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The View

'MANY PEOPLE AREN'T AWARE THAT THEY HAVE A GENDER IDENTITY' —NEXT PAGE

UNITED STATES

Why Uncle Sam wants to know how many LGBT people are in America

By Katy Steinmetz

FOR CENTURIES, BEING LESBIAN, gay, bisexual or transgender in America meant hiding at least part of who you were. The stigma traces as far back as the colonial era, when sodomy was a capital crime. The culture has shifted over time, and recent decades have brought a rapid social transformation. Today, as the LGBT population moves into its full and equal place in public life, more officials are asking an old question with new urgency: Just how many LGBT Americans are there?

Many experts believe that we need a full accounting of the nation's LGBT population and how they live for a host of legal, economic and medical reasons. Now, for the first time, a group of experts from 21 federal agencies is working on a project to figure out how to collect that kind of data. The results could pave the way for unprecedented surveys of America's sexual orientations and gender identities, influencing everything from local laws to military policy to health care.

"It's high time for the LGBT community to count and be counted," says California state assemblyman David Chiu, who proposed a law to require state health agencies to start asking about orientation and gender identity. "Data saves lives."



Counting LGBT Americans could spur changes in health care, military policies and more

Studies of sample groups have found, for instance, that LGBT people face more barriers to getting health care than the general public and that transgender women of color are at greatly increased risk for physical assault. But experts say the full scope of such problems can be revealed only by large-scale data collection—and that such information will make it easier to get the resources needed to fix disparities.

"It's important to know how many transgender veterans we're serving, what

kinds of care they're accessing," says Jillian Shipherd, who helps oversee LGBT patient care at the Department of Veterans Affairs. "And we just don't know what that looks like in the VA right now because we don't have the data."

Jim Mangia, CEO of St. John's Well Child and Family Center in Los Angeles County, says that when an organization like his can provide data showing that it serves thousands of transgender people, that can help it win millions in grant money to provide services transgender people

ILLUSTRATION BY DOMENIC BAHMANN FOR TIME

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DOMENIC BAHMANN - PILL BOX 2 / HOW FAR CAN YOU GO

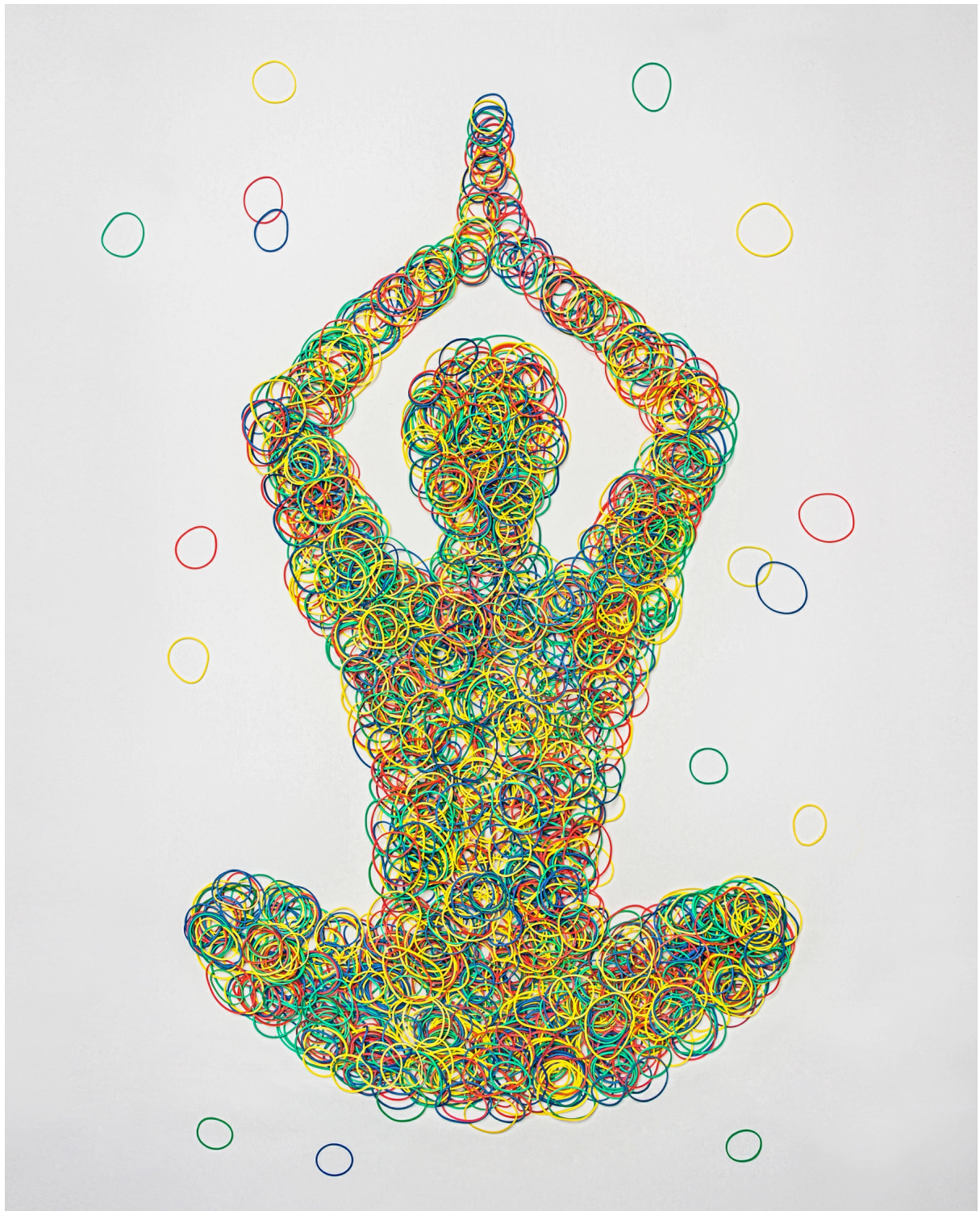
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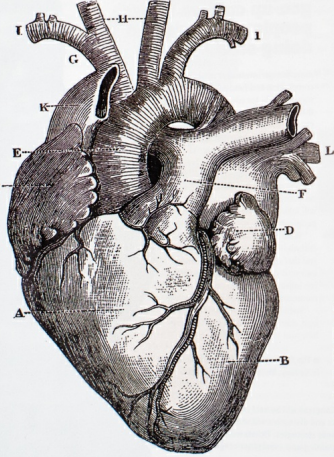
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“Telehealth’s biggest boon is its potential to deliver the right care at the right time.”

Lifeline for healthcare?

With global healthcare systems feeling the strain of soaring costs and stretched resources, information and communication technology is being touted as a much-needed remedy.

STORY SUSAN MULDOWNY

The cost of healthcare is one of the great riddles of economic management. In industries ranging from food to cars to telecommunications, things are getting better and cheaper. Not in healthcare. In Australia, for instance, healthcare costs have been rising by more than 5 per cent annually in recent years – almost double the pace of growth in the economy generally.

So fast are costs escalating in advanced economies that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts that, without reform, healthcare will be unaffordable by mid-century.

In seeking to fix this problem, experts are looking towards telehealth – using information and communication technology to deliver healthcare.

Telehealth encompasses all sorts of technological health solutions, from sophisticated in-home remote patient monitoring hardware to a simple SMS from a concerned parent to a general practitioner (GP).

Dr Tom Wade, a University of Adelaide research fellow who edits the *Journal of Telemedicine and Teleson*, gives the example of a patient with a chronic condition who steps onto an internet-connected weight scale every morning. A remote system can analyse and store their weight, and if it suddenly spikes – a sign of dangerous fluid overload – their medication can be quickly adjusted.

Such technology can not only reduce the costs of existing health procedures, but also improve on them. Dr James Freeman, a Tasmanian-based GP and founder of telehealth start-up GP2U, is one of many who argue that telehealth’s biggest boon is its potential to deliver the right care at the right time – sometimes well before a patient would have made a trip to a doctor.

In the waiting room

Some countries have made more progress than others on telehealth. Denmark’s national telehealth portal has been providing access to healthcare services for citizens and health professionals since 2005, and China is on track to become one of the largest >

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DOMENIC BAHMANN - JUICING ALONG

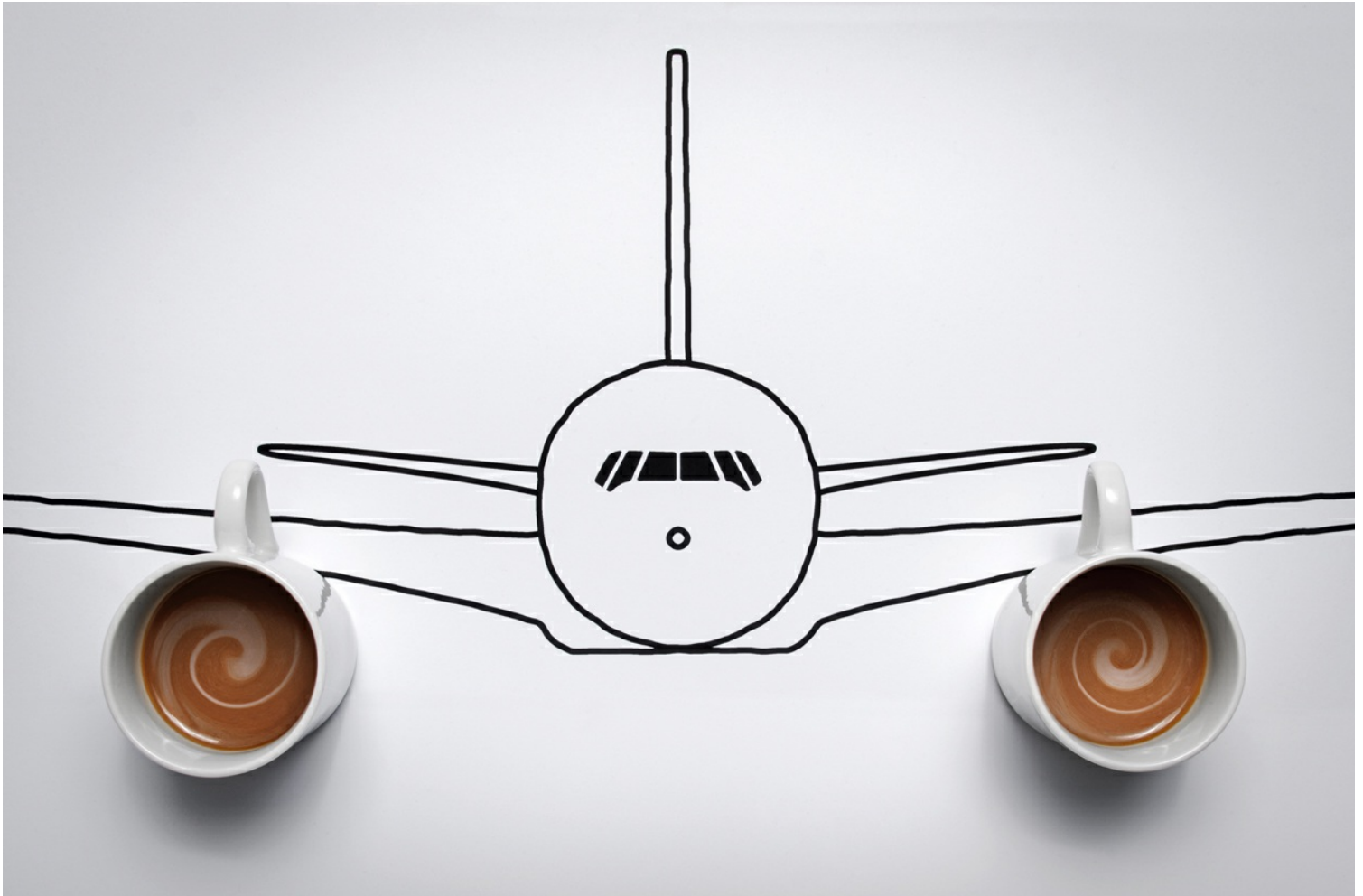
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DOMENIC BAHMANN - TAKEOFF IN THE MORNING

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