

Sexual Orientation Question in HMIS

Updated 05/02/24. See Revision History for details.

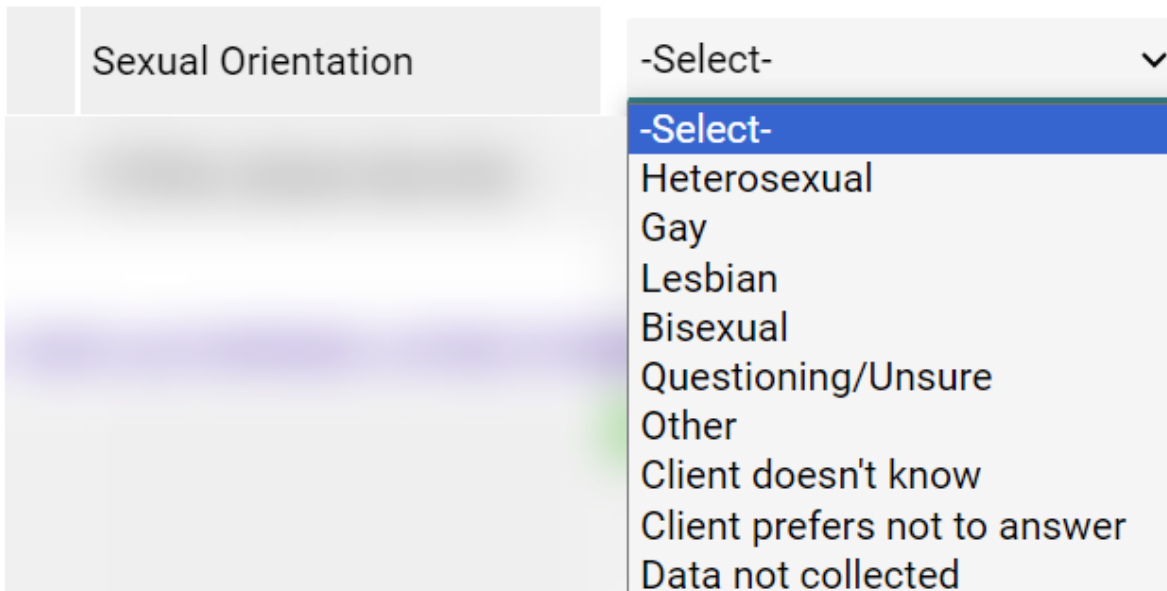
Table of Contents

What is the Sexual Orientation question in HMIS?.....	1
For whom and when is this question required?.....	2
Which programs are required to collect it?.....	2
Why do these programs have to ask this question?.....	3
How do we ask this question?.....	3
Anything else?.....	4
Additional Resources/Source Materials.....	5
Revision History.....	5

What is the Sexual Orientation question in HMIS?

The Sexual Orientation question actually consists of *two questions*.

The first is a dropdown question that looks like this:



The image shows a screenshot of a web form. On the left, there is a label 'Sexual Orientation' in a light gray box. To its right is a dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is currently open, showing a list of options. The top option is '-Select-' with a downward arrow icon. Below it, the following options are listed: 'Heterosexual', 'Gay', 'Lesbian', 'Bisexual', 'Questioning/Unsure', 'Other', 'Client doesn't know', 'Client prefers not to answer', and 'Data not collected'. The first option, '-Select-', is highlighted with a blue background.

The second question is an open text field called “If Other, please describe”. It lives directly under the Sexual Orientation question and looks like this:



Sexual Orientation	-Select-	▼ G
If Other, please describe		G

The “If Other...” field allows people to self-identify their sexual orientation if they do not see themselves reflected in the dropdown list of options.

For whom and when is this question required?

This data element is only collected for the Heads of Household (HoH) and Adults.

Collect this question *at program entry* for any HoH or adults that were open in relevant programs *on or after 10/01/2023*.

Which programs are required to collect it?

The Sexual Orientation question was introduced by the US Dept of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) for RHY-funded programs in 2020. RHY is a federal grant for homeless programs serving youth. HUD expanded the requirement to include certain permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs in 2023.

In Multnomah, all Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC) programs and all PSH programs (regardless of funding) are required to collect the Sexual Orientation question.

We may change the requirements around this question in the future.



Please contact us at hmishelp@multco.us if you have questions about whether you should be collecting this question.

Why do these programs have to ask this question?

This question is based on HUD's [Equal Access Rule](#), which “ensures equal access to individuals in accordance with their gender identity in programs and shelter funded under programs administered by HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD)”.

HUD states that, “Among homeless youth, a population estimated annually somewhere between 400,000 and 2.8 million, LGBT youth are significantly overrepresented, accounting for up to 40% of the population.

In short: This question allows HUD to track housing fairness for marginalized and impacted LGTBQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, 2 Spirit) participants.

How do we ask this question?

Be mindful that questions related to someone's sexual orientation are personal and may require extra care and attention for reasons of respect, privacy, and safety.

It is not possible to know someone's sexual orientation simply by looking at them. These assumptions can be harmful and create an environment that further marginalizes the participant.

Cont'd next page

Here are some other things to consider while asking this question:

- While asking for sensitive information, make sure that the participant is as comfortable as possible and is not placed at risk.
- Take the time to build trust with the participant as much as possible. They are likely to have shared vulnerable and personal information with you.
- Understand that filling out information such as this can be tedious, vulnerable, and time consuming. Be patient and supportive.
- Be aware that language and identities are always evolving and it's best to ask the individual how they identify and what language they want you to use.
- Mistakes will happen. Be sure to quickly apologize and move on without minimizing the impact and concern of the participant.
- Don't ask intrusive questions about someone's sexuality, gender, body, surgery, hormone status, or medical conditions.

Anything else?

- Add this question where you deem appropriate on existing intake forms. A separate form is not needed to ask this question.

Cont'd next page

Additional Resources/Source Materials

- [LGBTQIA+ Fair Housing Toolkit](#)
- [LGBTQ Homelessness](#)
- [Equal access to shelters](#)
- [Resources on housing discrimination and persons identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning \(LGBTQ\)](#)

Revision History

05/02/24: Updated HelpDesk email address. Added section headers: “For whom and when is this question required?” & “Anything else?” Added content under that header. Added Revision History. Slight formatting changes.

04/15/24: Expanded question requirement from RHY-funded programming to entirety of Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC)