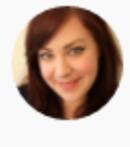




## 2015'S BEST MOMENTS FOR THE TRANS COMMUNITY

THERE'S STILL A LOT TO BE DONE, BUT THIS HAS BEEN A REMARKABLE YEAR SO FAR.



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There's still a lot to be done, but this has been a remarkable year so far.

Way back in 2012, Vice President Joe Biden [said](#) that transgender discrimination is the "civil rights issue of our time." Halfway through 2015, we seem to have more collective awareness of that truth than ever before.

While we still have a [long way to go](#), here's a look back at some of the improvements 2015 has brought about for the trans community so far, and a look forward at what's next.

### Obama became the first president ever to say the word "transgender"

During his State of the Union speech in January, Obama became the first president to ever publicly say the word "transgender."

"As Americans, we respect human dignity," he said. "That's why we defend free speech, and advocate for political prisoners, and condemn the persecution of women, or religious minorities, or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or

transgender. We do these things not only because they're right, but because they make us safer."

Janet Mock [told](#) *Time Magazine*, "The President's acknowledgment helps shatter the cloak of invisibility that has plagued trans people and forced many to suffer in silence. By speaking our community's name, the President pushes us all to recognize the existence and validity of trans people as Americans worthy of protection and our nation's resources."

Throughout the course of his presidency, Obama has also [appointed](#) transgender politicians to office, [approved](#) the hate crime legislation that contains the first-ever civil rights protections for transgender people, and [banned](#) workplace discrimination against transgender government employees. The Obama administration has also made it easier for transgender people to [update their passports](#) and [get health insurance](#) under the Affordable Care Act.

## **The Transgender Community Gained A Lot More Visibility**

A little over a year ago when [Laverne Cox](#) became the first transgender person to ever grace the cover of *Time*, the accompanying article was called "The Transgender Tipping Point." In her *Time* interview, Cox suggested that the increase of trans visibility has brought us to a unique point in history. "More of us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly, so people can say, 'Oh yeah, I know someone who is trans,'" she said. "When people have points of reference that are humanizing, that demystifies difference."

Here are some of the people and institutions demystifying difference in 2015:

### **Caitlyn Jenner**

[Caitlyn Jenner](#)'s very public coming out was met with mostly [warm](#), [positive](#) responses. It took a tremendous amount of courage for Caitlyn to do what she did, and her openness has helped [bring attention](#) to many of the pressing issues facing the transgender community.

### **Aydian Dowling**

Aydian Dowling is a transgender man whose pic for the cover of *FTMMagazine* -- in which he recreated Adam Levine's naked cover photo for *Cosmo U.K.* -- [went viral](#). He found his way back into the spotlight again by taking the lead in *Men's Health's Ultimate Guy Search*. The winner will be announced any day now, and with Aydian in the lead by over 50,000 votes, it seems likely that he'll be the first trans man ever to be featured on the cover of *Men's Health* magazine.

### **Jamie Lee Henry**

By conducting an interview with [BuzzFeed](#), Jamie Lee Henry became "the first known active-duty Army officer to come out as transgender," and the "first and only active duty service member who has changed her name and gender within the United

States Military." The army's official policy still maintains that being transgender is grounds for dismissal, so Jamie Lee Henry's willingness to speak publicly about her experience is not only brave, but ground-breaking.

## **Schuyler Bailar**

*The Washington Post* recently [reported on](#) Schuyler Bailar, "the first openly transgender collegiate swimmer in U.S. history," who'll be competing on Harvard's men's swimming team starting this fall. "I can't live inauthentically anymore," Bailar told *WaPo*. He said he was initially nervous about the other guys on the team, but was pleasantly surprised by them. "They just treat me like a regular guy," he said. "They're great people."

## **"Transparent"**

"Transparent," Amazon's show about a trans woman's coming out to her three adult children, won a whole slew of awards this year, including several Golden Globes and a [GLAAD Media Award](#). Director Jill Soloway has her own trans parent, and last year she [told Rolling Stone](#), "I wanted to make something that would make the world safer for my parent."

## **#Instapride**

Miley Cyrus has had [a big year](#) so far. She [came out](#) as queer, started the Happy Hippie Foundation to support homeless and LGBTQ youth, and [teamed up](#) with Instagram to create [#Instapride](#). The campaign features portraits of people from across the gender-identity spectrum that are shot by Miley herself. The project is helping to bring greater visibility to the trans community, while also highlighting the powerful work being done by transgender activists (like [Precious Davis and Myles Brady](#)) on the ground.

## **The media stepped up its game**

At the very beginning of 2015, GLAAD [called out](#) several news outlets for their harmful, misgendering coverage of a trans woman who was killed in Virginia. It was far from the first time this type of thing had happened in the news, and as writer Jos Truitt once [pointed out](#) in *The Guardian*, "For many years, trans people appeared in print almost exclusively as dead bodies -- almost always of murdered trans women of color, who face the highest rates of violence in the LGBT community."

Truitt also pointed out that "Articles regularly use the wrong name and gender pronouns for these murder victims, and paint salacious pictures that suggest these women were sex workers who likely tricked men into sleeping with them and ultimately 'had it coming.' The trans community has fought to end this negative press coverage - - and for the media to actually write about the real lives and struggles of trans people. For too long."

In April, after the Associate Press put out what's been [referred to](#) as a "complete and utter FAIL" of a story about Caitlyn Jenner's coming out, in which they violated their own guidelines and [misgendered her](#) by using the wrong name and pronouns (in

addition to [describing her](#) in a highly objectifying fashion), the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association widely distributed [best practices](#) on covering the stories of transgender people like Caitlyn.

Since then, much of the media [has started](#) to pay more attention to getting it right -- and to highlighting stories that document the real lives and struggles of trans people -- than ever before.

## **Access to healthcare improved for (some) transgender people**

### **Federal Employees**

In June, the Obama administration got rid of a 40-year-old rule that prevented government-contracted health insurers from paying for gender affirming surgeries for federal employees, and followed up by specifying that after 2015, they'll be required to provide transgender-inclusive healthcare. (They also got rid of a similar rule that applied to Medicare.) This means that at the beginning of 2016, hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery should be made available to all transgender federal employees.

### **Prisoners**

In April, a California court [ordered](#) the state prison system to provide gender-affirming surgery for Michelle Norsworthy, a transgender woman who was being held in a men's facility, asserting that failure to do so violated her rights to adequate medical care under the Eighth Amendment.

The following day, the Justice Department [issued a brief](#) in support of another transgender prisoner's lawsuit in Georgia, that stated, "Failure to provide individualized and appropriate medical care for inmates suffering from gender dysphoria violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment."

"Between the ruling in Michelle Norsworthy's case and the brief in Ashley Diamond's, both the court and the Department of Justice affirmed last week that no one, including transgender people, should be denied the medical care they need," Kris Hayashi, Executive Director of the Transgender Law Center, told MTV News. These two cases have helped to set the precedent that prisons must provide adequate healthcare for trans prisoners.

### **What's next?**

#### **Stopping violence**

A [report](#) issued by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) this year stated, "Even as we experience increased transgender visibility through a range of inspiring national media stories, the levels of violence and harassment transgender people face — particularly transgender women and transgender women of color — constitute a national crisis."

The National Coalition on Anti-Violence Programs recently released their hate violence [report](#) for last year, which showed that while overall violence against LGBT people decreased by 32%, **crimes against transgender people actually went up** by 13% in 2014.

The 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) [found](#) that of transgender people who had interacted with police, 22% reported bias-based harassment from police, 6% reported physical assault by police, and 20% reported that they were denied equal service by law enforcement. Nearly half of all transgender people surveyed said they felt uncomfortable turning to the police for help if their safety was threatened.

To begin combatting violence against the trans community, the HRC report [recommends](#) providing improved training to law enforcement officers, educators and school leaders, public and private corporations and emergency housing initiatives (like homeless shelters) about preventing transphobia and discrimination.

"There is no simple answer to stopping violence against transgender people," the report's authors wrote, "and there are many barriers to overcome. But that cannot – and must not – be an excuse for inaction.

### **End discrimination in school and the workplace**

The 2011 NTDS showed that 78% of trans and gender nonconforming kids in grades K-12 reported harassment. For 15% of those students, the harassment was so severe it forced them to leave school altogether, and many students surveyed reported missing school due to harassment.

Nearly 60% of trans students also [reported](#) that they'd been denied access to restrooms consistent with their gender identity. The [proposed](#) Student Nondiscrimination Act of 2015 would make it illegal to discriminate against public school students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In [65% of the country](#), it's still [perfectly legal](#) to fire someone on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In a 2013 [PEW survey](#), 21% of LGBT respondents said an employer had treated them unfairly because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would make discrimination against LGBT employees illegal, has been repeatedly introduced in Congress, but has never passed.

### **Improve Access To Healthcare**

While transgender federal employees will soon have access to trans-inclusive healthcare, only [nine states](#) currently ban anti-transgender discrimination in health insurance.

The 2011 NTDS found half of trans people surveyed reported having providers who were not sufficiently knowledgeable in transgender healthcare, which led many to delay seeking treatment when they needed it, and 22% of trans women surveyed

reported having no insurance coverage at all. Surveys have also [found](#) that 46 percent of trans men and 42 percent of trans women attempt to take their own lives at some point in their lifetimes. Having access to non-discriminatory healthcare can literally be a matter of life and death.

As reported by [HRC](#), "While the federal Affordable Care Act offers critical non-discrimination protections in insurance and health care, the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights has not yet released regulations to implement these protections. In order to protect LGBT people from discrimination in health care and ensure that transgender people receive full insurance coverage, the Office for Civil Rights should offer broad and inclusive non-discrimination regulations under the Affordable Care Act."

The Human Rights Campaign has [further recommendations](#) about what we can do next to advance equality for the transgender community.

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