

# How to ask your senior patients about sexuality and gender

## Advice and insights from real seniors

Humana partnered with an external research firm to conduct a qualitative study on a diverse group of older adults. This study allowed us to gain more insight into this population's thoughts on providing sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) information to healthcare providers and health insurance companies.

If you want to start asking patients about SOGI, but don't know where to begin, their responses provide valuable insights. Ultimately, **seniors are grateful you want to get to know them**, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) seniors feel especially safe when providers take time to understand them.



### Share the purpose

While seniors tend to be comfortable sharing sex and gender information in healthcare contexts, they want to know how sexuality information might be used—and why it's being collected at all.

- Explain why sexual orientation information is being collected (e.g., anonymized demographic data, sexual activity is relevant to healthcare, etc.).
- Display your nondiscrimination policy so every person feels safe.



### Reassure their privacy

Seniors also want their information to be secure and are suspicious of a government entity accessing it.

- Reassure patients in writing that their responses will be kept confidential.
- Be transparent about who will have access to their info—including if it's being shared with a Medicare insurance company—and get consent for sharing with approved parties.
- Instead of asking in-person or electronically, use paper forms for anonymity and privacy.



### Keep it simple

Though seniors are aware that younger generations are expanding their understanding of SOGI, evolving definitions can be confusing or alienating.

- List the most common options as choices, with short definitions for potentially unclear terms:
  - **Sex (for clinical use):** male, female
  - **Gender:** male, female, transgender woman, transgender man, genderqueer/nonbinary
  - **Sexual orientation (“Do you identify as...?”):** straight or heterosexual; lesbian, gay or homosexual; bisexual
- Consider whether gathering this information is necessary for your practice.



### Allow for alternate options

Respect patients' needs by offering alternatives.

- Provide a “choose not to disclose” option, or don't make the question(s) required.
- Include a self-identifying option, e.g., “Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_.”
- Add a question that opens a conversation, e.g., “Anything else you'd like to discuss?”



### Additional resources

- CDC LGBT health page: [www.CDC.gov/LGBTHealth](http://www.CDC.gov/LGBTHealth)
- The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center: [www.LGBTQIAHealthEducation.org](http://www.LGBTQIAHealthEducation.org)