



LGBTQ FIELD GUIDE to Health and Wellness



**Equitas Health
Institute**

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LGBTQ Field Guide to Health & Wellness

The purpose of this guide is to educate the LGBTQ community about overcoming barriers to care and interacting more effectively with your healthcare providers. After reading the guide, you'll know:

- About the unique health needs of different groups within the LGBTQ community
- What to discuss with your healthcare providers
- What your rights are as a patient
- Tools to help you prepare for your medical appointments

Things everyone should know:

Primary Care:

It is very important to establish care with a primary care physician or certified nurse practitioner (CNP) who can get to know you and empower you to reach your health goals. This person is called a primary care provider, or PCP. Just how important is primary care? The number of deaths is actually lower in areas of the United States with more primary care providers!

Anything that isn't a life threatening emergency is best handled at your PCP's office. Emergency medicine doctors are experts in the management of emergencies—for example, injuries from a car accident. On the other hand, primary care providers are experts in routine care and prevention of chronic disease. Plus, they'll have a better understanding about you and your overall health. Over 90% of your healthcare needs can be managed by a primary care provider, and primary care is cheaper than emergency care.

Once you feel safe with your PCP, don't be afraid to talk about your emotional health. If you are feeling down or depressed, have anxiety, are grieving, or are under a lot of stress, let your provider know.

Being Out to Your Provider:

Because LGBTQ people have specific health needs, it is important for you to find a provider that you feel safe and comfortable being out to. Being out will allow a provider to look at your health in a comprehensive manner. If you do not feel that you are able to be out to your provider, you might want to consider seeing someone that you can be upfront and honest with about who you are. Sometimes being out is not an option. Your safety needs to come first!

The Equitas Health Institute for LGBTQ Health Equity has assembled a directory of LGBTQ competent providers. It can be found at equitashealthinstitute.com/publications.

Finding a Provider

Choosing the right provider is one of the most important decisions you will make about your healthcare. It may take some extra effort, but it is completely worth it! Ideally, everyone should have a provider they can trust and work collaboratively with to achieve their health related goals. Below are suggested steps for finding the right one.

1. Ask around—friends, families, and provider guides are great resources to learn about other’s experiences, areas of expertise, and comfort level regarding the LGBTQ community. Word of mouth travels fast!
2. If you are insured, identify providers in your network—It is generally cheaper to see a provider who is in your network than one who isn’t. Your insurance company has an extensive list of who accepts their insurance. This list can be found on the company’s website or by calling the customer service number listed on the back of your insurance card.

3. Pick a provider—Feel free to call the provider’s office to ask questions. Some things to take into consideration:

- Is the provider accepting new patients?
- What are the office hours?
Do they work with your schedule?
- Which hospital(s) does the provider work with and can you get there if needed?
- What languages does the provider speak?
- Is the office staff respectful and helpful?
- Does the provider identify as an ally to the LGBTQ community?

4. Try them out—Finding the right provider is similar to dating. You are not married to your provider. Remember, you are in control of the relationship! If your needs are not being met, or if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you have the ability to find a new provider. It may take a few “dates” before you find the provider you would like to commit to.



What to expect at your first appointment:

- Prepare for the appointment by prioritizing your 2-3 most important issues to discuss. You can also write down a list of questions. Empower yourself by talking to your family about your family history. Be prepared to answer questions about any surgeries you've had and what medical problems you've been diagnosed with.
- If possible, bring a list of medications, including supplements that you are currently taking to the appointment.
- Arrive 15 minutes early to your appointment to have time to check in and fill out forms. You may have to wait anyway, unfortunately. Providers often run behind when spending extra time with patients who need it.
- If you have many concerns and haven't been to the doctor in a long time, you'll want to schedule several visits over a period of time to make sure all of your concerns are addressed thoroughly, your list of questions is answered, and you and your provider have made a plan together to improve your health and wellness
- Your provider should communicate in a clear, nonjudgmental manner. They should answer your questions without medical "jargon" and empower you to care for yourself and take part in improving your own health and wellness. If they do not, find a new one!

Safety and Wellness:

- If you are in a relationship where your partner causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm (such as hitting, kicking, or controlling your every move), you may be in an abusive relationship.

Contact Buckeye Regional Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO) for more information or to get help.

Visit bravo-ohio.org or call (866) 862-7286.

- Your individual risk of HIV will depend on many individual factors. If you think you may have been exposed to HIV, contact your provider immediately. There are medications that can be taken to prevent HIV transmission immediately after exposure (called “Post-Exposure Prophylaxis”, or “PEP”).
- Include a variety of nutrient-rich foods in your diet including vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Eat small amounts of energy-dense foods like olive oil and nuts. Shop around the edges of the grocery store such as the produce, dairy, and meat departments for fresh foods.

The majority of your diet should be made up of whole foods that have limited ingredients that you can pronounce.

- Exercise improves your physical and emotional health. Aim for 30 to 60 minutes of moderately intense activity daily.
- Set goals focused on specific healthy activities such as improving muscle tone through strength training, healthy meal planning, and keeping an exercise journal.



Learn about the unique health needs of different groups within the LGBTQ community, identified as:

- L** **Lesbian**
- G** **Gay**
- B** **Bisexual**
- Tm** **Trans Men**
- Tw** **Trans Women**
- NB** **Non-Binary**
- Q** **Queer/Questioning**



Lesbian:



- Lesbians have higher rates of breast cancer than heterosexual women.
 - Screening is recommended starting at age 40 with a mammogram every other year and after age 50 with a mammogram every year.
- More lesbians smoke than straight women. Smoking causes many types of cancer, lung disease, and heart disease.
 - There are many options to help you quit! Talk to your provider about quitting or contact your insurance about free programs that can help you stop smoking.
- It is a myth that women who have sex with women do not get sexually transmitted infections or HIV. You should receive the same STI screening as women who have sex with men.
- Research has shown that lesbians are more likely than straight cisgender women to suffer from anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health issues. Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health. Don't be afraid to talk to your PCP about your mental health.
- Lesbians are less likely to have received pap smears and/or HPV testing for cervical cancer even though studies show they are at similar risk to heterosexual women.
 - Pap smears should be done every 3-5 years depending on your age and risk factors.
- Lesbians are more likely to be overweight or obese. Obesity raises your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.
 - To find out if you are overweight, you need to calculate your BMI, which is based on your height and weight. Search "BMI calculator" on the internet to calculate your BMI.

Gay:

- Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health. Gay men suffer higher rates of depression than straight men. You can obtain counseling services often times without a referral. Check the Equitas Health Provider Guide at equitashealthinstitute.com for counseling resources near you. If you are interested in learning about medications for depression, start by talking to your PCP.
- It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly because high blood pressure has no symptoms but causes complications such as heart disease and stroke.
- If you have sex with men, your risk of HIV may be higher than the general population.
 - Talk to your provider about PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), the once daily pill to prevent HIV. For more information visit ohioprep.org.
- If you are living with HIV, the best way to protect your partners is to take your HIV medications daily as prescribed and have an undetectable viral load. Recent research has shown that those with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus (Undetectable=Untransmittable).
- Men who have sex with men are more likely to get viral hepatitis. Hepatitis A and B can be prevented by vaccines. All adults born between 1945-1965 should have a one-time screening for Hepatitis C.



B

Bisexual:



- Research has shown that bisexual women are more likely to be overweight or obese than the general population of women and also have higher rates of heart disease than heterosexual women.
- To protect yourself from heart disease, stop smoking, eat vegetables and fruits daily and exercise most days of the week for at least 20 minutes. Exercise should raise your heart rate enough where you can still talk but can't sing.
- If you are a bisexual cis woman who has sex with cis men and you aren't planning a pregnancy, talk to your provider about starting contraception (birth control). There are many options available.
- Bisexual folks have a greater risk for mental health issues than straight, lesbian, or gay folks. Don't be afraid to talk to your provider about your mental health!
- Bisexual men who have sex with men have higher rates of HIV. Testing is free and confidential. If you are at risk, get tested!
- More bisexuals smoke than straight people. Smoking causes many types of cancer, lung disease, and heart disease.
 - There are many options to help you quit. Talk to your provider about quitting or contact your insurance about free programs that can help you stop smoking.

Trans Men:

Tm



- It is important to reduce your alcohol use to a minimum and stop smoking if you are taking testosterone (T). Exercise most days of the week for at least 20 minutes.
 - Aerobic exercise helps strengthen your heart and strength training has many benefits, including improved mood and reduction in chronic pain.
- For cancer screenings, follow the “screen what you have” rule. If you still have a uterus, you’ll need a pap every 3 years or every 5 years with co-testing for HPV for age 30 or above.
- If you still have a uterus and use your vagina for sex with a partner who has a penis you may be able to become pregnant even if you are on T. If you are planning a pregnancy, make sure you tell your healthcare provider ahead of time to have the healthiest outcome. If you are not planning a pregnancy, discuss contraception (birth control). Many methods are available, which do not contain estrogen and will not interact with T.
- Follow safer sex recommendations, including using condoms, if you are having anal or vaginal sex.
- “Binding” or flattening breast tissue to create a male-appearing chest is a way for many trans men to reduce chest dysphoria. Never use bandages or duct tape to bind your chest. It’s best to use an official binder that reduces pain or discomfort and allows you to breathe fully. More tips including resources on where to purchase a new or find a gently-used binder, visit point5cc.com/binding-101-tips-to-bind-your-chest-safely.
- If you are taking hormones, even small amounts, you will need regular monitoring of your blood work and follow up appointments to monitor your progress.



Tw

Trans Women:



- Follow the “screen what you have” rule for cancer screenings. If you have a prostate, you’ll need to discuss the pros and cons of blood testing for prostate cancer with your primary care provider starting at age 45.
- If you have breasts, you should start receiving breast cancer screenings at age 40.
- Research shows that many people living with HIV in the United States do not know their status. Trans women are at a very high risk for HIV. Half of transgender people diagnosed with HIV are black/African American. Visit [equitashealth.com/testing](https://www.equitashealth.com/testing) for information on free, confidential HIV testing.
- If you are exposed to HIV, contact your provider immediately! There are medications that can be taken up to 72 hours after exposure to prevent HIV transmission called “Post-Exposure Prophylaxis” or PEP.
- Talk to your provider about PrEP, the once daily pill to prevent HIV. For more information visit [ohioprep.org](https://www.ohioprep.org).
- If you are taking hormones, even small amounts, you will need regular monitoring of your blood work and follow up appointments to monitor your progress.

Nonbinary: (Genderqueer, Agender, Gender Nonconforming, etc.)

- There are many ways to express your unique gender identity. Use of hormones will depend on if you wish to make physical changes to your body, and if so, what you wish to accomplish. If you are taking hormones, even small amounts, you will need regular monitoring of your blood work and follow up appointments to monitor your progress.
- If you are planning surgery, it is best to work on improving your health before surgery to lower your risk of problems with anesthesia and to heal quickly. For example, quit smoking, achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and exercise regularly.
- For cancer screenings, follow the “screen what you have” rule.
- If a healthcare provider pressures you to make changes to your body that you aren’t comfortable with, find a new provider.
- “Binding” or flattening breast tissue to create a male-appearing chest is a way for many trans men to reduce chest dysphoria. Never use bandages or duck tape to bind your chest. It’s best to use an official binder that doesn’t cause pain or discomfort and allows you to breathe fully. More tips including resources on where to purchase a new or find a gently-used binder, visit point5cc.com/binding-101-tips-to-bind-your-chest-safely.



Q

Queer

Queer is a term with a painful past. For many years it was used as a slur against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, gender non-conforming individuals, and other people who challenged social norms associated with sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It is also a word that has been taken back by many people who identify as LGBTQ. Comfort levels with the use of this term vary by age, race, educational background, cultural affiliation and other categories. A person who uses the term queer to identify themselves is comfortable with the word and is likely to align with some, many or all letters in the acronym, LGBTQ. For most people who identify as queer, they will find health recommendations under several categories in this guide. Queer is, by definition, an expansive term with a great deal of personal significance. Please see the other sections of this guide as appropriate.



Questioning:

Questioning one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a natural developmental process. Often, people who question these identities experience the same or similar health challenges at LGBTQ individuals.

- If you feel comfortable, come out to your healthcare provider. It is important that they know about your individual sexual orientation and gender identity to determine what health risks you have. Also, share with them what your individual health goals are and what motivates you to be healthy.
- It is OK to question your sexual orientation and gender identity, and to share this information with your health provider. It is especially important to share this information if you experience anxiety, stress or discomfort with your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- For more information on screening and recommended health maintenance, visit [healthfinder.gov](https://www.healthfinder.gov) and take the "My Health Finder" assessment for personalized recommendations.

Empower Yourself

Being in a clinic or doctor's office can be intimidating. Remember that you have many rights as a patient. Most healthcare organizations have a "Patient Bill of Rights" which should be provided to you upon request. These rights should include the following at a minimum:

- All personal information including your health information should be protected and kept confidential (private) at all times.
 - **The HIPAA law** (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) or **Privacy Rule**, a Federal law, gives you rights over your health information and sets rules and limits on who can look at and receive your health information. The Privacy Rule applies to all forms of your protected health information, whether electronic, written, or oral. Sexual orientation and gender identity are protected under HIPAA.
- You have the right to request a copy of your medical records.
- You have the right to receive copies of your test results and imaging results.
- You have the right to receive services free from discrimination based on your race, religion, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation or disability status.
- You have the right to have your gender identity and pronouns respected by your health care team.
- You have a right to know the name, credentials and role of each person on the healthcare team taking care of you.
- You have the right to say no if you are uncomfortable with an observer-- for example, a medical student in the room.
- You have the right to tell your provider that you need to take a break for a drink of water, or to collect your thoughts, or to use the restroom.
- You have a right to understand all risks, benefits and alternatives of a treatment. You have a right to obtain a second opinion before agreeing to any course of treatment.
- You have the right to ask questions about your medical care.
- You have the right to receive clear, respectful and nonjudgmental communication from all members of the healthcare team.

Institute for LGBTQ Health Equity

The Institute for LGBTQ Health Equity is the education, research, and community engagement arm of Equitas Health, focusing on reducing health disparities in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community. We do this by developing and delivering exceptional LGBTQ culturally competent healthcare education and training, engaging with LGBTQ individuals, working with community based organizations, and supporting LGBTQ health research efforts in our region.

Our work with the LGBTQ community encompasses all sexual and gender minorities, including, but not limited to, those who identify as pansexual, asexual, omnisexual, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex.

For more information, call (614) 929-8894,
or email equitasinstitute@equitashealth.com.

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EquitasHealthInstitute.com



Additional Resources

To find a primary care provider or other health professional, consult the Equitas Health 2017 Ohio LGBTQ Provider Guide. Download your free copy at EquitasHealthInstitute.com/publications.

To learn the most up to date preventive care recommendations based on your age, sex assigned at birth, and risk factors: US Preventive Services Task Force.

Visit uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/recommendations

Note: This website is not inclusive of gender identity.

For LGBTQ young people in crisis, feeling suicidal, or in need of a safe and judgment-free place to talk, call the Trevor Lifeline at (866) 488-7386 or visit thetrevorproject.org.

For transgender people experiencing emotional distress or crises, contact the Trans Lifeline, a hotline staffed by trained volunteers who are transgender people themselves. Call (877) 565-8860 or visit translifeline.org.

For reliable, current information on many different health and wellness topics, for example chronic pain, nutrition, child development and exercise, go to familydoctor.org or mayoclinic.org.

To learn more about STIs and PrEP for HIV prevention, go to ohioprep.org.


For resources about intimate partner violence (IPV), including how to help yourself or someone else leave an abusive relationship, visit bravo-ohio.org.

For resources about alcohol and other substance abuse, visit the Ohio department of Mental Health and Addiction Services at mha.ohio.gov.

Primary Care Visit Worksheet

The Equitas Health Institute for LGBTQ Health Equity has created some additional resources to help you feel confident and prepared when attending medical appointments and empowered to take control of your health.

We encourage you to fill out the patient empowerment sheet and Wellness Plan template, which can both be found at EquitasHealthInstitute.com/publications. Bring them to your medical appointment to help you remember all of the medications and providers, and have a place to write down everything you would like to talk about during that visit.

**Equitas Health** INSTITUTE FOR LGBTQ HEALTH EQUITY

Patient Empowerment Sheet

My Legal Name: _____

Name I Use: _____

My Pronouns Are (please circle): He She They

My Sex Assigned at Birth (please circle): Male Female Intersex

My Gender Identity (please circle):
Male Female Trans Women Trans Men Non-Binary Self-identify: _____

My Sexual Orientation (please circle):
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Pansexual Asexual Self-identify: _____

Current Insurance: _____

Current Pharmacy: _____

Current Medications: _____

Primary Care Provider: _____

OB/GYN (if applicable): _____

I see a specialist for: _____

Other provider names: _____

I struggle with (please check): depression/anxiety relationship/dating religion
 family substance housing bullying/harassment smoking drugs alcohol
 sexuality/gender sex/STIs/pregnancy

Today I would like to talk about:

Today I have questions about:

EquitasHealthInstitute.com

Notes

We encourage you to fill out the more detailed patient empowerment sheet, available at EquitasHealthInstitute.com/publications
The card below is to give to your basic info if you lack access to a printer.

Basic Info for my Provider

My Legal Name: _____

Name I Use: _____

My Pronouns Are *(please circle)*: He She They _____

My Sex Assigned at Birth *(please circle)*: Male Female Intersex

My Gender Identity *(please circle)*:

Male Female Trans Woman Trans Man Non-Binary

Self-Identify: _____

My Sexual Orientation *(please circle)*:

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Pansexual Asexual

Self-Identify: _____



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