

Guidelines for providing culturally competent care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) Homeless Youth

According to a 2007 report, LGBTQ youth comprise up to 42% of the youth homeless population in the United States. LGBTQ youth face unique challenges in receiving social services, Lambda Legal Defense and the National Alliance to End Homelessness developed recommended best practices for serving LGBT homeless youth. Here are these and other recommendations that will help your agency improve the delivery of service to LGBTQ youth.

Office, Group Home, Shelter Environment

- Post a non-discrimination statement. This should explain that care will be provided to all clients, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, physical ability or attributes, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression.
- This statement should also be provided, in writing, to every client and staff member.
- Provide in-depth training for staff members on homophobia, LGBT health concerns and providing culturally sensitive care for LGBT clients. New staff should receive training within 3 months of employment.
- Participate in social service provider referral programs through LGBT organizations.
- Display LGBT supportive images such as pink triangles, rainbows, acceptance posters and include LGBT friendly magazines, newsletters, etc. in the waiting room and various appropriate areas.

Intake Process

- Use intake forms that include optional questions about a youth's sexual orientation/gender identity.
- Do not ask questions that assume sexual orientation or gender identity. Call youth by their preferred name and pronoun in accordance with the youth's gender identity or expression.
- Respect transgender clients by making sure all shelter staff is trained to use their preferred pronoun and name. Clearly indicate this information on their case management record in a manner that allows you to easily reference it.

- Consider adding a “transgender” option to the male/female check boxes on your intake form. This will help capture better information about transgender residents, and will be an immediate sign of acceptance to that person. Do not list transgendered as an alternate sexual orientation (like lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual). Gender identity and sexual orientation are distinct.
- When talking with transgender clients, ask questions necessary to assess the issue, but avoid unrelated probing.

General Youth Care and Safety

- As with all youth contacts, approach the interview showing empathy open-mindedness, and without rendering judgment.
- When talking about sexual or relationship partners, use gender-neutral language such as “partner(s)” or “significant other(s).” Ask open-ended questions, and avoid making assumptions about the gender of a youth’s partner(s) or about sexual behavior(s). Use the same language that a youth does to describe self, sexual partners, relationships, and identity.
- Do not make assumptions about past, current, and future sexual behavior.
- Adopt and enforce LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, and make it clear that anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated and there will consequences as a result of non-adherence.
- Ensure youth are aware of a grievance process in the case of harassment and discrimination.
- Address problem behaviors of bullying and harassment at school against LGBT youth clients and work with school staff to address this problem.
- Sexual minority youth are at increased risk for both suicide and abuse, pay special attention to the mental health of this patient. Ask about the patient's access to support. Isolation from peers and rejection by family are very real risk factors for some sexual minority youth.

Create community connections.

- Make available an easily accessible referral list/directory of LGBTQ youth serving agencies for personnel and youth to use.
- Include linkage to medical service providers for hormones and other medical procedures that a youth may seek to align their physical bodies with the gender identity.

Make appropriate, individualized classification and housing decisions

- Do not segregate/isolate LGBTQ young people or prohibit them from having roommates, as a means to ensure safety. While this may be motivated by good intentions, it will only deprive LGBTQ youth of opportunities to interact with their peers, and compound their feelings of isolation.

Develop Agency Connections to LGBT Organizations and the LGBT Community

- Get involved with local networks of organizations that are concerned with the welfare of LGBT people.
- Commit to outreach in areas where LGBT youth have been known to congregate.
- Build a stronger network of LGBT people and allies within agency and agency contractors.

This document was produced by the Mayor's Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Affairs. The practices recommended herein are provided for informational purposes only and do not carry the force of effect of law or any other regulation(s). These recommendations do not constitute legal advice.

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