

NHS Sheffield Equality Data Collection Tool – guidance for ‘interviewers’

NHS Sheffield has legal duties around equality and human rights to fulfil as well as certain Standards for Better Health around ensuring that our services are accessible by all sections of the population.

Research consistently shows that people receive less favourable treatment, difficulty accessing services and poorer health outcomes depending on their gender (including transgender), age, race, sexual orientation, whether or not they have a disability, and their religion or belief.

We need to reassure ourselves that our services are available to all and we will, therefore, be monitoring who uses our services to ascertain whether this is happening or whether we need to take remedial action to improve what we do.

As a representative of NHS Sheffield, you will be asking the questions on the NHS Sheffield Data Collection Tool, which has been approved for use by the Corporate Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Group.

In general

Work done by the Office for National Statistics, the Royal College of Nursing and others has shown that if the interviewer is matter of fact about collecting this information then the respondent is likely to take a similar attitude and answer the questions in a straight forward manner.

Do not apologise for asking the questions in general or any question in particular. Most statutory authorities are asking these sorts of questions.

Tell them that this information is voluntary and that they do not have to answer any of the questions. However, do not give the option “prefer not to say” when asking each question. Only tick this option when they have said that they don’t want to answer. This has been shown to increase the response rate.

Reassure, if necessary, that the data protection act applies to this information and that it will be stored confidentially and used for data monitoring purposes only.

If they ask why you are asking for the information, tell them that we are monitoring who accesses our services in order to ensure that we are not discriminating in our service provision. The only way that we can ensure this is by finding out who is, and who isn’t, using us.

Age Question

This should not pose any problems. If they give you their date of birth instead, work out their age and confirm with them that this is correct.

Race question

Most people will probably be used, by now, to being asked about their race or ethnicity.

Ask the question: “What is your ethnic origin?”

If the respondent answers with a broad category – eg Black/White/Asian – then take them through the sub categories. For instance:

“When you say Black; is that Black African, Black Caribbean, or another Black background?”

If the respondent doesn't understand the question, go through the broad headings – “Would you say you were White, Mixed race, Asian, Black, or another group?” – then, when they have identified their broad group, take them through the sub categories for that group.

NB – the 2011 census categories have put Chinese into the Asian category and added Arab to the ‘other ethnic group’ category.

Language question

We need to know whether language is a barrier to accessing services and we are therefore asking two questions about language – main language and ability to speak English.

You may think that you already know the answer to this question by now but we need the person's self assessment, not yours, so please ask.

Religion/belief question

This question is not just about religion, it is also about non-belief such as atheism and non-religious beliefs such as humanism and Buddhism.

Ask the question “Would you say you were Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, agnostic or another religion or belief that I have not mentioned”

Disability question

Please read the list out as it is. Many people do not consider themselves to be disabled – for instance if they have a long term condition such as diabetes or angina.

If they ask for an explanation of any of the terms please give the following information, as necessary:

- Mental health condition – such as bi-polar disorder or chronic depression
- Physical impairment – such as muscular dystrophy or paraplegia
- Cognitive impairment – such as brain injury or Alzheimer’s disease
- Long standing illness – such as diabetes, asthma or heart disease
- Speech impairment – from a stroke for instance
- Sensory impairment – blindness or visual impairment/ deafness or hearing impairment
- Learning disability – Also referred to as intellectually or developmentally disabled
- Learning difficulty – such as dyslexia

Sexual orientation question

This question is for adults, and unaccompanied children who are ‘Fraser competent’. Do not ask accompanied children or their parents this question.

Acceptability of the question:

Survey response

There was no evidence to suggest that survey response rates had been affected by the inclusion of a question on sexual identity. Indeed one survey tested its questionnaire with and without a sexual identity question to confirm this.

Item response

Higher rates of missing data were obtained when questions were administered by self-completion compared with interviewer-administered mode. This suggested that perhaps there was an issue of invasion of privacy or objection to being asked about sexual identity. Feedback from one postal survey supported this assumption, although it found that objecting to being asked and objecting to giving an answer did not necessarily correspond. Such concerns were less evident when the question was interviewer-administered, where missing data was lower probably due to the fact that respondents tend to be more compliant in interviewer-administered surveys.

Developing survey questions on sexual identity:
UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation
ONS 2008

Ask the question: “Would you describe yourself as heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual?”

- If the caller questions why you are asking the question, respond by saying “ From 2007 it has been illegal to discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation in the same way as it was already illegal to discriminate against people because of their gender or race. In order to monitor whether discrimination exists, we need to collect information on people’s sexual identity.”
- If the caller does not understand the terminology say “heterosexual means that you are attracted to people of the opposite gender, a gay man is a man who is attracted to other men and lesbian means a woman who is attracted to other women, bisexual means someone who is attracted to both men and women”

Gender question

Ask the question “Are you a man or a woman?” Follow this up with “Do you live and work permanently in a gender other than that assigned at birth?”

If the respondent does not understand what the second part of the question means, explain that it means someone who was born male but who is now living as a woman or someone who was born female but who is now living as a man.

This wording has been suggested by a national transgender organisation and approved by a local trans support group.