

Guide to collecting and recording data about sex, gender and sexual orientation

Purpose

This guide supports human service organisations to ask and record client information in a way that is respectful and inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations.

Introduction

The Department of Human Services (DHS) believes that human services should be inclusive and respectful of all South Australians. We also want to ensure that the demographic data we collect can be used to inform evidence-based services and government policy into the future.

The recommendations in this guide align with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables](#), which as of 2025 is considered best practice in Australia.

In considering this guide, organisations are encouraged to reflect on the nature of their service to ensure that information is collected, recorded and shared in ways that, above all else, always respects the privacy and wellbeing of all clients.

Why asking matters

- By respectfully asking questions, services let LGBTIQ+ clients know it is safe to disclose personal information, which helps to make the service more welcoming;
- Collecting and recording information about things such as a client's gender, chosen name or pronouns can help to ensure that staff are aware of how to respectfully talk with a client; and
- It allows service providers to identify if LGBTIQ+ people are accessing and benefiting from the services being offered. This can assist in evaluating and improving services, as well as helping to inform the development of future services and government policy.

Note that it may not be appropriate to ask all questions included in this guide, however at a minimum, questions about gender should be inclusive of genders other than male and female.

Definitions

- **LGBTIQA+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (i.e., non-binary) people.
- **Sex:** A classification often made at birth based on sex characteristics.
- **Sex characteristics:** Physical features relating to sex, including genitalia, chromosomes and hormones.
- **Intersex:** People born with innate variations of sex characteristics that differ from medical or social norms for female or male bodies.
- **Gender:** A person's sense of whether they are a man, woman, non-binary, or various other identities. A person's gender can change over time.
- **Cisgender:** A term to describe when a person's gender and sex assigned at birth align.
- **Transgender:** A term to describe when a person's gender and sex assigned at birth are different.
- **Non-binary:** An umbrella term for gender identities outside of the binary of man and woman.
- **Pronouns:** Words that take the place of a person's name, such as he and him, she and her, or they and them.
- **Sexual orientation:** Attraction to other people, such as heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual.

For more information about LGBTIQA+ terminology, refer to the [Australian Institute of Family Studies' LGBTIQA+ glossary of terms](#).

Considering what to ask

Questions about sex, gender and sexual orientation may be perceived as very personal.

Consider the context of your service when deciding what questions are appropriate to ask:

- Will this information support the delivery or evaluation of your service?
- How will you ask the question? Will it be done in a respectful way?
- Do staff in your service understand what the questions mean and why they are being asked?
- Have your staff received training about LGBTIQA+ inclusion? Do all staff know how to respond respectfully?
- Will clients understand what you're asking them and why it's being asked?
- Will clients have the option not to answer the question?
- Is the question culturally and age appropriate for your clients?
- How do you gather other demographic information from your clients?
- If questions are asked verbally, could someone overhear this conversation?
- How will information be recorded? Will it be kept private?

Also consider when to ask for information. People may feel more comfortable to share personal information once rapport has been established with staff.

What to ask

The following questions can be asked either verbally or through documents, such as client intake or assessment forms.

Asking questions about gender and pronouns is appropriate for most services. Asking about sexual orientation or sex should only be done if relevant.

Asking about gender

Use either of the following questions:

How do you describe your gender?

- Man or male
- Woman or female
- Non-binary
- I use a different term (*include a free-text field*)
- Prefer not to say

OR

What is your gender?

(Provide a free-text field for responses)

Asking about pronouns

Use either of the following questions:

What are your pronouns?

(*Select all that apply*)

- He/him
- She/her
- They/them
- I use a different pronoun (*include a free-text field*)

OR

What are your pronouns?

(Provide a free-text field for responses)

Asking about sexual orientation

How do you describe your sexual orientation?

- Straight (heterosexual)
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- I use a different term (*free-text field*)
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Note: Questions about sexual orientation should be age appropriate. The ABS recommends only asking this question of people aged 15 years or older. It may also be necessary to consider the cultural appropriateness of asking this question.

Asking about sex

What was your sex recorded at birth?

- Male
- Female
- Another term (*include a free-text field*)

Note: For most human services, it is sufficient to only ask about a person's gender. Asking about sex recorded at birth may be relevant in the delivery of some health or personal hygiene services.

If including questions about both sex and gender:

- Ask for a person's sex first, then ask about gender immediately after
- Include a descriptor with the gender question to help clarify the difference between sex and gender, such as:

Gender refers to current gender, which may be different to sex recorded at birth and may be different to what is indicated on legal documents.

Other questions to consider

Legal vs chosen or preferred name

Some people use names other than their legal name (the name on legal documents such as birth certificates). This includes transgender and gender diverse people who may have chosen a different name as part of affirming their gender, and people from various cultures who may use an Anglicised name.

A person's chosen or preferred name should be used as a matter of respect. It is advisable to record chosen names on forms as this will ensure all staff use the right name when referring to clients.

If legal names are required, consider having separate fields for 'Legal name' and 'Chosen name' or 'Preferred name'.

Relationship status

If you ask clients about their relationship status or collect details about their partner(s), ensure these questions are inclusive of same-gender relationships and people with non-binary genders.

As above, also consider separate fields for legal and chosen or preferred names.

Sex characteristics

Consider the nature of the services you deliver to determine if it is appropriate to ask if someone was born with a variation of sex characteristics.

Refer to [InterAction for Health and Human Rights' website](#) for guidance.

Who to collect information from

Someone's sex, gender and sexual orientation are personal information.

- **Seek information directly from the client** unless they have provided permission for you to ask a third party (i.e., a parent or carer)
- **Do not make assumptions about someone** based on their name or appearance.
- **Ask questions in private where possible** – the client may not have come out to other people but may be willing to tell you privately.

Prefacing these questions

Clients should know why their personal information is being sought, and how this information might be used.

Consider adding questions in this guide to a 'Personal information' section of a client intake, and preface the questions with a statement such as:

"I am going to ask you some personal questions. We ask everyone these questions to help us understand you and so we can provide you the best possible service."

You can choose not to answer any of these questions, and you can also share information with me later if you don't want to tell me now or if anything changes over time."

Seeking consent to record and share data

Many LGBTIQ+ people have experienced stigma or discrimination because of who they are. For some, this harm has been caused by service providers or people close to them.

Never assume that a LGBTIQ+ person is 'out' to everyone in their life just because they disclose information to you.

It is always advisable to ask a LGBTIQ+ person for consent to record or share their data, and to confirm who they are willing for this information to be shared with.

Organisations should consider how clients are made aware of their right to privacy, how client consent is recorded, and how records can be updated later.

The following statement may assist:

“Any information about your gender/pronouns/sexual orientation is private and we will only share it with other people if we have your permission. You can also tell us later if you want us to stop sharing information with someone.

Can we share this information with other people?

Is there anyone you do not want us to share this information with?”

Evaluating data

It is recommended to consider how data is recorded in client record management systems to ensure it can be utilised for future evaluation and analysis.

The ABS' [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables](#) provides guidance on how to code data for most of the topics discussed in this guide.

Additional resources

- [Australian Bureau of Statistics: Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables](#) (2020)
- [Australian Institute of Family Studies: LGBTIQ+ glossary of common terms](#)
- [InterAction for Health and Human Rights: Forms and data collection](#)
- [Rainbow Tick](#): Refer to Standard 5 (Disclosure and documentation)
- [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners: Collecting and recording information about patient sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation](#) (2024)
- [South Australian Rainbow Advocacy Alliance: LGBTIQ+ inclusive data collection](#) (2025)