

**National
Resource
Center**



ON LGBT AGING

QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN AGING SERVICES

sage

Advocacy & Services
for LGBT Elders

We refuse to be invisible

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The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging is supported, in part, under a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to freely express their findings and conclusions. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed. All Rights Reserved.

Why am I being asked about my sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity?

There are some states mandated by law to ask for this information. In other states some agencies are being proactive in capturing as much information as possible about the communities they serve. It's important for service providers to not assume everyone identifies as heterosexual or straight (sexual orientation) and as their sex assigned at birth, male or female, (gender). When these assumptions are wrong, they can affect access to services.

Why is it essential to ask demographic questions?

Every day decisions are made based on data. As older adults, you may be completing an intake form at a community center, health provider, or other service organization and encounter demographic or data questions, such as race, ethnicity, educational background, income, relationship status, emergency contact, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. These are all data questions that help service providers get to know you better and understand any unique challenges you may experience. For example, research has shown that older African American and Latino persons are at higher risk of developing Alzheimer's. Older people who are single and do not have children may be at higher risk for social isolation. When programs know the people they are working with may be at a higher risk for chronic illness, social isolation, and poverty, for instance, they can work to ensure their programs are meeting the needs of the community they serve.

For older people who identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), research has shown that they may also be at higher risk for chronic illness and social isolation. Historically, LGBT older people have been mostly invisible in programs for older people. This invisibility often leaves LGBT family, friends, and neighbors, fearful of accessing services and at increased risk for chronic illness and social isolation.

Who has access to this information?

Your responses to demographic questions are voluntary and not required to receive services. When you do share this information, aging and health service organizations have policies required by state and federal privacy laws that protect the confidentiality of personally identifying information. Your provider and staff providing you services will see this information to assist in providing you services. If you are unsure about privacy rules, ask to see the organization's privacy policy.

Common Terms

Gender- A person's internal sense of being male, female or another gender. A person may choose to express their gender through culturally defined norms associated with male and female, which may or may not align with a person's internal gender identity or with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender Identity - The gender you feel you are inside (man, woman, neither or both). For transgender people, their birth-assigned gender and their personal sense of gender identity do not match. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

Transgender- An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to transsexuals and cross-dressers. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF).

Non-binary and/or genderqueer - Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.

Cisgender - Individuals whose gender identity and/or gender expression do align with their biological or assigned sex. If someone was assigned the sex female at birth and lives comfortably as a woman, she is likely cisgender.

Sex Assigned at Birth- At birth, infants are usually given a sex designation of male or female by a doctor based on the child's genitals.

Sexual Orientation - A person's primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations.

Bisexual - An individual who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women. "Bisexual" does not suggest having equal sexual experience with both men and women. In fact, some people who identify as "bisexual" have not had any sexual experience at all.

Gay - A word used to describe anyone, mainly men, who have primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to someone of the same sex, e.g., gay man, gay people.

Lesbian - A woman whose primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women.

Heterosexual- Used to describe people whose primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex; also known as straight.

For additional information on asking questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and additional terms and terminology see the guide *Inclusive Questions for Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Collecting Data on Sexual Orientation and Gender identity* for here:
www.lgbtagingcenter.org/resources/resource.cfm?r=601

Special thank you to Yuisa Gimeno, County of Los Angeles, Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS) Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Program for assisting with the development of this fact sheet.