Intersex Mental Health

Intersex is an umbrella term for natural variations in sex characteristics.

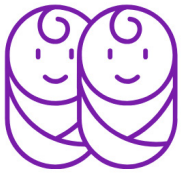
These variations can include differences in:

- Chromosomes
- Hormones
- Gonads
- Internal or external anatomy

1 out of 50 are born intersex. Other groups that make up 2% of the population include:

- **People with red hair**
- **People with green eyes**
- **Twins**





Historically, some intersex infants have undergone non-emergency, cosmetic medical procedures before they are able to participate in decision-making. Intersex activists have been advocating for years that medically unnecessary cosmetic infant surgeries cause unnecessary harm to intersex individuals, and should be postponed until age of consent.

More than 5 in 10 of intersex adults report having fair or poor mental health:

- **6 in 10 intersex adults report experiencing depression**
- **6 in 10 intersex adults report experiencing anxiety**
- **4 in 10 intersex adults report experiencing PTSD**

Mental Health and Substance Use

Research indicates that intersex individuals experience higher rates of mental health challenges compared to the general population, including depression, anxiety, and elevated rates of suicidality and self-harm.



These outcomes are associated with factors such as:

- Stigma and lack of awareness
- Medical trauma or early interventions
- Barriers to affirming healthcare

CALIFORNIA LGBTQ HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES NETWORK

#Out4MentalHealth

Mental health disparities are closely linked to increased risk for substance use disorder (SUD), opioid use disorder (OUD), and stimulant use disorder (StUD). Intersex individuals may face:

- Higher vulnerability to substance use as a coping strategy
- Barriers to accessing inclusive and affirming OUD/StUD treatment
- Lower rates of engagement in prevention and recovery services if the care is not culturally responsive or supportive

Providing inclusive, trauma-informed, and affirming care environments can support

- Earlier engagement in OUD/StUD prevention services
- Increased access to treatment
- Improved recovery outcomes

Creating Supportive Health Systems

To support intersex individuals in OUD/StUD prevention, treatment, and recovery, health systems and providers can:

- Integrate trauma-informed care into prevention and treatment settings
- Ensure inclusive intake practices that recognize variations in sex characteristics
- Provide culturally responsive behavioral health services
- Reduce stigma through provider training and education
- Improve linkages between mental health services and OUD/StUD care



Key takeaway

Improving mental health outcomes and reducing stigma for intersex individuals are critical components of effective substance use prevention and treatment. Inclusive, patient-centered care environments can strengthen engagement across the full continuum–from prevention to recovery support.

Organizations and Resources for Information

interACT https://interactadvocates.org/faq/

InterConnect https://interconnect.support/

TGI Justice Project https://tgijp.org/

