Frequently Asked Questions about
Marriage Equality and LGBT Health

Is a domestic partnership the same as marriage? Why do same-sex couples need "marriage"?

There are significant legal differences between domestic partnerships and marriage. For example, public employees cannot obtain long-term healthcare benefits for their domestic partner but they can do so for spouses.

Domestic partners are not treated with the same automatic recognition and respect as legally married spouses. For example, in medical emergencies it is not uncommon for the attending staff to deny a domestic partner the same recognition as a spouse. They may refuse to allow partners to ride in an ambulance, be in the emergency room with their injured or ill loved one, or to make crucial life or death decisions for them. Part of the protection marriage provides is that everyone automatically understands and knows what it means to be married.

What about civil unions?

Civil unions and California domestic partnerships are essentially the same. Neither one provides the security, dignity or equality of marriage.

California Residents:

Doesn’t California already have legal marriage for same-sex couples? What would Prop 8 do if it passes on Nov. 4, 2008?

The California Constitution now guarantees marriage equality for same-sex couples. But Prop 8 would change the California Constitution and take away that freedom and mandate that government treat same-sex couples differently from everyone else.

How will the medical community help to win this?

By being strategic and focused, and by mobilizing our entire community -- including allies, family and friends -- to speak up for fairness and equality.

Polls indicate that the single most important factor in whether a person supports the freedom to marry is whether they personally know a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person. More urgently than ever before, we need every member of the medical community to come out to their neighbors, co-workers, family members and friends and urge them to Vote No on Prop 8.
Why is the medical community fighting so hard for marriage?

As healthcare professionals we have the expertise, status and qualifications to speak to healthcare policy issues and the effects that marriage equality would bring to gay male and lesbian couples.

We know that denying lesbians and gay men the opportunity to marry denies them multiple benefits of marriage that support relationships and promote mental health. As an act of discrimination, it compounds sexual orientation stigma that has been linked to psychological distress and increased odds of being diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.

We also know that aging LGBT individuals may face harder health circumstances without the legal recognition of marriage. A gay or lesbian retiree who is not legally married can only receive Social Security at a single person's rate, even though retirement funds may be supporting a couple.

Finally, we are fully aware that scientific data overwhelmingly demonstrates that there is no relationship between parents' sexual orientation and any measure of children's emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral adjustment. As a result, GLMA along with several other medical associations, conclude that marriage equality is beneficial to children, regardless of the gender of the parents.

As members of the medical community we must bring our knowledge and understanding to the conversation about marriage equality and its positive effects upon health and wellness.

Will churches that refuse to perform weddings for same-sex couples lose their tax-exempt status or be in danger of having their clergy and leaders arrested?

No. There is an important difference between religious marriage and civil marriage. Religious groups and clergy members have a constitutionally protected right to recognize or refuse to recognize religious marriages based on the tenets of their particular faith. That has not changed and will not change. But the government can't treat same-sex couples differently when issuing civil marriage licenses or solemnizing civil marriages.

Will schools teach that marriage for same-sex couples is the same as "traditional" marriage?

Local school districts and parents develop health education programs for their schools. In California no child can be taught anything relating to family and health against the will his or her parents.