



## My Emergency Preparedness Guide: LGBTQ+ Considerations for Emergency Managers, Responders and Community Providers

### **Disasters don't discriminate, but sometimes people do.**

The LGBTQ+ community can be especially vulnerable to the effects of disasters. A recent Federal Emergency Management Agency report warned that LGBTQ+ people are "more likely than others to be severely impacted by disasters." Historically LGBTQ+ people have faced discrimination and prejudice. The LGBTQ+ community is still disproportionately impacted by disasters and are more likely to face challenges during the response and recovery.

Disasters are particularly traumatic and stressful events. As emergency planners and responders, it is essential that you create a welcoming and inclusive setting for all those impacted, including members of your LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ individuals remain an underserved group. Emergency managers, disaster responders, community providers, and volunteer groups should proactively engage with the LGBTQ+ community during emergency planning and preparedness activities. Below are some initial considerations to ensure a more inclusive environment before, during and after disasters:

### **Responding to a Disaster**

- Recognize that many LGBTQ+ people, especially seniors, may have a "chosen family" comprised of close friends who are not necessarily biologically related.
- Be careful not to "out" anyone during the response. Confidentiality is important for everyone. It should be the decision of the individual whether or not to tell others their orientation and/or gender identity.

- Normalize asking everyone for their pronouns. Include this question in your regular registration/welcoming process. For example ask, "What is your name, date of birth, and your pronouns?"
- Respect all relationships and family structures. If an individual states that they are in a relationship or are a family member, provide assistance to them as you would any family. This may be especially important in the provision of support and counseling in the event of a fatality.
- While people of all genders and sexual orientations can be legally married, many people choose not to. Use neutral language like spouse or partner rather than husband/wife. Similarly avoid using mother/father on parent questions and use parent/guardian instead.
- Consider eliminating gender questions from registration forms. If you do need to know gender to offer assistance include other options, like "non-binary" or an open field where an individual can write in their gender identity. Avoid using the gender option "other."
- Always respect an individual's stated or presented gender identity. Keep in mind that an individual's appearance may not align with your idea of how their gender "should" appear.
- Never ask about any surgery, medical procedures or anything else that is irrelevant to assisting anyone through their disaster caused needs.
- Avoid using gendered greetings such as "sir," "ma'am," or "Ladies & Gentlemen" to be more inclusive, simply say "Welcome Everyone."

## Disaster & Emergency Planning

- Identify LGBTQ+ community groups and leaders who you can collaborate within your community's emergency planning and response.
- Invite LGBTQ+ community leaders and groups into the emergency planning process to assist in developing inclusive practices and policies.
- Recognize and acknowledge that some members of the LGBTQ+ community have distrust and previous negative experiences with some responding organizations.
- Recruit LGBTQ+ people into local volunteer disaster response groups so that your community's responders more inclusively represent your community.
- Ask LGBTQ+ community members to participate in community disaster exercises and drills and provide feedback to your community's response processes.
- Consider including LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for your staff and/or volunteers. Your local LGBTQ+ community organization can often provide this training.

## Considerations for Emergency Shelters

- Honor family units and the relationship status of all residents when providing emergency shelter services.
- All facilities used as emergency shelters should ensure that transgender individuals have access to appropriate facilities based on their gender identity or those that feel safest for them. This includes bathrooms, showers, housing, and all other facilities.
- Consider temporarily replacing bathroom signage in shelter facilities to provide gender-neutral bathroom options when a facility is used as a disaster shelter.
- For shared shower spaces create a sign-up schedule for everyone. This provides greater privacy for everyone.
- Provide private areas for changing of clothing that are gender-neutral and available for all to use.
- Ensure that transgender people feel safe in disaster shelter settings. Never create separate and unequal accommodations for transgender shelter residents.
- Ensure that adequate privacy is provided. Be empathetic to specific requests that transgender people may have, for example providing a bathroom chaperone or regular nighttime safety checks.
- Be aware that many transgender people do not have identification that matches their gender identity. In some states it can be very difficult to obtain identification that matches a person's gender identity. Maryland and DC both allow individuals to change their gender on their drivers license without any documentation. They also both allow X as a non-binary gender choice.

## Personal Preparedness

- Encourage everyone to take personal preparedness steps. Members of the LGBTQ+ community may need to include specific considerations in their preparedness plans. More information on personal preparedness for the LGBTQ+ community can be found in the **"My Emergency Preparedness Guide: LGBTQ+ Community Members."**

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## Human Rights Commission Glossary of LGBTQ+ Terms

- <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

## Resources

- [HRC's Cultural Competency Guide for Emergency Responders and Volunteers](#)
- [Life Bridge Health LGBTQ+ Resources](#)

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