



Preventing Harassment of LGBTQIA+ Youth, Adults, and Families in Shelter and Housing Programs

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Introduction

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has identified how LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities continue to face widespread violence, harassment, and discrimination when seeking access to programs, benefits, services, shelter, and housing. Since 2012, the [Equal Access Rule](#) has prohibited discrimination in HUD-funded projects based on “marriage status, sexual orientation or gender identity.” During an [Equal Access Rule listening session hosted by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness](#), service providers highlighted alarming challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals—particularly transgender individuals—who are frequently excluded from shelters or placed in unsafe environments based on their sex assigned at birth. LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of violence and are targeted due to their vulnerabilities. In the listening sessions, many transgender individuals reported that, if given the *choice* between shelter or sleeping outside, they would choose the streets. There is a current [epidemic of violence](#) against the transgender community. LGBTQIA+ youth often have experiences of harassment in school, foster care, the juvenile justice system, and from their families. This may cause a heightened distrust of the homeless response system. These barriers underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies and practices in publicly funded projects to ensure safety and equity for LGBTQIA+ communities.

Develop Policy Standards for Guests, Staff and Contractors

All HUD-funded projects are required to be free of discrimination and harassment. ***All*** are welcome. Along with federal law, many jurisdictions, state and local laws provide additional non-discrimination protections that will be helpful when you develop your policies and procedures. Below are recommended practices to get you started.

Communicate the Absence of Bias by Using Inclusive Language in:

- Signage within the project;
- Trauma informed interactions between staff and residents;
- Publications about the housing project; and
- Intake forms and data collection that give residents the option to reveal or omit their LGBTQIA+ gender identity status. Do not ask inappropriate or invasive questions related to gender identity. Guests self-identify and must not be required to prove their gender.



Use of Gender-Neutral Standards in Policies and Procedures:

- Articulate the dress code to focus on which areas of a guest's body should be covered rather than focusing on gender-specific articles of clothing (e.g., guests must be covered from the base of their neck to their knees when in public areas of the project). This removes any reference to particular types of clothes that individuals must wear.
- Incorporate the same standards of respectful behavior into employee, guest, volunteer, board, and contractor agreements and trainings to establish consistent expectations.
- Offer guests services and access to project facilities consistent with their gender identity regardless of records or identification documents listing a different sex or perceived gender identity.
- Include behaviors that violate standards of respectful behavior, such as language, actions and non-verbal intimidation.
- If guests express concerns about LGBTQIA+ guests, staff should educate, inform and reaffirm the commitment to a non-discriminatory project.
- Escalate corrective actions if an individual repeats the same violation of standards after educational opportunities are offered.
- Focus corrective actions on aggressors who violate project rules, not on the subject of their harassment.



Recommended Practices to Address Harassment and Abuse

- If a crime is committed, do not blame the victim or require survivors of hate crimes or interpersonal crimes to be involved in the criminal legal system. However, if a guest wants a referral or help accessing the legal system, be prepared to support them with resources.
- If a guest continues to disrespect an LGBTQIA+ individual, consider as interim steps:
 - Requiring that the harassing resident stay away from the LGBTQIA+ individual,
 - Making changes in sleeping arrangements or more private arrangements without limiting the freedom of the LGBTQIA+ individual, or
 - Pursuing other interventions that do not result in the expulsion of the harassing resident.
- In no instance should any steps taken to address harassment or discrimination involve expulsion of harassed guests. If the harassed guest no longer feels safe, work to rebuild trust. If a guest requests a referral to an alternate project for safety reasons, and in such cases, staff may provide a referral or offer clients a hotel or motel voucher. It is only at the guest's request.
- Helping everyone to feel more emotionally balanced in the space will add to the safety of staff and guests alike.



- Trauma-informed environments offer tools in the physical space that invite self-regulation, such as cold water to drink, an organized intake process that is easy to navigate, or a private place of respite.

Resources to Support Policy and Procedure Development Include:

Resource	Description
Equal Access for Transgender People: Supporting Inclusive Housing and Shelters	These materials provide a framework to create welcoming and inclusive projects for transgender and gender non-conforming people and how to follow Equal Access.
Shelter Access Toolkit: Increasing Shelter Access to LGBTQ Survivors	This toolkit addresses sheltering survivors of GBV whose gender or sexual identity may be different from many survivors most often served by mainstream shelter and housing programs.
Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People	This guide is designed for shelter administrators and staff, government officials, and anyone who is interested in making shelters safe for transgender people.

This resource is prepared by technical assistance providers and intended only to provide guidance. The contents of this document, except when based on statutory or regulatory authority or law, do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.