Best Practices to Create a *Safe and Inclusive* Environment for LGBTQ Patients

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people face bias, discrimination, and barriers to equal and inclusive health care.   The repercussions of this are immense. Public health professionals play an integral role in creating safe, welcome, and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ Coloradans and their families.

One Colorado's Transparent: The State of Transgender Health in Colorado report, a 2014 transgender behavioral health study, found that 40% of transgender Coloradans reported delaying access to care because of experiences with discrimination. In Closing the Gap, the Turning Point for LGBTQ Health in Colorado, fewer respondents stated that they had access to an LGBTQ competent provider than the inaugural health assessment published in 2011. When asked what would make a provider competent or inclusive to serve them as an LGBTQ person, respondents stated the following. They are not in rank order.

The provider:

- Is comfortable with my sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Asks me about my sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or relationship status;
- Uses gender-neutral language when talking about reproductive health, sexual health, or relationship status;
- Asks me and addresses me by my correct pronouns;
- Asks me and addresses me by my chosen name, rather than my legal name;
- Has knowledge on transgender-specific and related health care needs;
- Is comfortable with patients who identify as transgender;
- Addresses my transgender-specific health care needs, not only other medical needs; and
- Has specific knowledge or training to deliver health care services to LGBTQ people.

The facility:

- Has LGBTQ-inclusive forms that list sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or relationship status (more information below);
- Has signs, posters, and other visible signals that the office setting is LGBTQ-inclusive (more information below);
- Includes sexual orientation and gender identity in the organization's posted non-discrimination statement;
- Has gender-neutral restrooms in the office and/or clinic setting;
- Has LGBTQ people on staff (more information below);
- Has trained frontline and medical support staff on LGBTQ competency (more information below); and
- Has office policies and forms that are transgender-inclusive.

Authors: Carley Little, MS & Cara Cheevers, MSW. Revised June 2019.

Further best practices include:

- **Train ALL staff on LGBTQ competency.** This includes front office, board members, medical assistants, maintenance technicians, nurses, and others, on LGBTQ identities, terminology, health disparities, and competency. This is essential for all staff that have even minor patient contact. More information on staff training can be found here: Providing Care for LGBT People: A Guide for Health Care Staff
- **Ensure that all policies and procedures are inclusive of LGBTQ people.** Post these policies and procedures in several high-profile locations around the office and create process exists for **r**eporting and responding to instances of discrimination. This includes creating and posting a well-defined nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- **Use forms that reflect the diversity of LGBTQ people and their relationships.** Ask about sexual orientation, chosen name, gender pronouns, marital, domestic partner, relationship status in a non-gendered manner, family planning and reproductive health care, including adoption and insemination, gender-neutral sexual health history, urologic health for any person with a prostate and testicles, and gynecological health for any person with a uterus, vagina, and cervix. More information can be found here.
- **Create a welcoming physical environment.** Post signs that identify the room as a safe space, clearly designate a comment box, clearly post a nondiscrimination policy, set out LGBTQ health brochures, magazines, and reading materials, and specifically identify gender-neutral, single-occupancy restrooms.
- **Collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity of <u>all</u> patients**. Implement a standardized method that also includes gender identity and sex assigned at birth to allow for more thorough care, and verify that insurance billing codes allow for appropriate coverage on physical exams pertaining to the organ inventory of each patient. More information on data collection can be found at Collecting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data in Electronic Health Records.
- **Take routine sexual histories on <u>all</u> patients.** This history should be broad and include questions beyond HIV, STIs, contraceptives, and pregnancy information to include questions about sexual function, satisfaction, desires, trauma and abuse, and family planning. Providers should use open-ended questions to gather more information, and ask patients if they have concerns about their gender identity (opening the door for more disclosure). More information on sexual history best practices can be found at Taking Routine Histories of Sexual Health: A System-Wide Approach for Health Centers
- **Engage in the local LGBTQ community.** Cosponsor or host community events with LGBTQ organizations, recognize LGBTQ holidays, including but not limited to National Coming Out Day and Transgender Day of Remembrance, and organize a group of staff to march in local LGBTQ pride parades.
- **Incorporate LGBTQ-specific health care needs into clinical care.** Some specific health needs and risk factors surrounding the LGBTQ community include: HIV and PrEP planning, cervical cancer screenings, pap smears for women and trans men, smoking cessation conversation and planning, screening for anal cancer, hormone therapy, family planning, and mental health screenings. More information about LGBTQ-specific health care needs can be found at Understanding the Health Needs of LGBT People
- **Create an LGBTQ "champion" for the space.** This is the point-person accountable for leading the implementation of and assessing the environment for LGBTQ inclusive initiatives

- **Recruit and retain LGBTQ staff.** Establish an employee non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as an LGBTQ-inclusive benefits package that supports benefits like family medical leave and comprehensive health insurance coverage for people who transition while employed.

For more detailed information on creating a safe and inclusive environment, please visit:
- [Ten Things: Creating Inclusive Health Care Environments for LGBT People](#)
- [Guidelines for Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Patients](#)