MISSOURI LGBTQ CLIMATE SURVEY, 2023-2025

Three years of stress, mental health strain, and plans to leave among LGBTQ adults, parents of LGBTQ youth, and the providers who serve them.

Missouri's LGBTQ adults, parents of LGBTQ youth, and the providers who serve them have lived at twice the high-stress mark for three straight years. Saint Louis University surveyed 939 Missourians across fall 2023, 2024, and 2025. Every group, every year, averaged between 12.5 and 12.8 on a 16-point stress scale, where 6 marks high stress.

The sociopolitical climate is the cause of the high stress named by participants. The share of LGBTQ adults who said the state's political climate hurt their mental health rose from 61% in 2023 to 78% in 2025. Half of LGBTQ adults said each year that they had considered leaving Missouri. The share of providers who considered leaving grew every year, from 33% in 2023 to 40% in 2025.

78%
of LGBTQ adults say the political climate has hurt their mental health, up from 61% in 2023

40%
of providers considered leaving Missouri in 2025, up from 33% in 2023

2x
the high-stress mark, the average stress score for every group in all three years

> *"Missouri families have lived at twice the high-stress mark for three years. The providers who care for them are thinking about leaving too."*

ABOUT THE STUDY

The survey ran each fall for three years with the same core questions. Each year it reached three groups of Missouri residents age 18 and older: LGBTQ adults, parents of LGBTQ youth, and medical and mental health providers who serve LGBTQ patients. LGBTQ youth were left out because The Trevor Project already surveys them each year.

Survey year	Fielded	Total	LGBTQ adults	Parents	Providers	Report released
2025	Oct to Nov 2025	273	116	81	76	Oct 2026
2024	Oct to Nov 2024, spanning the Nov 5 election	334	156	130	47	Apr 2025
2023	Oct to Dec 2023	332	106	91	135	Mar 2024

Each survey used the 4-item Perceived Stress Scale, one item on mental health impact of the political climate, and one item on considering leaving Missouri. Participants came through LGBTQ organizations, social media,

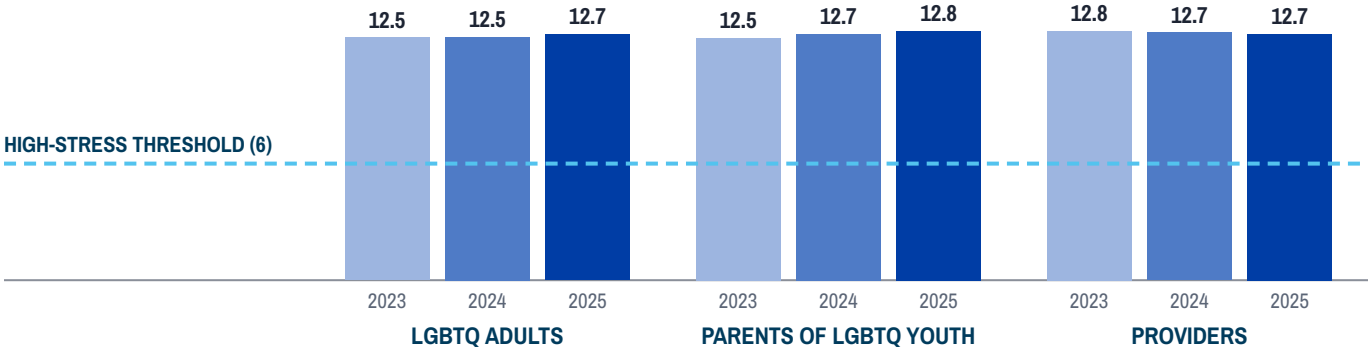
and the Prolific research panel. SLU's IRB approved the study (protocol #33711), and internal research support funded it.

THREE YEARS OF FINDINGS

Stress held steady at about twice the high-stress mark for all three groups in all three years. What changed is how much of that stress residents tie to the climate, and who is thinking about leaving.

STRESS STAYED AT TWICE THE HIGH-STRESS THRESHOLD FOR THREE YEARS

Mean Perceived Stress Scale score, 0 to 16



Source: SLU Missouri LGBTQ Political Climate Surveys, 2023 to 2025. PSS-4 means from each report.

Measure	2023	2024	2025
LGBTQ adults: mental health hurt by political climate	61%	65%	**78%**
Parents: own mental health hurt by political climate	56%	48%	**53%**
Providers: mental health hurt by political climate	56%	72%	**69%**
LGBTQ adults: considered leaving Missouri	51%	48%	**51%**
Parents: considered leaving Missouri	40%	32%	**26%**
Providers: considered leaving Missouri	33%	38%	**40%**
Providers: same or more stress than last year	93%	96%	**99%**
Parents of trans and nonbinary youth: child's mental health hurt	66%	52%	**71%**

Mental health impact among LGBTQ adults rose 17 points in two years, while the share considering a move held near half. Most stay for family and work, so leaving is a hard choice even for those who want to go.

FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS

PARENTS OF LGBTQ YOUTH

Parents of transgender and nonbinary children carry the heaviest load. In 2023, 2 in 3 of these parents said the political climate had hurt their child's mental health. By 2025 that figure was 71%, and 53% of all

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Providers report stress that climbs each year. The share with the same or more stress than the year before rose from 93% in 2023 to 99% in 2025. In comments they described state investigations of

parents said the climate had hurt their own mental health. Parents' top fear was their child's safety at school and in their town, and 96% reported the same or more stress than the year before.

Fewer parents now say they have considered leaving, down from 40% in 2023 to 26% in 2025. Family ties (76%) and work or money (69%) are what keep them in the state. The survey cannot say whether the drop means families feel safer, already left, or cannot afford to go.

colleagues, fear that clinical notes would be subpoenaed, and laws that conflict with their ethics codes.

Missouri has 896 health workforce shortage areas, the 4th most of any state (HRSA, as cited in the reports). Intent to leave rose each year, from 33% of providers in 2023 to 38% in 2024 and 40% in 2025. Most stay for family (84%) and work (77%), which gives employers and the state something to build on.

REAL-WORLD STAKES

The stakes show up in daily routines, family plans, and the clinics that stay open. Participants wrote 1,000+ comments over three years, and three voices carry the pattern.

> *"A constant low-level grade of stress and fear in the background every time I leave the house with my wife. A momentary pause while I consider if I should refer to my 'wife' or my 'partner.'"*
> LGBTQ ADULT, 2025

> *"Feeling betrayed by my home state, my child's doctor and by hateful people who don't understand the needs of my child. I needed to increase my medication and my husband sought therapy for the first time in his life. We are making plans to move from the state in which we have lived our entire lives."*
> PARENT, 2023

> *"Anxiety, panic attacks, took 5 weeks off of work to recover, I ended up transferring my entire caseload to other providers, closed my license, and left the state."*
> PROVIDER, 2024

The third story matters most for policy. One provider leaving means a caseload of Missourians searching for care in a state already short on clinicians.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The stress in these surveys tracks the climate, so the fixes sit in policy and institutions. Each step below answers a concern participants named most often.

1. **Pass statewide nondiscrimination protections.** State law does not name sexual orientation or gender identity as protected categories. Protections give residents a reason to stay and give employers a recruiting tool.
2. **Protect patient records and provider licenses.** Providers fear that clinical notes and support letters will be pulled into state investigations. Clear limits on access to confidential records, absent a court order, keep patients in care and providers in practice.

3. **Treat provider retention as a workforce issue.** Missouri ranks 4th for shortage areas. Health systems and the state can tie retention efforts to the family and work ties that already keep providers here.

4. **Make schools safe for LGBTQ students.** School safety is the top fear parents name. Enforced anti-bullying policies and trained staff lower that stress for the child and the whole family.

5. **Survey rural and minority communities.** Three years of data now show a pattern but is limited by race, ethnicity, and lack of rural representation in the samples. Targeted surveys for rural and Black/African American, Latine/Hispanic, and immigrant communities in Missouri could surface additional stressors and needs.

Legislators, health system leaders, and school boards can start by reviewing this brief with the SLU research team in the 2027 session planning cycle.

LIMITS OF THE DATA

The pattern holds across three samples, but each sample is a snapshot. Different people took the survey each year, so the data show trends in groups, not change in individuals. Participants chose to take part, most lived near St. Louis or Kansas City, and samples of LGBTQ people of color were too small for separate analysis. The provider sample fell from 135 in 2023 to 47 in 2024.

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Sources. 2023 Missouri LGBTQ Political Climate Survey, released March 2024. 2024 Missouri LGBTQ Political Climate Survey, released April 2025. 2025 Missouri LGBTQ Political Climate Survey, released October 2026.