connections.
- **Narrow definitions of advocacy** and community work in the TGNC families funding space tend to center and resource the work of white people. This can be seen in how policy advocacy is framed as more legitimate than social media visibility, or how the work of a 501(c)3 organization is often viewed as more important than leading a grassroots mutual aid campaign. Both mindsets contribute to a limited understanding of how work gets done.
- **Overall different standards**, expectations, and portrayals of white and BIPOC public figures in the TGNC families space. white people are often highlighted as professionals or educators, undermining the expertise of BIPOC people by solely portraying them in the context of their personal experience or challenges.

Combating racism within TGNC communities



While some of these dynamics are driven by bias in media portrayals and funding from outside the TGNC community, it is important to note that many white TGNC individuals are complicit in reinforcing or perpetuating these and other forms of racism within the TGNC community.

White TGNC individuals have a responsibility to develop awareness of these dynamics and to actively resist them.

Some tangible steps may include speaking up in defense of BIPOC TGNC people, recommending BIPOC TGNC colleagues as paid speakers or trainers, centering BIPOC-led work in the TGNC families space, and making it clear that white people cannot and should not speak for BIPOC TGNC families.

We emphasize that while creating space for the voices and stories of BIPOC TGNC families, white people cannot and should not avoid speaking up at all. True, informed allyship from white TGNC individuals grounded in listening, learning, and speaking up can serve as a critical source of support for BIPOC TGNC families.

Strengthening Intergenerational Resourcing for TGNC Families

As efforts are being made to erase TGNC people from public life, we recognized that resourcing intergenerational ties, whether at an individual or community level through bringing people together, or at an institutional level by funding projects that support these intergenerational connections, is a key strategy in building TGNC resilience.

Due to the extraordinary importance of intergenerational resourcing as a source of TGNC resilience, we looked closely at challenges and strengths in this area.



Envisioning new approaches to sharing knowledge and wealth



We discussed the fact that in "traditional" families, there is an assumed model where financial and knowledge resources flow "downward" to younger generations, while in TGNC families, knowledge and resources are more likely to flow in multiple directions.



In some cases, people who are younger may have been "out" in the TGNC community longer, and may have knowledge resources to pass to those who are older than them. Financial resources may flow in many different directions as needed by mutual aid and through caring for those we love and choose as our family, regardless of age differences or legal ties.



Because many structures for passing accumulated wealth are based on legal familial ties, there is a need to create and expand the availability of structures to pass accumulated wealth to the community. Similarly, there is a need to invest in formal and informal structures to pass knowledge resources between TGNC community elders and youth, and among many different generations within the TGNC community.



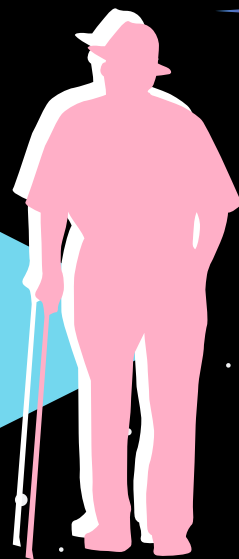
Early rejection from family of origin can lead to disruptions not only in formal education for TGNC individuals but can also prevent TGNC young adults from having opportunities to develop life skills, including in the areas of healthy relationships, work/career, mental and physical health, and financial literacy. Supporting TGNC community resourcing means ensuring that individuals have the ability to develop these skills in supportive environments with others who understand their experiences.

Caring for and resourcing TGNC elders

There is a need to meaningfully resource care for TGNC elders. TGNC elders frequently lack options for competent and affirming long-term care facilities or supportive home care. This is compounded by the fact that many TGNC elders today may be disconnected from biological family and may have lost significant numbers of friends and chosen family members to AIDS or violence, reducing their options for receiving informal care or support as they age. At an institutional and policy level, solutions are needed to ensure the availability of appropriate and affirming elder services for TGNC individuals. At a community level, we must ensure that we are creating opportunities for TGNC elders and younger TGNC individuals to connect and provide mutual support to one another.

The stories and wisdom from TGNC elders are critical in shaping TGNC futures, and the need to resource spaces for younger TGNC folks to connect with and learn from TGNC elders is essential to the long-term resilience of TGNC communities and our movements for justice.

TGNC community-led organizations can play a key role in this work, as can TGNC creators, filmmakers, podcasters, historians, and other cultural workers. This work is central to TGNC community resilience, and funders and allies should resource and uplift this work whenever possible.

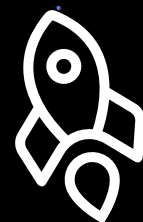


Raising the Bar on Allyship

This report has often mentioned a need to "resource" various spaces and initiatives, and this opens up a conversation about resourcing--what it means, what it can look like, and how it can be reshaped in stronger support of TGNC communities.

Discussions of resourcing often involve conversations about allies or allyship, as well as about the philanthropic sector--how can these be re-envisioned to best support our communities?

We identified a need to raise the bar on allyship--to clearly distinguish between meaningful actions that support TGNC communities and statements or actions that have no impact or even drive resources away from TGNC-led work toward cis-led organizations.



What can allies do?



- **Understand the diversity of experiences within the TGNC community.**
 - One TGNC person can never speak for all of us.
- **Understand that actions and their impacts count; words do not.**
 - We noted many examples of self-identified allies expressing “wishes” without backing them up with actions. Examples included self-identified allies working in healthcare or other professionalized fields who state, “we need more TGNC people in leadership,” but take no meaningful actions to support early-career TGNC individuals within these fields, and providers of gender-affirming care who “wish” they saw more BIPOC patients while taking no actions to outreach to the BIPOC community or make their services more accessible.
- **Acknowledge and pay for TGNC expertise.**
 - We noted numerous structures that expect or promote unpaid work from TGNC community members, such as expecting TGNC employees to offer “Trans 101” or similar trainings outside their scope of work, expecting TGNC community members to volunteer their time for events like Pride or an employee resource group, or expecting TGNC individuals to give input on TGNC-related subjects wholly outside their professional work or expertise. This devalues the actual expertise of TGNC people who work professionally as educators, event planners, or consultants.
- **Lift up and resource TGNC-led work.**
 - We noted cis-led LGBTQ+ organizations highlighting challenges facing the TGNC community when fundraising, but not lifting up the leadership of TGNC individuals or prioritizing moving resources to TGNC-led work.

In some cases, an excuse is given that a qualified TGNC individual could not be found, and that a cis individual was therefore better equipped to hold a leadership role or speak on TGNC community needs.

TGNC communities include professionals with a diverse array of training and experience.

If you can't find a TGNC individual with subject matter expertise, you haven't looked hard enough.

Raising the Bar on Institutional Support

While many of the conversations above about resourcing apply equally to the philanthropic sector, there are some additional considerations in this space.

Much of the important community-driven work within the TGNC community exists outside of traditional nonprofit or social services structures. Resourcing for TGNC community work must adapt to this reality.



What can institutions do?

Our community organizations need the right to fail.

We need unrestricted, multi-year funding to be able to experiment with new approaches without the fear of funding loss if these experiments don't work the first time.

Due to legacies of lack of resourcing in our communities, we don't always have the same evidence base for what may work best for our communities--instead of trying to import "evidence-based" social services models from outside our communities, support us in finding what works in our own contexts and communities. We need philanthropic partners who support our work even when projects may not work out the first time—that is how we iterate and learn to serve our communities.

Supporting our work supports our families



Funding support for TGNC-led organizations inherently bolsters TGNC families' ability by supporting salaried positions and career growth for TGNC staff.

For projects in the TGNC space, we must look to support TGNC leadership (not just LGBTQ+ leadership).

As one participant put it, **"We cannot liberate ourselves within the tools and frameworks that oppress us -- funders must relinquish their approval of our methods."** TGNC-led community work has been systematically under-resourced for many years, and funding and evaluation approaches that were developed outside of TGNC contexts may not carry over directly to TGNC community work. We need funders who understand this and who will partner with TGNC-led organizations to explore new approaches to philanthropy in the TGNC space.

Further Reading

[Family-Based Interventions with Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth: Systematic Review and Best Practice Recommendations](#)

[Developing Parenting Guidelines to Support Transgender and Gender Diverse Children's Well-being](#)

[Gender-Affirming Care and Young People](#)

[Agents of scientific uncertainty: Conflicts over evidence and expertise in gender-affirming care bans for minor](#)

[Perspectives of transgender youth on parental support: qualitative findings from the Resilience and Transgender Youth Study](#)

[Resilience in Families in Transition: What Happens When a Parent Is Transgender?](#)

[Drag Queens: Re-Envisioning the Meaning of Family and Community](#)

[Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship](#)

[Constructing home and family: How the ballroom community supports African American GLBTQ youth in the face of HIV/AIDS](#)

[Children with Trans Parents: Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Psychological Well-being](#)

[Support for Mothers, Fathers, or Guardians of Transgender Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review on the Dynamics of Secondary Social Networks](#)

[What do we know about transgender parenting?: Findings from a systematic review](#)

[Transgender Parenting: A Review of Existing Research](#)

[5 Questions: Tandy Aye on what transgender teens need from their parents](#)

[Protecting the Rights of Transgender Parents and their Children](#)

[Family of origin, not chosen family, predicts psychological health in a LGBTQ+ sample](#)

["We Just Take Care of Each Other": Navigating 'Chosen Family' in the Context of Health, Illness, and the Mutual Provision of Care amongst Queer and Transgender Young Adults](#)

[Queering Methodologies to Understand Queer Families](#)

[A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children](#)

[Child, Family, and Community Transformations: Findings from Interviews with Mothers of Transgender Girls](#)

[Transgender Parenting](#)



Conclusion



Affirming the Right to Care for Those We Love

Finally, we affirm a right to care for our loved ones, regardless of legal ties or family structure. We must fight for the infrastructure to allow us to do this.

On an institutional or policy level, the right to care for those we love includes access to paid leave for caregiving and bereavement for those who are family to us, regardless of legal or biological ties. We need policies and knowledge dissemination that support us in naming our healthcare proxies and next of kin, and that support us in moving financial and knowledge resources to one another regardless of legal ties or family structure.

On individual and community levels, we need infrastructure that enables us to care for our families, whether that is forms that allow us to designate the relationships that are important to us or whether that is practical things like access to family restrooms and changing tables to care for our children.

TGNC families have always cared for one another regardless of state recognition, and we will continue this legacy of care through formal and informal approaches, through individual acts of care and through collective acts of advocacy.

OUR LOVE MAKES US STRONG AND RESILIENT



A Special Thanks to our Think Tank Contributors!



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SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change

TRANSFORMATIONS

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