



ALLIES IN HEALTH:

**LGBTQ HEALTH
EQUITY TOOLKIT**



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CHAMPIONING HEALTH EQUITY FOR FLORIDA'S LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Health equity ensures that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. However, significant disparities persist, profoundly impacting the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals in Florida. The LGBTQ community faces unique health challenges, including higher rates of mental health issues and certain chronic conditions – especially for our youngest generations – all exacerbated by discrimination and barriers to care. These issues have been further compounded by recent legislative actions making it increasingly difficult for LGBTQ individuals to receive adequate healthcare. There remains an urgent need for comprehensive, inclusive healthcare practices to support the health and well-being of LGBTQ Floridians.

WHY DOES LGBTQ HEALTH EQUITY MATTER?

Florida is home to one of the highest LGBTQ populations in the United States. In 2023, 5.4% of the adult population in the state identified as part of this community. Moreover, the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that 24.9% of Florida high school students identified as LGBTQ. Given the substantial presence of the LGBTQ population in Florida, it is imperative that healthcare facilities provide care that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to their unique needs.

Unfortunately, we know that LGBTQ individuals in Florida encounter numerous obstacles in accessing healthcare, which significantly affects their overall health and well-being. [Research](#) underscores a lack of culturally competent healthcare providers trained to address their specific needs, leading to negative experiences and feeling unwelcome or misunderstood in healthcare settings (Center for American Progress, 2023; National Coalition for LGBT Health, 2023). For instance, a 2022 [survey](#) by the Center for American Progress revealed that over 20% of LGBTQ adults postponed or avoided medical care due to provider disrespect or discrimination, including more than 30% of transgender or gender-diverse individuals. LGBTQ people of color, transgender and gender-diverse individuals, youth, seniors, People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), and those living at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities face heightened risks due to a combination of personal and social factors such as systemic racism, [social isolation and loneliness](#), or inadequate health insurance coverage. These intersecting issues contribute to poorer health outcomes, higher rates of HIV transmission and fewer resources for prevention and treatment, further exacerbating the impact on these already vulnerable populations and underscoring the urgent necessity for inclusive healthcare approaches.

Importantly, [studies](#) indicate that LGBTQ patients are more likely to seek medical care if

they feel understood, heard, affirmed, and respected. When fully implemented, LGBTQ culturally competent care can mitigate the systemic healthcare discrimination faced by LGBTQ individuals. The benefits of culturally competent care include increased access to services, improved prevention and early intervention, more accurate diagnoses, better treatment adherence and compliance, and higher patient retention.



COMMITMENT TO A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Equality Florida's health equity initiative, *Allies in Health*, emerged in response to the undeniable obstacles that stand in the way of realizing a vision where every LGBTQ individual has access to high-quality, compassionate, and equitable healthcare.

This **LGBTQ Health Equity Toolkit** is designed to address these challenges head-on. It serves as a comprehensive resource for healthcare administrators and providers, policymakers, community leaders, and advocates committed to advancing health equity and provides actionable strategies, evidence-based practices, and community-driven insights to enhance the quality of care and support for LGBTQ individuals across the state. By working together, we can dismantle barriers to health equity and ensure that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can lead a healthy and fulfilling life.

Thank you for joining us in this vital effort. Together, we can create a healthier, more equitable future for Florida's LGBTQ community.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING AND MAINTAINING LGBTQ HEALTH EQUITY INITIATIVES

Recommendations detailed within the toolkit are aligned with criteria from the [Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index \(HEI\)](#) and informed by leading medical and psychological organizations such as the Joint Commission, American Medical Association (AMA), American Psychological Association (APA), and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). It is important to note that the following guidance is not exhaustive and readers are advised to refer to the resources referenced within this toolkit for more comprehensive and detailed information. Healthcare administrators and professionals are encouraged to seek out additional training and consultation for ongoing support.

The LGBTQ Health Equity Toolkit offers a comprehensive guide to implementing strategies to support LGBTQ patients; however, maximizing the effectiveness of these efforts begins with the development of a comprehensive written strategy specifically aimed at reducing health disparities among LGBTQ patients. A key element of this approach is the formation of an internal planning or advisory committee. This dedicated group, focused on LGBTQ patient care issues and employee diversity, will be instrumental in driving initiatives, providing valuable insights, and ensuring that LGBTQ voices are integral to the organization's decision-making processes. Additionally, including LGBTQ patients in the development and implementation of these strategies is crucial. Actively engaging patients through focus groups, surveys, and advisory panels ensures that their experiences and needs are directly informing policy and practice. This patient-centered approach fosters trust, improves patient satisfaction, and leads to more effective and responsive healthcare services.

The following recommendations are provided for informational purposes only and do not constitute legal advice. Please be aware that applicable federal, state, and local laws are always subject to change and are detailed in the Addendum. Hospital administrators are strongly encouraged to review these policies in consultation with their legal counsel and leadership teams to ensure compliance with current laws and regulations.

LGBTQ TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Familiarizing yourself with the language used by the LGBTQ community is essential for providing patients with the highest quality care. The following list includes terms relevant to the information contained in this toolkit and is sourced from the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center. It is important to not only familiarize yourself with these terms but also to access the [full glossary](#) for additional definitions and to stay up to date with any changes as terminology continues to evolve.

- **Cisgender:** Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth, based on societal expectations. The term cisgender is derived from the Latin preposition cis, which means “on this side of,” and is the antonym of trans, which means “across” or “beyond.”
- **Gender Affirmation:** An umbrella term for the range of actions that transgender and gender diverse people may undertake to live in greater alignment with their gender identity and/or gender expression, and thus thrive as their authentic selves. A person may affirm their gender identity or expression through social, legal, medical, or surgical means. What gender affirmation looks like for every individual is unique and based on what is personally affirming, what feels safe to do, and what is accessible and available.
- **Gender Diverse:** An umbrella term describing people who have gender identities and/or gender expressions that go beyond the gender binary of female/girl/woman or male/boy/man.
- **Gender Expression:** The ways in which people present their gender identity to others, such as through gait, mannerisms, voice, dress, and hairstyle. Cultural and historical contexts influence how people interpret and express gender identity
- **Gender Identity:** A person’s inner sense of being a girl/woman/female, boy/man/male, both, neither, or beyond the gender binary
- **Misgender:** To refer to someone in a way that does not affirm that person’s gender identity; for example, by using incorrect pronouns or by deadnaming
- **Name Used:** The name a person goes by and wants others to use in personal communication, including when that person’s insurance or identification documents lists a different name. The terms “name used,” “affirmed name,” or “chosen name” are recommended over “preferred name.”
- **Sex Assigned at Birth:** The categorization of an infant as female, male, or intersex, based on the appearance of the infant’s genitalia and/or sex chromosomes.
- **Sexual Orientation:** How a person experiences their physical, emotional, and romantic attachments to other people
- **SOGIE:** Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression
- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth, based on societal expectations

1. NONDISCRIMINATION POLICIES (PATIENT AND EMPLOYEE)

IMPORTANCE:

Inclusive policies in hospitals are crucial for ensuring that all patients receive equitable and respectful care, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. These policies help prevent discrimination, improve patient outcomes, and foster a safe environment. Without inclusive policies, LGBTQ patients may face stigma, receive inadequate care, or avoid seeking medical help altogether.



ACTIONS:

- ☐ Develop an inclusive Patient Non-Discrimination Policy that explicitly incorporates “sexual orientation” and “gender identity or expression”.
- ☐ Develop an inclusive Employee Non-Discrimination Policy that explicitly incorporates “sexual orientation” and “gender identity or expression”.
- ☐ Ensure the Patient and Employee Non-Discrimination Policies are effectively communicated:
 - ☐ Share the policy with patients and staff.
 - ☐ Publicize the policy both online and in print.
 - ☐ Distribute the policy to staff through at least one internal communication channel.

POLICY EXAMPLES:

PATIENT NON-DISCRIMINATION LANGUAGE:

- Under the Non-Discrimination Policy webpage: “[Healthcare Facility Name] is dedicated to providing exceptional care to all patients and ensuring an environment of respect and dignity. We adhere to all federal, state, and local laws regarding non-discrimination and equal opportunity. Our policy prohibits discrimination in the delivery of healthcare services based on age, race, color, national origin, culture, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, religion, physical or mental disability, sex, **sexual orientation, gender identity or expression**, or manner of payment.”

- Under Patient/Visitor webpage, patient handbook, or patient bill of rights: “Patients have the right to receive considerate, respectful delivery of care regardless of age, race, color, national origin, culture, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, religion, physical or mental disability, sex, **sexual orientation, gender identity or expression**, or manner of payment.”

EMPLOYEE NON-DISCRIMINATION LANGUAGE:

- On facility intranet or materials at employee orientation/training: “[Healthcare Facility Name] is an equal opportunity employer. We are committed to ensuring equal employment opportunities to all qualified individuals. Our policy is to provide employment, training, compensation, promotion, and other conditions of employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, culture, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, religion, physical or mental disability, sex, **sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.**”



2. EQUAL VISITATION POLICIES

IMPORTANCE:

Equal visitation policies for LGBTQ patients in healthcare settings are crucial for ensuring that all individuals have the right to receive support and companionship from their chosen loved ones during times of illness or medical treatment. By recognizing and respecting the diverse compositions of families and support networks, equal visitation policies foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for LGBTQ patients, promoting their emotional well-being and facilitating better health outcomes.



ACTIONS:

- ☐ Develop an equal visitation policy that explicitly ensures all patients, including those who identify as LGBTQ, have the right to receive visitors of their choosing, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or relationship status.
- ☐ Ensure the equal visitation policy is effectively communicated:
 - ☐ Share the policy with patients and staff.
 - ☐ Publicize the policy both online and in print.
 - ☐ Distribute the policy to staff through at least one internal communication channel.



POLICY EXAMPLES:

EQUAL VISITATION LANGUAGE:

“We will provide notice to patients or their Support Persons (where appropriate) of their visitation rights, including **the right to receive, subject to the patient’s consent, visitors designated by the patient**, including but not limited to a spouse, civil union partner, **domestic partner (including a same-sex partner)**, another family member, or a friend. The notice must also advise of the patient’s right to withdraw or deny consent at any time either orally or in writing. The provision of notice will be documented in the medical record. We will not restrict, limit, or deny visitation privileges based on race, skin color, age, national origin, ancestry, nationality, religion, sex, **gender identity or expression, sexual orientation**, or disability. All visitors enjoy full and equal visitation privileges consistent with patient privileges and the limitations set forth in this policy.”

3. MEDICAL DECISION MAKING

IMPORTANCE:

Medical decision-making policies tailored for LGBTQ patients are crucial to ensuring equitable and affirming healthcare experiences. These policies not only uphold patients' autonomy and right to self-determination but also address unique considerations related to gender-affirming care, HIV prevention and treatment, mental health support, and reproductive healthcare.



ACTIONS:

- ☐ Develop a policy that ensures LGBTQ patients have a right to designate the person of their choice, including a same-sex partner, as an authority to make medical decisions on their behalf should they become incapacitated.
- ☐ Explicitly inform patients of their right to designate a person of their choice, including a domestic partner, as a medical decision-maker.

POLICY EXAMPLES:

“A “healthcare representative” is a person you choose to receive healthcare information and make healthcare decisions for you when you cannot. You can choose to appoint any adult over the age of 18, including but not limited to a spouse, unmarried partner of the same or other gender, parent, sibling, child, or friend.

We encourage all patients, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, to create advance directives, such as living wills and healthcare surrogate designations, to express their healthcare preferences and appoint a trusted individual to make decisions on their behalf in the event they become incapacitated. Advance directives provide patients with the opportunity to document their wishes regarding medical treatment, end-of-life care, and other healthcare decisions, ensuring that their preferences are known and respected.”

4. LGBTQ PATIENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

IMPORTANCE:

LGBTQ specific clinical services are specialized healthcare offerings designed to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ individuals, ensuring culturally competent and affirming care that addresses their specific concerns and challenges. These services can be provided in various healthcare settings; however, providing LGBTQ-specific services within a dedicated clinic setting can be essential for addressing the unique healthcare needs of LGBTQ individuals effectively. Such a clinic ensures that healthcare providers are trained in and committed to delivering culturally competent care that respects and affirms diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. This specialized approach helps mitigate the barriers that LGBTQ individuals often face in mainstream healthcare settings. This fosters trust and encourages regular healthcare engagement among LGBTQ individuals, ultimately promoting better health outcomes and overall well-being within the community.

ACTIONS:

- ☐ Make LGBTQ-knowledgeable providers known to interested patients or publicly promote a confidential mechanism to make LGBTQ-specific referrals.
- ☐ Provide and externally promote LGBTQ-specific clinical services.
- ☐ Provide and externally promote an LGBTQ-specific clinic.
- ☐ Provide and externally promote an LGBTQ-focused office, advocate or LGBTQ-specific patient navigator.



EXAMPLES:

The following link is an example of externally promoted LGBTQ patient services, showcasing how healthcare organizations can publicly affirm their commitment to providing inclusive and affirming care for LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ specific services can include, but are not limited, to:

- Mental health services
- Alcohol and substance use treatment
- Assisted reproductive treatment
- Disease-specific support group(s)
- Other prevention, screening, wellness or testing services

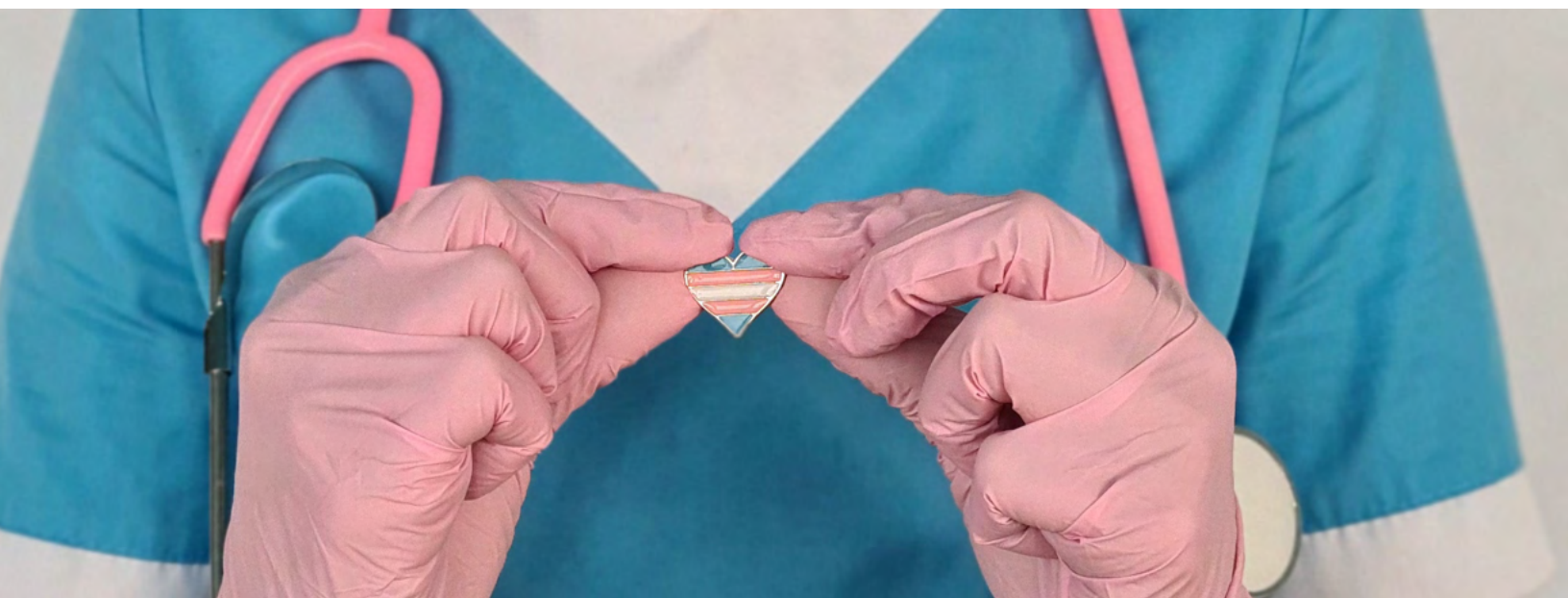
[LGBTQ Health & Care | Cleveland Clinic](#)

5. GENDER-AFFIRMING SERVICES AND SUPPORT

IMPORTANCE:

Gender-affirming services and support encompasses a spectrum of interventions covering social, psychological, behavioral, and medical care in order to affirm an individual's gender identity. These services and support are essential for the health and well-being of transgender and gender-diverse individuals, and encompass a range of interventions that might include, but are not limited to, changes in social expression, mental health counseling, case management, hormone therapy, and/or surgical procedures. [Research](#) has shown that gender-affirming interventions can lead to improved relationship satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and greater confidence, as well as reductions in anxiety, depression, suicidality, and substance use. Importantly, increased access to medical and social support for gender affirmation significantly enhances the quality of life for transgender individuals.

Standards of care for gender-affirming interventions are provided in guidelines from several organizations, including the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Endocrine Society. As well, the Florida Board of Medicine and the Florida Board of Osteopathic Medicine are regulatory bodies responsible for licensing, monitoring, disciplining and educating physicians and osteopathic physicians to assure competency and safety to practice in Florida. Healthcare organizations should familiarize themselves with the established standards of care, ethics, and professional conduct related to gender-affirming interventions and take the following steps to ensure that comprehensive and culturally competent services are provided as patients navigate their holistic needs.



ACTIONS:

- ☐ Offer Gender-affirming clinical services (distinct from a general LGBTQ care clinic).
- ☐ Offer and externally promote a multidisciplinary Gender-affirming care clinic for either adults and/or youth.
- ☐ Develop inclusive policies related to rooming, restroom access, and access to items that assist with gender presentation.
- ☐ Develop a program or position to provide patient navigation/advocacy services specifically for transgender and gender-diverse patients (distinct from a general LGBTQ navigation program).

EXAMPLES:

GENDER-AFFIRMING CLINICAL SERVICES

These are specific healthcare practices or interventions that support and affirm an individual's gender identity. These services can be provided in various healthcare settings and may include, but are not limited to:

- Trans-affirming gynecological care
- Hormone therapy and monitoring
- Psychological, physical, and psychiatric evaluations
- Gender-affirming surgeries
- Preoperative and postoperative care for Gender-affirming surgeries
- Transgender fertility preservation services and/or family-building assisted reproductive treatment

MULTIDISCIPLINARY GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE CLINIC

A multidisciplinary gender-affirming care clinic is a specialized clinic that focuses specifically on providing comprehensive gender-affirming services and support. A gender-affirming care clinic typically offers a full range of gender-affirming clinical services under one roof, often with a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals who specialize in the unique needs of transgender and gender-diverse patients. The clinic provides a centralized and coordinated approach to care, ensuring that patients receive holistic and continuous support throughout their healthcare journey. There are many different facets of treatment that are included in these clinics and they all play a vital role in increasing mental and physical health. Examples include the gender-affirming clinical services listed above and may also include:

- Primary care services
- Behavioral health screenings

- Individual or group psychotherapy/counseling
- Medication management
- Speech and/or voice therapy
- Hair removal
- Support groups and resources
- Case management
- Patient advocacy services
- Pharmacy services
- Physical and occupational therapy

POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Gender-affirming support is best delivered through a multidisciplinary approach, involving collaboration among healthcare professionals across various fields to address the unique needs of each patient. This ensures that patients can explore and prepare for different possibilities and treatment options, allowing for personalized care that aligns with their individual goals and circumstances. The [following information is sourced from the Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](#) and should be considered when developing policies and implementing support for transgender and gender-diverse patients.

ROOMING RIGHTS

Ensuring the safety, dignity, and comfort of transgender and gender-diverse patients during their hospital stay is crucial. Denying patients room assignments that align with their gender identity, or other appropriate accommodations, can compromise a patient's dignity and privacy. This can lead transgender and gender-diverse patients to delay or even avoid seeking medical care altogether if they feel unsafe or unsupported. Hospital policies should affirm rooming rights that respect patient autonomy, support informed decision-making, and prioritize patient safety. Considerations should include, but are not limited to:

- What procedures are in place for determining a patient's self-identified gender prior to assigning a room? Does this process involve reviewing the patient's admitting/registration record?
- How does your hospital involve patients in decision-making regarding their care to ensure their comfort, privacy, and overall well-being are prioritized throughout the process?
- What procedures does your hospital have to ensure sufficient privacy for all patients involved?
- What alternative accommodations are available for patients, such as private rooms, single side rooms adjacent to a gender-appropriate ward, empty double rooms with the second bed blocked, curtain usage, etc.?
- Are there procedures in place to make a private room available if doing so would not compromise the health or safety of the patient(s) being moved?

- Has your hospital identified areas where a transgender patient can remain without harassment until a private room becomes available?
- What procedures does your hospital have to ensure that patient/ethical complaints are handled by a staff member trained in transgender cultural competency and that ethical consultations take place when needed?

ACCESS TO RESTROOMS

Safe and inclusive restroom access is essential for transgender and gender-diverse patients as it promotes their dignity, well-being, and access to healthcare services. Ensuring inclusive restroom policies not only demonstrates respect for patients' gender identities but also fosters trust between patients and healthcare providers, encouraging transgender and gender-diverse individuals to seek medical care when needed. Considerations should include, but are not limited to:

- What measures will be taken to ensure all patients, employees, and visitors have the ability to access restrooms that align with their gender identity and/or honors privacy preferences?
- What measures will be taken to expand access and ensure accessibility to unisex restrooms, particularly in public areas?
- What policies will be implemented to prevent and address harassment of transgender and gender-diverse patients using restrooms according to their gender identity?
- How will your hospital ensure that transgender and gender-diverse patients who experience harassment can contact a staff member trained in handling harassment complaints and issues of cultural competency?
- What steps will be taken to create clear signage that informs patients about restroom policies and available options?

ACCESS TO PERSONAL ITEMS THAT ASSIST WITH GENDER PRESENTATION

Providing access to items that assist with gender presentation can have a profound impact on the mental health, self-esteem, and well-being of transgender and gender-diverse patients. Allowing access to these items demonstrates a commitment to providing comprehensive, patient-centered care that addresses the diverse needs and identities of all individuals. Considerations should include, but are not limited to:

- What steps will be taken to recognize and support the importance of gender presentation for the health and well-being of transgender and gender-diverse individuals?
- How will your hospital ensure that transgender and gender-diverse patients can use personal items that facilitate gender expression and have access to other personal items that assist in their gender presentation?
- How will your hospital balance the allowance of items for gender presentation with existing policies that limit access to certain personal items to ensure they do not hinder treatment or jeopardize patient safety?

6. HIV SPECIFIC SERVICES

IMPORTANCE

HIV has been a significant public health issue in Florida, with a long history of efforts to combat the epidemic. In [2022](#), 4,606 Floridians received new HIV diagnoses, marking a 16% increase from the previous year. Of these new diagnoses, 75% of male cases were among men who have sex with men (MSM), underscoring the continued vulnerability of this group. [Data](#) also indicates ongoing challenges, particularly for Black and Hispanic/Latino MSM and transgender women who have sex with men, who experience a disproportionate burden of HIV, alongside patterns of inequity in healthcare access and outcomes.

Stigma and fear of discrimination or mistreatment in healthcare settings can deter LGBTQ individuals and People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) from accessing care, leading



to delays in diagnosis, treatment initiation and treatment adherence. In [2021](#), 76% of MSM without HIV had received testing in the past 12 months and for those who were HIV-positive, only 69% reported that they accessed care within one month after diagnosis.

Further, although Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is highly effective in preventing HIV transmission, [PrEP usage remains limited](#) among gay and bisexual men. Additional factors such as racial and ethnic disparities in PrEP awareness and usage and structural barriers such as high costs and lack of insurance coverage further impede access.

Timely and equitable access to HIV education, prevention, testing, treatment, and care services can significantly reduce the transmission of HIV and improve health outcomes for individuals living with HIV. Additionally, accessible HIV services play a crucial role in reducing stigma and discrimination associated with HIV by providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment for individuals seeking care. Ultimately, HIV services contribute to public health efforts in combating the HIV epidemic, promoting health equity, and improving the overall well-being of communities.

ACTIONS:

- ☐ Embed routine HIV testing [protocols](#) in standard practice during intake for all primary care, urgent care, and emergency medicine encounters to ensure early detection and integrate comprehensive counseling services with testing to provide education, emotional support, and prevention strategies.
- ☐ Educate healthcare providers and patients about the benefits and accessibility of PrEP to reduce new HIV infections and [ensure](#) PrEP is readily available, including individuals at high risk of HIV.
- ☐ In accordance with the IDSA [guidelines](#), provide timely and consistent access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for those diagnosed with HIV and develop treatment plans to optimize health outcomes and minimize the risk of transmission.
- ☐ Offer integrated support services, including mental health care, substance use treatment, case management, pharmacy services, and social support as indicated, to address the holistic needs of patients.
- ☐ Create a referral network to connect patients with necessary community resources.
- ☐ Develop and implement community outreach programs to raise awareness about HIV prevention and care.



7. SOGI DATA COLLECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY

IMPORTANCE:

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) data collection is a critical component of providing equitable and affirming healthcare to LGBTQ individuals. Collecting SOGI data in clinical settings is vital for several reasons. Improving patient care is one of the key benefits of collecting SOGI data, as understanding a patient's sexual orientation and gender identity allows healthcare providers to offer more personalized and appropriate care, addressing specific health risks and needs. Additionally, SOGI data helps identify health disparities among LGBTQ populations, which enables targeted interventions and resources. Importantly, studies indicate that a majority of patients prefer to be asked about their SOGI in a respectful manner, as it fosters a sense of inclusivity and trust in their healthcare [providers](#).

ACTIONS:

- ☐ Develop clear policies and procedures specifically addressing the collection, storage, and access of SOGI data. Ensure these policies align with HIPAA regulations, particularly concerning Protected Health Information (PHI).
- ☐ [Review intake, registration, and/or social history forms](#) to ensure language and diagrams are inclusive related to the patient's sexual orientation, gender identity, affirmed name and pronouns, relationship status, anatomical inventory and areas of pain or concern.
- ☐ Configure Electronic Health Records (EHR) systems to integrate SOGI data effectively. Create built-in fields for SOGI data and address interoperability issues to ensure data is shared across healthcare systems.

PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS:

When asking questions related to SOGI, [best practices include](#), but are not limited, to:

- Explain why relevant and that questions are optional;
- Provide open ended questions and responses;
- Ask permission to include information about a patient's sexual orientation and gender identity in the medical record;
- Explain information will be confidential unless related to care;
- Discuss how it will be documented in the chart and electronic records; and
- Refer the patient to HIPAA policy for disclosure information.

EXAMPLE INTAKE QUESTIONS:

1. What is your legal name as it appears on your insurance and other legal documents?

2. What is your affirmed name or name that you use? (Optional)

3. What are your pronouns? (Optional)

☐ He/him

☐ She/her

☐ They/them

☐ Other: _____

4. How do you currently describe your sexual orientation? (Select all that apply)

☐ Lesbian

☐ Gay

☐ Bisexual

☐ Heterosexual (Straight)

☐ Queer

☐ Questioning

☐ I don't know

☐ I use a different term: _____

☐ I prefer to not disclose

5. How do you currently describe your gender identity? (Select all that apply)

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Transgender Male/Trans Man

☐ Transgender Female/Trans Woman

☐ Nonbinary

☐ Another gender identity: _____

☐ I don't know

☐ I prefer not to disclose

6. What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate? (Check one)

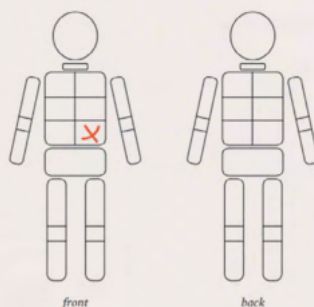
☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Intersex

☐ I prefer not to disclose

7. Please use the form below to document areas of pain or concern:



8. INCLUSIVE WEBSITE AND PHYSICAL SPACE

IMPORTANCE:

Being a visibly inclusive healthcare setting is crucial. There are many ways to do this, both inside and outside of the healthcare setting. The goal is for patients to feel comfortable enough to make an appointment, as well as supported enough to return. In order for this to happen, both the website and physical space need to include elements that visibly support the LGBTQ community.

The website is often the first place people will go to interact with the healthcare system. Making this an inclusive space will help patients feel like they are going to be welcomed, understood, and taken care of.

Once patients enter the physical healthcare space, it can be helpful to include visuals that show you are there to serve everyone, including the LGBTQ community. This includes both visuals within the clinic, as well as external communication by physicians about their inclusion. This will allow patients to feel more comfortable being there for appointments and create more communication between them and their provider.



ACTIONS:

WEBSITE

- ☐ Develop landing pages with information related to inclusive policies and LGBTQ inclusive services/support.
- ☐ Provide informational articles about LGBTQ health topics and LGBTQ health disparities.
- ☐ Provide tailored resources for LGBTQ patients, such as support groups, internal LGBTQ services, or LGBTQ friendly provider search tools.
- ☐ On physician/provider profiles, provide options to include pronouns, list that they are LGBTQ friendly, and include any training they have completed (ex. safe zone training).
- ☐ Display your HEI badge if you participate in the survey or any other virtual badges that inform patients of your dedication to LGBTQ inclusion.
- ☐ Utilize LGBTQ inclusive marketing or advertising.
- ☐ Develop an LGBTQ specific logo that can be used externally online, in marketing materials, or in other community engagement efforts.

PHYSICAL SPACE

- ☐ Visibly post inclusive policies for patients, employees, and visitors.
- ☐ Provide LGBTQ specific health education materials in waiting areas and exam rooms to inform patients about their unique health needs and available services.
- ☐ Display LGBTQ inclusive signage and symbols throughout the clinic to create a welcoming environment, such as inclusive language posters and Safe Space/Zone stickers.
- ☐ Encourage staff to include their pronouns on name tags and email signatures, and to introduce themselves with their own pronouns as well as ask patients their affirmed names and pronouns.



9. FEEDBACK AND IMPROVEMENT

IMPORTANCE:

Surveys and patient and employee experience assessments play a crucial role in understanding and improving healthcare services and workplace culture for LGBTQ individuals. These tools provide valuable insights into community and patient engagement, helping healthcare providers tailor their services to better meet the needs of LGBTQ patients and employees alike. By establishing intentional opportunities for feedback, healthcare facilities not only demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity but also create opportunities for LGBTQ individuals to voice their experiences and concerns. This proactive approach enhances trust and satisfaction and also fosters a culture of responsiveness and continuous improvement.

ACTIONS:

- ☐ Establish channels for LGBTQ patients to provide feedback on their experiences and suggest improvements to ensure ongoing inclusivity and responsiveness. These methods can be integrated into:
 - Patient registration forms
 - Patient satisfaction surveys
 - Health risk assessments
 - Electronic health record (EHR)
- ☐ Analyze patient satisfaction and/or EHR data with an intersectional LGBTQ lens to identify LGBTQ health and programmatic needs.
- ☐ Work with external LGBTQ organizations or community members to assess and address LGBTQ health needs or concerns.
- ☐ Conduct anonymous employee engagement or climate surveys that allow employees to identify as LGBTQ and include question(s) related to LGBTQ concerns.



10. STAFF TRAINING



IMPORTANCE:

Ongoing staff and employee training is a necessary component of system-wide implementation. Cultural competency training equips healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high-quality, patient-centered care to LGBTQ patients, addressing their unique healthcare needs with sensitivity and awareness. Additionally, procedural training assists with the consistent implementation of policies and practices to ensure equitable and respectful care across all healthcare settings.

ACTIONS:

- ☐ Regularly assess staff members' cultural competency, clinical needs, and responsiveness to LGBTQ patients through surveys, and use the results to develop targeted staff training and professional development opportunities aimed at continuous improvement.
- ☐ Offer new hire and ongoing training covering topics such as:
 - ☐ 101 LGBTQ Cultural Competency: Training in basic LGBTQ cultural competency to enhance understanding and learn LGBTQ patient health disparities and needs.
 - ☐ Inclusive Policies and Practices: Workshops that review your hospital or organization's policies and practices, related to nondiscrimination, equal visitation, rooming, data collection/confidentiality, etc. ensuring all staff are aware of and adhere to these standards.
 - ☐ Inclusive Language in the Healthcare Setting: Workshops on using inclusive language in healthcare settings to ensure respectful and effective communication with patients of diverse identities including consistently using patients' affirmed names and pronouns in patient interactions.
 - ☐ HIV Education: Workshops focused on HIV prevention and treatment to reduce stigma, promote safer behaviors, and encourage regular testing and treatment adherence.
 - ☐ Trauma-Informed Care: Workshops on trauma-informed care principles to better support patients who have experienced trauma, and ways that this model of care specifically applies to LGBTQ patient care.

11. EQUAL BENEFITS AND SUPPORTS FOR LGBTQ EMPLOYEES

IMPORTANCE:

Creating an inclusive workplace in healthcare means offering equal benefits and opportunities, promoting engagement and visibility, and providing comprehensive healthcare benefits for LGBTQ employees. These steps cultivate a workplace where LGBTQ employees feel valued, respected, and empowered, contributing to their ability to effectively deliver patient-centered care.



ACTIONS:

- ☐ Provide healthcare benefits to domestic partners of employees.
- ☐ Offer LGBTQ-inclusive family assistance and formation benefits, FMLA-equivalent leave, and paid family leave policies inclusive of domestic partners and their children, biological or adopted, ensuring non-discriminatory access based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status.
- ☐ Provide employees with an LGBTQ benefits guide upon hire and annually during open enrollment OR provide access to a benefits concierge service with an LGBTQ specialty.
- ☐ Adopt written gender transition guidelines documenting supportive policies and practices on issues pertinent to a workplace gender transition.
- ☐ Provide at least one health plan to all employees that affirmatively and explicitly covers medically necessary health services for transgender and gender-diverse people

CONCLUSION

Achieving health equity for LGBTQ individuals in Florida is an essential and urgent goal. The unique health challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, including higher rates of mental health issues, chronic conditions, and experiences of discrimination, necessitate comprehensive, inclusive, and culturally competent healthcare practices. By implementing the recommendations and best practices outlined in this toolkit, healthcare facilities can create welcoming and affirming environments that respect and celebrate the diversity of all patients. Inclusive policies, staff training, and patient-centered care are critical components in dismantling barriers to health equity and ensuring that LGBTQ individuals receive the compassionate and equitable care they deserve.

The collective efforts of healthcare providers, policymakers, and communities are essential in fostering a healthcare system that supports the health and well-being of all Floridians, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Together, we can create a future where every LGBTQ individual has access to high-quality, compassionate, and equitable healthcare, empowering them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

We encourage you to take the insights and tools provided in this toolkit and actively integrate them into your practice, policies, and advocacy efforts. The journey towards health equity for LGBTQ individuals is a shared responsibility, and with your commitment, we can make significant strides towards a more inclusive and just healthcare system.



The following legal guidelines and regulations are included for review as critical considerations when implementing LGBTQ inclusive policies and practices. It is important to note that the following information is reflective of current policy as of August 2024 and that federal, state, and local laws are constantly evolving. Therefore, hospital administrators are strongly encouraged to review these policies in consultation with their legal counsel and leadership teams to ensure full compliance with current laws and regulations.

- [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act](#): Prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), and national origin.
- [Affordable Care Act ACA Section 1557](#): Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), age, or disability in health programs and activities.
- [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission EEOC Guidelines](#): Protects employees from harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- [The Florida Patient's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities \(Chapter 381.026, Florida Statutes\)](#): Establishes fundamental rights for patients receiving healthcare services in the state. While the law does not explicitly mention sexual orientation or gender identity, it states that a patient:
 - has the right to be treated with courtesy and respect and with appreciation of individual dignity
 - has the right to retain and use personal clothing or possessions as space permits, unless to do so would infringe upon the right of another patient or is medically or programmatically contraindicated for documented medical, safety, or programmatic reasons
 - has the right to be treated with protection of his or her need for privacy.
- [CMS Regulations \(2011\)](#): Mandates equal visitation rights for all patients and outlines principles for medical decision-making that apply broadly to all patients, including those who identify as LGBTQ
- [Florida Health Care Advance Directives Act \(Chapter 765, Florida Statutes\)](#): Allows individuals to create advance directives, such as living wills and healthcare surrogate designations, to express their healthcare preferences and appoint a surrogate decision-maker in the event they become incapacitated.
- [Health Resources and Services Administration \(HRSA\) SOGI Data Reporting Requirement \(Program Assistance Letter \(PAL 2016-2\)\)\(2016\)](#): Requires that SOGI data must be reported yearly in the Uniform Data System (UDS), starting in 2016.
- [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\) and Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology \(ONC\) EHR System Requirements \(2015\)](#): Requires electronic health record (EHR) systems certified under the Meaningful Use Incentive Program to be able to record, change, and access structured SOGI data.
- [Affordable Care Act Section 4302 \(2010\)](#): Recommends the collection of demographic data, including SOGI, to identify and address health disparities. This section encourages federal health programs to collect and report SOGI data to better understand and serve diverse populations.

- The [Medicaid Expansion](#) under Section 2001 of the Affordable Care Act was left optional for states, and as of August 2024, has not been implemented in Florida. If implemented, Medicaid expansion in Florida could significantly increase access to lifesaving healthcare for LGBTQ Floridians by providing nearly a million residents with primary and preventive care, reducing unexpected deaths, and addressing disparities in rural and marginalized communities. It would also enable early diagnosis and treatment for mental health and substance use disorders, protect families from poverty, and stimulate economic growth with new jobs and federal benefits. Additionally, by reducing uncompensated care costs, Medicaid expansion would bolster the financial stability of healthcare institutions, ensuring that at-risk communities, including LGBTQ individuals, receive essential care.
- [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#): Under HIPAA, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) are considered protected health information, meaning that healthcare providers must ensure the privacy and confidentiality of this sensitive data, safeguarding it from unauthorized access or disclosure.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

WEBSITES:

- [American Medical Association LGBTQ Population Care Statement](#)
- [American Nurses Association Statement of LGBTQ Healthcare](#)
- [American Psychological Association LGBTQ Resources](#)
- [Creating Equal Access to Quality Health Care for Transgender Patients](#)
- [FL Board of Medicine](#)
- [FL Board of Osteopathic Medicine](#)
- [Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality \(GLMA\)](#)
- [LGBT Health Link](#)
- [LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams](#)
- [National Association of Social Workers on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity](#)
- [National Coalition for LGBTQ Health](#)
- [National HIV/AIDS Strategy](#)
- [SAMHSA - Behavioral Health Equity](#)
- [The Center of Excellence on LGBTQ Behavioral Health Equity](#)
- [The Human Rights Campaign - HIV and Health Equity](#)
- [The Human Rights Campaign - Healthcare Equality Index](#)
- [US Department of Health and Human Services - LGBTQIA+ Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [World Professional Association for Transgender Care - SOC8](#)

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