

Inclusive Language, Communication & Information Records Management*

* Used and modified with permission by AHS Human Resources from the *Guide To Creating Safe and Welcoming Places for Sexual & Gender Diverse (LGBTQ*) People* (2016)

What's in a name?

Our names are important to all of us regardless of our gender. Our name is part of our identity, our story, our history. This couldn't be any truer for transgender or gender diverse people. When we use someone's preferred name, we are telling them "We respect you. We care about you. You are welcome here."

What if the person's government issued identification is different than the name they want to be called?

We all know a William whom we call Bill because they prefer that name. We may know a Betty who's "legal" name is Elizabeth. Often, we don't even know the person's "legal" name. Out of respect, we should use the name they prefer. The same goes for our transgender and gender diverse family, friends, staff and patients.

What about name/gender in patient/client records?

The 2014 [Provincial Registration Standards and Practices Manual](#), prepared by Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services, have set standards on how to record patient demographic information. The following text is a direct quote from this document:

Preferred Name

" [While we are required to enter the documented name] a client may request that they be identified by their preferred first name, nickname or alias name [...] a preferred name can be recorded in some registration systems and wherever possible the client's preferred name should be collected and displayed but secondary to the documented first name".

Gender

"For the purposes of identification, the gender, as declared by the client, is the sexual category for the client portraying the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex."

"Administrative Gender is recorded as the client presents or requests ... Administrative Gender is a mandatory data attribute and must be collected for all Alberta health system events. Clinical Gender may differ from Administrative Gender [...] Individuals will not be required to provide proof before a correction will be made to their gender".

Regardless of what the system allows us to use, we need to ensure that the client's preferred name and self-declared gender are being communicated to all relevant health care providers and are being used when talking to and about them.

Pronouns

Next to a person's name, the pronouns we use when talking about others are an important and meaningful way of showing respect and dignity. Most often, we will use "He" or "She" when addressing people who identify as male or female respectively and who prefer those pronouns. However, not everyone identifies as male or female. Some people's gender identity is along the spectrum between the two, others do not identify with a gender at all. "They" is most commonly used by people who do not identify with one gender. They may also prefer pronouns such as "Ze" (used like "he") or "Per" (used like "her").

Use their preferred pronouns when talking to the person and, equally as important, when talking about them. Don't assume you know the preferred pronoun based on gender expression. Always ask "what pronoun do you prefer I use?"

Inclusive Language

When talking with and about sexual and gender diverse people, the use of inclusive language and open ended questions are another way of showing respect and recognizing that we, as people, are not only men or women, nor do we all come from families with one mom and one dad. Some have two dads. Some have two moms. The structure of a family is as diverse as the people who are part of the family. Inclusive language avoids reinforcing stereotypes and assumptions of the gender of people who perform various roles.

Instead of:	Use:
Husband or Wife	Spouse
Boyfriend or Girlfriend	Partner
Mother or Father	Parent
He/She	They (or preferred pronoun)
Manpower	Workforce or personnel
Chairman	Chair or Chairperson
Male Nurse	Nurse
Female Doctor	Physician or Doctor

When we make assumptions about people's relationships or the types of work they do, we are telling them that anyone who does not fit such an expectation is "abnormal", "different" or just not part of the "normal human experience".

Inclusive Communications, Brochures & Posters

Images and language should reflect the diversity of the people it represents. Questions to consider include:

- Do the images you use in your communication, brochures and posters show a diversity of abilities, identities, ethnicities, workforce, family makeup (same-sex parents, single patients, etc.)?
- Does your communication use “he/she or his/hers” or “they/their”? (For example ... rather than “Please enter his/her name in the record” consider using “Please enter their name in the record”).
- Do the magazines in your waiting areas reflect the diversity of the employees, volunteers and patients who are part of our workplace?

Inclusive Surveys, Forms & Questionnaires

When reviewing or designing surveys, forms or questionnaires, one should first ask why questions related to gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, etc. are being asked. What do you do with this information? Do you need this information as part of your work? Sometimes it is appropriate to gather such information. Following are some things to consider to ensure your questions are inclusive, respectful and representative of the population you are gathering this information on:

- Do the images you use in your communication, brochures and posters show a diversity of abilities, identities, ethnicities, workforce, family makeup (same-sex parents, single patients, etc.)?
- Do you ask for mother/father? Or parent/guardian?
- Does your communication use “he/she or his/hers” or “they/their”? (For example ... rather than “Please enter his/her name in the record” consider using “Please enter their name in the record”).

Surveys and forms that only use “Male/ Female” as possible answers to the question of gender, reinforces the outdated understanding that gender is binary. There are many people who work for or who interact with AHS who do not fit into the binary of either male or female. Here are some things to consider when you need to ask about gender in your surveys or forms:

- First, ask why are these questions being asked? Do you need information on gender, sexual orientation, marital status, etc.? What do you do with this information?

- When asking about gender, avoid using “other” as an alternative to Male/Female. Using “other” tends to further marginalize people who do not fit into the binary of either male or female.
- It is considered best practice to not limit an individual’s choice to one gender identity. For example, if you only offered “Male, Female, Transgender or Other” as options, a transgender female may only select *Female* as this is the gender she identifies as. However, if you allowed the individual to “select all that apply”, they may choose to select *Female AND Transgender*.

Suggested methods:

- Consider asking the individual to enter their own gender identity by using an open-ended question such as “How do you identify your gender?”
- If you prefer to use a list or for research based surveys which may require consistent coding, consider asking question that is reflective of your population such as:

How do you identify your gender? (Choose all that apply. This list is intended to be representative rather than comprehensive. If you identify with other terms, you are welcome to include them in the additional box below).

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Two-Spirit
- I do not identify with a gender
- Prefer not to answer
- You are welcome to include additional gender identities (use open text box):

Confidentiality

When someone discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity to you, they have shared something very personal. This is often a reflection of your ability to create a safe and trusted space for that individual.

Sharing information about an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity that is not known by others is commonly referred to as “outing”. “Outing” someone is not only disrespectful, in many cases, it could put the person at significant risk of discrimination, harassment and violence. Someone’s sexual orientation and gender identity is identifiable information which may be protected by privacy legislation. Sexual orientation and gender identity are also part of patients’ medical information which may be subject to health information privacy legislation. Honour the privilege that you’ve been given by the individual who invited you to be part of their very personal journey and recognize that it is always their story to tell.

What if I get it wrong?

- Step 1: Forgive yourself! This can be a new experience for many. Recognize we are all in this journey together and as humans, we don't always get it right.
- Step 2: Apologize. Just a simple apology will do. Say something like "I'm sorry, I will try harder next time."
- Step 3: Try harder next time.