How to find and choose a LGBTQ+ Healthcare provider

LGBTQ+ people face unique health issues that require inclusive and respectful care. Some LGBTQ+ people delay seeking the healthcare they need because of past negative experiences or fear of discrimination. Being a young LGBTQ+ person can sometimes feel even more complicated.

Maybe you have been seeing the same doctor since you were a kid, but feel like you’re ready for a change. Maybe you have a ton of questions about health, gender, sex, and sexuality, but don’t feel totally comfortable discussing them with your current doctor. Maybe you have been thinking about trying out a new doctor, but don’t know how or where to find one that will give you the competent and sensitive healthcare you deserve. You are not alone! Choosing a LGBTQ+ positive healthcare provider can feel really challenging.

This step by step guide provides some tips and resources to help find the healthcare provider that is right for you! If you are confused by any terms in this guide, we recommend that you check out our LGBTQ+ Healthcare Decoder [coming soon] and/or Community Decoder [coming soon] to help you understand the different words this guide uses.

Step 1 – Think about what you’re looking for

Recognizing that your health matters is the first, vital step in choosing a healthcare provider. Remember, while many healthcare providers are doctors, there are other types of health professionals who might provide you care – like physician’s assistants and nurse practitioners.

Even though providers have a lot of training and professional experience, it’s important to remember that when it comes to your body, experiences, and health needs – YOU are the expert! You have the power to decide who can best meet your needs as a patient. Before starting your search, it’s important that you take a few minutes and think about what those might be.

When it comes to health and healthcare, everyone is different. Healthcare can take a lot of different forms depending on who you are and what you need. Ask yourself: “do I need a general practitioner (GP) or primary care provider (PCP) who takes care of my overall health and gives me regular checkups? A doctor or clinic that specializes in sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)? Someone who has experience with trans and non-binary patients? Maybe I just need a professional to talk to about my mental health or something difficult happening in my life...”

It can also be helpful to ask yourself some specific questions about what qualities you’re looking for in a provider. Ask yourself:

- Is the gender of my provider important to me?
- Do I prefer a provider who is closer in age to me, or someone who is older?
- What about my provider’s culture and ethnicity? Is it important that they look like me?
- Does my provider have to share some aspect of identity or experience with me?
- Are there any deal breakers?
Whatever the case, it’s essential that you feel safe and comfortable when talking to a healthcare provider. Remembering that you, the patient, are in control of your healthcare can help give you the confidence to be open and honest about your needs. If you’re wondering about whether or not you should come out to your healthcare provider about being LGBTQ+, please click here – “Should I come out to my healthcare provider?” [coming soon]

**Step 2 – Find a LGBTQ+ Provider**

Once you’ve identified your needs, it’s time to start your search. Beginning to look for a healthcare provider can feel really overwhelming. There are tons of providers out there, and it’s important to make sure you find one that will give you respectful and competent care! Below are two helpful tricks you can use to find a LGBTQ+ provider:

1. **Community Referrals**

   Often the best information on LGBTQ+ healthcare can come from a friend or trusted peer in your community. If you’re involved with any in-person or online LGBTQ+ community groups, it never hurts to ask around and see where other people get healthcare. If you are not currently involved with any community groups, it might be helpful to get more connected. If you want to join a local group that meets in-person, try googling “[the city you live in] LGBTQ group,” and see what you find. You can also join groups online. For example, Facebook is home to a ton of different “Queer Exchange” groups, where LGBTQ+ people can trade goods, post events, or simply ask for LGBTQ+ friendly advice on a whole number of topics - including healthcare! There are also similar groups on many other social media platforms.

   Asking other community members what they like or dislike about their current provider can help you get a better sense of where you might want to seek care. If you feel comfortable, share some of your individual health needs or concerns with a peer and ask if their current healthcare provider might be a good fit for you. If a provider sounds promising, ask for their contact information.

   It’s important to remember that everyone is different. Just because you share community with someone doesn’t mean that you have the exact same health needs, or that their healthcare provider is right for you. It’s never a bad idea to call ahead and ask some questions.

2. **Community Directories**

   If you aren’t currently involved with any LGBTQ+ community, or don’t feel comfortable talking to other community members about your healthcare, there are lots of resources to help you find a provider. Some awesome organizations across Canada and the United States have compiled lists (directories) of doctors, clinics, hospitals, therapists, and tons of other specialists that all provide safe, respectful, and competent healthcare to LGBTQ+ people. Below you will find six popular directories to help you in your search. Be sure to carefully read the descriptions. The directories differ a bit in their use, instructions, and geographical areas covered. Also, just because a provider isn’t listed in a certain directory doesn’t mean they can’t offer you sensitive and competent service. A lot of these directories are focused more on urban centers, but that doesn’t mean that if you’re from a more rural area that you won’t ever be able to find safe healthcare. Ultimately, you decide whether a provider is a good fit. Calling ahead can help you with this decision.
LGBTQ+ Service Provider Directories


Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality is one of the oldest and largest associations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer healthcare professionals in the world. This database has listings for self-registered LGBTQ+ friendly primary care providers, specialists, therapists, dentists and other health professionals in your area. Simply type in your postal code or city of residence and see if anything comes up! This database mostly serves the United States but has some listings for larger Canadian cities.

The OutList (OutCare): https://www.outcarehealth.org/outlist/

OutCare Health is a non-profit organization that provides extensive information and education on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) healthcare. OutCare produces the OutList - a service provider directory that lists healthcare providers who are culturally competent in the provision of care, treatment, and services for the LGBTQ+ population. Type in your city of residence and specify if there is a particular type of care you are looking for. This directory only lists providers in the United States.

The Human Rights Campaign 2018 Healthcare Equity Index: https://www.hrc.org/hei

Each year, the Human Rights Campaign publishes an evaluation of healthcare facilities across the United States to determine their competence in providing safe, inclusive, and respectful healthcare to LGBTQ+ patients. In 2018, 626 healthcare facilities were scored. Using the link below, explore the published pdf and see if a facility near you is a “Healthcare Equality Leader.”

Rainbow Health Ontario Service Provider Directory: https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/service-directory/

Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO) is a province wide organization that works to promote the health of Ontario’s LGBT2SQ+ communities and improve their access to services. RHO works to continually expand its Service Provider Directory, which lists health and social service providers as well as programs that have expressed a commitment to providing competent and welcoming care to LGBT2SQ+ people in Ontario (there are even a few providers outside the province). The directory allows you to filter based on where you are and what kind of services you are looking for. If you currently live in Ontario, this is the resource for you!

QMUNITY Referrals: https://qmunity.ca/get-support/referrals/

QMUNITY is a non-profit organization based in Vancouver that works to improve queer, trans, and Two-Spirit lives. If you live in British Columbia, feel free to call or email QMUNITY’s referral service. The organization has a database full of referrals for providers who will be able to give you appropriate support, information, and LGBTQ+-competent service.

Action Canada Access Line and Service Provider Directory https://www.actioncanadashr.org/find-service-provider

Action Canada is progressive, pro-choice Canadian organization committed to advancing and upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights. This organization has a huge directory of service providers across Canada who are competent on issues of gender, sexuality, and reproductive health. You can filter your search by selecting your province of residence and seeing what options are available. If you have any questions about referrals, feel free to call their toll-free, 24-hour Access Line at 1-888-642-2725
Step 3 – Call Ahead

Once you have an idea about where you might want to seek care, it can be really helpful to call ahead and chat with your potential provider. Talking with a healthcare professional, even for just a few minutes, should give you a sense of whether or not this person is right for you. This is also a great opportunity to ask your potential provider some questions and get a feel for how they approach LGBTQ+ healthcare. If you’re nervous, remember that you don’t have to disclose any personal info over the phone – not even your name! You can simply express that you’re looking to switch healthcare providers and that you have a few questions. If you feel comfortable, talk a bit about yourself: who you are, where you’re from, why you’re calling, etc. You can even bring up some of your individual concerns or health needs and ask your potential provider how they might address them.

If you’re not sure where to start, or what questions you might ask, look below for a couple of sample questions. Some questions are more practical and direct. Others relate more to ethics and your potential provider’s social and political values. Pick and choose what’s important to you!

- Have you ever worked with LGBTQ+ patients before? If so, how many LGBTQ+ clients have you had and for how long?
- How do you generally work with LGBTQ+ people?
- What type of professional education do you have in working with LGBTQ+ people? If you don’t have any, what steps might you take to learn?
- What kind of referral policies do you have in place for LGBTQ+ patients? (for example, for gender confirmation surgery, hormone therapy, PrEP access, mental health counselling, therapy, addiction services, etc.)
- What are your values around sex, gender, and sexuality? How do you feel about LGBTQ+ people? How do you feel about transgender and non-binary people?
- What are your values around sexual and reproductive health? What are your thoughts on LGBTQ+ young people and sex? What is your opinion of abortion?
- Why do you do what you do?
- Who and/or what informs your understanding of oppression?
- How many bathrooms do you have in your office? Are they gender neutral or gendered? Are they accessible?
- What gender options are present on your intake and consent forms? Is there anywhere I can list my preferred pronouns?

Before you reach Step 4, there are two important things to remember:

1. Not all healthcare providers are available by phone and might only meet you for an appointment. If this is the case, it might be a good idea to see your potential provider in person for a quick appointment where you can ask them some of these questions (see Step 4).

2. Medical systems are complicated. Receiving and paying for healthcare can look very different depending on where you are, but this should NOT stop you from seeking out the care you deserve. If you want to learn more about some of your options, check out “How to Discuss Payment with Your Healthcare Provider” [coming soon]

Step 4 – Make a choice and book an appointment

Once you feel like you have found a healthcare provider that is right for you, make an appointment to meet them in person and start your care. Trying a new provider for the first time can be intimidating, so bring a friend, parent, or trusted adult along if you want to. Remember: nothing is set in stone! If after your initial visit you’re not feeling totally comfortable with your decision, keep looking. There are tons of incredible providers out there, who have experience working with LGBTQ+ people and you have the right to choose the one who best suits your needs.