

# UPDATE

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## Understanding and Working with the LGBTQ+ Community

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A recent study found that the number of people who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and others) has doubled in the past 10 years. Additionally, the younger a person is, the more likely they identify in this way. This means, whether you know it or not, you are likely seeing people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community at your health center, school or office.

Despite the growing visibility and recognition of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially transgender people, there remains discrimination, hostility, and major disparities in their access to housing, employment, health care, and more. Many in the LGBTQ+ community have been left out or worse yet, threatened, bullied, or otherwise harmed for who they know they are. As health care providers and educators we must recognize that our patients and students do not comprise any one identity. Therefore, we must make meaningful efforts to be inclusive of a person's gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation in our language, marketing materials, and their overall health care experiences.

While it may seem daunting, just a few small changes in your office will start to help more people feel welcome and respected. First, look around your space. Who is represented in pictures on the wall and your magazines or pamphlets? Do you have anything that indicates LGBTQ+ people will be welcome? A simple sign saying "All are Welcome Here" or a small rainbow sticker or flag will be noticed and appreciated.



However, remember that if you put up a sign or flag, you must follow through and be inclusive with your actions and language.

What about your intake process? When you ask for someone's gender, do you only give "female" or "male" options? Many people now identify as "nonbinary", meaning they do not see themselves as strictly male or female. Offering a write in option next to a box for "other" will be welcoming to many people, as it will let them accurately identify their gender. If you ask for someone's sexual orientation, it is helpful if you add a line for people to write in their answer.

How do you address people in your office? Do you ask everyone for their preferred name and the pronouns they use? Many people use a name other than their legal name. It shows respect to ask for **and use** someone's preferred name. And just as you would never assume you knew someone's name; don't assume you know the pronouns they use. Ask, and then make sure you use the ones they give you. And try to avoid gendered language like sir or ma'am, husband or wife. That makes an assumption that may be wrong and can be offensive. By using inclusive words, we make space for more people to exist and be safe.

*Rachel Marcey and Sue Wendelgass work for Planned Parenthood of Greater New York under a grant from the NYS AIDS Institute to provide training and information on LGBTQ+ topics across the Capital Region. If you are interested in free training or more information, please contact them at 518-605-4664.*

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