

Providing Care for Individuals with Unique Needs

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), you may have experienced more newly insured patients seeking care for the first time. Some of these patients may have unique medical needs that require extra sensitivity and care considerations. Below are tips for providing care to some individuals who have especially benefitted from the ACA.

How can I help my LGBT patients?

When providing care to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) patients, it is important to create an open environment for communication.

- Include a general nondiscrimination statement during the opening conversation
- Demonstrate familiarity with LGBT questions and concerns
- Avoid making assumptions about any aspect of the patient's identity and experience
- Ask open-ended questions regarding their gender and gender identity, preferred names and pronouns, sexual orientation, relationship status, family configuration, HIV/AIDS status, etc.
- Give patients the opening to point or write down answers to sensitive questions such as a transgender person's legal name or an individual's need for HIV treatment
- Reassure the patient by stating that you ask the same questions of every consumer

Outside of the examination room, make changes in forms and signage to reaffirm the welcoming environment of the office.

- Intake forms should include a range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Patients become more comfortable discussing their health risks, concerns and behaviors after that information has been disclosed
- Develop and prominently display non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity
- Offer LGBT-oriented magazines and educational brochures displayed among the other reading materials

How can I help my homeless patients?

When providing care to homeless patients, it is important to take into account that they may have different needs and resources available to them than other patients.

- Ask questions and assess the patient's basic needs to ensure they are being met
- Seek to understand and pursue a patient's goals and priorities, even if they are different from what you think they should be, and create an action plan that addresses those goals
- Offer portable action plans and other materials that can fit into a pocket
- Provide patients with a pocket card with their immunizations, chronic illnesses and medications which they can then show other health care professionals if they seek care elsewhere
- If you prescribe medications for a homeless patient, prescribe a simple medication regimen with prescriptions that can be stored without a refrigerator if possible
- Build trust with your patient by creating a therapeutic relationship with person-centered, trauma-informed and recovery-oriented care and frequent encounters with the patient
- Anticipate and work to accommodate unscheduled visits
- Get the contact information for the patient, their friends, family and/or case manager

How can I help patients who have a mental health or substance use issue?

When providing care for patients who have a mental health or substance use issue, it's important to create a comfortable, supportive environment.

- Periodically and routinely screen all patients. Screen adolescents every time they seek medical care
- Ask questions about substance use in the context of other lifestyle questions
- Use simple language to present screening results in a straightforward, open manner
- Stress health concerns related to substance use rather than legal concerns
- Expect a range of patient reactions
- Reassure patients that issues can be addressed over subsequent visits