The Colorado Health Foundation™

Pride and the Power of Belonging

June invites us to celebrate and reflect on visibility, community, and what it truly means to belong. Pride Month traces back to a legacy of resistance, reminding us that many of the freedoms we experience today were hard fought and remain fragile for too many Coloradans. It calls us to honor that history while recognizing the ongoing need to create spaces where everyone feels seen, valued, and connected. At its core, Pride is deeply linked to belonging, and belonging is essential to health and well-being. Pride is so much more than just being seen; it is about having the freedom to live fully, safely, and authentically every day.

What we mean by belonging

Belonging is shaped by the environments we build, the spoken and unspoken rules we uphold, and the relationships we nurture. It shows up when people are safe, when they are treated with dignity and respect, and when they have real opportunities to participate fully in their communities and in everyday life. **Belonging is not just personal; it is collective, created through shared responsibility and daily actions that signal who is valued and who is included. It is shaped across every level of our lives.**

Belonging happens at every level

Belonging shapes how we see ourselves and how we move through the world. It touches every level of our lives, from the deeply personal to the broadly political.

Level	Description	Example
Individual	Being able to understand and express who you are, live authentically without fear, and experience well-being through self-acceptance.	Celebrating queer joy
Interpersonal	Belonging is shaped in everyday relationships through affirmation, respect, and the ability to exist without having to explain or defend who you are.	Affirming your trans child
Organizational	Schools, workplaces, and institutions shape belonging through the inclusivity of their spaces, practices, and culture.	LGBTQ+ non-discrimination protections for employees or students
Community	Belonging grows through shared spaces and collective experiences that foster visibility, connection, and support.	Pride events
Policy	Policies, laws, cultural norms, and public narratives shape who is included or excluded and determine access to systems like healthcare, education, and employment.	Inclusive and affirming LGBTQ+ policies

Belonging is something we build together

If belonging is essential to health, then we must ask: what does belonging look like in real life, and what does it take to build it? It starts with inclusive policies that create real protections: laws and workplace policies that prevent discrimination against someone because of who they love or who they know themselves to be on the inside, affirm people's identities even if we may not understand them, and ensure safety in schools, workplaces, and public life. People can help make this real by supporting inclusive legislation, advocating within their organizations for equitable policies, and speaking up when those protections are threatened or ignored.

Belonging includes access to medical care that is respectful, affirming, and safe. Providers and medical centers should center the dignity of LGBTQ+ patients and

be culturally responsive. This means staying up to date on evidence-based practices such as gender-affirming care for trans and gender diverse youth and adults.

Belonging also shows up when people can fully participate in everyday life, like joining a sports team, attending school events, and gathering in public spaces without being excluded or made to feel unsafe. When we tell transgender kids that they do not belong in sports, we are taking away their opportunity to build leadership skills, learn about collaboration and teamwork, and feel the sense of camaraderie and friendship that comes with playing sports with peers. Belonging for LGBTQ+ Coloradans means having access to spaces that support identities, growth, and joy. You can help build this kind of belonging by making community spaces more inclusive, challenging exclusion when you see it, and creating opportunities for others to show up fully as themselves.

Belonging means not having to sit on the sidelines of life. Building it requires all of us to take an active role in making that possible.

Pride Month is both a reminder of the progress made and the work ahead. While June offers a visible moment to honor LGBTQ+ communities, belonging cannot be limited to a single month. It requires an ongoing commitment to creating environments, policies, and relationships where people are safe, respected, and able to fully participate in life year round. Each of us has a role to play, whether through the choices we make or the ways we show up for one another. Pride Month reminds us that belonging is not a given. It is something we must build together. And when we do, we create the conditions for everyone in Colorado to thrive.

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