# Gay conversion therapy in shocking US comeback... despite bans



Conversion therapy, once thought to be fading, is quietly resurging in new, subtle forms, continuing to inflict significant harm on LGBTQ+ individuals when they are most vulnerable. Andrew Pledger’s experience, described in a recent feature, illustrates the trauma hidden behind the closed doors of private counselling sessions often disguised as spiritual or therapeutic care. Pledger, a student at a private evangelical university, sought help for his depression but ended up subjected to a session aimed not at healing but at changing his sexual orientation—a practice broadly discredited by all major medical bodies due to its links to increased depression and suicide risk among young people.

Survivors recount how conversion therapy is seldom labelled as such, stripping away the clarity of its destructive intent. Rocky Tishma, who was 16 when his Mormon church offered 'help' after a suicide attempt, remembers being warned he would 'get AIDS and die alone' if he lived openly as queer. Curtis Lopez-Galloway describes being sent to Christian counsellors with instructions to adopt a more 'masculine persona' and study women to 'figure out what types' he should find attractive. These coercive tactics are often veiled as pastoral guidance or psychological support, perpetuating harm without transparent acknowledgment.

The movement’s own founders have renounced the practice. John Smid, Randy Scobey, and Bill Prickett—formerly leaders in prominent ex-gay ministries—have admitted that no one was truly 'cured' and expressed remorse for the damage caused. Their rueful confessions underscore the falsehood and cruelty at the heart of conversion therapy and highlight the persistence of these harmful ideologies in some religious communities and political agendas today.

Despite bans in 20 U.S. states and local jurisdictions, conservative political shifts have emboldened proponents of conversion therapy. Efforts led by Republican groups have overturned bans, framing restrictions as violations of parental rights and free speech. A pending Supreme Court case challenging Colorado’s prohibition on conversion therapy for minors threatens to unravel protections nationwide. Meanwhile, organisations like the Trevor Project report the practice continues unabated in 48 states, often operating under different labels or through informal channels.

Survivors often face long-lasting trauma. Tishma’s story of excommunication and substance abuse illustrates how deeply conversion therapy scars lives. Yet from this pain, new paths to healing have emerged. Tishma now works as a psychotherapist assisting other survivors, while Lopez-Galloway founded the Conversion Therapy Survivor Network, which offers solidarity, support, and education to those affected. This network is a crucial space where survivors can share their stories and begin recovery—a process many experts affirm requires tailored resources acknowledging the unique wounds conversion therapy inflicts.

The psychological community broadly condemns conversion therapy. The American Medical Association, among others, classifies it as harmful, and recent studies reveal that survivors suffer enduring shame, self-hatred, and mental health challenges. Research led by LGBTQ2S+ survivors highlights significant barriers to recovery, demanding more comprehensive support to help survivors move from mere survival toward thriving. Initiatives like the Southern Poverty Law Center and Truth Wins Out campaigns also strive to raise awareness and advocate for stronger legal protections.

Documentary films such as Netflix’s 2021 Pray Away further expose conversion therapy’s continuing legacy within conservative religious groups, featuring voices of former leaders who now repudiate their past roles and share the trauma endured by countless individuals. These stories amplify the urgent need for public education and legislative action to prevent new victims and support survivors.

In Australia and elsewhere, the fight against conversion therapy persists, often propelled by the courageous testimonies of those who lived through the ordeal. Kate McCobb’s eight-year experience with conversion therapy demonstrates how insidious these practices can be—masquerading as therapy, yet rooted in pathologising LGBTQ identity. Her recovery, aided by knowledgeable and affirming therapists, underscores the importance of informed, compassionate mental health care for survivors. Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dnamagazine.com.au/conversion-therapy-is-resurging-and-survivors-are-fighting-back/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/6088170/pray-away-documentary/> - The documentary 'Pray Away,' directed by Kristine Stolakis and released on Netflix on August 3, 2021, explores the history and ongoing impact of religious-affiliated conversion therapy programs in the United States. The practice, which claims to change an LGBTQ person's sexuality or gender identity, has affected more than 700,000 people since the 1960s and 70s. Conversion therapy has been widely discredited as pseudoscience and is banned in 20 U.S. states. However, it remains prevalent in some conservative religious communities. The film highlights the trauma experienced by individuals who underwent conversion therapy and features testimonies from former leaders of the movement who have now recanted and recognized the harm they caused. Stolakis discusses the detrimental effects this practice has on LGBTQ individuals, noting that internalized homophobia and transphobia continue to fuel the movement despite its proven ineffectiveness and the significant psychological damage it causes. The documentary aims to bring awareness to this issue and stimulate further discourse on the dangers of conversion therapy.
3. <https://www.conversionsurvivor.org/> - The Conversion Therapy Survivor Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed by survivors of conversion therapy, united to support others in their journey of healing. They provide a safe space for survivors to find solace, knowing they are not alone in their experiences. Their belief is that healing comes from shared understanding and connection—by offering a platform to share stories and connect with others who have endured similar trauma, they help survivors take steps toward recovery. They offer programs such as Survivor Sunday, a weekly meeting that offers a safe and understanding virtual round-table setting where survivors of conversion therapy come together to share their stories, and education through presentations, videos, and panels to help further awareness about the issue and personal stories.
4. <https://www.nclrights.org/i-survived-eight-years-of-conversion-therapy-but-i-fought-back/> - Kate McCobb shares her personal experience of surviving eight years of conversion therapy. In 2006, at the age of 25, she began seeing a therapist who fixated on her being a lesbian, despite not seeking counseling for that. The therapist insisted that her attraction to women was pathological, a result of childhood sexual abuse, even though she had no memories of that. He claimed that with his help, her brain could be 'rewired' to reveal her 'true self'—a heterosexual woman. Through individual and group sessions, he encouraged her to become 'more feminine'—to lose weight, grow out her hair, change her wardrobe, and date men. He convinced her that she was sick and that she could change. For eight years, she tried. But she moved to another state in 2014 and began seeing a new therapist the following spring. It was from her new therapist that she discovered that 'conversion therapy' was considered unethical and harmful by all the major medical and mental health associations. She shares her gratitude for the support she received and hopes her story encourages others to step forward and fight against this practice.
5. <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/stories/splc-and-truth-wins-out-launch-campaign-targeting-destructive-conversion-therapy/> - The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and Truth Wins Out (TWO) launched a national campaign targeting conversion therapy, a practice that claims to 'convert' people from homosexuality to heterosexuality. The campaign began with a series of community meetings in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., for survivors of the practice, which has been discredited or highly criticized by virtually all major American medical, psychiatric, psychological, and professional counseling organizations. Survivors were also invited to share their own stories. The campaign also encouraged community advocates and elected leaders to scrutinize local conversion therapy programs. Christine Sun, deputy legal director leading the SPLC’s LGBT rights project, stated, 'Conversion therapy programs have devastated all too many lives and families by attempting to change a person’s sexual orientation.'
6. <https://www.cbrc.net/study_finds_survivors_of_conversion_therapy_need_much_more_support> - A study led by LGBTQ2S+ survivors highlights the barriers to recovery for those who have undergone conversion therapy, also known as sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression change efforts (SOGIECE). The research indicates that many survivors experience lasting trauma, including shame and self-hatred, years after so-called 'treatment.' The study emphasizes the need for more support and resources to help survivors move from surviving to thriving. Jordan Sullivan, coordinator of the research project, stated, 'Moving from surviving to thriving is possible.' The study also aims to create a knowledge hub utilizing SOGIECE data and information to further develop recovery through connection and storytelling.