

PATIENT POPULATION COMPETENCY - LGBTQ+

The most important thing is to demonstrate respect, concern, and openness, regardless of a patient's sexual orientation/behaviors and/or gender identity/expression. Remember, **everyone is a person in need of care.**

"You can't be healthy if you have to hide who you are or if you think you have to hide who you are because you don't know if it's safe."

--Transgender Man (Center for American Progress)

PATIENT CHALLENGES

- Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and gender-nonconforming (LGBTQ+) people avoid or delay care because of experiences with discrimination by health care providers and institutions. **Developing trust may take longer and require additional sensitivity** from the provider.
- Patients may experience additional social, cultural, and physical barriers. The LGBTQ+ community is diverse and not homogenous.
- Social stigma creates lifelong stress associated with mental and physical health problems.
- LGBTQ+ people are especially vulnerable to social stress that may lead to higher tobacco and substance use. Social stress may influence body image, diet, and exercise habits.
- Legal marriage is one of the primary ways people acquire health insurance. As a result, LGBTQ+ people have historically had lower rates of health insurance.
- As a result of social exclusion, transgender people may have histories of cycling in and out of employment (and therefore health insurance), interrupted/avoiding medical care, interrupted education, social isolation, trauma, poverty, engaging in survival sex, or pursuing alternate gender confirmation therapies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Avoid making assumptions about the gender or sexual behaviors of a patient or a patient's partner(s). Use gender neutral language. Ex. "partner(s)" or "significant others(s)"
- Use the same language the patient uses to describe identity, sexual partners, and relationships. **If in doubt, ask what word or phrase they prefer.**
 - Many people do not define themselves by a sexual orientation label. Ex. Some people may have both female and male sexual partners but consider themselves heterosexual.
- If a woman identifies as lesbian or has a female sexual partner, do not assume she has never had a male sexual partner, has no children, has never been pregnant, or has little risk of STIs. Men who identify as gay may have had female sexual partners or have children.
- Avoid unrelated probing. **Explaining why you need information can help avoid the perception of intrusion.** Ex. "To help assess your health risks, can you tell me about any history you have had with hormone use?"

TRANSGENDER-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Do not make assumptions about behavior or bodies based on presentation, **ask!**
- **Use correct pronouns.** Ex. She/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/their (gender neutral)
- Apologize for slip-ups but don't make a big deal of it. We're all learning!

HIV/AIDS

- HIV/AIDS is an important and **sensitive** health concern for many in the LGBTQ+ community. HIV is not spread through casual contact.