



Standard of Practice

Effective Date: August 5, 2015

Approved by: Pat Valentine

Expectations for Serving LGBTQ¹ Individuals

"All communities and populations have unique cultural characteristics. Services will be delivered in a manner that is inclusive, competent and respectful of these characteristics" (DHS Values and Principles for Integrated Practice).

This Standard of Practice is intended to provide guidance for DHS and contracted provider staff to enhance their interactions and service delivery with individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

DHS staff, provider staff, as well as foster/resource families and Dom Care Providers, will follow these guidelines for practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals and families:

- **Utilize** inclusive and welcoming terminology and display affirming materials and resources.
- **Remember** that individuals are the principal **owners of their own information**. Protecting their confidentiality is critical to ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being. Outing an individual without their consent not only harms the trust and rapport between the individual and staff, but may also put the individual at risk for harm and discrimination, including self-harm.
- **Demonstrate willingness to explore** any LGBTQ issues that arise openly, non-judgmentally, and empathetically, and provide welcoming community resources for collaboration and referral as needed.
- **Avoid assuming** any mental illness or pathology because an individual identifies as LGBTQ. Understand that being LGBTQ is **NOT** a form of mental illness, and accordingly, staff must not support any form of conversion or reparative therapies for LGBTQ individuals.
- **However, recognize** that LGBTQ individuals are at **greater risk for mental illness or substance use disorders due to external influences** from their environment. Be aware that LGBTQ individuals frequently experience significant psychosocial stress as a result of explicit and

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning

implicit homophobia, biphobia, heterosexism, transphobia, and the stigma associated with being LGBTQ. Individuals may experience depression, anxiety, increased suicide risk, substance abuse, and (for youth) truancy or dropping out of school due to external reactions to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, or **perceived** sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Therefore, assisting the individual in getting screened for these behavioral health conditions is critical.

- **Be aware** that many LGBTQ individuals who are system-involved have **experiences of trauma**, and all staff should accordingly maintain ongoing training specific to these unique forms of trauma, and be able to recognize signs of distress.
- **Demonstrate understanding** of the unique dynamics that can emerge for LGBTQ individuals and their **families**, and how that has the potential to lead to involvement with the child welfare, justice, behavioral health, and homeless systems.
- **Treat the individual holistically** – recognize that their LGBTQ identity is not all that defines them, and that their life experiences are shaped by all of the different aspects of their identity (e.g. race, religion, language, culture, etc.), how they intersect, and how society responds to them.
- When working with **transgender** individuals, **give special attention to meaningfully integrating** counseling, mental health services, and medical care to support those who choose to pursue a social or medical transition.
- When screening all individuals for medical conditions, clinicians and providers should **seek to understand not only behaviors, but also identities** (ex: not only asking about the sex of sexual partners but also sensitively inquiring whether they identify as LGBTQ).

If a staff member becomes aware of a colleague intentionally disregarding the guidelines outlined in this standard, staff must report the incident to their direct supervisor **OR** to their Human Resources department **OR** to the Director's Action Line. Contracted provider staff should follow the appropriate reporting procedures as determined by their specific organization.

Related Resources & Documents

Policy Statements

Allegheny County Department of Human Services

DHS Anti-Discrimination Policy

<http://info.alleghenycounty.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=5675>

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Guidelines to Ensure Affirmative Environments and Clinically Appropriate Service to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and Intersex Consumers and Their Family Members

[Allegheny County Department of Human Services](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/DHS/index.aspx)

1 Smithfield Street

Pittsburgh, PA 15222

412-350-5701

<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/DHS/index.aspx>

http://www.parecovery.org/documents/OMHSAS_Bulletin_11-02.pdf

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services: Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth in Foster Care
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/im1103.pdf>

Resources

Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Director's Action Line

1-800-862-6783

<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/dal.aspx>

American Psychological Association

Best Practices for Mental Health Facilities Working with LGBT Clients

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/promoting-good-practices.aspx>

Child Welfare League of America

CWLA Best Practices for Working with LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care

<http://www.nclrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/bestpracticeslgbtyouth.pdf>

National Resource Center on LGBT Aging

Legal Developments and Practical Considerations: Improving the Quality of Care for Older LGBT Adults in the Long Term Care Setting

<http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/resources/resource.cfm?r=735>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Top Health Issues for LGBT Populations Information & Resource Kit

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA12-4684/SMA12-4684.pdf>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Trauma Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning Youth

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/culture_and_trauma_brief_LGBTQ_youth.pdf

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