

# How to Find Affirming Care: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Youth and Their Parents and Caregivers



## FINDING LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Finding the right provider is important for one's physical and mental health but the process can be difficult. LGBTQ+ people have an added challenge finding a provider who supports their identity. We encourage you to use this resource when talking with new or existing providers to understand their ability to treat and support LGBTQ+ youth.

**Parents and caregivers** – We encourage you to support the youth in your life in finding affirming providers. Feeling supported by family in accessing affirming care can help get rid of barriers keeping many LGBTQ+ youth from accessing mental health and substance use treatment.<sup>6</sup> Like family, affirming care providers can be an important part of an LGBTQ+ child's support system.

**Youth** – You can use this resource to find a provider by yourself or with the help of a parent or caregiver. You might also share this with your parent or caregiver to help explain why you want to find an affirming provider. We know this can be a scary process, but you deserve health care providers you can trust and feel safe with!

## WHAT IS AN AFFIRMING PROVIDER?

An affirming provider is a health care provider (for example, a doctor, nurse or therapist) who supports or encourages their patient's identity and recognizes how it impacts life and health. LGBTQ+ affirming providers have a positive view of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships and understand that discrimination can have a negative effect on mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ+ affirming providers shouldn't just be OK with patients' LGBTQ+ identities, they should support patients' unique strengths, needs and concerns.



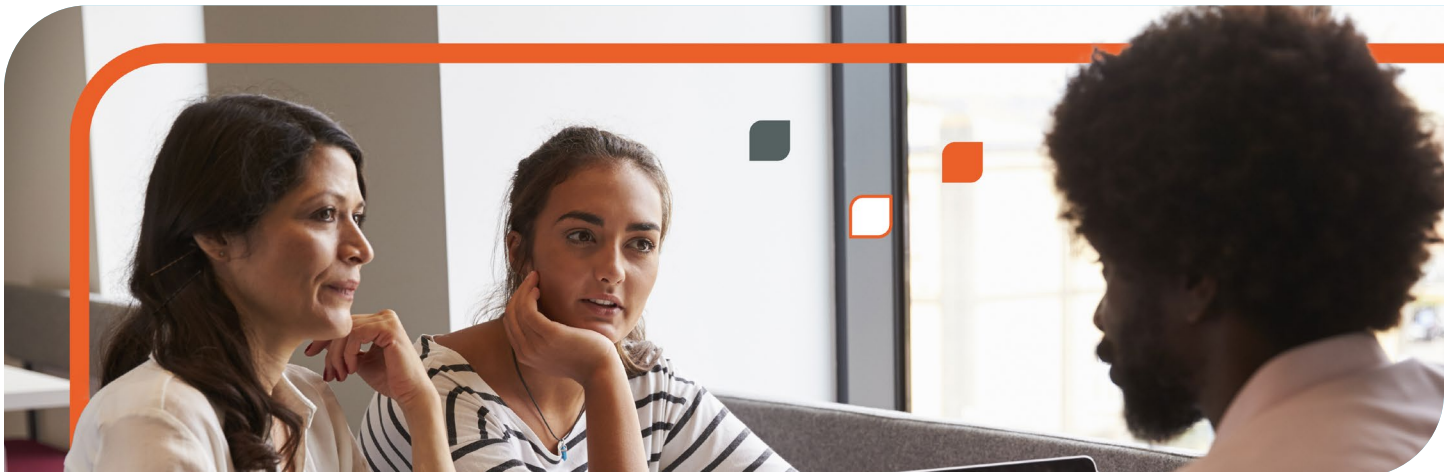
**Bottom line?** An affirming provider is someone who supports and respects their patient's whole identity.

### *In searching for an LGBTQ+ affirming provider, look for a provider who...*

- Has experience working with LGBTQ+ youth and connection to LGBTQ+ communities, especially a provider who openly identifies as LGBTQ+.
- Shares specific certifications they hold, evidence-based practices they use or trainings they have attended, such as the trainings for behavioral health and primary care practitioners listed by [SAMHSA](#) and [OutCare](#).
- Creates space for patients' identities by asking questions and not making assumptions. This includes:
  - Asking for gender identity and chosen name on forms.
  - Asking how each patient's identity affects their life.
  - Acknowledging what they don't know but showing they want to learn and how they are learning.
- Does not support the use of conversion therapy, also known as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) change efforts or sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), and does not try to change or discourage anyone from being LGBTQ+.
- Understands the importance of LGBTQ+ affirming care.



**What are SOGI change efforts (conversion therapy)?** SOGI change efforts are when a provider tries to change a person's orientation to make them heterosexual (straight) or cisgender (identifying as the sex on their birth certificate).<sup>4</sup> There is lots of evidence that SOGI change efforts don't work, and that these efforts can be upsetting or harmful to LGBTQ+ people who experience them. The American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association do not support SOGI change efforts.



# QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO ASK HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS\*

It may be helpful for youth to first discuss these questions with their parents or caregivers to decide which questions they are comfortable asking and which are most important to them. The questions can also be changed to fit unique identities and needs.

**Parents and caregivers** – You can encourage youth to ask these questions if they feel comfortable. Being able to advocate for themselves in health care settings is an important skill for children to practice going into adulthood.

**Youth** – You deserve to have a voice in finding the right provider that fits your needs. These questions can help you talk to providers and find one who is a good fit.

1. How do you affirm your patients' identities?
2. Do you or anyone on your staff openly identify as LGBTQ+?
3. What is your experience working with LGBTQ+ youth?
4. What is your approach to working with LGBTQ+ patients? What evidence-based practices do you use?
5. What is your understanding of the health needs for LGBTQ+ populations around mental health and substance use disorders?
6. What is your view on “conversion therapy” practices that try to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity?
7. What is your knowledge of stereotypes and/or common misconceptions that could harm LGBTQ+ people?
8. Do you offer identity-specific support groups? What local community resources do you recommend for LGBTQ+ youth?

9. How do you stay up-to-date on best practices for treating the LGBTQ+ community?
10. Are you active in any advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community?

## Additional questions for transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive individuals to ask:

1. What is your experience and comfort level working with transgender and nonbinary patients?
2. What is your experience working with young people exploring social and/or hormonal transitions?
3. How do you create space for patients to introduce their gender identities, particularly patients whose identities are not immediately visible?
4. How does your practice make sure that patients are gendered correctly by staff and on forms?
5. When does your practice ask for or refer to sex assigned at birth or legal names?



### Tip for Youth: More Ways to Prepare for an Appointment with a New Provider

While you're getting your questions ready, think about what's important for your provider to know about you. You can write this information down on your phone, in an email to your provider or on a notecard to bring with you. You may even be able to call and talk to a provider before scheduling an appointment – ask if they offer free consultation calls.

**Remember, you can stop seeing a provider at any time if you decide they aren't the right fit!**

\* These questions were adapted from resources created by Mental Health America and Partnership to End Addiction



## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR FINDING LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING PROVIDERS

This next section has public national lists of providers who identify as LGBTQ+ or LGBTQ+ affirming. While these lists can be a helpful first step for finding health care providers, it is important to ask if they offer an initial consultation where you can ask questions and decide if they are a good fit. Local LGBTQ+ resource centers (see the LGBTQ Center Directory) may know potential providers in the area. You can also search via social media – more and more LGBTQ+ providers have social media accounts.

**Parents and caregivers** – If you have health insurance, the insurance company website may offer tools for finding in-network providers who are LGBTQ+ focused. Other non-LGBTQ+-specific lists and resources such as Psychology Today can also be helpful in finding providers in a specific area or who are covered by specific insurance plans.

While the internet and social media can be great sources of information, it's important to make sure you and your child are getting information from reputable sources. Check out these [tips for helping your child find trustworthy health information online](#).

**Youth** – The internet can be a great place to find and learn from LGBTQ+ providers, but first make sure the people you're following and listening to are legitimate. Try starting with these [trusted health websites for youth](#) or looking for the listed organizations' official social media accounts. Social media can be especially full of bad health information, so when looking for health care providers to follow, make sure they list degrees and licenses related to what they're talking about. Remember, a health or mental health “coach” is not the same thing as a medical professional! Check out this [resource on using social media to support your mental health](#) for more tips.



Think about what is most important for you in a provider (e.g., gender, identity, distance from home) and start the search there.

| LGBTQ+ Provider Directories and Databases  |  |  |  |           |                                 |   |
|--|--|--|--|-----------|---------------------------------|---|
| Resource   | Source   | Description  | Searchable by:   |           |                                 |   |
|  |  |  | Provider type?   | Location? | Insurance/ payment type?        | Other filters   |
| <a href="#">LGBTQ+ Healthcare Provider Directory</a>                             | Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality (previously known as the Gay & Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)) and the Tegan and Sara Foundation | Directory of self-identified LGBTQ+ and affirming providers.   | Yes, including addiction medicine physicians and mental health care providers. | Yes       | Yes                             | Framework, including trauma-informed, weight-inclusive and harm reductionist providers. |
| <a href="#">The Outlist (LGBTQ+ Affirming Health care Provider Directory)</a>    | OutCare Health   | Directory of affirming health care providers.  | Yes  | Yes       | No                              | Keywords  |
| <a href="#">National Queer &amp; Trans Therapists of Color Network Directory</a> | National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network   | Directory of queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) mental health practitioners; entries are reviewed by directory staff before being listed. | No   | Yes       | Accepts “sliding scale” option. | Accepting new clients; provides telemedicine.   |
| <a href="#">CDC List of LGBT Health Clinics by state</a>                         | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)   | Non-filterable list of health clinics for LGBT people by state.  | No   | Yes       | No                              | No  |

## Other Helpful Resources

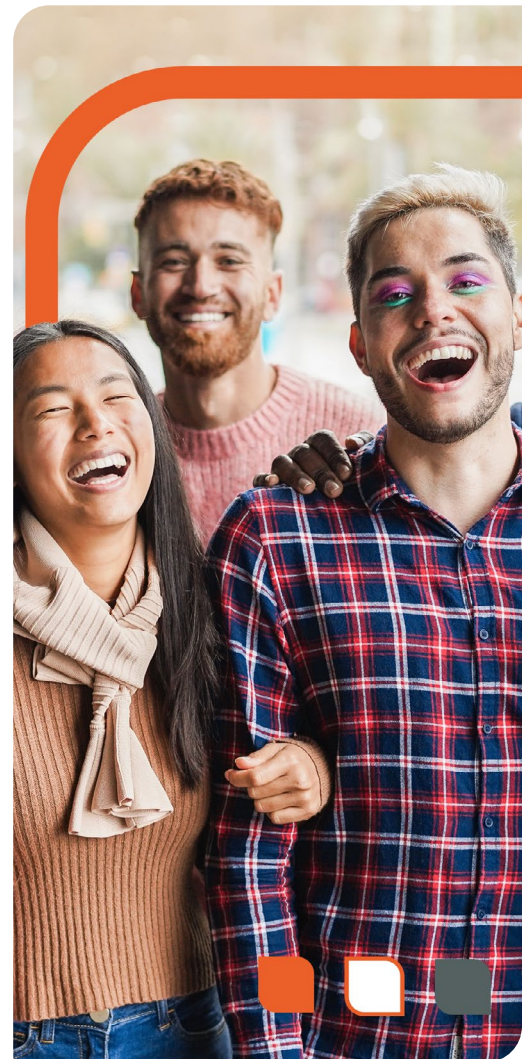
- **LGBT Community Center Member Directory** – Created by Centerlink, a member-based coalition of LGBTQ+ community centers. This international directory is searchable by location. Though community centers are not health care providers, many LGBTQ+ centers offer in-house counseling services or have connections to local affirming providers.
- **Resources and Rights for LGBTQ+ Patients** – Created by the Human Rights Campaign. This resource contains key information for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking care, such as health care rights for members of the LGBTQ+ community and what to do if you or an LGBTQ+ person you know experiences discrimination in health care.
- **Health Insurance Enrollment Assistance** – Created by Out2Enroll. This set of free tools provides assistance choosing a health care plan and enrolling in coverage for LGBTQ+ people and their families.
- **National SOGIE Center** – Created by The National Center for Youth with Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression. This centralized site features resources on providing culturally responsive care to children, youth and young adults with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) – and their families – across systems, including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health (including school mental health), substance use systems and housing and homelessness.



**Planned Parenthood and other private health care organizations can also be sources of affirming, inclusive and accessible services nationally via telehealth or in-person clinics.**

## Additional resources from the National Council and partners:

- **LGBTQ+ Recovery Resources** – Compiled by the National Council. This brief list of links and resources for LGBTQ+ people in recovery from alcohol and/or substance use includes social media accounts, online support groups, recovery meetings and in-person LGBTQ+ sober spaces.
- **The Center for LGBTQ+ Health Equity video resources** – Created by the University of Southern California's Center for LGBTQ+ Health Equity (CLHE) in partnership with the National Council. These videos highlight bullying and other stresses LGBTQ+ youth face.
- **Be True and Be You - A Basic Mental Health Guide for LGBTQ+ Youth** – Created by the National Council. This resource covers terms about sexual orientation, gender identity/ expression and mental health while identifying ways to cope with stress and emotions and discussing how to get support for yourself and others.
- **CONNECTED - Youth-Adult Partnership Guide** – Created by the National Council. This resource aims to facilitate building effective youth-adult partnerships and communication



## REFERENCES

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