

# PROVIDING LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE CARE AND SERVICES AT YOUR PHARMACY

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A Resource Guide for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Staff



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
CAMPAIGN  
FOUNDATION™

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Studies have shown that many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) patients experience bias in the healthcare system, which leads to numerous healthcare disparities as well as barriers to care. Pharmacists play an important role in the healthcare system and can take positive steps to promote the health of their LGBTQ patients by examining their patient interactions, pharmacy environments, policies and staff training for ways to improve access to quality, inclusive healthcare..

This guide has been developed to help pharmacists and pharmacy staff provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for their LGBTQ patients. When LGBTQ patients do not feel welcomed and included or when they experience a negative encounter at a pharmacy they are less likely to return, which may negatively impact their health if this leads to delays or non-adherence with prescribed medications.

This guide will cover key concepts and LGBTQ terms as well as the health disparities faced by LGBTQ people. It includes key tips on how to best care for LGBTQ patients as well as how to make your pharmacy environment welcoming and inclusive. It also includes resources and helpful websites for you to find additional information.

## About the Human Rights Campaign Foundation

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation is the educational arm of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Health and Aging Program oversees the annual Healthcare Equality Index (HEI), the HIV and Health Equity project and other projects related to LGBTQ health and aging.

## Acknowledgments

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## GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LGBTQ PATIENTS

### Concepts and Terms

As part of getting to know your LGBTQ patients it is important to know some basic concepts and terms that will help you better understand and communicate with this group.

There are two important things to keep in mind:

1. Language matters, and
2. Language is constantly evolving.

Language matters because being mindful and choosing your words carefully are the simplest ways to create a safe space for LGBTQ patients. Understanding and increasing your comfort level in using (or in some cases, not using) the terms below can help patients to know that you are an accepting and inclusive healthcare provider and that they can talk to you about their healthcare needs without experiencing bias.

Later in this guide we will discuss how you can use inclusive language on paperwork, resources, brochures and forms to help to ensure a welcoming environment within the pharmacy.

As you review these terms, keep in mind that the list is not comprehensive and that language is constantly evolving. For example, some words, like “homosexual” and “transsexual” are now seen as outdated and should be avoided. If you come across a word you don’t know, look it up! A little bit of research can go a long way in demonstrating your support and understanding of LGBTQ patients.

To start off, it is important to understand the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Everyone has a sexual orientation and a gender identity; but sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same thing.

**Sexual orientation** refers to a person’s enduring emotional, romantic, physical and/or sexual attraction to other people. Some common terms associated with sexual orientation include:

- **Heterosexual** - A person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of a different gender. Straight is another term used to describe heterosexuals.
- **Bisexual** - A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. “Bi” is often used as an abbreviation. Related terms include pansexual, queer, fluid, omnisexual, non-monosexual, in the middle sexualities, heteroflexible, homoflexible, polysexual and many others.
- **Lesbian** - A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay** - A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. It is more commonly used to describe men.
- **Queer** - A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations.

While these are some of the most commonly used terms, it is important to remember that people may describe their sexual orientation in other ways. For example, some people may prefer terms like “same-gender-loving” or “same-sex attracted.” It is important for healthcare providers to let LGBTQ people describe themselves using language that they prefer.

**Gender identity** refers to a person's internal sense of being male or female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. Some common terms associated with gender identity include:

- **Transgender** - An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Cisgender** - A term used to describe people whose gender identity or expression aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Transgender (or Trans) Man** - A person who was assigned female at birth and who identifies as a man.
- **Transgender (or Trans) Woman** - A person who was assigned male at birth and who identifies as a woman.
- **Gender expression** - The external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.
- **Genderqueer** - People who reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories. A related term is gender fluid.
- **Gender transition** - The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of their gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using different names and pronouns and/or being socially recognized as another gender. Some people may undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions such as by taking cross-sex hormones or having surgery. It is important to realize that the gender transition process is different for everyone.

Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, etc.

Understanding the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity and the key terms associated with these concepts is important. However, it is also important to recognize that LGBTQ people are very diverse and that everyone's identity is made up of many different visible and invisible components. Race, ethnicity, immigration status, religion, ability, education, socioeconomic resources and age are all other factors that may impact a person's societal and healthcare experiences and how they interact with your pharmacy and the larger healthcare system. In order to provide optimal care and services to your LGBTQ patients, it is important to understand how their identities and experiences might affect their health.

## LGBTQ Healthcare Disparities

LGBTQ people may have difficulty accessing healthcare and face healthcare disparities stemming from structural and legal factors, social stigma, and a lack of culturally competent healthcare. Review the healthcare disparities illustrated below to help you think about some of the conditions that may lead LGBTQ patients to your pharmacy and how you can help.

HEALTH DISPARITIES		HOW PHARMACISTS CAN HELP
<p>LGBTQ people are less likely to have health insurance than their heterosexual counterparts and transgender people have the lowest insurance rates of all groups.</p>	<p>Insurance coverage/access</p> 	<p>Help patients identify and access prescription assistance programs.</p>
<p>LGB people report more chronic conditions, asthma diagnoses, headaches, allergies, osteoarthritis, and gastro-intestinal problems than heterosexual individuals.</p>	<p>Chronic conditions</p> 	<p>Help patients manage conditions with either prescriptions or over the counter options.</p>
<p>LGBTQ people smoke cigarettes at rates that are <b>68% higher</b> than the rest of the population.</p>	<p>Smoking</p> 	<p>Be aware of the need to assess cigarette and other tobacco product use and to provide smoking cessation counseling as needed.</p>
<p>LGBTQ are <b>two and a half times</b> more likely to experience depression and anxiety.</p>	<p>Mental health</p> 	<p>Pharmacists can be a valuable resource for LGBTQ-inclusive referrals for mental health services in the community.</p>
<p>An estimated <b>20-30%</b> of LGBTQ people abuse substances, compared to about 9% of the general population and <b>25%</b> of LGBTQ people abuse alcohol, compared to 5-10% of the general population.</p>	<p>Alcohol and substance abuse</p> 	<p>Pharmacists can be a valuable resource for LGBTQ-inclusive referrals for substance abuse services in the community. There are also important implications for potential adverse effects with other medications a patient may be taking.</p>

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING PHARMACY

To begin to address the health needs of your LGBTQ patients, one of the first steps is to create an environment that will feel welcoming and inclusive of all LGBTQ people. Here are some key steps that you can take:

### 1. Provide Training to Staff on LGBTQ Culturally Affirming Care

Training on LGBTQ identities, terminology and health disparities, as well as on how to avoid stereotypes and assumptions about patients' sexual orientations and gender identities help to facilitate respectful communication with LGBTQ patients. When patients are received in a non-judgmental and inclusive way they are more likely to remain engaged in care. Free online training is available from the National LGBT Health Education Center.

### 2. Create a Welcoming Physical Environment

LGBTQ patients report that they often search for subtle cues in the environment to determine acceptance. Here are some ways you can make your pharmacy environment signal acceptance:

- Display a rainbow sticker, the HRC logo or a Safe Zone sticker.
- Make sure that signs and marketing and health education materials include images of same-sex couples or families.
- Display LGBTQ-specific health education materials or other resource materials from local LGBTQ organizations

### 3. Restrooms

Transgender and gender nonconforming people sometimes experience questioning or harassment in public restrooms. Have a clear policy that ensures that people have access to the restroom that matches their gender identity. You can also provide single occupancy gender-neutral restrooms.

### 4. Communication Basics

You can help to establish a trusting relationship with a patient by using the right words when communicating either directly or through the forms in your pharmacy. Here are some places to start:

- Never make assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation based on a person's name or how they look or sound.
- Only use gender pronouns if you are sure of a person's gender identity and the pronouns that they use – otherwise you should stick to gender neutral language.
- In some cases transgender people have insurance and identification documents that do not accurately reflect their current name or gender identity – take caution to make sure you know what name and pronoun they use and use that name and pronoun when talking with them or referring to them.
- To prevent miscommunication by staff, consider adding a name and pronoun in use option on intake forms and in the pharmacy records.
- Consider making forms used in the pharmacy more inclusive, not just male/female binary.
- Avoid asking any unnecessary personal questions that are not directly relevant to the patient's care.
- If you make a mistake with someone's name or pronoun, a simple apology can go a long way.

## 5. Outreach and Community Engagement

Engaging with the local LGBTQ community is also critical to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment. Consider:

- Co-sponsoring or hosting community events in collaboration with local LGBTQ organizations.
- Recognizing LGBTQ awareness “holidays” such as LGBT Health Week, National Coming out Day, and Transgender Day of Remembrance.
- Organizing a group of staff to march in the community's annual LGBTQ pride parade.
- Marketing or advertising directly to the LGBTQ community.

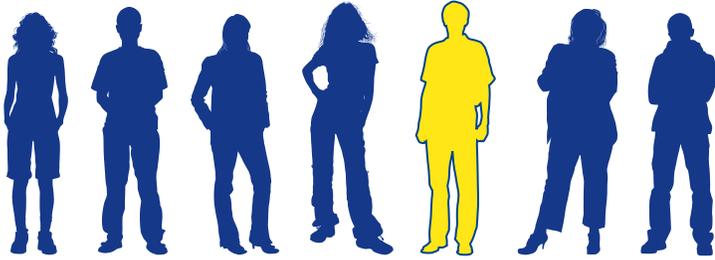
### **SECTION 1557 OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT**

Section 1557 is the civil rights provision of the Affordable Care Act which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability and age. The federal department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights has issued final regulations on Section 1557 that make it clear that sex includes gender identity and sex stereotyping.

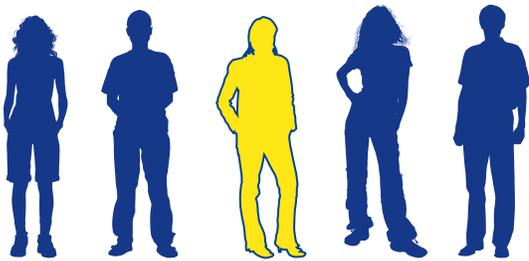
This means that most insurers and providers (including pharmacies) are prohibited from discriminating against transgender and gender non-conforming people in the provision of healthcare coverage and services.

Section 1557 applies to any health program or activity, any part of which receives federal funding, including Medicaid or Medicare payments. This means that most pharmacies must abide by these guidelines and should put policies and procedures in place to help avoid discrimination against LGBT people.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS



Of the 1.2 million people living with HIV in the United States, **roughly one in seven does not know their HIV status**



There are 50,000 new transmissions each year, with **one in five new cases occurring among youth between the ages of 13 and 24.**

## HIV Prevention and Care

Gay and bisexual men and transgender women of color continue to bear the biggest burden when it comes to HIV. Pharmacists can play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of HIV.

### Prevention

#### Testing

HIV testing and early HIV diagnosis improves access to treatment that can prolong life and help prevent transmission to others. Pharmacists can help by:

- Being familiar with and referring to community HIV testing sites.
- Offering on-site rapid HIV testing and counseling services.
- Making referrals for confirmatory testing and linkage to care.

#### PrEP

1.2 Million Americans are likely candidates for PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC found that one in four gay and bisexual men, one in five injectable drug users, and one in 200 heterosexual adults should consider using PrEP. When taken as prescribed by a knowledgeable healthcare provider, PrEP has been shown to be safe and highly effective at reducing the likelihood of HIV acquisition.

Pharmacists can do their part to meet the CDC's recommendations by:

- Helping to identify patients that may benefit from PrEP and linking them to PrEP prescribers in the community.
- Ensuring PrEP users are refilling their prescriptions in accordance with current CDC guidelines.
- Working with patients on PrEP to promote medication adherence.
- Assisting patients on PrEP in accessing payment assistance programs.
- Establishing protocol-based, pharmacist-run PrEP clinics to increase access.

## Treatment

Pharmacists are an essential member of a person's HIV care team and their involvement in managing HIV-related care has been associated with improved health outcomes. Pharmacists' roles typically include:

- Working with the care team to select individualized HIV treatment regimens.
- Providing patient counseling.
- Monitoring for treatment responses and adverse effects.
- Evaluating regimens for drug interactions.
- Identifying opportunities for regimen simplification.
- Monitor patient adherence to therapy and intervene to improve adherence.
- Participate in the management of medications used for other acute and chronic conditions.

## Transgender Healthcare

Not all transgender patients pursue hormone therapy, but those that do need to manage the potential risks and side effects associated with the medications. Transgender patients have a unique need for a sound relationship with their pharmacist because knowledge of medications is so essential to a transgender patient's quality of life. The potential for pharmacists to make a positive impact in the lives of their transgender patients is immense. Here are some ways that they can do this:

- Create an inclusive and welcoming pharmacy where all pharmacists and staff are sensitive to a person's gender identity and name and pronoun in use and treat all patients with respect.
- Help transgender patients understand their treatments and the potential intended and unintended side effects.
- Be an advocate for patients with insurance companies that may deny coverage.
- Help patients manage adverse reactions and avoid potential drug interactions.



I think pharmacists play an incredibly vital role in my healthcare. They help me manage my health, offer a wealth of information, and are key in my overall well-being. **Walking into a pharmacy and having the people behind the counter validate my identity as a transgender man and walk me through my testosterone prescription as easily as they would penicillin makes the entire experience truly positive.** Knowing my pharmacist is educated about my community and is invested in my care is invaluable.



- **Rowan**, a transgender man

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **The National LGBT Health Education Center**

Free online, on-demand training and other resources  
[www.lgbthealtheducation.org](http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org)

### **Center of Excellence for Transgender Health**

Primary Care Protocols.  
[www.transhealth.ucsf.edu](http://www.transhealth.ucsf.edu)

### **World Professional Association for Transgender Health**

Standards of Care  
[www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)

### **Human Rights Campaign Foundation**

Sample patient non-discrimination policies  
[www.hrc.org/patient-non-discrimination](http://www.hrc.org/patient-non-discrimination)

### **ASHP Guidelines on Pharmacist Involvement in HIV Care**

[www.ashp.org/DocLibrary/BestPractices/Guidelines-Pharmacist-Involvement-HIV-Care.aspx](http://www.ashp.org/DocLibrary/BestPractices/Guidelines-Pharmacist-Involvement-HIV-Care.aspx)

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