



Sex, stigma & the 'murderous logic' of the healthcare industry

*Featuring Michael Lighty,
Healthy California Now*

This time on Code WACK!

In honor of pride month, we're examining the pivotal role the LGBTQ community has played in advocating for healthcare reform. Is it just a coincidence that most of California's single-payer bills have been introduced by lawmakers in the LGBTQ community? *How can we further galvanize the community around this life-saving issue?*

To find out, we spoke with **Michael Lighty**, president of the [Healthy California Now](#) Coalition, and former constituency director for Bernie 2020.

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

In light of diseases like HIV and Mpox that are transmitted by bodily contact, how can we communicate openly about them while avoiding stigmatizing communities?

"...what public health requires is direct, honest, transparent communication. So if there is a disease that is transmitted through bodily contact and the outbreak is initiated among a certain population, you've got to target that population.

"...And messaging for, you know, White gay men that might be around safe sex and so forth, isn't going to necessarily reach Black men who have sex with other men, in part because maybe they don't identify as gay.

"So, you know, messaging has to be tailored to specific populations. IV drug users need a specific message, right? Women who have sex with men need to have specific education. Trans people need to have specific education..."

- Michael Lighty

Today, LGBTQ populations are more likely to be uninsured, to be living in poverty and to have disabilities that may impact access to health care according to the Williams Institute. Why do you think that is?

"...marginalized populations have less access to health care, period, because they don't pay, because they're more likely to be uninsured, because they're more likely to be on public programs that have lower reimbursement rates, because they can't afford the pharmaceutical treatments like the prophylactic treatment for HIV that cost \$22,000 a year.

"So if you don't have the economic resources, you're not going to count in a healthcare industry based upon the profit motive, because "we can't make

money from you” and that really is the explanation. It's the logic of the healthcare industry, and it's a murderous logic.” – **Michael Lighty**

What is the biggest obstacle to LGBTQ organizations strongly advocating for single payer? And how can we overcome it?

“... the extent that they're funded by the pharmaceutical industry. I admit to a certain level of cynicism having <laugh> lived through all that I've lived through, but I'm not sure it's more complicated than that.

“The only thing, as many have said, that beats money is people...and that's ultimately the lesson of ACT UP....

“They took on big money and they took on government inaction and eventually they saved lives. And so that's what it takes. But it also takes, I think, making the pharmaceutical industry money and the insurance company money, healthcare industry money, toxic politically, and also making sure that politicians can't front for the industry as they do.” – **Michael Lighty**

Helpful Links

[Gaps in Health Care Access and Health Insurance among LGBT Populations in California](#), ***UCLA - The Williams Institute***

[Mpox, AIDS and COVID-19 show the challenges of targeting public health messaging to specific groups without causing stigma](#), ***The Conversation***

[New report reveals Big Pharma's influence on patient advocacy groups](#), ***Patients for Affordable Drugs***

[Equality California](#) - Legislation

[More than 1 in 8 LGBTQ people live in states where doctors can refuse to treat them](#), *NBC News*

Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

Biography: Michael Lighty

Michael Lighty, President, [Healthy California Now](#), has organized, advocated and developed policy for single-payer, Medicare for All nationally and in California for over 30 years.

He is a founding Fellow of the [Sanders Institute](#), and most recently, he was the Healthcare Constituency Director for Bernie 2020.

Formerly he was director of public policy for the California Nurses Association/ National Nurses United. He was lead policy analyst, a leader of Campaign for a Healthy California and testified on behalf of the single-payer bill, SB 562.

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