

Get the Facts...

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SEXUAL HEALTH:

Information for Veterans

We are asking you about your sexual orientation and sexual health to provide you with the care that meets your needs. Read below to learn what these questions mean and how the information will be used to improve your health care.

Why am I being asked about my sexual orientation and sexual health?

Everyone has a sexual orientation. Asking about sexual orientation is part of a routine health assessment. This information may feel personal and private, but your VA provider needs to know. Your VA provider will need to ask personal questions to best assess your health and work with you to ensure your health needs are met. This information will be part of your private, protected health record.

Asking everyone about their sexual orientation is important because:

- Knowing your sexual orientation will help providers better understand your social and health needs and make good recommendations.
- Having a specific sexual orientation (e.g., gay/lesbian, bisexual, queer) will cue a provider to assess for ongoing stress and unique health concerns.
- Sexual orientation identity, attractions, and behavior are part of a sexual health assessment which may identify concerns that need to be addressed.
- Your provider can use respectful terms that you feel comfortable with when talking about your relationships.
- VA wants to understand how many Veterans are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer and use this information to ensure that LGBTQ+ Veterans receive the best care possible.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is how people experience sexual and romantic attraction to others. Everyone has a sexual orientation. Many people think of sexual orientation as the social term people use to identify their attractions. These terms include:

- **Heterosexual or Straight**
someone who is different-sex attracted
- **Gay or Lesbian**
someone who is same-sex attracted
- **Bisexual**
someone who is attracted to both men and women
- **Queer**
someone who experiences non-heterosexual attractions and/or rejects binary labels of sexual orientation

Others may use terms like pansexual or asexual. Some people may question their attractions, and others may prefer not to label their sexual orientation.

What if none of the categories describe me?

If none of the categories describe you, your provider can write that in the open text box in your health record.

What is Sexual Health?

Sexual health is more than avoiding disease. Being sexually healthy means having a healthier body, a satisfying sexual life, positive sexual relationships, and emotional well-being.

Every Veteran should have a sexual health assessment to identify their health goals and potential health issues. For example, pain during or after sexual activity or difficulty with sexual functioning may signal a health condition that has not been treated. Problems with sexual functioning can also result from medications and chronic illness. If this happens to you, changes to treatments may restore functioning. Problems with sexual functioning may also be the first sign of an undiagnosed health condition. Discussion about sexual health can help family building or prevent pregnancy. Finally, discussing sexual activities and partners can help identify strategies for preventing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.



If I am sexually active, how can I stay safe and healthy?

Talk to your provider about your sexual relationships, activities, and goals. Together you and your provider can identify strategies for staying safe and healthy in your relationships. Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that every sexually active adult be informed that Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) can prevent HIV. PrEP is medication (oral and injection) that is highly effective at preventing HIV. PrEP is available in the VA to anyone who asks for it.

Learn more about [PrEP, HIV and AIDS \(CDC\)](#)

Who should I talk to if I want to start a family but having trouble?

Talk to your health care provider if you or your partner have been unsuccessful in becoming pregnant, need assistance, or don't know how to get started. Your provider can discuss family-building options.

Who will see my sexual orientation? How will my information be protected?

It will become part of your electronic health record and be protected as confidential. Your providers will be able to see this information in future visits. Your personal health information, including sexual orientation and sexual behavior, is hidden and only available to VA health care personnel who treat you. VA does not disclose this information without your consent. VA policy prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and prohibits attempts to change someone's sexual orientation.

Does the VA have resources to help me find a provider who is comfortable-comfortable provider with for my sexual orientation?

Yes! Each facility has an LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator, who can help you find a culturally competent provider. In addition, VA facilities have LGBTQ+ Veteran web pages.

For a list of those web pages, see here:

www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/VAFacilities.asp

Thank you for taking the time to read this factsheet. If you have more questions, please speak with your health care provider or LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Are you a medical provider looking for resources to help provide care to LGBTQ+ Veterans?

Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality

www.glma.org

The Fenway Institute –The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center

<https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/>

Are you a Veteran looking to understand why your sexual orientation and gender identity are essential to your overall care?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – LGBTQ+ Health

www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth

Do you want more information on the VA's LGBTQ+ health program?

<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/index.asp>



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If you are in crisis, please call 911, go to your nearest Emergency Room, or call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (press "1" after you call)