

Increasing accessibility of *Washington Healthplanfinder* for gender-diverse individuals

Washington Health Benefit Exchange is committed to working with impacted community members, partner agencies, and carriers to make *Washington Healthplanfinder* more accessible for gender-diverse individuals.

Recent system updates

In May 2020, in response to changes made by the Department of Health and Department of Licensing to add a third gender option - gender x - to identity documents, the Exchange began working to make *Washington Healthplanfinder* accessible to gender-diverse individuals. It was necessary to make updates to *Washington Healthplanfinder* as the only options available in response to sex were Male or Female which left gender-diverse individuals without a way to accurately answer that question. However, in order to capture the information necessary to screen individuals for all available benefits, it was necessary for the Exchange to ask customers to provide their sex assigned at birth.

These changes are the result of meaningful outreach to external stakeholders representing gender-diverse communities in Washington. Their feedback was incorporated during the design process and is reflected in the final language displayed on screen.

Continuous Improvement: next steps

The Exchange recognizes the initial on-screen changes are a small step toward ensuring *Washington Healthplanfinder* is accessible for gender-diverse individuals. A shared long-term goal of the Exchange and the partner agencies we rely on is to make the application more culturally sensitive. This includes exploring how to make the answer choices to sex assigned at birth more inclusive, adding a question affirming the gender identity of all customers, and making other related system and process changes. We are committed to doing this in partnership with impacted communities.

The Exchange recognizes the changes were implemented in May are a short-term solution while long-term solutions (including inclusion of gender x, adding an additional question related to gender identity, and related changes to make the application more culturally sensitive). Cross-agency workgroups have been established as part of the Health and Human Services (HHS) Governance process to move this work forward.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is a mandatory question about sex assigned at birth asked for in the *Washington Healthplanfinder* application? How is this information used?

The answer to the "sex assigned at birth" question is currently used by the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) and the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to make sure you receive all health benefits you might need, including pregnancy benefits.

A coalition of state agency partners, in partnership with the Washington State LGBTQ Commission, is exploring additional changes to make the application more culturally sensitive.



Frequently Asked Questions continued

Q: Why was the question text changed in May 2020 from “sex” to “sex assigned at birth”?

The on-screen language was changed in collaboration with impacted community members and a coalition of state agency partners, to address the needs of individuals with an X designation on their identity documents. These individuals were facing an access barrier when using Washington Healthplanfinder. We worked in partnership with community partners on the language itself, user tested the language with members of impacted communities, and also included additional information at the request of community partners on why this information is collected.

Q: Why are “Male” and “Female” the only answer choices to the question about sex assigned at birth?

A shared goal of the Exchange and our partner agencies is to make the answer choices for this question more inclusive. A cross-agency workgroup is analyzing the changes needed to existing Health Care Authority (HCA) and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) systems for Gender X to be added.

A coalition of state agency partners, in partnership with the Washington State LGBTQ Commission, is exploring additional changes to make the application more culturally sensitive.

Q: Will the answer to sex assigned at birth be used to match records with social security?

No. Sex assigned at birth is not information that is passed to or used by the Federal Social Security Administration. The Exchange is required by federal law to verify an individual Social Security Number. Discrepancies with federal databases related to First Name and Last Name may result in an individual providing documentation to verify a Social Security Number. This does not occur as a result of an answer to the “Sex-assigned at birth” question.

Q: Will the answer to sex assigned at birth be used for the sex designation with my insurance carrier?

How a carrier uses the answer to the formerly “sex” and current “sex assigned at birth” question has not changed. And, how carriers currently capture information about gender identity varies. The Exchange is working with carriers to further understand what processes they use and other relevant carrier practices and procedures. Once the Exchange learns more, steps to help a customer navigate them will be shared.

Q: Why is there not a question that asks about my gender identity?

A coalition of state agency partners, in partnership with the Washington State LGBTQ Commission, is exploring additional changes to make the application more culturally sensitive.



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