

PRIDE *in Health*

A resource for the
LGBTQIA+ community
of Wisconsin




mhs health
wisconsin.

Healthcare Matters

for Everyone

MHS Health believes every person deserves access to quality care. We also know it can be hard for people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and gender diverse (LGBTQIA+) to get the healthcare they need.¹

That's why we created *Pride in Health* — to help you feel seen, understood, and supported.

We believe that knowing the right health information and feeling safe with your provider helps you make the best choices for yourself and your family.

If you are LGBTQIA+ and not sure about how to talk with your healthcare provider, have questions about your health, or need help finding care, this resource can help you.

Keep reading to learn how to be your own healthcare advocate, take control of your health, and how to make the most of your care. You deserve to live a healthy and happy life.

MHS Health believes LGBTQIA+ health and healthcare matters.



¹ Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (n.d.). *LGBTQ health: health care provider resources*. dhs.wisconsin.gov/lgbthealth/providers.htm



About MHS Health

MHS Health is a health maintenance organization (HMO) owned by Centene Corporation. MHS Health was founded in Milwaukee in 1984 by Elizabeth “Betty” Brinn.

Betty spent her childhood in and out of foster care homes. A lack of regular medical care led to a late diagnosis of health problems in her back and foot. Betty did not learn to walk until she was three years old.

Betty never forgot her childhood. Her experiences inspired a promise to improve access to healthcare for children and families.

Betty’s passion of helping others is still at the core of everything we do.

It is the foundation of the MHS Health mission to:

Transform the health of the communities we serve, one person at a time.

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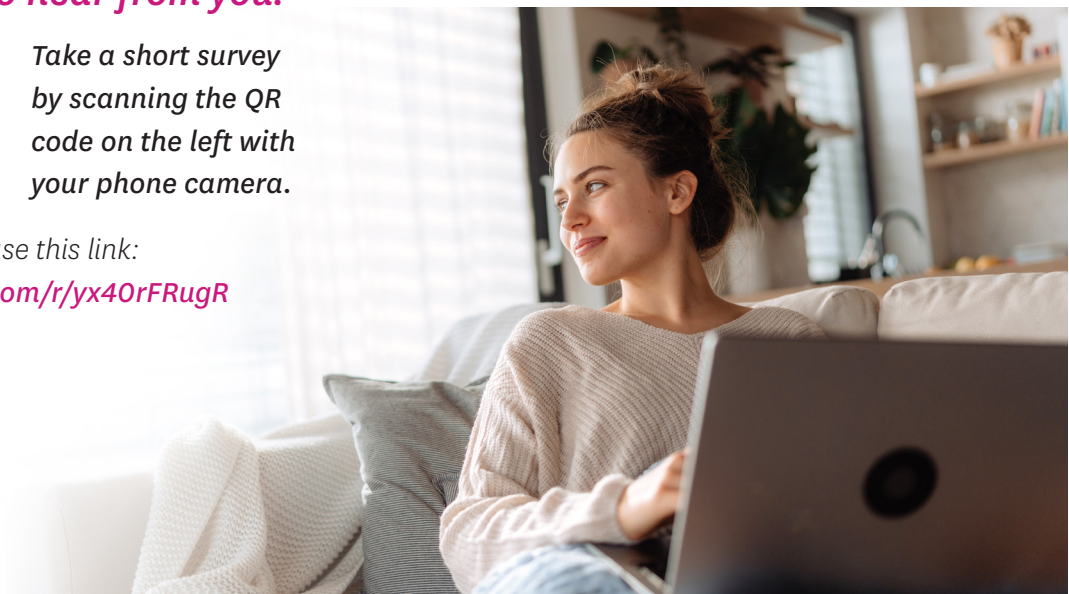
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We want to hear from you!



Take a short survey
by scanning the QR
code on the left with
your phone camera.

You can also use this link:
forms.office.com/r/yx40rFRugR



Looking After Your Health

Learning more about health helps us take better care of ourselves now and as we get older. Everyone has health problems at different points in their life. Some people have more health problems than others because of things like their family history, where they live, or how people treat them. These problems are often not their fault or something that can be controlled. **The list below highlights health issues that many people have. If you have health concerns, there is help available.**

Common concerns that impact health



MENTAL HEALTH. Stress, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, alcohol and drug use, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide are often common. You are not alone.



HEALTH CONDITIONS. Not getting good medical care and not getting care when you need it can lead to serious health issues like chronic conditions, heart disease, or cancers.



COVERED OPTIONS. Healthcare can be confusing. If you don't know what your healthcare benefits are, it can be hard to get care when it's needed.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. When someone is hurt by their partner or someone they live with, this is called *domestic violence*. This can look like being hurt physically, being yelled at, or being scared or controlled by someone.



HOUSING. Being treated unfairly or not getting help can make it hard to find a safe and stable place to live.



IMMIGRATION. Some people leave their home country because they were treated unfairly, didn't have family support, or because they were scared of being judged.



EXITING THE PRISON SYSTEM. If you're leaving or recently left prison, it's possible you may have missed important physical and mental health check-ups.



SEX TRAFFICKING. *Sex trafficking* is when someone is forced into doing sexual activities, usually for money or other benefits.

What does this mean for your healthcare?

Your health and wellbeing belong to you. Taking care of your health is one of the most powerful gifts you can give yourself. When you choose to put yourself first, no one can take that away. In the next few pages, you'll discover ways that may help you be a stronger ally for yourself.

Take control of your health — you deserve it!

Your healthcare providers should provide respectful care that helps you live your healthiest life possible. However, you have the most important job in making that happen. **Here are a few things you can do for your health.**

LEARN ABOUT YOUR HEALTH. Stay informed about health conditions. Be aware of general health risks for your age. Even staying up to date on improvements in science and medicine can help, such as HIV prevention and treatment or access to hormone therapy.

START OR CONTINUE HEALTHY HABITS. Try to eat healthy, exercise regularly, and avoid things that are bad for your health. If you are sexually active, it's important to practice safe sex. This means using protection and getting regular tests for any sexual transmitted infections (STI).



SPEAK UP. Talk with your provider if you're worried about something or need more information. You can always ask questions or get a second opinion from another provider.

QUESTIONING QUESTIONS. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you can ask how that question impacts your health. You can also say you don't want to answer.

What else can you do for your health?

YEARLY PROVIDER VISITS. Go to the provider regularly for health check-ups. These visits help you catch any health problems early. They can also send you to a health specialist.

GET IMPORTANT TESTS AND VACCINES. Get health tests, screenings, and vaccines that can prevent and detect illnesses. If you're LGBTQIA+, a provider may want to do extra tests to make sure you stay healthy.

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK UPS. If you are feeling sad, stressed, or afraid, try talking to your provider, a counselor or therapist. They can help you develop ways to deal with these feelings.

ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE. Your provider can help if you use alcohol and/or drugs. Being open about this can help you feel better and be more healthy.

See Page 11 to get connected to support and resources that can help you take the best care of yourself and your family.

Making Healthcare Easier

Healthcare can be confusing for anyone. **Use the tips below to help make things easier for you and your family to get the care you need.**



FIND A MAIN PROVIDER. This provider is sometimes called your *Primary Care Physician*, *Primary Care Provider*, or *PCP*. They will help guide you through your healthcare.

GET TO KNOW YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE. Know what it covers, how much you will pay, and where you can go for care. Check your benefits or contact their customer service team to learn more.

ONLINE PROVIDERS. Some providers offer appointments online. That way, you can complete your visit over the phone, tablet, or computer.

KNOW WHEN TO USE THE EMERGENCY ROOM. Emergency care is used when you think your life is in danger. In a true emergency, call 911. If you're not in a medical emergency and your provider is unable to help you, go to the nearest urgent care center.



KEEP TRACK OF YOUR HEALTH RECORDS, INSURANCE CARD, AND APPOINTMENTS. You can use a folder or notebook. Many providers also have medical records you can access securely online.

BE HONEST WITH YOUR PROVIDER. Your provider should offer a safe space for you to share your health and personal concerns. Over time, you and your provider can develop a trusting relationship.

ASK QUESTIONS AND TAKE NOTES. Bring a list of questions to ask your provider. Write their answers down and any other instructions. You can ask them to repeat themselves or explain things in a new way. You can also ask if it's okay to record the conversation during your appointment.

PLAN AHEAD. *Advanced Directives* are legal documents that help you plan for times when you can't make decisions for yourself. Be sure to fill these out and give copies to your provider and loved ones.

See Page 11 for resources that can help you fill out Advanced Directives.

Find the right provider for you

It's important to find a provider who makes you feel comfortable. Take time to figure out what you're looking for in a provider.

Try some of the tips below to find a provider who helps you feel safe.

Tips to help find a provider

ASK FOR SUGGESTIONS. Talk to friends, family, or a LGBTQIA+ organization or group near you.

ASK THE PROVIDER'S OFFICE ABOUT TREATING LGBTQIA+ PATIENTS. You can call a provider and ask if they have cared for other patients who identify as LGBTQIA+. You can also ask to meet with or speak to the provider before scheduling a health visit.

USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM. Bring someone with to your appointment. This can help you feel more comfortable. They can speak up if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable. You have the right to leave an appointment anytime you want.

LOOK FOR SIGNS THAT YOUR PROVIDER SUPPORTS PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBTQIA+.

When you go to your appointment, check for things like LGBTQIA+ pride flags, *All Are Welcome Here* signs, LGBTQIA+ health flyers or posters, and gender neutral bathrooms. If your provider doesn't have these things, that doesn't mean they don't support people who are LGBTQIA+.





Coming out to your provider

You choose what you share with your provider. You don't need to have all the answers when you talk to your provider. It's okay if you're not sure about your feelings or how you identify. Being open helps your provider make a plan to take care of you where you are right now.

Here are some ways to help you share your identity with your provider.

UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION BEFORE SEEING YOUR PROVIDER. Your provider may ask you to fill out a health history form before your appointment. Be honest about your health history and any health concerns. Your provider may ask questions about what you wrote down.

PRACTICE. Ask a friend, family member, or a nurse if you can practice with them before seeing your provider. If you prefer, you can ask the nurse to tell the provider for you, but the provider may still talk to you about it.

SHARE YOUR IDENTITY AT YOUR OWN PACE. You can share during your first appointment or wait until you're more comfortable. You're in control of what you decide to share and when.

FIND A NEW PROVIDER IF NEEDED. It's okay to look for a new provider if they are not the best fit for you. Your comfort, health, and safety are important. There are many providers who want to help. If you need help finding a new provider, you can contact your health insurance company.

Leading with Pride

Unfair treatment and discrimination

Providers and their clinic or hospital teams must treat all patients fairly. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect and to keep their personal information private.

Some people who are LGBTQIA+ may face unfair treatment at the provider's office. This can look like providers or their staff refusing care, not respecting their families or friends, or using hurtful language or actions. This can make it harder for people to feel safe and get the care they need.



The Affordable Care Act (ACA) makes it illegal for providers to discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation.

If you feel that your provider is treating you unfairly, is being disrespectful, or is discriminating against you, here are some things you can think about doing.

Ways you can respond to unfair treatment

- 1. IF YOU'RE COMFORTABLE, TALK TO THE PROVIDER.** It's possible the provider might not realize what they're doing. Sometimes, a calm conversation can help. If the situation doesn't get better, you can find a new provider.
- 2. SPEAK TO A NURSE OR OFFICE MANAGER.** Let someone else at the provider's office know what happened. They can help you talk to your provider or help guide you on what to do next.
- 3. WRITE A COMPLAINT.** Write a formal complaint to the provider, system, or hospital. This documents the issue and can lead to changes in how they handle situations in the future.
- 4. TALK TO YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY.** Reach out and let them know what happened. They can help guide you on what to do next.

Take time to figure out what you're looking for in your provider. When you find a new provider, make sure you're comfortable with them and they understand your needs.

You don't have to settle for a provider that does not meet your needs. See Page 11 for even more resources that can help.

When mistakes happen

If someone makes a mistake, such as using the wrong name, pronoun, or word, try not to take it personally. Some mistakes happen by accident. It's important to give people a chance. If they don't apologize, you can explain how it made you feel.

One way to say this to someone is, "Before we talk about this more, I want to tell you what you said made me feel disrespected. I understand that you probably didn't mean to hurt me, but the way it made me feel was _____. I would feel a lot better if you stopped doing _____ or started doing _____."

It takes courage to speak up, and we hope that you never have to. However, it's important to be prepared in case it does. Speaking up gets easier with practice. Try it with someone you trust to help make you feel more comfortable.

Making a Difference Together

We hope *Pride in Health* gave you the tools and confidence you need to take the best care of yourself. Whether you are LGBTQIA+ or an ally of the LGBTQIA+ community, we believe this information can be helpful for everyone. Sharing what you learned can help others get the support they need, too.

MHS Health is here to support all its members — because everyone deserves great care. Together, we can make sure everyone has a chance to live a healthy and happy life.



Resources

Great healthcare means having access to helpful resources. **The list below can help you find information, care, and support you may need to take care of yourself.**

Take action:

- The Gay & Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) has a free, searchable database of providers who specifically work with people who are LGBTQIA+. Visit: lgbtqhealthcaredirectory.org
- The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) offers support and resources if you need help fighting for your rights. Visit: glaad.org/resourcelist
- The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) offers support on filling out your Advanced Directives. *See Page 6 to learn how Advanced Directives can help you.* Visit: dhs.wisconsin.gov/forms/advdirectives



Health education:

- Wisconsin DHS has resources for Wisconsin residents who are LGBTQIA+. They can help you with your health, social support, safety, and more. Visit: dhs.wisconsin.gov/lgbthealth
- The Wisconsin DHS *Consumer Guide to Healthcare* has even more information on where to go for medical care, who to see, and what to know. Visit: dhs.wisconsin.gov/guide
- The Human Rights Campaign offers definitions of common words used in the LGBTQIA+ community. To learn more, visit: hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms

Help for mental health and alcohol and/or drug use:

If you have mental health problems, use alcohol and/or drugs, or you're thinking about suicide, there is help available. If you need help quickly, call 911. You can also call a free crisis hotline below.

- Visit The Trevor Project website: thetrevorproject.org
 - ▶ Hotline: 1-866-488-7386 or text 678-678
- Visit the 988 website: 988lifeline.org
 - ▶ Hotline: Call or text 988



