



OFFICE OF POLICY, PROCEDURES AND TRAINING

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

DHS-PB-2020-010

<p>SUBJECT:</p> <p>DHS' Guide to Improving Services for LGBTQI Clients - Frequently Asked Questions</p>	<p>APPLICABLE TO:</p> <p>All DHS Directly Operated or Funded Facilities/Programs Serving Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness</p>	<p>ISSUED:</p> <p>August 10, 2020</p>
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<p>ADMINISTERED BY:</p> <p>DHS Office of Program Development and Implementation, DSS Office of LGBTQI Affairs</p>	<p>APPROVED BY:</p> <p>Joslyn Carter, Administrator Department of Social Services/ Department of Homeless Services</p>
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■ INTRODUCTION

This crisis of homelessness impacts many populations and communities across the nation. However, some groups experience homelessness at disproportionate rates due to factors such as discrimination, economic oppression, and racist policies and practices. LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Intersex) people, particularly transgender people of color, are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness. A disproportionate number of the nation's youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQI. Despite the wide-reaching impacts of these disparities, there is limited awareness among social services professionals as to how to create inclusive and affirming services to address the root causes of homelessness among LGBTQI-identifying individuals.

■ PURPOSE

The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) created the Guide to Improving Services for LGBTQI Clients – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (**DHS-45a**), to share information about homelessness in the LGBTQI community and to highlight resources that staff should use to better support LGBTQI clients. This guide references the DHS *Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Clients procedure (DHS-PB-2019-015)* and the DSS *Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning and Intersex Policy (DSS-PD-2017-01)*.

■ PROCEDURE

DHS staff and providers should use this form to:

1. Build their knowledge of LGBTQI homelessness and its impacts.
2. Refer to tools and resources DHS and partner organizations have developed.
3. Create a plan to ensure their shelters are inclusive and comfortable for clients of all gender identities.

Effective Immediately

■ RELATED PROCEDURES

- [DSS-PD-2017-001](#) Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning & Intersex (LGBTQI) Policy
- [DHS-PB-2019-015](#) Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Clients

■ ATTACHMENTS

- DHS-45a** DHS Guide to Improving Services for LGBTQI Clients – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



DHS's GUIDE TO IMPROVING SERVICES FOR LGBTQI CLIENTS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING AND INTERSEX (LGBTQI) HOMELESSNESS?

LGBTQI is an acronym used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Intersex communities. It is important to know that LGBTQI individuals - especially transgender and gender non-conforming individuals (TGNC) - may use a wide range of terms to describe themselves. The best practice is to use terms that individuals use to describe themselves. The individual is the best person to determine their own identity. Avoid assigning terminology to identities and using terms that make individuals uncomfortable. Review the [DSS LGBTQI Policy](#) for definitions of all the terms contained in this acronym.

As a social services agency, it is important for staff to understand that LGBTQI people may experience discrimination in society at large due to their sexual orientation or gender, and particularly when accessing services such as shelter. This is especially true for those who are also experiencing structural racism. Homeless services can be especially difficult to navigate for transgender and gender non-conforming clients - clients whose gender identity or expression is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. This is where our support can make the greatest difference.

There are several unique drivers to homelessness for the LGBTQI community. These include:

- Familial rejection due to sexual orientation or gender expression.
 - **Note:** Research shows a strong link between family rejection and negative health and mental health outcomes. Generally, rejection and discrimination of any kind contributes to higher rates of depression, conduct disorder, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal behavior.¹ Up to 40% of transgender people attempt suicide.²
- Housing discrimination and refusal to take on LGBTQI people as tenants.
- Employment discrimination, especially among trans women of color.
 - **Note:** In June 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled that it is illegal to fire someone because of their sexual orientation or because they are transgender. Prior to that ruling, in most states, it was still perfectly legal to fire someone from their job because they are LGBTQI.
 - **Note:** Due to widespread employment discrimination, many turn to sex work to survive. This has led to negative stereotypes about sex workers and transgender people.
- Higher rates of arrest and incarceration, particularly for youth of color.
 - **Note:** Incarceration can lead to a cycle of housing and employment discrimination.

These obstacles increase the likelihood that LGBTQI people will experience housing insecurity and street homelessness. It is essential that providers understand what our clients may be experiencing when they arrive at intake, safe havens, drop-ins, or are engaged by street outreach workers.

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1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/homelessness_programs_resources/learning-field-programs-serving-youth-lgbtqi2s-experiencing-homelessness.pdf

2 The Williams Institute: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults/>

WHAT DOES LOCAL AND NATIONAL DATA TELL US ABOUT LGBTIQI PEOPLE?

The data below emphasizes the importance for DHS' recent efforts and the acknowledgement to do more. New York City has a robust set of human rights laws to protect New Yorkers from discrimination of different kinds.

- More than 1 in 10 TGNC people in the United States (U.S.) has been evicted from their homes because of their gender identity.³
- 40% of the 1.6 million homeless youth in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ.⁴
- Gender minorities are more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness (e.g., 82% of gender non-binary adults who are experiencing homelessness are unsheltered).⁵
- In a 2015 LGBT Health and Human Services Needs for New York State, 40% of respondents reported experiencing food insecurity within the past year. Nearly 1 in 5 (17.75%) reported having been homeless at some point in their lives. For people of color, 30.2% of respondents had been homeless at some point in their lives.⁶
- LGBTQI youth comprise up to 40% of the homeless youth population.⁷

One third of LGBTQI people have been rejected by their families after they come out, and these children are more likely to experience food insecurity, homelessness, and/or incarceration.⁸

WHAT TOOLS DOES DHS HAVE IN PLACE TO HELP STAFF BETTER SUPPORT AND SERVICE LGBTIQI CLIENTS?

Our recent Agency-wide efforts demonstrate a commitment to the LGBTQI community, and we encourage all providers to ensure that staff of all levels are aware of them and practice them with diligence.

1. Policies that apply to all staff and providers:

- DHS released a [Transgender, Non-binary, and Intersex Clients Policy \(DHS-PB-2019-015\)](#) policy that includes:
 - Guidance for appropriate service delivery.
 - Background on terminology and purpose
 - An introduction of gender pronouns and chosen name to Agency procedures.
 - A script for modeling respectful introductions to clients.
- DSS released a comprehensive [LGBTQI policy](#) which covers general use of practices such as pronouns and relevant laws.

2. System Changes to Assist Providers Better Serve LGBTQI Community:

- DHS added a **field in CARES for preferred/chosen name**, a name that clients may use that is different than their legal name.
- CARES **nightly rosters print preferred name** over legal name, which prevents clients from being "outed" as transgender during roster checks.
- DSS provides **LGBTQI training** to all new DHS and HRA staff.
- DSS opened **Marsha's House**, a shelter for LGBTQI adults ages 18-30.
- DSS is **distributing non-discrimination signage** and plans to increase the visibility of rights and resources for all clients.

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³ National Center for Transgender Equality: <https://transequality.org/issues/housing-homelessness>

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⁵ National Alliance to End Homelessness using HUD data: <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Gender-Minority-Homelessness-Article-Revised-6-24-19-JJ-002.pdf>

⁶ LGBT Health and Human Services Needs in New York State: <https://37vtav3mmzd7nxd582dguu4m-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Needs-Assessment-WEB.pdf>

⁷ Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2012/07/12/11954/gay-and-transgender-homeless-youth-face-huge-obstacles/>

⁸ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition: [https://www.nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/Out of Sight LGBTQ Youth and Adults in Texas Justice Systems.pdf](https://www.nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/Out%20of%20Sight%20LGBTQ%20Youth%20and%20Adults%20in%20Texas%20Justice%20Systems.pdf); Coalition for Juvenile Justice: https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Principles_FINAL.pdf

WHAT TOOLS DOES DHS HAVE IN PLACE TO HELP STAFF BETTER SUPPORT AND SERVICE LGBTQI CLIENTS? *(continued)*

3. Resources, Referrals and Partnerships:

- DHS is working to improve resources and linkages to strengthen a continuum of services. For example, we are partnering with the Unity Project to distribute resource guides for LGBTQI young adults.
- DHS is working with transgender advocates such as the Solutions Coalition and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project to better understand the needs of TGNC clients.
- The DHS Office of the Medical Director is creating a fact sheet for staff and clients, to assist in the coordination for health-related resources for LGBTQI people experiencing homelessness.
- DSS/DHS hired a consultant, the National Innovation Service, to conduct an evaluation of the needs and experiences of TGNC clients, in order to inform ways to improve service provision.
- DHS, in partnership with the CUNY School of Professional Studies, developed a series of Model of Practice (MOP) foundational trainings that include components of the LGBTQI community.

Note: While the Agency collects gender identity in CARES, some individuals may choose not to disclose. We do not know how many of our clients identify as LGBTQI, since we do not ask for information about sexual orientation. Therefore, the best practice is to implement inclusive practices and procedures.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY FACILITY MORE AFFIRMING AND WELCOMING FOR LGBTQI CLIENTS?

We invite you to take charge and be proactive in your efforts. Here are some things you can do:

1. **Make sure all staff are familiar with the [DHS TNBI Procedure](#) and [DSS LGBTQI Policy](#).** These resources exist to assist staff with any questions they may have and contain information that may be new to some. The materials cover most common needs of TNBI and LGBO people, including what the law expects, how to use affirming language like preferred name and pronouns, what to do if you make a mistake, what to do if an employee or coworker comes out to you, and how to make sure CARES provides the most helpful information for serving transgender clients.
2. **Understand the most common needs of LGBTQI clients:** If client says they are being harassed due to their LGBTQI identity, take their word seriously and help them resolve the conflict. Work with other staff and clients to increase competency and knowledge of LGBTQI identities to minimize the risk of discriminatory incidents.
 - a. **Example:** Some client requests require a receipt. These include: name change, gender pronoun change, and requests to transfer. Please refer to form DHS-45(E) attached to the TNBI procedure.
3. **Privacy and Reasonable Accommodations:** Create opportunities for privacy when possible. For example, transgender clients may request a separate shower time. Contact DSS Disability Affairs for assistance if a client submits a reasonable accommodation request related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. Contact the DSS Office of LGBTQI Affairs (contact information below) if an LGBTQI client needs additional support.
4. **Attend Training:** Offer your staff effective LGBTQI awareness and cultural sensitivity training and materials. Attend trainings offered by DSS/DHS and research additional training resources within your community. For example, the [Safe Zone Project](#) offers online training resources. You may also contact the [Mayor's Office to End Gender-based Violence](#), which offers LGBTQI trainings related to interpersonal violence, and you may also contact the DSS LGBTQI Affairs Office for guidance on resources.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY FACILITY MORE AFFIRMING AND WELCOMING FOR LGBTQI CLIENTS? *(continued)*

5. **Create and Maintain Community Linkages:** Research LGBTQI organizations and health clinics in the local community. Establish a relationship with these organizations and refer clients to them. Share information about them with all clients, not only those who are “out” as LGBTQI. For help finding organizations to work with, please contact the DSS Office of LGBTQI Affairs.
 - a. **Example:** There are many community-based organizations (CBO’s) and non-profits around the city that aim to provide assistance as resources to LGBTQI New Yorkers. For example, contact the [Unity Project](#), a division of the Mayor’s Office, which provides resources and opportunities to LGBTQI young people, and is willing to meet with service providers to discuss their work and available resources. **Providers are encouraged to establish relationships with these groups.**
6. **Enhance the Physical Space:** Display LGBTQI-affirming posters or flags in public spaces. This can be anything from an LGBTQI flag to a poster explaining gender pronouns, in addition to DHS Rights & Responsibilities signs and other approved collaterals.
7. **Distribute Non-Discrimination Statements:** Print out DHS’ [non-discrimination statement](#). When clients arrive at your facility, hand them a copy. Make yourself available to answer questions regarding filing official complaints through the Office of the Ombudsman. You can also access guidance of the NYC Human Rights Law that explains [protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression](#).
 - a. **Example:** LGBTQI clients experience housing discrimination at higher rates. Housing specialists should work to identify LGBTQI brokers who are proactive in counteracting discrimination and violations of [NYC Human Rights Law](#).

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

- ▶ **DSS Office of LGBTQI Affairs:** Under DSS, this office increases awareness and visibility of LGBTQI issues across DHS and HRA, works with program staff to implement solutions to obstacles faced by LGBTQI participants, coordinates with community organizations, and assist program participants with concerns or complaints related to accessing HRA/DHS services. **Email:** lgbtqi@dss.nyc.gov
- ▶ **DHS/OPDI:** The Office of Program Development and Implementation (OPDI) sits in the DHS Executive Office. OPDI works closely with the Agency’s divisions, as well as our partners at DSS, providing foundational support in the development and implementation of strategic initiatives, trainings, policies, and procedures. **Email:** opdi@dhs.nyc.gov.