

Summary of BRFSS Research Activities on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Questions

In an effort to understand best practices on the inclusion of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) questions on the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), the Population Health Surveillance Branch (PHSB) has conducted the following activities:

1. Created a crosswalk of SOGI questions from 17 national surveys.
2. Compiled an annotated bibliography of articles, reports and other published materials that describe methods for collecting SOGI information from the public.
3. Conducted focus groups to compare and contrast currently used SOGI questions.
4. Solicited feedback from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Association of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Employees (GLOBE) community members with surveillance expertise.

Documents summarizing each of the reports from the above list are attached.

Findings from these research efforts indicate the following:

1. Persons in the focus groups and among the GLOBE experts indicate that all versions of the questions were clear and could be answered, although changes were recommended (as provided below).
2. There should be two questions (one for sexual orientation and a separate one for gender identity. The inclusion of both concepts in a single response set is not mutually exclusive. For example the response set of: 1. Straight/ 2. Gay or lesbian/ 3. Bisexual and/ 4. Transgender, transsexual or gender nonconforming (as presented in the GenIUSS report) was found to be confusing by persons providing feedback.
3. There should be no skip patterns for any SOGI question. Questions on transgender should not be skipped as a result of previous responses to sexual orientation.
4. The list of responses to the sexual orientation question should not be based on responses to the sex question in the demographics. For example persons who say that they are male on the sex question should be provided a sexual orientation question which includes gay and lesbian in the response set.
5. The sexual orientation question should not include the term "something else." A category such as "another sexual orientation" can be used, but the term "something else" was found to be offensive to respondents.
6. The current demographic question on respondent sex should be modified to collect information on sex at birth. The use of terms "birth certificate" and/or "assigned at birth" should be avoided. (Note: The birth certificate sex category may be changed after birth in many states)
7. Numbers should be read to respondents before response choices in both the sexual orientation and gender identity question. Respondents may then respond by giving a number rather than a category. This protects respondent confidentiality when interviews are being conducted by phone.
8. Response options on the sexual orientation question were insufficient. New options should include asexual, pansexual, queer, polysexual and questioning.
9. Response option on the sexual orientation question should be ordered to have "straight" as the first response.
10. The wording "how you think of yourself," "how do you describe yourself" or "do you consider yourself" was offensive to some persons providing feedback. Question stems could be modified to "Are you....". The assumption that sexual orientation or gender identity was something that the respondents thought rather than fact was found to be offensive.