

LGBTQ+ AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENTS IN SAFETY

In June, we recognize and celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) Pride Month. Pride marks the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall rebellion, which brought new visibility to the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

Throughout history, many who identify as LGBTQ+ have contributed to the improvement of safety and health through their leadership, innovation and research. Not all of them were empowered to publicly acknowledge their LGBTQ+ identities during their lifetimes. Here are 10 stories of safety, passion and perseverance.



Sarah Josephine Baker

One of few female doctors in the early 20th century, Baker was appointed the head of the Bureau of Child Hygiene where her hygiene protocols and education efforts helped reduce New York City's infant mortality rate by half. She also famously apprehended cook Mary Mallon, the real "Typhoid Mary," as the source of a small typhoid epidemic in 1907.



Pauline Newman

Newman started working at a hairbrush factory at age 9 and by 11 was working in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. This was in the late 19th century, prior to the fire in March 1911 that would claim the lives of 146 people. Her experiences in poor working conditions inspired her successful fight for better pay, hours and safety standards for women through unionization and education.



Gerald Bostock

Bostock sued his employer, Clayton County, Georgia, for firing him shortly after joining a gay recreational softball league. The case, later combined with others, went to the Supreme Court and resulted in a 2020 decision that outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in most workplaces, creating safer work environments for LGBTQ+ employees.



Rachel Carson

Carson was a marine biologist whose environmental activism led to national recognition of the effects of hazardous chemicals on our environment, spurring bans on pesticides and pollutants and launching environmental regulations that safety and health professionals follow today. She was a posthumous recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Phill Wilson

As an activist, Wilson has spent more than four decades on HIV/AIDS policy, research, prevention and treatment issues, particularly in Black communities. Recently bringing his experience to the fight against COVID-19, he advocates for social approaches to infectious disease management that go beyond biomedical solutions.



Walter Westman

As an ecologist and botanist, Westman had a significant influence on environmental policy. During a fellowship with Congress, he helped write portions of the Clean Water Act in 1972. Throughout his career, he fought against homophobia in the sciences and in 1980 founded the National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists, now called Out to Innovate.



Joni Christian

Following a gender-affirmation surgery while Christian was employed on a plant assembly line in the 1970s, her coworkers harassed her and attempted to block her use of the women's restroom — an issue OSHA has since addressed as important to overall worker safety and health. She sued and won better working conditions for transgender people.



Urvashi Vaid

An influential attorney, author and LGBTQ+ rights activist, Vaid fought for legislation and funding to improve safety and health for people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, particularly those who were incarcerated. Vaid was one of the five incorporators of the American LGBTQ+ Museum, which will soon open at the New-York Historical Society.



Sally Ride

Since becoming the first American woman in space in 1983 (and the youngest American in space at that time), astronaut Sally Ride has inspired many women and girls to pursue careers in STEM — science, technology, engineering and math. She also acted as an incident investigator on NASA boards looking into the 1986 Challenger and 2003 Columbia incidents.



Tammy Baldwin

As the first openly gay candidate elected to the U.S. Senate, Baldwin has fought for LGBTQ+ rights as well as improving safety standards in transportation and protecting worker health at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. She recently introduced The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Worker Act.