

Responding to Bias in the Healthcare Setting

The healthcare setting can be a vulnerable time for many LGBTQ patients, particularly as you share your private health information with providers. Naturally, providers may make mistakes while navigating sensitive topics that affect the LGBTQ community. These may come in the form of explicit bias or phobia, which refer to a conscious expression of attitudes or beliefs about a person or community. It may also come in the form of implicit bias or microaggressions, which refer to an unconscious and often unintentional expression of attitudes or beliefs about a person or community.

These explicit or implicit biases may materialize during interactions with healthcare providers, leaving many LGBTQ persons in an uncomfortable situation. This can be a particularly challenging experience to navigate for those who want to continue seeking care with a particular provider or have no other option to change providers.

If you find yourself in a situation where a provider displays biased behavior, you have the power to provide them feedback. Always remember that the patient is truly in control of the healthcare experience. Here is a model for providing feedback to your provider in a respectful and productive way:

- **Consent:** Ask your provider if it's okay to provide them with feedback so they understand a harm has taken place.
- **Specific:** Focus on a specific action or language choice that made you feel uncomfortable.
- **Behavior-Oriented:** Hone in on a behavior your provider displayed that can be altered rather than focusing on character traits that they may not be able to change.
- **Impact:** Describe the impact that the behavior had on you or your community.
- **Alternative:** Offer an alternative behavior for the provider to learn from their mistake.

Example: E is a transgender man living in a rural area of Colorado and is seeking care from the only provider in the area accepting new patients. E exclusively uses he/him/his pronouns and feels uncomfortable when overhearing his provider accidentally using she/her/hers pronouns when interacting with the medical assistant outside of the exam room.

Consent: When E's provider enters the room, E asks if it's okay to offer some feedback before starting their visit. The doctor consents.

Specific & Behavior-Oriented: E specifically refers to the instance when he overheard the doctor misgendering him while discussing his case with the medical assistant.

Impact: E explains that the behavior of misgendering impacts him in a serious way by making him feel as though the doctor doesn't respect his identity and doesn't believe in the lived experience of transgender individuals. He further explains that misgendering happens often among members of the transgender community and contributes greatly to gender dysphoria and chronic minority stress that often leads to negative health outcomes.

Alternative: E then offers the provider an alternative in the future: "Please only use he/him/his pronouns when talking about me to others because it shows me that you truly care about me as a patient. If you catch yourself using inappropriate pronouns, I only

ask that you promptly apologize for the harm and correct the mistake. Then, we can both move on rather than dwell on the harm. Does all of that make sense? I appreciate your willingness to be a better healthcare provider for me by allowing me to give you this feedback.”

Offering constructive feedback to your provider may not work in all situations. If a provider is not responsive to your feedback, you may consider filing a formal complaint with the office staff. Procedures to file complaints vary widely between different practices. If you need support in this process at a Colorado location, contact One Colorado directly at health@one-colorado.org. You can also [file a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Division](#).