

Geisinger

Improving LGBTQ+ healthcare

A resource for our LGBTQ+ community

Geisinger

Geisinger

Medical Center

EMERGENCY

Entrance

Entrance

Entrance



Improving your healthcare

What can I do to improve my health if I identify as LGBTQ+?

Along with eating well, exercising and avoiding tobacco use, here are some things you can do as an LGBTQ+ person to improve your health:

- Protect yourself and your partner in case of catastrophic illness:
 - **Designate** a healthcare power of attorney. Give a copy to your primary care provider and to significant others and carry one when you travel.
 - **Purchase** long-term care insurance — though less urgent for those in legal marriages or civil unions, it can still be helpful.
 - **Inform** your healthcare providers if you are married or in a civil union.
- If you have a cervix (typically those who have a uterus), have cervical cancer screening starting at age 21 and then at least every three years.
- If you are over age 40 and have breast tissue, discuss chest screenings with your healthcare provider.

- Talk with an LGBTQ+ culturally competent behavioral health or drug/alcohol treatment professional if you have depression, anxiety, or substance abuse issues.
- Reach out to your healthcare provider for housing resources in your community if you're experiencing homelessness.
- If you are sexually active, consider talking with your doctor about:
 - Screening for STIs (sexually transmitted infections)
 - Your individual contraception needs (e.g., if you have a uterus, you can get pregnant even while taking testosterone, so you must use contraception if you don't want to get pregnant)
 - Regular testing for HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), HPV (human papillomavirus) and hepatitis
 - PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) – medicine taken to prevent getting HIV for those at risk
 - Family planning – whether you want to get pregnant or preserve fertility
 - Appropriate vaccinations and immunizations
 - How to make condoms and/or latex dental dams a comfortable, expected part of sexual activity

Coming out to your healthcare provider

One of the keys to good healthcare is being open with your healthcare provider. Doctors, nurses, physician assistants, behavioral health providers and other professionals treating you need to know about your sexual orientation and gender identity to give the best care possible. Coming out to your doctor gives you an opportunity to be more open about your life as it relates to your health and to make a plan to stay healthy.

Feel nervous, uncomfortable or fearful of how a doctor will react? Don't let your feelings keep you from disclosing your sexual orientation or gender identity — because that can impact your health. Healthcare professionals are obligated to maintain patient confidentiality and are held accountable for keeping patient privacy with rules and consequences defined in HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996). This federal law created national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge.

Your healthcare provider needs to consider your sexual orientation and/or gender identity to form a productive and positive relationship with you, just as they consider qualities of their heterosexual and cisgender patients in planning for care. If you aren't comfortable coming out to your doctor — or if their reception to your sexual orientation and/or gender identity isn't positive — you may want to seek a medical professional in a more LGBTQ-affirmative environment.

Reach out to Geisinger's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for help: diversity@geisinger.edu.

Tips for finding and being open with healthcare providers

Ask for referrals. Ask friends or local LGBTQ+ centers for the names of LGBTQ+-friendly healthcare providers. You can also check LGBTQ+ medical websites for referrals.

Inquire by phone. When you call to make an appointment, ask if the practice has any LGBTQ+ patients or LGBTQ+-friendly providers. If you're nervous about asking, remember that you don't have to give your name during the initial call.

Bring a friend or family member. Uneasy about being open with your healthcare provider? Consider asking a trusted friend to come with you. Plan together about how they can help if things aren't going well during the medical visit.

Bring up your LGBTQ+ identity when you feel most comfortable. Ask your doctor to chat while you are still fully clothed.

Know what to ask. Learn about the specific healthcare issues facing LGBTQ+ people and prepare a list of questions before your visit.

Questions to ask yourself after a wellness visit

- Do you trust your healthcare provider?
- Were they receptive to questions about your unique needs?
- Is your provider experienced in working with LGBTQ+ patients?
- Did they review your complete medical history?
- How did they manage issues of privacy and confidentiality?
- Has your provider respected your particular wishes for privacy?
- Did they explain their choices for treatment or non-treatment?
- Did you feel they judged your sexual orientation or gender identity?
- Were they comfortable providing care related to your sexual health and family planning goals?
- Did they show willingness to learn more about caring for LGBTQ patients, if needed?

Resources

LGBTQ youth can visit these websites to find healthcare or get more information.

- Questions about your sexual health? Visit Advocates for Youth (advocatesforyouth.org).
- Want support for your friends or family? Visit the TransYouth Family Allies (imatyfa.org) or Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (pflag.org) for lists of organizations and local support groups.
- Want to make changes at school? Find resources at GSA Network (gsanetwork.org) or Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (glsen.org).
- Want to find organizations committed to LGBTQ+ healthcare? Review the Human Rights Campaign Health Equality Index (hrc.org/hei).

LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts. If you have concerns about your family member, ask them directly if they are thinking about hurting or killing themselves. Connect with crisis resources:

- Trevor Project – Connect to a crisis counselor 24/7/365 from anywhere in the U.S. It's 100% confidential and 100% free.
 - Call 866-488-7386.
 - Text START to 678-678.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – A United States-based suicide prevention network of 200+ crisis centers that provides 24/7 service via a toll-free hotline.
 - Call or text 988.

Support for youth

LGBTQ youth can find support in places like these:

- Neighborly helps you find free or reduced-cost services in your community. Search for local resources to access food and housing assistance, childcare, transportation, utility assistance, healthcare, financial assistance and other needs (neighborlypa.org)
- Want a safe place to call for information, referrals and support? Try the Peer Listening Line, 617-267-2535 (toll-free 800-399-PEER), or the GLBT National Help Center's Youth Talkline at 800-246-PRIDE (7743).
- Have you experienced violence or sexual assault? Contact the Safe Homes Project at 800-621-HOPE (4673) or Llámanos Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-223-5001.
- Have you run away from home or are you homeless? Call the National Runaway Safeline for help at 800-786-2929, or visit (1800runaway.org)
- Are you feeling sad or thinking about hurting yourself? Call the Trevor Project's Lifeline at 866-488-7386 (thetrevorproject.org).