

# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND WRITING GUIDE SECOND EDITION



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## **PLEASE NOTE**

This document is provided for guidance only. Language and terminology evolve frequently, and we continually work to enhance our understanding of the communities and concepts included. This evolution is due to various factors, including different preferences within population groups. **Therefore, a best practice is to have members of the community you are speaking about review your content;** if you are working with a specific organization, ask which terms they prefer to use or check their website and other available resources.



Be advised that this guide will mention or call out specific terminology that may be offensive to certain groups of people. We include these references because some people may not be aware that certain terms may cause offense and should not be used. We will also highlight inclusive terms that will ensure your communications speak about individuals with respect and dignity and are free from bias and stereotypes.

If you have experienced trauma related to any of these terms, feel free to engage with the content at your own discretion and take the time you need to reflect and practice self-care.

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE AND WHY WAS IT CREATED?

We know that words have power and that words matter. This [Inclusive Language and Writing Guide](#) provides American Cancer Society (ACS) and American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network <sup>SM</sup> (ACS CAN) staff and volunteers with preferred word choices and phrasing to empower them to communicate accurately, respectfully, and consistently about cancer disparities and our efforts to advance health equity. The language and word choices in this guide were selected because they are community-driven, and it is our hope that they will authentically represent those communities' perspectives and experiences.

In applying this guide, remember that people with cancer, their caregivers, and communities are at the center of our work and should be valued humanely and appropriately.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE AND WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

This Guide is intended to support team members and volunteers who engage with community members, health systems, corporate entities, donors, policymakers, and global partners. It also supports ACS and ACS CAN team members across departments who create internal and external materials and products (e.g., presentations, data reports, grant proposals, and marketing, communications, health promotion, or educational materials). It provides language guidance on subject matter related to health equity and inclusive word choices to ensure more consistent messaging across the organization.

The content in this guide supports ACS' and ACS CAN's diversity, equity, inclusion, and health equity work and amplifies the importance of recognizing everyone's equal and inherent value. Additionally, this guide will help us avoid using negative stereotypes and connotations or unintentionally assigning blame for people's life circumstances or health status. While many of the terms you will see in the Guide pertain to the cultural milieu of the U.S., being mindful of cultural context is equally as important in global health settings.

## HOW DO I USE THIS GUIDE?

Use this Guide whenever you need guidance on inclusive language during the materials development process. It was designed to be both print and digital-friendly. It also has several features making it easier to navigate in digital format (*continued on next page*):

# INTRODUCTION

- ✓ An interactive [Table of Contents](#) broken down by topic area:
  - The Social Determinants of Health
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Shifting from Disease-Focused Language
  - Gender Identity
  - Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin
  - Disability Status
- ✓ A [Glossary](#) to familiarize yourself with some of the terms you'll hear around diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- ✓ Each section of the Guide is broken down into the same format to give you a balanced learning experience:

SEXUAL ORIENTATION


For decades, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) community has fought for normalizing... pathologize, reframe... voices... that LGBTQ+ people are... different terms and... you communicate about... human complexity,

... constantly evolving and... new terms are created, old... been reclaimed by some... acronym "LGBTQ" is fluid, and you may see it written... with fewer or more letters depending on the person or group (ex: LGBTQIA). If you're more interested in learning about the different acronyms and what the letters stand for, please explore the resources listed at the end of this section.

It is crucial to tailor communications for and about LGBTQ+ people based on Insights from the community (i.e., through an advisory board) and an individual's personal preferences. It's important not to make assumptions about a person's sexual orientation. It's equally important to only communicate about someone's sexual orientation when it is relevant to the story or if they have given you express permission to do so. Sexual orientation can be very personal and private for some people and they may or may not want it to be public knowledge. There is also potential to do unintended harm and possibly even reinforce a stigma or stereotype if mention of sexual orientation is not contextualized.

UP CLOSE: INTERNAL LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

- Our partnerships with LGBTQ+-led organizations
- Cancer disparities research highlights, including an LGBTQ+-based study
- Cancer Facts for Lesbian and Bisexual Women
- Cancer Facts for Gay and Bisexual Men
- Cancer Care for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People (Professional audiences)
- LGBTQ+ People and Cancer Facts
- Pride Resources on Grand Top



An introduction to each topic area, giving cultural and historic context.

"Terminology Requiring a Closer Look": Quick Reference-style tables providing inclusive word choices and the rationale behind them.


"Up Close": Real-life applications or instances where inclusive language principles can be examined further.

TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
MSM (men who have sex with other men), FSF (women who have sex with other women); Homosexual	LGBTQ+ people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer/questioning person; LGBTQ community	Reflects the diversity of the LGBTQ community and removes outdated or offensive terminology
*Please note that you may see additional letters in the acronym depending on the organization or individual. For example, you may see A added for asexual or I for intersex.		
sexual orientation		Removes outdated language
sexsex		Removes outdated and offensive language
transgender; transgender person		Removes outdated and offensive language
Assigned male or female at birth (MAB, AFAB)		Removes outdated and offensive language. Should only be referenced if relevant and with express permission.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [GLAAD's Media Reference Guide, 10th ed.](#)
- [National LGBT Health Center Glossary](#)
- [Center of Excellence for Transgender Health Resources](#)
- [National LGBT Cancer Network](#)
- [University of North Carolina's Writing Center for Gender Inclusive Terminology](#)
- [OutRight Action International: Acronyms Explained](#)



"References and Further Readings": Opportunities for you to advance your learning and increase your cultural competency.

# INTRODUCTION

## **CAN I USE THIS GUIDE WITH THE PARTNERS I WORK WITH?**

Absolutely! We acknowledge that the primary voice of the Guide is for ACS or ACS CAN team members and volunteers. This guide can also be shared widely with your partners and constituents, but please recognize:

- that no two communities or regions are exactly alike, and
- this Guide may not be all-encompassing or exhaustive in every situation.

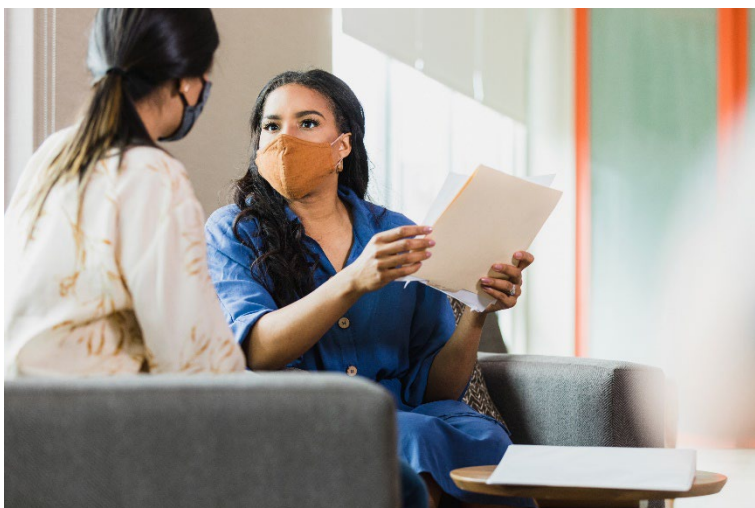
Thus, the guidance may need to be adapted or modified for some audiences or community partners.

As a general rule of thumb, we advise that you meet your audience where they are; make sure you are using the preferred terminology of the community, person, or partner you're working with, and invite them to be part of your materials development process so you can understand their perspective and apply it to your work.

## **HOW WAS THIS GUIDE CREATED?**

This Guide was co-created in good faith by a team of advisors, subject matter experts, and community representatives both inside and outside of ACS and ACS CAN. Careful consideration was taken to ensure each population group of focus mentioned in the Guide was represented in some way during the creation and review process. The Guide was also closely beta-tested with a sample of more than 50 potential end-users inside of the organization. Any sensitive content has been carefully reviewed and shared with leadership and partners for additional perspective.

We plan to keep this Guide updated and refreshed as language evolves, times change, and we learn more about inclusive practice as an organization.



# ABOUT OUR WORK

## WHAT IS HEALTH EQUITY AT ACS?

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer – no matter how much money someone makes, the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, their disability status, or where they live.

[Take a deeper dive on this concept here.](#)

Health equity is not the same as equality. Equality is providing everyone with the same tools and resources. Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for everyone, while addressing needs and eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation and success of all people.

Equity acknowledges that people have different circumstances or barriers they need to overcome, often through no fault of their own. These barriers are because of deeply rooted, long standing inequities at all levels of society that will take an intentional effort to address in order to have equal cancer outcomes. Because of this, the tools and resources needed will be different from one person to the next.

## WHAT IS DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is in direct support of ACS and ACS CAN's vision to end cancer as we know it for everyone and is an essential strategy for achieving our organizational priorities. Diversity describes the many qualities and characteristics that make us alike or different and helps us identify as members of communities or groups. Inclusion refers to our behaviors and interactions with one another. It describes how we collaborate, seek, and value different perspectives and demonstrate mutual respect.

To learn more about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, please visit [Society Source](#) and [cancer.org](#), and please direct inquiries to [inclusion@cancer.org](mailto:inclusion@cancer.org).

## WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

There are many ways you can continue your learning journey at ACS and ACS CAN:

- Join an [Employee Engagement Group](#).
- Apply your learnings from the mandatory 3-step Foundations of Health Equity training on MyADP.
- Browse our [health equity](#) and [diversity and inclusion](#) resources on Society Source

## ABOUT OUR WORK

- Learn more about our [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion partnerships on cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org/diversity-equity-inclusion-partnerships).
- Take time to read the [Health Equity Principles](#). Ask yourself how health equity affects the work you do at ACS and ACS CAN and how you might apply health equity principles to your work. In addition, can you enhance the narratives used to articulate your work to include health equity?
- Participate in trainings and education sessions offered by the DEI Team, which include population-specific and diversity trainings on MyADP. Please refer to the [DEI Society Source page](#) for the most up-to-date information and resources.

## HOW DO I SUBMIT FEEDBACK ON THIS GUIDE?

You can submit feedback [via email to healthequity@cancer.org](mailto:healthequity@cancer.org).







**Using a Health Equity  
Lens to Communicate  
About Cancer  
Disparities**

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# USING A HEALTH EQUITY LENS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CANCER DISPARITIES

This section of the Guide will focus on some basic inclusive writing skills that can be a starting place for materials development. When we communicate about the term “health equity,” it’s important to remember that not everyone will know what that means. Therefore, always give appropriate context and framing to your audiences and constituents using these principles:



Emphasize health equity as a shared value where all communities benefit when we uplift those with the greatest need.



Avoid language that appears to assign blame to a specific individual, population group, or community for their increased cancer risk.



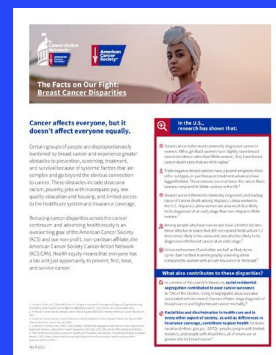
Explain the connection between cancer disparities and the root causes of health and how they impact each other, using clear and concise terms.



State facts, share data objectively, and give readers additional context around the data points by explaining the systemic barriers that impact the findings.

## UP CLOSE: DATA STORYTELLING THROUGH THE HEALTH EQUITY DATA BRIEFS

Visit "[The Facts on Our Fight Data Briefs series](#)" to see some real-life applications of data storytelling in action from ACS and ACS CAN. “The Facts on Our Fight” shares data talking points focused on cancer disparities. The data is used to connect the dots between systemic barriers and cancer outcomes and then tells the “story” of the work we’re doing across the country to advance health equity and address cancer disparities.



## TELLING AUTHENTIC STORIES

It’s important to engage the people whose stories you’re telling to ensure their experiences and perspectives are reflected. You will hear about individual cultural identities, life experiences, languages, histories, nationalities, and religious/spiritual beliefs for every population group you engage. People can have overlapping identities, which are varied, complex, and shaped by the systems they interface. This concept is referred to as [intersectionality](#).

# USING A HEALTH EQUITY LENS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CANCER DISPARITIES

## TELLING AUTHENTIC STORIES, CONT.

You can achieve authenticity and successfully communicate our work through a health equity lens by doing the following:

- ✓ Ask people from the communities you are writing about to co-create your materials with you and give you their input as subject matter experts and/or testers.
- ✓ Recognize that some communities will not be able to adopt health recommendations or take action in complying with clinical guidelines due to lack of resources and other systemic barriers such as [structural racism](#).
- ✓ Avoid the use of stereotypes or stigmas in your words and images — this includes outdated terminology.
- ✓ Choose culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive words and images that are relevant to the community you are trying to reach.
- ✓ Use language that's [inclusive](#), clear, consistent, and plain.
- ✓ Use the everyday terms, names, titles, and labels that are preferred by the community you're writing for and about when it's relevant to the story you're telling.
- ✓ Use the correct identity perspective preferred by the specific community or person you are referring to, whether it's [person-first or identity-first](#).
- ✓ Acknowledge that the community ultimately owns their own stories and that their voices must always be centered, prioritized, and given credit/attribution.

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## A DEEPER DIVE INTO MORE INCLUSIVE WRITING AND COMMUNICATING

Ready to really start applying these inclusive language skills? Here's some additional insights that you can use to keep building your knowledge base:

1. **Have ongoing conversations with co-workers and partners about inclusive language.** Don't just do it when the language evolves because of changing norms or current events. Make it part of your everyday communications.
2. **Use [plain language](#) as much as possible.** Plain language is writing in a way that ensures your reader understands as quickly, completely, and easily as possible.

# USING A HEALTH EQUITY LENS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CANCER DISPARITIES

## A DEEPER DIVE INTO MORE INCLUSIVE WRITING AND COMMUNICATING, CONT.

### **Plain language, cont.**

- Pick familiar or everyday words over obscure or unusual words.
- Avoid jargon or overly technical language when writing for non-professional audiences. Your writing should be used to inform first and impress second.
- Use a thesaurus to find words with similar meanings but more appropriate readability.
- Minimize abbreviations and spell acronyms out on the first mention. (Ex: Spell out American Cancer Society followed by the acronym on the first mention, then abbreviate as ACS after that.)
- Consistently use the same words and terminology throughout your writing.
- Avoid adding extra verbs and nouns when they are unnecessary to understand your message.
- Avoid stringing too many nouns together in a single sentence. A good rule of thumb is to use bullets when you need to list more than three nouns in a row. This helps with readability.
- Be concise. This means avoiding wordy or very dense sentences with multiple phrases and clauses.
- Bookmark and use a free readability checker such as [Grammarly](#) or the [CDC's Clear Communications Index](#).

- 3. Use an active voice as much as possible.** Active voice means that the subject in a sentence acts upon the verb, making the tone strong, direct, and clear. The sentence structure should be subject-verb-object in that order.
  - An example of active voice (preferred) is “*Susan stayed at the Atlanta Hope Lodge during her treatment.*”
  - An example of passive voice using the same sentence is “*The Atlanta Hope Lodge is where Susan stayed during her treatment.*”
- 4. Always ask if it's OK to share personal details about someone, such as gender identity or disability status, in your story and be clear about how their story will be used.** Never assume someone is OK with sharing information about aspects of their identity to the public.
- 5. Write for your audience.** Know the expertise level, interest level, and comfort level of your audience groups. What do they want to know? What do they already know? What do you want them to do after reading your message? It's crucial for you to do your research and test your assumptions to truly understand who your audience is and how to effectively reach them.
- 6. Prevent and address unintended consequences ([an ACS and ACS CAN health equity principle](#)) by thoughtfully checking for content that could cause unintended harm to audiences of focus when you communicate about health equity.** An effective strategy to prevent unintended consequences is to engage the community in the development, implementation, and evaluation of your work. If you receive negative feedback, seek to understand why it was a mistake and identify an appropriate way to remedy it.

# USING A HEALTH EQUITY LENS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CANCER DISPARITIES

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

### **1. General Guidance on Writing About Health Equity Concepts and Terms**

- [The CDC's Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication](#)
- [Writing About Population Groups](#)
- ["Vulnerable" versus "Marginalized"](#)
- [The Sum of Us: A Progressive's Style Guide](#)
- [RWJF and the Human Impact Partners Project: Defining Health Equity](#)
- [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#)
- [National Stakeholder Strategy for Achieving Health Equity](#), developed by the Office of Minority Health's National Partnership for Action
- [Advancement Project's The Social Justice Phrase Guide](#)
- [University of Minnesota's Center for Practice Transformation Guide](#)

### **2. General Guidance for Health Literacy Considerations and Plain Language**

- [The Health Literacy Solution Center](#)
- [Communicate Health](#)
- [The CDC's Everyday Words for Public Health Communications](#)
- [The CDC's Clear Communications Index](#)
- [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)

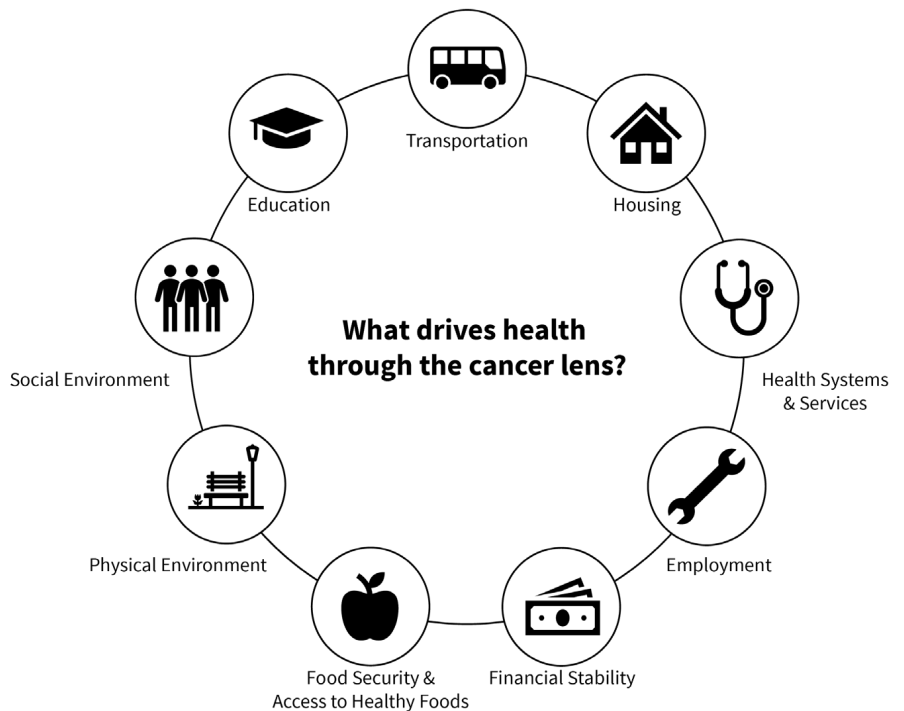


# The Social Determinants of Health



# THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the social determinants of health (hereafter abbreviated as SDOH) are the conditions where we live, work, learn, play, worship, and age. They can also include the complex systemic and social structures that influence these conditions, such as policy and economic climate. Most times, these interrelated conditions are out of someone's personal control. At ACS and ACS CAN, we sometimes use this graphic on the right to conceptualize the social determinants of health through the cancer lens.

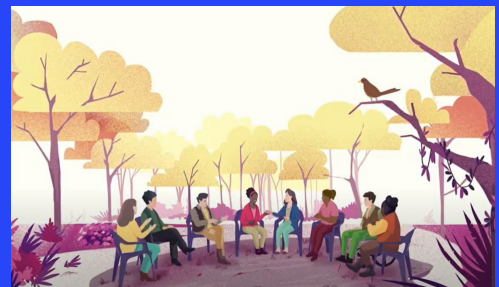


We know that SDOH has a direct impact on a person's health. People who do not have access to the resources that protect, improve, and maintain a good quality of life can cause them to experience unfair and unjust cancer disparities. Addressing the SDOH helps us to advance health equity so that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

In your work at ACS and ACS CAN, you may be presented with a situation where you need to communicate about SDOH. Remember to define them and give full context for their relationship to cancer disparities for your audience to reach an understanding of how they impact health outcomes.

## UP CLOSE: DIVERGENT PATHS

Meet Jenny and Maryanne: childhood friends, both with breast cancer but with very different experiences. To better understand how the social determinants of health can have a direct impact on someone's health, [watch the animated short, "Divergent Paths: A Health Equity Story,"](#) and see if you can connect the dots between Maryanne's cancer experience and the barriers she faced throughout the story.



# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
<p>“Low” literacy, education, income, resources</p> <p><i>*Please note: You may see the term “easy reading” instead of “low literacy” used to describe health education print items. This is because “easy reading” is a plainer way to say “limited literacy” for websites.</i></p> <p><i>Carefully consider when to use “low” or “lower,” which may be a more grammatically appropriate choice when making comparisons in a sentence such as “lower income versus higher income.”</i></p>	<p><b>Limited literacy, education, income, resources; the person is living with limited ____.</b></p> <p><b>Examples:</b>  <b>James has limited income.</b>  <b>The northside neighborhood has limited access to resources.</b>  <b>Keisha had limited educational opportunities.</b>  <b>John is living with a limited income.</b></p>	<p>Emphasizes the potential for improvement and removes the negative connotation of “low” or “less than.”</p>
<p>Victim/suffering from/afflicted by</p>	<p><b>Survivor; the person has/ has experienced/ has had ____</b></p>	<p>Removes passive language and the implication that the person is “less than” or victimized.</p>
<p>Vulnerable, special, or at-risk</p> <p><b>Please note the new guidance to the right regarding “disinvested,” “underserved,” and “under-resourced.”</b></p>	<p><b>People who are marginalized; people who are historically excluded (Note: “traditionally excluded” can be used when referring to countries that don’t have a history of colonization.)</b></p> <p><b>People who are at increased risk/higher risk for cancer; people who live/work in settings that put them at increased/higher risk</b></p> <p><b>Use disinvested when talking about neighborhoods, schools, institutions, and communities that have been historically excluded from equitable distribution of resources.</b></p> <p><b>Use underrepresented when you are specifically talking about communities and population groups in context.</b></p> <p><b>Use under-resourced or underserved when you are specifically talking about resources.</b></p>	<p>Removes victimizing language and negative connotations.</p> <p>Allows for the opportunity to provide greater context to the reader.</p>



TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
The poor, the needy, less fortunate	<b>Has experienced/experiencing poverty, has limited financial resources</b>	Removes undue focus on the Condition, and puts the person first; removes victimizing language
On welfare/on food stamps/ Section 8	<b>Describe the program in context. Examples: a person with cancer used food stamps to address food insecurity, a person with cancer used Section 8 HUD housing vouchers to find a place closer to treatment centers</b>	Removes the scarcity- or “resource competition”-based view, and emphasizes that these programs exist to help people
The homeless	<b>Person experiencing homelessness; houseless</b>	Removes undue focus on the condition, and puts the person first
Rural people, frontier people	<b>People/residents/communities in rural or frontier areas</b>	Person-first perspective, removes negative connotation of living far away from areas of high population density
Urban dwellers, urban people	<b>People/residents/communities in urban/metropolitan/core neighborhoods or high population density areas</b>  <b>*Never use the word “urban” to describe people of color</b>	Person-first perspective, humanizes language by removing negative/racist connotation of “dweller” and the historically racist use of the word “urban” to describe people of color
Inner city, the slums	<b>Urban neighborhood; metropolitan or core neighborhood if it’s in close proximity to a major city’s geographical center</b>  <b>*Never use “urban” to describe a group of people or a person of color.</b>	Decolonizes racist and discriminatory language around areas of high population density that have been historically excluded due to practices such as redlining
Old people, seniors, frail, fragile  <i>*Please note that some cultures use “Elder” as a term of respect-ensure this term is appropriate to use and seek guidance from community members.</i>	<b>Older adults; use numeric designation for age group (ex: people 65 or older)</b>	Removes victimizing language
Stakeholders, shareholders - use with discretion when working with Indigenous communities	<b>Partners, collaborators, allies</b>	This term has violent historical context for some tribal and Indigenous organizations.
Third-world	<b>Low-to-middle-income country (LMIC), or use the specific name of the country in reference</b>	Removes negative connotation that a country was less economically sound than Western countries following the Cold War era
Ex-convict/ ex-con, ex-offender, criminal, felon	<b>Person who is/has been incarcerated, inmate, person in prison</b>	Person-first approach which centers on restorative justice



## Shifting to Person-Centered Language

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# SHIFTING TO PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

**The language we use around patient care matters, and a person-centered perspective allows us to focus on the dignity, strength, and uniqueness of every individual instead of centering on their disease or illness.** In the clinical setting, providers may sometimes use casual labels or deficits-based language that contributes to bias and depersonalizes the individual under their care. While not always done intentionally, this approach can result in ineffective care and discriminatory practices that become embedded into the health care system's culture. It's vital that we make a conscious effort to shift the way we talk about illness so that barriers to recovery can be removed.



## UP CLOSE: WHEN TO USE "PATIENT"

Knowing when to use the word "patient" versus "person with (a specific illness)" can be confusing. On the one hand, the word "patient" is the status quo - it's the word we're most accustomed to hearing, saying, and writing when we talk about cancer care. It's also the most logical fit when you're writing for clinicians and professional audiences. And, if you work in marketing or fundraising, sometimes using "patient" can seem compelling, evoking strong emotions in donors and volunteers to be called to action. However, remember that people are whole, unique, and not solely defined by their medical conditions. If we want to use fully-inclusive language, it's vital to uphold the person-first principle that all patients are people who should be treated with dignity and respect.

As you continue your journey toward health equity practice, challenge yourself to reframe how you write about people with cancer in instances where it's not required to say "patient." Here are some great resources for deeper reading on this:

- ["Words Are Important: Patient vs Person" by Jordan Asher](#)
- [Use of Language in Diabetes Care and Education](#)
- [Tip Sheet for Person-Centered Language](#)



# SHIFTING TO PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

## A NOTE ON OLDER ADULTS

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According to the [ACS Cancer Facts & Figures report](#), “the risk of developing cancer increases with advancing age; 80% of all cancers in the United States are diagnosed in people 55 years of age or older.” This is important to the work of ACS because physical, mental, and family/social role changes that happen as a person ages can adversely affect their health and treatment outcomes, as well as their access to care.

“ In June 2017, the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (JAGS)* adopted the *American Medical Association Manual of Style* including qualified recommendations for the language used to describe older people. Based on the American Geriatrics Society’s (AGS) work with the Leaders of Aging Organizations and the FrameWorks Institute, these recommendations were grounded in building better public perceptions of aging. They reinforced ‘that words like (the) aged, elder(s), (the) elderly, and seniors should not be used . . . because [they] connote discrimination and certain negative stereotypes.’ The journal thus adopted ‘older adult(s)’ and ‘older person/people’ as preferred terminology, explicitly advocating against using ‘the elderly,’ ‘senior(s),’ and/or ‘senior citizen(s)’.”

- *When It Comes to Older Adults, Language Matters and Is Changing: American Geriatrics Society Update on Reframing Aging Style Changes*; Trucil, Lundebjerg, & Busso; Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 2020

There are many terms to describe people who have advanced past middle age, but many journalistic and professional organizations have started moving away from using stigmatizing or victimizing terms such as elderly, senior citizens/seniors, geriatric people, and “old people.” Be mindful that someone’s numerical age does not fully define who they are as a person regarding cultural identity, values, interests, or mental and physical health status. Age should only be used as an identifier when it’s relevant to the content being created. When mention of age is a necessary part of your story, it’s recommended to either use “older adults” or to be precise and mention the population group’s age parameters such as “adults over 65” or “adults between the ages of x and y.”

Please note that some cultures use the term “Elder” as a sign of respect and to denote a station of significance in their community, neighborhood, or family. When this is the case, please confer with the people or organizations you are working with to ensure you’re using respectful terminology.

If you are interested in reading more on this topic, check out these resources:

- [The National Council on Aging](#)
- [The American Geriatrics Society](#)
- [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion: Older Adults](#)
- [American Association of Retired Persons \(AARP\)](#)
- [The Center for Positive Aging](#)

# SHIFTING TO PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

## A NOTE ON OBESITY, DIFFERENT BODY TYPES, AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT TERMINOLOGY

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**From cancer.org:** “Overweight or obesity is clearly linked to an overall increased risk of cancer. According to research from the American Cancer Society, excess body weight is thought to be responsible for about 11% of cancers in women and about 5% of cancers in men in the United States, as well as about 7% of all cancer deaths.”

Discussions about obesity and weight are important to the work of ACS because of the increased risk of certain cancer types and because cancer can affect weight and nutritional needs during and after treatment. Weight is a highly sensitive topic for many people and may be especially difficult for people with cancer to discuss. Health care and public health professionals can build trust by speaking respectfully and working with community members as partners when choosing how to frame obesity in materials and in conversations.

Unfortunately, weight-based bias and stigma are pervasive in many sectors of society, and we want to be sure not to inadvertently contribute to this situation with our messaging and communication. One way to do this is when discussing obesity or body type, use person-first language that avoids a stigmatizing or negative frame. Possible choices are “a person has obesity/person with obesity/person affected by obesity.” You can also do away with the term “obese/obesity” altogether and use terms like “people with high/low weight,” “people affected by excess weight,” “people in larger/smaller bodies,” and “people with a BMI of XX” (include appropriate BMI measure or range of measures). Some additional pointers:

- Don’t oversimplify weight and weight loss. Messages like “eat less, move more” don’t take into account the complexity of the issue. Body weight is influenced by a combination of factors that can be genetic/biological, psychological, societal, economic, and environmental. Messages that focus only on personal behavior can place blame and increase stigma on people living with higher body weight.
- Use an individualized and intersectional approach when writing about healthy behaviors. Be mindful that healthy eating and exercise may be challenging for people who experience barriers to health, and they may not always be able to follow medical advice if they don’t have access to certain resources.
- Diet and exercise shouldn’t always be coupled with weight loss/gain. A healthy diet and being active have health benefits irrespective of weight and should be encouraged for those reasons. Unless you are specifically writing/talking about body weight, focus on the behaviors without putting it in the context of weight.
- Don’t mention someone’s weight or body type if it’s unnecessary to your story.
- How weight and body type are discussed and embraced can vary across cultures, social norms, and population groups.
- Avoid stereotypes when portraying people in larger bodies. For example, **don’t** portray people affected by obesity as lacking willpower or engaging in stereotypical behaviors like eating unhealthy food or being sedentary. **Do** portray people with high body weight engaging in diverse activities, careers, and lifestyle behaviors.

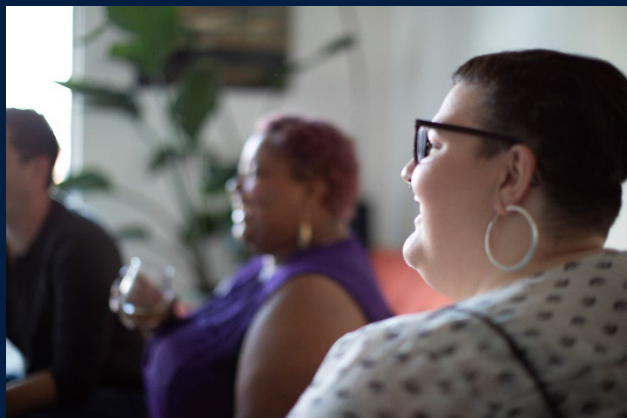
# SHIFTING TO PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

## A NOTE ON OBESITY, DIFFERENT BODY TYPES, AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT TERMINOLOGY, CONT.

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### Additional resources on this topic:

- [What words should we use to talk about weight? A systematic review](#)
- [Terminology matters in medical communication about obesity](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Patient and Family Perspectives on Terms for Obesity](#)
- [NIH: Talking With Patients About Weight Loss](#)
- [The Obesity Action Coalition](#)
- [The Obesity Society](#)



# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
Victim/suffering from/afflicted by	<b>Survivor; cancer survivor; person has/ has experienced/ has had; person lives with or is being treated for</b>	Removes passive language and the implication that the person is “less than” or victimized
Weaknesses	<b>Barriers to change or needs; limitations; challenges</b>	More specific and people-inclusive
Vulnerable, special, or at-risk	<p><b>People who are marginalized; people who are excluded/historically excluded (Note: “traditionally excluded” can be used when referring to countries that don’t have a history of colonization); communities that are disinvested</b></p> <p><b>People who are at increased risk/higher risk for cancer; people who live/work in settings that put them at increased/higher risk</b></p> <p><b>Use underrepresented when you are specifically talking about communities and population groups in context</b></p> <p><b>Use under-resourced when you are specifically talking about resources</b></p>	Removes victimizing language
Handicapped, handi-capable, differently abled, challenged, special needs, special Ed, retarded, lame, impaired, crippled	<p><b>Person with a disability or disabled person</b></p> <p><b>*Please refer to <a href="#">this note</a> for more information on identity-first and person-first terminology</b></p>	Removes infantilizing, offensive, or condescending euphemisms; keeps a person-first perspective
Caretaker	<b>Caregiver</b>	Caregiver implies giving care to people while caretaker implies taking care of an object (e.g., property)
<p>Patient</p> <p><i>*Please refer to <a href="#">this note</a> for more thoughts on use of the word “patient,” with respect to the fact that this word choice may be dependent on audience.</i></p>	<b>Person with specific illness (e.g., a person with cancer)</b>	More people - centered; removes rhetoric around historic medical racism for people of color who have been subjected to unjust/non-consenting medical experimentation

# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

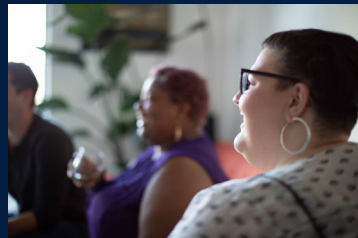
TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
<p>Old people, seniors, frail, fragile</p> <p><i>*Please note that some cultures use "Elder" as a term of respect- consider when this word is appropriate to use and seek guidance from community members.</i></p>	<p><b>Older adults; use numeric designation for age group (ex: people 65 or older)</b></p>	<p>Removes victimizing language</p>
<p>Habit</p> <p><i>*Please note that "habit" is still used in some health promotion materials to refer to lifestyle behaviors.</i></p>	<p><b>Has substance use disorder or addiction (ex: "Tim used to have a tobacco addiction" instead of "Tim had a smoking habit.")</b></p>	<p>Removes stigmatizing or shaming/blaming language and keeps people first</p>
<p>Abuse</p>	<p><b>Substance use or misuse</b></p>	<p>Removes stigmatizing or shaming/blaming language and keeps people first</p>
<p>Smokers, former smokers, addicts, users, abusers, alcoholics, junkies</p>	<p><b>People who smoke/used to smoke/quit smoking/use tobacco/use a substance/ use alcohol/ have a substance use disorder</b></p>	<p>Removes stigmatizing or shaming/blaming language and keeps people first</p>
<p>Obese person/person is obese; overweight, fat</p>	<p><b>Person has obesity, person with obesity, person affected by obesity. You can also do away with the term "obese/obesity" altogether and use terms like: people with high weight, people affected by excess weight; people in larger bodies; people with a BMI of XX (include appropriate BMI measure or range of measures).</b></p> <p><i>*Please note that some community members may prefer to use "body positive" terminology when referring to weight.</i></p>	<p>Person-first perspective; eliminates bias towards weight and oversimplification of systemic causes contributing to obesity</p>



# SHIFTING TO PERSON-CENTERED LANGUAGE

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#)
- [University of Minnesota's Center for Practice Transformation Guide to Person- Centered Language](#)
- [Communicate Health](#)
- [The CDC's Everyday Words for Public Health Communications](#) [The CDC's Clear Communications Index](#)
- [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)





**Race, Ethnicity, and  
National Origin**

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# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN

*From the ACS Editorial Style Guide:* “ General writing that involves reference to race or ethnicity calls for thoughtful consideration, precise language, and an openness to discussions with others of diverse backgrounds about how to frame the text and include language that is appropriate, accurate, and fair. Only reference a person's race or ethnicity when it is pertinent, and its relevance is clear to readers.”

Remember that race and ethnicity are not the same things, and groups of people should be considered as individuals instead of a monolithic group. Avoid broad generalizations and labels, as race and ethnicity are only one part of a person’s identity.



## GENERAL GUIDANCE AND TIPS

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- The terms person of color or people of color (POC/BIPOC/BIMPOC) are meant only for broad usage. Be as specific as possible when you are highlighting racial or ethnic groups such as Black, Asian, American Indian, or Hispanic/Latino people.
- Additionally, be specific about someone’s ethnic, tribal, or national identity when relevant to the story (i.e., saying Korean American instead of Asian American, member of the Blackfoot Tribe instead of Indigenous, Cuban American instead of Hispanic/Latino).
- The word “people” should follow the referenced race. By default, race should never be used as a standalone noun (“Blacks,” “Whites,” etc.). Instead, refer to “Black people,” “Hispanic/Latino people,” etc. You can also use descriptive nouns other than “people” such as Americans, men, women, children, employees, neighbors, and so on. Always capitalize racial and ethnic terminology.
  - Some organizations or individuals may prefer to use race as a standalone noun. For example, **UnidosUS**, our DEI partner, uses Latinos and Hispanics interchangeably. When this is the case, follow the lead of the people you are partnering with.
- Do not add hyphens between a race or ethnicity and the word “American” (for example, use Asian American, not Asian-American).
- Do not assume that all people identify as “American.” If unsure, ask as appropriate. You can also just say “people living in the U.S.”
- For individuals who are more than one race, ask them for their preferred terms. Don’t assume it is OK to automatically label someone as biracial, multiracial, or mixed-race.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN

- Part of undoing structural racism (See *Glossary*) is a willingness to learn from mistakes and to be humble. If you find yourself in a situation where you have done unintentional harm with your word choice regarding race or ethnicity, take the time to listen to and learn from others, and think about where you can improve for next time.
- Great ways to continue your learnings around race and ethnicity at ACS and ACS CAN are:
  - ✓ Join an **Employee Engagement Group**
  - ✓ Check out the **Community Outreach Resources on the DEI page on Society Source**.
  - ✓ Participate in trainings and education sessions offered by the DEI team, including population-specific and diversity trainings on MyADP and Society Source.

## A NOTE ON THE CAPITALIZATION OF RACIAL CATEGORIES

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This continues to be an evolving and sensitive topic across many professional and journalistic organizations. Our current recommendation is the following:

- **All races should always be capitalized, including White.**
  - Given that the ILWG is an ever-evolving document, and in alignment with other organizations such as the National Association of Black Journalists, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Chicago Tribune, the Executive Team has decided to update our practices to capitalize the W in White.
- **When you are working with external partners such as stakeholder groups, coalitions, health care organizations, or community members, please work with them to determine their preferred capitalization and terminology.**
  - If you ever have any concerns or questions regarding situations where preferred terminology or style differs from ACS guidance, **please contact the DEI Team**.

## A NOTE ON USE OF THE WORD “MINORITY”

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Many public health, nonprofit, and healthcare organizations as well as the U.S. government use the word “minority” (e.g., Minority Serving Institutions). The recommendation at ACS and ACS CAN is **not** to use the word minority when referring to racial and ethnic groups. “Minority” implies that there are two categories of race in the U.S.: the “majority” of white people and the “minority” of everyone else. This can be seen as a means to perpetuate racism by using a framework of “us versus them” and minimizes the unique perspectives and experiences of people who have been historically excluded. “Minority” is also not an accurate word to describe the growing cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity that makes up the fabric of the U.S.

It is only appropriate to use the word “minority” when you are partnered with an organization that uses it and you verified that “minority” is their preferred word choice.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
- [Racial equity tools around framing and messaging](#)
- [Race Reporting Guidelines from Race Forward](#)
- [The Sum Of Us: A Progressive Style Guide](#)
- [The Opportunity Agenda: Communications Toolkit](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#)
- [JAMA: Reporting of Race and Ethnicity in Medical and Science Labels](#)
- [The Diversity Style Guide from the Center for Integration and Improvement in Journalism](#)
- [American Medical Association: AMA Style Insider](#)
- [American Heart Association's Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide](#)



# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

## RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES (AIAN)

In the US alone, **there are 574 federally recognized tribes or nations indigenous to America, each with their own cultural identities, languages, traditions, and spiritual beliefs.**

When writing about AIAN people, it's very important to identify them not just as Indigenous, but also by their unique tribal affiliation when requested or relevant to the story.



### **ACS AND ACS CAN RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation for general or broad use in the United States is **American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN).**

**When possible, be specific about a person or community's tribal or national affiliation.**

When you are working with an individual, community partner, or organization, always follow their preference for terminology.

### **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE TERMS INDIGENOUS, AMERICAN INDIAN, AND NATIVE AMERICAN**

#### **INDIGENOUS**

A global term used to describe people who inhabited a geographical area before people of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived.

#### **NATIVE AMERICAN**

A term referring to the Indigenous peoples of North and South America. Sometimes used interchangeably with American Indian.

#### **AMERICAN INDIAN**

A term referring to the Indigenous people of the contiguous United States. This is the term used by Federal Indian Law. It does not include Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES

## SOME POINTERS TO KEEP IN MIND...

- There is no single Indigenous culture or language, and Indigenous people describe their cultures, histories, and homes in many different ways. Always use the terminology the members of the community use to describe themselves collectively to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity.
- Christopher Columbus was so certain the "new" world he landed on was India that he called its people "Indios," which later became "Indians". While the U.S. government continues to use the term "American Indian", many find "Indian" or "native" a painful reminder of the racism, violence, theft, and decimation of their people. Some Indigenous people may favor the term "Native American," while others prefer "American Indian". This terminology is important when it comes to personal preference and should be used with respect.
- In addition to federally recognized tribes, there are also state recognized tribes, tribes that are unrecognized, and tribes that were terminated in the 1950s and 1960s that have not been restored. Not all tribes have federal recognition status.
- A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty), and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.
- Some tribes and tribal nations may refer to individuals as "members", while others may use "citizen", and the words "tribe" and "nation" may hold different meanings from one tribal community to another.
- It's important to remember that some tribal names you're familiar with may not actually originate with that tribe. For example, enrolled members of the Sioux Nation may call themselves Lakota or members of the Navajo Nation may call themselves Diné - their names in their own languages. The best term to use in a given situation usually comes down to preference — not your personal preference, but the preference of the person you're speaking with.
- In Alaska, the Indigenous groups are collectively known as Alaska/Alaskan Natives.
- Do not refer to Indigenous ceremonial or spiritual attire as "costumes". Always ask for the accurate and appropriate name for the items in question.
- There are many terms from Indigenous culture that have been appropriated over time. Phrases such as "pow-wow", "spirit animal," or "low man on the totem pole" are a part of everyday jargon, but to Indigenous people, these terms have significant spiritual meaning or historic context, and using them outside of their original meaning can be seen as disrespectful. If you are an ACS or ACS CAN team member, we encourage you to learn more about the topic of cultural appropriation through training offered by the DEI Team.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
<p>Minority populations/minorities</p> <p><i>*Please note that some Indigenous organizations may use “minority” in their messaging, and you should consult with them on appropriate word choices</i></p>	<p><b>Use specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate such as member of the Apache Tribe, member of the Crow Nation, or Alaskan Native; people of color; people who have been historically excluded.</b></p>	<p>The word “minority” centers whiteness and it is othering, monolithic, and categorizes people as either white or non-white, which is a pillar of systemic racism.</p> <p><i>*Othering is defined as the practice of viewing or treating a group of people as different in an alienating way or in a way that categorizes them as inferior (“us versus them”).</i></p>
<p>Indian</p>	<p><b>AIAN or Indigenous people; Native Americans or American Indians (if in the Americas), Alaska/Alaskan Native (if in Alaska), First Nations (if in Canada), Aboriginal Peoples (if in Australia); First Peoples. Specific tribal affiliation should be used when relevant (e.g., member of the Navajo Nation).</b></p>	<p>Removes outdated or harmful language by centering indigeneity and ancestry, recognizes the incredible diversity and uniqueness of each tribe or nation</p>
<p>Eskimo</p>	<p><b>Inuk (singular), Inuit (plural), First Nations (if Canadian), Alaska Native.</b></p>	<p>“Eskimo” is a term used by European colonizers with racist origins. It does not consider the diversity of the Indigenous people of North America.</p>
<p>Low man on the totem pole, pow-wow, spirit animal; any other words co-opted from Indigenous culture</p>	<p><b>Use a thesaurus for appropriate substitutions</b></p>	<p>Eliminates cultural appropriation of Indigenous symbols and terms</p>
<p>Stakeholders, shareholders- <i>use with discretion when working with Indigenous communities</i></p>	<p><b>Partners, collaborators, allies</b></p>	<p>This term has violent historical context for some tribal and Indigenous organizations.</p>

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Community Outreach Resources on the DEI Team’s Society Source page](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [Indigenous Pact](#)
- [The Native American Journalists’ Association: Terminology Guide](#)
- [Survival International’s Terminology Guide](#)
- [“What We Want to Be Called” by Michael Yellow Bird for American Indian Quarterly](#)
- [The National Museum of the American Indian: Native Knowledge 360](#)
- [The Sinchi Foundation: Don’t use the word Eskimo](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#)



# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

## RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: ASIAN AMERICANS, NATIVE HAWAIIANS, PACIFIC ISLANDERS

We often group these populations together under the term “Asian American and Pacific Islander” (AAPI), but these global communities are very diverse and come from many religions, ethnicities, languages, cultural identities, and countries of origin, representing some of the largest regions of the world.



### **ACS AND ACS CAN RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation for general or broad use is **Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, abbreviated as AANHPI**. When possible, try to be specific about someone’s race and ethnicity rather than using AANHPI as a blanket term for all population groups.

When you are working with an individual, community partner, or organization, always follow their preference for terminology.

### **SOME POINTERS TO KEEP IN MIND...**

- Asian people can be from Southeast, East, South, or Central Asia and may also include people who can trace their ancestry to North Africa or West Asia/the Middle East. It’s important to respect Asian and Asian American people’s origins and cultural identities by being specific when you refer to them (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, Indonesian, etc.).
- Pacific Islanders should only be used for people who are ethnically Pacific Islanders. When you are referring to Pacific Islanders other than Native Hawaiians, try to be as specific as possible regarding ethnic origin.
- Pacific Islanders can be broadly broken into Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian people.
  - Polynesian people include Tongans, Samoans, Tokelauans, Tahitians, and Native Hawaiians.
  - Micronesian people includes Guamanians or Chamorro, Mariana Islanders, Saipanese, Palauan, Yapanese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean, Marshallese, and I-Kiribat.
  - Melanesian people include Fijians, Papua New Guineans, Solomon Islanders, and Ni-Vanuatu.
- Do not use Native Hawaiian to refer to all people who live in Hawaii (Hawaii residents). Only Native Hawaiians should be referred to as Hawaiian.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: ASIAN AMERICANS, NATIVE HAWAIIANS, PACIFIC ISLANDERS

- The acronym AANHPI is somewhat recent and is not widely known. For external audiences, you should always write out “Asians/Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders” first.
- Never use “Asians” as shorthand for Asian Americans (Americans of Asian ancestry). Be specific.

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
Minority populations/minorities  <i>*Please note that some AANHPI organizations may use “minority” in their messaging, and you should consult with them on appropriate word choices</i>	<b>Specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate such as Korean American people, Native Hawaiians, and so on; people of color; people who have been historically excluded.</b>	The word “minority” centers whiteness and it is othering, monolithic, and categorizes people as either white or non-white, which is a pillar of systemic racism.  <i>*Othering is defined as the practice of viewing or treating a group of people as different in an alienating way or in a way that categorizes them as inferior (“us vs. them”).</i>
Alien; illegals; illegal immigrant	<b>Asylum seeker, immigrant, refugee, person seeking citizenship, naturalized citizen. Ask for preference or use term specific to person’s experiences.</b>	Presumes innocence and removes negative or criminalizing language regarding immigration
Oriental; Mongoloid	<b>Asian people, Asian Americans</b>	Removes outdated and offensive language based in historic racism and pseudoscience
BAME, BAM (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic)	<b>Specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate</b>	Removes outdated terms that refer to multiple races/ethnicities in a general or monolithic way

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Community Outreach Resources on the DEI Team’s Society Source page](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#)
- [Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum](#)
- [Asian Pacific American Heritage](#)
- [Defining Diaspora: Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi Identities](#)
- [The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence: AAPI Identities and Diversity](#)
- [“The Inadequacy of the Term Asian American”: Li Zhou for Vox Media](#)
- [JAMA: Reporting of Race and Ethnicity in Medical and Science Labels](#)
- [“Understanding Our Perceptions of Asian Americans”: Peter Kiang for the Asia Society](#)

# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

## RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: BLACK PEOPLE AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

The Black and African American population of the United States is incredibly diverse, with nuanced racial and ethnic identities from all over the globe. Its members have varied histories and represent many languages, religions, cultures, and countries of origin.



### **ACS AND ACS CAN RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation for general or broad use is **Black people and African Americans**. The terms Black and African American are sometimes, but not always, interchangeable.

When you are working with an individual, community partner, or organization, always follow their preference for terminology.

### **SOME POINTERS TO KEEP IN MIND...**

- For people who prefer the term Black, it should always be used as an adjective and never as a standalone noun (e.g., Blacks). The term Black can also be used as a group designation to uplift the collective history, cultural identity, and valued contributions of Black people to society rather than as a skin color alone. Black should always be capitalized.
- African American and Black culture includes many countries of origin. Be as specific as possible when talking about Black people and African Americans to show respect for their cultural identities and when relevant (Senegalese, Nigerian, Jamaican, etc.).
- Black people may refer to themselves using terms signifying:
  - Ethnicities such as Afro-Latino/a, Creole, Caribbean American, or West Indian
  - A specific country of origin, such as Dominican American or Haitian American
- If you are referencing or quoting a study, use the same terminology the study used. Ensure you understand which populations are represented and refer to them accurately and appropriately.

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: BLACK PEOPLE AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
<p>Minority populations/minorities</p> <p><i>*Please note that some Black/ African American organizations may use “minority” in their messaging, and you should consult with them on appropriate word choices.</i></p>	<p><b>Specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate such as Black people or African Americans; people of color; people who have been historically excluded</b></p>	<p>The word “minority” centers whiteness and it is othering*, monolithic, and categorizes people as either white or non-white, which is a pillar of systemic racism.</p> <p><i>*Othering is defined as the practice of viewing or treating a group of people as different in an alienating way or in a way that categorizes them as inferior (“us vs. them”)</i></p>
<p>“Blacks,” “Negro,” “Negroid,” “Coloreds”</p> <p><i>*Please note that some Black/ African American organizations or individuals prefer to say Blacks as a noun and may use the word Negro or Colored, such as the <a href="#">National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</a> or NAACP; you should consult with them on appropriate word choices.</i></p>	<p><b>Black people or African Americans</b></p>	<p>Keeps person-first perspective by removing race as a noun; removes outdated or offensive terms</p>
<p>BAME, BAM (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic)</p>	<p><b>Specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate such as Caribbean American, African American, Black people, and so on</b></p>	<p>Removes outdated terms that refer to multiple races/ethnicities in a general or monolithic way</p>

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Community Outreach Resources on the DEI Team’s Society Source page](#)
- [Center for Black Health & Equity](#)
- [The National Association of Black Journalists](#)
- [The National Black Justice Coalition](#)
- [“The Growing Diversity of Black America”: Christine Tamir for the Pew Research Center](#)
- [“The Gallup Vault: Black Americans’ Preferred Racial Labels”: Lydia Saab for Gallup](#)
- [Urban Institute’s “Urban Wire” Blog: Margaret Simms, Black economist, on race and ethnicity](#)
- [JAMA: Reporting of Race and Ethnicity in Medical and Science Labels](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#)

# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

## RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: HISPANIC/LATINO PEOPLE

Over the years, many pan-ethnic terms have evolved to describe people who trace their roots to Latin America and Spain.

This global community is incredibly diverse and is made up of people from all races, religions, languages, and cultural identities.



### ACS AND ACS CAN RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation for general or broad use is **Hispanic/Latino**. This is what is used by many of our partners and [Hispanic/Latino organizations such as UnidosUS](#).

When you are working with an individual, community partner, or organization, always follow their preference for terminology.

### SOME POINTERS TO KEEP IN MIND...

- **“Hispanic”** very broadly refers to people who descended from Spanish-speaking countries (excluding Brazil, where Portuguese is the primary language).
- **“Latino”** very broadly refers to people of Latin American descent who live in North America and the Caribbean, South America, Central America, Mexico, and Brazil. You may see people use the following derivatives of Latino:
  - **Latina** is the feminine derivative of **Latino**.
  - **Latinx** (*pronounced Latin-EX*), **Latine**, **Latin@**, and **Latinu** are gender-neutral derivatives. Latinx is a term that is still evolving and is not used universally by all Latino communities, so consider your audience before using it.
- Hispanic/Latino culture includes many countries. Be as specific as possible when talking about Hispanic/Latino people to show respect for their cultural identities and origins (Mexican, Cuban, Peruvian, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, etc.).
- You may find that while someone is Spanish-speaking and comes from a Latin American country, the term Hispanic/Latino doesn't fully or accurately describe them (e.g., Chicano/a, Indigenous, Black or Afro-Caribbean, Brazilian).

# RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONAL ORIGIN: HISPANIC/LATINO PEOPLE

- Be mindful that not all people who identify as Hispanic/Latino speak Spanish or use Spanish surnames. They may also have a unique perspective regarding their ancestry, and the impact of colonization or immigration as it relates to their lived experiences or heritage. This in turn may influence their personal preferred terms.

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
Minority populations/minorities  <i>*Please note that some Hispanic/Latino organizations may use “minority” in their messaging, and you should consult with them on appropriate word choices.</i>	<b>Specific terms for the individual race or ethnicity when appropriate such as Hispanic/Latino people, Mexican Americans, etc.; people of color; people who have been historically excluded.</b>	The word “minority” centers on whiteness, and it is othering*, monolithic, and categorizes people as either white or non-white, which is a pillar of systemic racism.  <i>*Othering is defined as the practice of viewing or treating a group of people as different in an alienating way or in a way that categorizes them as inferior (“us vs. them”)</i>
“Hispanics”  <i>*Please note that some Hispanic/Latino organizations or individuals prefer to say Hispanics or Latinos.</i>	<b>Hispanic/Latino people; specific terms such as Cuban American, etc.</b>	Keeps person-first perspective by removing race as a noun
Alien; illegals; illegal immigrant	<b>Asylum seeker, immigrant, refugee, person seeking citizenship, naturalized citizen. Ask for preference or use term specific to person’s experiences.</b>	Presumes innocence and removes negative or criminalizing language regarding immigration

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Community Outreach Resources on the DEI Team’s Society Source page](#)
- [UnidosUS](#)
- [University of California Editorial Style Guide \(Latino/Latina and Hispanic\)](#)
- [North American Congress on Latin America](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#)
- [Interview with Cristina Mora, Mexican American sociologist, on Hispanic/Latino identity](#)
- [League of United Latin American Citizens \(LULAC\)](#)
- [Hispanic Communications Network](#)
- [Hispanic Heritage Foundation](#)
- [National Alliance for Hispanic Health](#)

## Sexual Orientation

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# SEXUAL ORIENTATION

For decades, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) communities have fought for normalizing language that does not stigmatize or stereotype, pathologize, reframe sexuality and gender expression as “taboo,” or silence LGBTQ+ voices and experiences. LGBTQ+ people are a part of every community, and there are as many different terms and labels as there are individuals. Therefore, when you communicate about LGBTQ+ people, there must be space held for human complexity, intersectionality, and diversity.

It is crucial to tailor communications for and about LGBTQ+ people based on insights from the community (i.e., through an advisory board), audience segmentation/testing, and a storyteller’s personal preferences. Do not make assumptions about a person’s sexual orientation. It’s equally important to only communicate about someone’s sexual orientation when it is relevant to the story or if they have given you express permission to do so. Sexual orientation can be very personal and private for some people, who may or may not want it to be public knowledge. There is also the potential to do unintended harm and possibly even reinforce a stigma or stereotype if the mention of sexual orientation is not contextualized. Additionally, LGBTQ+ people face unique barriers to cancer care, and using respectful language can help build trust between LGBTQ+ people with cancer and health care professionals.

Remember that there is a difference between sexual orientation and gender identity (*covered in the next section*), which are independent of each other.



## UP CLOSE: INTERNAL LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

- [The LGBTQ & Allies Employee Engagement Group](#)
- [Our partnerships with LGBTQ+ organizations](#)
- [Cancer disparities research highlights, including an LGBTQ+- based study](#)
- [Cancer Facts for Lesbian and Bisexual Women](#)
- [Cancer Facts for Gay and Bisexual Men](#)
- [Cancer Care for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People](#) (Professional audiences)
- [LGBTQ+ People and Cancer Fact Sheet](#) (Professional audiences)
- [Pride Resources on Brand Toolkit](#)





# SEXUAL ORIENTATION

## A NOTE ON THE LGBTQ+ ACRONYM

The terminology for LGBTQ+ communities is constantly evolving and is deeply personal and individualized. Just as new terms are created, old terms once historically considered hurtful have been reclaimed by some communities (e.g., the word “queer”). Even the acronym “LGBTQ” is fluid, and you may see it written with fewer or more letters depending on the person or group (e.g., LGBTQIA to include intersex and asexual, LGBTQI2S to include intersex and Two-Spirit). The “+” is for people who identify with the acronym but don’t necessarily identify with the specific ones listed. If you’re more interested in learning about the different acronyms and what the letters stand for, please explore the resources listed at the end of this section or get involved with the LGBTQ+ & Allies EEG.

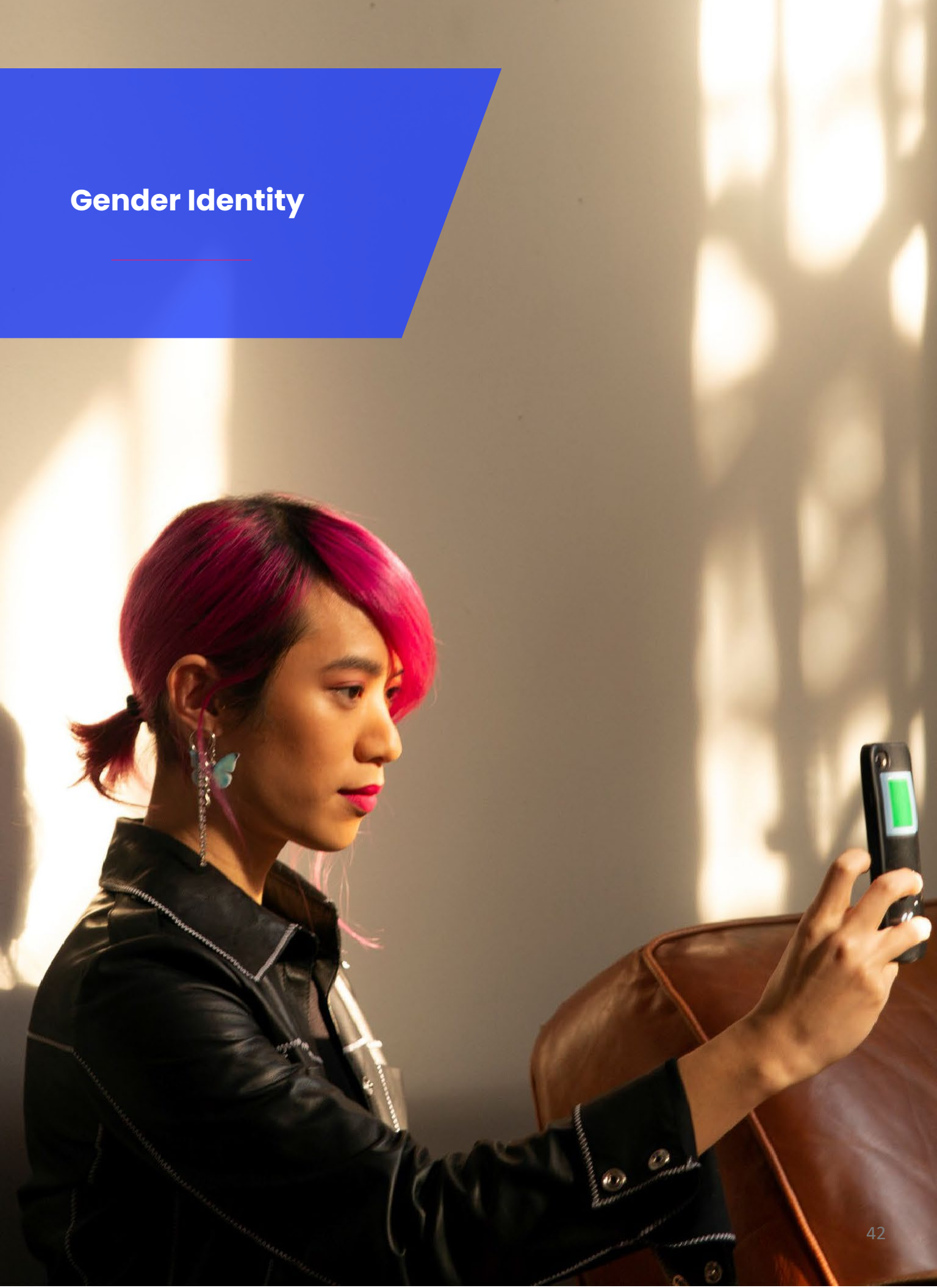
Also note that the word “queer” was once considered derogatory and has only recently been reclaimed by some (not all) community members. Use this word with careful thought and consideration given to your audience.

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
MSM (men who have sex with other men)*, FSF (women who have sex with other women); Homosexual, Sexual Minority  <i>*Please note that some of our health care partners and other nonprofits still use the terms MSM and FSF.</i>	<b>LGBTQ+ people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer/questioning person; LGBTQ+ communities</b>  <b>*Please note that you may see additional letters in the acronym depending on the organization or individual. For example, you may see A added for asexual or I for intersex. Always check with your community partner for their preferred acronyms.</b>	Reflects the diversity of LGBTQ+ communities and removes outdated or offensive terminology
“Identifies as”	<b>“(Name) is gay, bisexual, pansexual, a lesbian, etc.”</b>	Removes implication that sexual orientation is a choice.
Sexual preference or lifestyle	<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Removes outdated language; same as above

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [CommunicateHealth’s Inclusive Language Playbook: Writing for LGBTQ+ Communities](#)
- [GLAAD's Media Reference Guide, 10th ed.](#)
- [National LGBT Health Center Glossary](#)
- [Center of Excellence for TransgenderHealth Resources](#)
- [National LGBT Cancer Network](#)
- [University of North Carolina's Writing Center for Gender Inclusive Terminology](#)
- [OutRight Action International: Acronyms Explained](#)
- [The Association of Cancer Community Centers: Sexual and Gender Minority Patients](#)

# Gender Identity



# GENDER IDENTITY

Making decisions about gendered language in your writing can be challenging against the status quo as traditionally, masculine nouns and pronouns have always been used when a subject's gender is unclear (for example, in job titles such as "fireman" or "mailman"). The general public has historically also leaned on gendered language when it comes to broadly categorizing groups of people by referring to them as "men" or by assigning gender-specific titles to people such as "Mr." or "Ms."



Gender-inclusive terminology is constantly evolving and changing with the times. Additionally, someone's gender identity may shift over time or not be assigned to any one specific gender at all. It has become standard for most journalistic or professional organizations to use gender-neutral language to be as inclusive of all gender identities as possible. While there are no universally agreed-upon guidelines for this, there are strategies you can take to avoid stereotypes and show sensitivity in your writing.



## GENERAL GUIDANCE AND TIPS

- When you are using nouns that typically end in -man or -woman (e.g., congresswoman, businessman, chairman), use -person (e.g., chairperson). If you are writing about a specific individual and they have shared their pronouns, adjust accordingly (e.g., Susan uses she/her and is a chairwoman).
  - The same rule can apply when the noun begins with man- or woman-. An example of this is saying humankind (or simply "people") instead of mankind.
- There are many alternate word choices for nouns that are traditionally masculine. You can always use a thesaurus if you need some ideas for more gender-inclusive word choices, such as substituting "members of Congress" instead of Congressmen or "first-year students" for "freshmen."
- If a person has shared with you that they are trans, genderfluid/genderqueer, gender nonconforming, Two-Spirit, or nonbinary, please be sensitive to using their stated name, pronouns, and gender. It is discrimination to use someone's name or gender assigned at birth when they have explicitly indicated other preferences.
- If you are working on materials and you have a required field with salutations (e.g., Mr., Ms., Mx., Dr., etc.) seek feedback on appropriate salutations from a diverse group of stakeholders when possible. Don't make assumptions about which salutations are preferred.

# GENDER IDENTITY

## HELPFUL DEFINITIONS AROUND GENDER IDENTITY

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From **GLAAD’s Media Reference Guide**: “To understand many of the terms used by transgender and non-binary people, it is necessary to understand the difference between sex at birth, gender, identity, and gender expression – and how those three things are not the same as sexual orientation.”

Here we provide some definitions from LGBTQ+ organizations that will be helpful as we continue to improve our storytelling about transgender and non-binary people:

**Gender Expression:** External manifestations of gender expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, voice, and/or behavior. Societies classify these external cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s deeply held core sense of self in relation to gender. It does not always correspond to biological sex and is a separate concept from sexual orientation and gender expression.

**Gender Nonconforming (GNC):** A scientific term to describe someone who does not follow gender stereotypes or who expands ideas of gender expression and identity. Being GNC is not the same as being nonbinary, and both trans- and cisgender people also can be GNC.

**Nonbinary:** An adjective used by people who experience gender outside of the binary categories of “man” and “woman.” It is not the same as being transgender. Nonbinary is a very personalized umbrella term that can be used in many ways to express one’s gender. A few examples you may see or hear are agender, bigender, demigender, or pangender, as well as the shorthand term “enby.”

**Sex (Sex at Birth):** The biological and physiological characteristics that are used to classify someone as male or female. It is not the same as someone’s gender identity.

**Two-Spirit:** American Indians and Alaska Natives who are male, female, and sometimes intersex individuals who combine activities of both men and women with traits unique to their status as Two-Spirit people.

**Transgender:** The scientifically accurate term to describe someone whose gender identity is different from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. This is not dependent on someone’s physical appearance, sexual orientation, or medical/surgical history. A transgender person may have additional or different terms to describe themselves more specifically.

### REFERENCES:

- [Indian Health Services: Two-Spirit](#)
- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 11th Edition](#)
- [PFLAG LGBTQ+ Glossary](#)
- [National Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists Stylebook](#)



# GENDER IDENTITY

## A NOTE ON GENDER-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE AND CANCER

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A cancer diagnosis can be hard no matter what gender identity you are. Using inclusive language for transgender, gender nonconforming, genderqueer/genderfluid, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary people is an essential part of patient-centered care and can help build trust between health care professionals and people with cancer when done in a culturally competent way. Gender-inclusive language is also an evolving topic around the development and maintenance of clinical guidance publications and health communications materials. For now, we offer the following recommendations:

- Follow the language used in [ACS' Clinical Guidelines](#) and the [Cancer Care for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People one-pager](#).
- Stay informed on updates to the language as the conversation evolves.
- If writing about an individual, always ask for their pronouns and use the terms they use.

For the development of external-facing communications materials, the following is taken from [The Inclusive Language Playbook: Writing for LGBTQ+ Communities by CommunicateHealth](#): “We recommend using gender-conscious language. That means being thoughtful about using gendered language when gender is important and using gender-neutral language when it’s not. Using this approach helps your writing honor your audiences’ genders while being inclusive. Discuss language in communication materials and test them with your priority audiences.”

## A NOTE ON PRONOUN USE

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When someone shares their pronouns with you, they are informing you how to refer to them in the third person (or how you should refer to them when you’re talking to someone else). Pronouns are very important to gender expression, individuality, and validation of personhood. They can include she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/hir, and many other options. If you’re unsure of someone’s pronouns, you can use their name until you’ve had an opportunity to ask them directly what pronouns you should use. Do not assume anything about someone’s gender or sexual orientation based on their pronouns or outward appearance.

Using an individual’s shared pronouns is a sign of respect and honor, and it helps us to normalize gender-inclusive terms and identities for everyone. If you’d like to learn more about pronouns, please check out these great resources:

- [Pronouns Matter: Mypronouns.org](#)
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
- [Pronouns Explained: CNNWellness](#)
- [Talking About Pronouns in the Workplace: The Human Rights Campaign](#)

Did you know that you can add your pronouns to your Outlook signature at ACS and ACS CAN? [Find out more!](#)

# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
<p>Exclusively using “men” or “women” in materials when your message is targeting a general audience that may include trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, or Two-Spirit people.</p>	<p><b>Use gender-affirming/gender-conscious language. This means using gendered language when it is important (e.g., your target audience is very specific, such as Black women between the ages of 18-40) and using gender-neutral language when it is not (i.e., screening for everyone, everywhere).</b></p> <p><b>Always test materials with your priority audience regarding gender - focused content.</b></p>	<p>More gender-inclusive</p>
<p>Transsexual, transgendered, transgenders</p>	<p><b>Transgender; transgender person/man/woman</b></p> <p><b>Use the full word “transgender” on the first mention and “trans” on the second mention and after</b></p> <p><b>Please note that some people may also use the terms gender nonconforming, genderfluid, genderqueer, Two-Spirit, nonbinary or something else alongside trans.</b></p>	<p>Removes outdated and offensive language</p>
<p>Gender variant</p>	<p><b>Gender Nonconforming (GNC)</b></p> <p><b>Being gender nonconforming is not the same thing as being trans or nonbinary.</b></p>	<p>Replaces outdated term with one used by LGBTQ+ communities</p>
<p>Biologically or genetically male/female, natural or birth sex</p>	<p><b>Sex assigned at birth</b></p> <p><b>A person’s actual gender identity should always be what is referenced.</b></p>	<p>Removes outdated and offensive language. Should only be referenced if relevant and with express permission.</p>
<p>Sex reassignment surgery, pre-op/post-op, sex change, Female to Male (FTM) or Male to Female (MTF), “changed genders”</p>	<p><b>Transition</b></p> <p><b>Gender-affirming care</b></p>	<p>Unless a story is specifically about medical transition as it relates to cancer or policies related to access to cancer care for transgender people, transition does not need to be mentioned.</p>
<p>Hermaphrodite</p>	<p><b>Intersex as an adjective (e.g., Taylor is intersex.)</b></p>	<p>Removes outdated language</p>
<p>“Preferred pronouns”</p>	<p><b>Pronouns or shared pronouns</b></p>	<p>Helps to affirm a person’s gender expression and identity</p>
<p>“Identifies as”</p>	<p><b>“(Name) is a man/woman/transgender woman” etc.</b></p>	<p>Removes implication that gender identity is a choice.</p>

# GENDER IDENTITY

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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- [GLAAD's Media Reference Guide, 11th ed.](#)
- [National LGBT Health Center Glossary](#) [Center of Excellence for TransgenderHealth Resources](#)
- [National LGBT Cancer Network](#)
- [University of North Carolina's Writing Center for Gender Inclusive Terminology](#)
- [OutRight Action International: Acronyms Explained](#)
- [The National LGBT Cancer Center's Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Patients homepage](#)
- [The Association of Cancer Community Centers' Cancer Care Considerations for Sexual and Gender Minority Patients](#)
- [CancerCare's Gender Diversity Fact Sheet](#)
- [Indian Health Services: Two-Spirit](#)
- [PFLAG LGBTQ+ Glossary](#)
- [National Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists Stylebook](#)



# Disability Status

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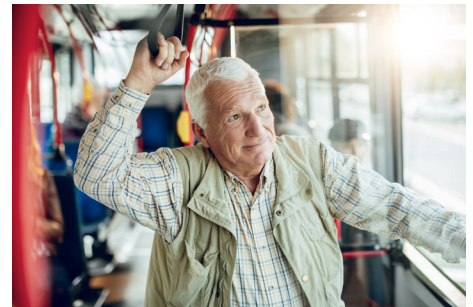


# DISABILITY STATUS

Much like writing about race and ethnicity, careful thought and respect should go into communicating about disability status. No two people in the disability community are alike, and the language constantly evolves. The best way to ensure accuracy and objectiveness is to work directly with the community or ask for individual preferences and feedback. You should also consider whether mentioning someone's disability status is relevant to your story. For some people with disabilities, their status is an important part of their cancer story, and disability is part of their identity. Others may prefer to keep that information private, and it should never be assumed that someone is willing to openly share their status unless they disclose it to you.



What society considers a disability is also evolving, as the general public has become more aware of invisible illnesses and chronic conditions. In addition to mental health diagnoses, conditions such as developmental disorders, cognitive or learning disorders, chronic pain conditions, immune or endocrine disorders, traumatic brain injuries, deafness/blindness, and many others can be considered invisible disabilities. Disabilities can be present at birth, can be acquired (as the result of an acute illness like cancer or a traumatic injury like a car accident), can appear gradually over a person's lifetime, or can come and go in periodic intervals and intensity.



Care should be taken not to elaborate a story about someone with a disability using overly heroic or inspiring jargon (e.g., “struggles with,” “champion,” “is strong for enduring,” “cheery despite disability”). This can reinforce negative stereotypes that everyone with a disability is expected to live up to inspiring or extraordinary expectations. People with disabilities want full acceptance into society and to simply be able to live their lives, and this type of false or exaggerated narrative can cause unintended harm.

## UP CLOSE: REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

[The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) has made it possible for some states to put laws and policies into effect that require inclusive language on official documents for or about people with disabilities. For example, some jurisdictions require person-first language. When you partner with health systems and organizations at the state and local levels, it's always a good idea to check for any state language mandates to help guide your writing process around disability.



# DISABILITY STATUS

## A NOTE ON PERSON-FIRST AND IDENTITY-FIRST PERSPECTIVES

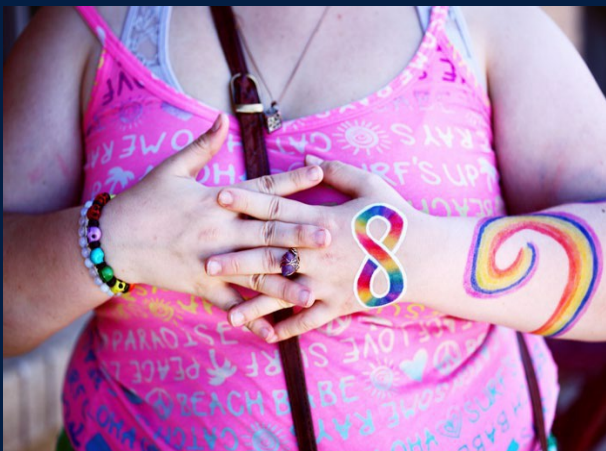
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Just like no two people with disabilities are the same, no two disability communities are the same either. As disability rights have become part of political and public health discourse, disability advocates have worked hard and faced years of institutional discrimination (ableism) to have their voices heard and cultures recognized. It is crucial to know how a person with disabilities identifies themselves as a sign of respect, especially if they align with a specific community's beliefs.

Some people with disabilities prefer person-first language, where personhood is listed before the disability (i.e., a person with cystic fibrosis).

Other disabled people may prefer identity-first language, where the disability is listed first (i.e., a blind person, an autistic person).

There are three broad communities of note who have collectively advocated for identity-first language: the autistic community, the d/Deaf, and Hard of Hearing (HOH) community, and the blind community.



# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
Handicapped, handi-capable, differently abled, dis-ABILITY, challenged, special needs, special Ed, retarded, lame, impaired, crippled	<p><b>A person with a disability (or disabled person if the individual prefers identity-first language)</b></p> <p><b>Terms such as “ability” or “special ability” should never replace “disability.”</b></p>	Removes infantilizing, offensive, or condescending euphemisms; keeps a person-first perspective
Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair	<b>Uses a wheelchair, uses a mobility device</b>	Focuses on empowerment by emphasizing what someone can do
Handicapped parking/restroom	<b>Accessible parking/restroom</b>	Emphasizes the importance of accessibility
Able-bodied, body ability, normal, whole	<b>People without disabilities</b>	Removes negative framing around having a disability
Non-verbal, mute, dumb, deaf and dumb, deaf-mute	<p><b>Non-speaking; uses alternative communication method or Augmentative Alternative Communications (AAC); uses sign language or American Sign Language (ASL); is d/Deaf or hard of hearing; is neurodivergent (Please note that “deaf” refers to audiological status, and “Deaf” refers to the culture and community of Deaf people.)</b></p> <p><b>Try to avoid using terms like “deaf” and “blind” as slang or out of context (e.g., “turning a blind eye”).</b></p>	Emphasizes empowerment, normalizes alternate modes of communication, and reduces stigma/othering towards non-speaking people and neurodivergent people
Visually impaired	<b>Blind (complete vision loss) or legally blind (almost complete vision loss) person, a person who is blind or legally blind; a person who has low or limited vision</b>	Removes outdated and victimizing language
Victim, suffering from, afflicted by	<b>Survivor; cancer survivor; person has/ has experienced/ has had a stroke, a congenital disability, etc.</b>	Removes passive language and the implication that the person is “less than” or victimized

# TERMINOLOGY REQUIRING A CLOSER LOOK

TERMS TO AVOID	SUGGESTED REPLACEMENT	RATIONALE
Insane, crazy, schizo, gone mad, mental health case, mentally ill, hysterical	<b>Person with a mental health condition or psychiatric disability</b> <b>Defer to personal preference when writing about individuals.</b>	Breaks down stigmas around mental health using more responsible language from the American Psychological Association (APA)
Learning disabled, dumb, illiterate, slow learner	<b>Person with a learning, developmental, or cognitive disability; person is neurodivergent</b>	Removes infantilizing, offensive, or condescending euphemisms; keeps a person-first perspective
Addicted/drug users, drug abusers, smokers	<b>Person with a substance use disorder; person who smokes/smoked</b>	Breaks down stigmas around mental health using more responsible language from the APA
High functioning or low functioning (regarding cognitive, learning, or developmental disorders)	<b>Use name of medical diagnosis to accurately describe person's condition</b>	Eliminates dismissive or reductive language around a person's social and cognitive abilities
Has "fits", spastic	<b>Has epilepsy/has seizures/has a seizure disorder</b>	Eliminates offensive and outdated jargon
Defect or deficit	<b>Has a specific condition</b>	Removes negative connotation around the disability
Deformed	<b>Do not use as an adjective; instead, describe the specific disability or cause of deformity (e.g., person has a cranial deformity, person is an amputee)</b>	Removes negative connotation around the disability

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Diversability](#)
- [Disability Visibility Project](#)
- [Why Language Matters](#)
- [National Disability Authority](#)
- [National Center on Disability and Journalism Style Guide](#)
- [The ADA's Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities](#)
- [How to Write and Report About People With Disabilities, 8th ed.](#)
- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network \(ASAN\): Using Identity-First Language \(for Neurodivergent Populations\)](#)
- [Health Journalism Blog: The Distinction Between Person-First and Identity- First](#)

# Appendix

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## WHAT IS HEALTH EQUITY?

Health equity is not a program but rather an over-arching vision of what it means for every person, in every community, to achieve optimal health — especially communities who have been marginalized. To achieve health equity in every community, the barriers to health must be removed. These barriers are complex and have many historic, social, economic, cultural, political, and geographical influences that intertwine and impact each other at all levels. They include imbalances of power and privilege between groups of people, such as poverty, racism, and discrimination.

When these barriers are not addressed, they can have serious consequences such as lack of access to:

- healthy and affordable foods;
- safe neighborhoods and stable, affordable housing;
- quality education;
- accessible and affordable transportation;
- secure employment with fair pay and paid sick leave;
- comprehensive insurance coverage; and
- the health care system, including high-quality health care.

Some groups of people will experience these consequences much more often or to a greater degree than others due to decades of injustice and discriminatory policies and practices at all levels of community and government and within organizations. When a difference in health status or mortality arises between groups of people because of unfair, unjust, avoidable, and systemic causes, it is called a health disparity. Along these same lines, differences in cancer outcomes are called cancer disparities.

**Accessibility:** When the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered, and products, services, events, and facilities are created or modified so that they can be used by everyone.<sup>1</sup>

**Ally:** A general term for individuals who stand up for and support historically excluded groups. Allyship is an ongoing process of learning, listening, recognizing privilege, building relationships, and taking action to fight oppression.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Bias:** Partiality; an inclination or predisposition for or against something.<sup>4</sup> When discussing cultural competency, there are two types of bias<sup>5</sup>:

- **Explicit/Conscious:** The person is very clear about their feelings or attitudes, and related behaviors are conducted with intent, leading to exclusion or physical or verbal harm.
- **Implicit/Unconscious:** The person is unaware that their feelings or attitudes are harmful, and they can even be acting in direct opposition to their stated values and beliefs. This type of bias can seep into a person's affect or behavior without their awareness.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Cancer Disparity:** A health disparity related to cancer outcomes.

**Cisgender:** Refers to someone whose gender identity aligns with the gender and biological sex assigned at birth.<sup>6</sup>

**Class:** Relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, occupational status, housing privileges, and/or power.<sup>7</sup>

**Culture:** A collective system of beliefs, values, and ways of living shared by a group. Culture can include language, history, spiritual beliefs, stories, food, social behaviors, attire, customs, traditions, community needs, and any other aspect that makes a group unique.<sup>8</sup>

**Cultural Appropriation:** Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or objects from someone else's culture without permission. It can be particularly harmful when the source community is a historically excluded group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object in question is of a sensitive nature (i.e., a religious symbol).<sup>9</sup>

**Disability:** A physical, sensory, neurological, cognitive, developmental, emotional, or mental health condition that restricts an individual's ability to engage in one or more major life activities. This is due to personal and environmental factors including negative societal attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, restrictive policies, and limited social support.<sup>10</sup>

**Discrimination:** The unjust or prejudicial treatment of groups of people on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, income level, education level, age, size, or place of origin.

- **Ableism:** Discrimination against people with disabilities
- **Ageism:** Discrimination against older adults
- **Classism:** Discrimination based on social or economic class
- **Cisgenderism/Transphobia:** Discrimination against transgender people
- **Colorism:** Discrimination based on the construct that lighter skin color is favorable
- **Ethnocentrism:** Discrimination against people who speak English as a second language
- **Heterosexism/Homophobia:** Discrimination against LGBTQ+ people
- **Racism:** Discrimination based on race
- **Sexism:** Discrimination based on gender identity and sex
- **Sizeism:** Discrimination based on someone's size or weight
- **Xenophobia:** Discrimination against people from other countries

**Diversity:** Describes the many qualities and characteristics that make us alike or different and helps us identify as members of communities or groups.

**Disinvested:** Referring to the fact that neighborhoods, schools, institutions, and communities have been historically excluded from equitable distribution of resources.<sup>19</sup>

**EEG:** Acronym for Employee Engagement Group. An EEG is a voluntary, employee-led, welcoming space to connect with one another, discuss difficult topics, share personal experiences, celebrate culture, and foster learning opportunities. Membership includes employees representing various population groups or cultures, plus their allies and co-collaborators.

**Equality:** Providing everyone with the same tools and resources.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Equity:** Fair and just treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for everyone, while addressing needs and eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation and success of all people.<sup>11</sup>

**Ethnicity:** Belonging to a group of people with a shared culture, language, religion, ancestry, or other characteristics handed down from one generation to the next. Groups of people with the same ethnicity may or may not come from the same country or live together. Ethnicity is not the same as race. Examples of ethnicity include Korean, Cuban, Haitian, Navajo, Chicano, Italian, and Ashkenazi Jewish.<sup>12</sup>

**Genderfluid:** Describes a person who does not consistently adhere to one fixed gender and who may move from one gender to another.<sup>2</sup>

**Gender Identity:** A person's deeply held core sense of self in relation to gender. It does not always correspond to biological sex and is a separate concept from sexual orientation and gender expression.<sup>2</sup>

**Gender Nonconforming (GNC):** A scientific term to describe someone who does not follow gender stereotypes or who expands ideas of gender expression and identity. Being GNC is not the same as being nonbinary, and both trans- and cisgender people also can be GNC.<sup>2</sup>

**Health Disparity:** A particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantages and other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health. Changes in health disparities help us measure whether there is progress toward health equity.

**Health Equity:** Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including (but not limited to) powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.<sup>11</sup>

**HAES:** "Health At Any Size." A term created by the [Association for Size Diversity and Health \(ASDAH\)](#), HAES considers health as existing on a continuum that varies with time and individual circumstances, that health status should never be used to oppress, and that everyone should have access to quality health care regardless of size. HAES promotes health equity and supports ending weight discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

**Inclusion:** Refers to our behaviors and interactions with one another. It describes how we collaborate, seek, and value different perspectives while demonstrating mutual respect.

**Indigenous:** The descendants of people who inhabited a country or geographical region before people of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through colonization, conquest, settlement, or other means. Indigenous is a term used worldwide. Examples of Indigenous people are the Lakota tribe of the United States, the Mayan people of Guatemala, the Aborigine and Torres Strait Island people of Australia, the Saami people of northern Europe, and the Inuit and Aleutian people of the Arctic Circle regions of North America.<sup>14</sup>

**Intersectionality:** A term created by [American activist Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) to describe the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group. It's an understanding that people have overlapping identities, which are varied, complex, and shaped by the systems they interface. Intersectionality acknowledges that no two people's lived experiences are the same, and that we experience discrimination, oppression, or privilege in multifaceted ways.<sup>15</sup>



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**LGBTQ+:** The acronym used by ACS and ACS CAN for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning people and identities. The + is added to recognize and hold space for all other non-heterosexual, non-cisgender people. There are many acceptable variations of this acronym (see sections on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).<sup>16</sup>

**Marginalized:** Being treated as if one is powerless or insignificant. Can be used as a general term but try to be specific in your word choices to describe the community or person and how they are marginalized (ex: people in the neighborhood are marginalized due to discriminatory housing practices.) Alternate ways to say this would be “excluded” or “historically excluded”, “disenfranchised,” or “underrepresented.” If you work in global health and are referring to people from a country that does not have a history of colonization, you can also say “traditionally excluded.”<sup>17</sup>

**Microaggression:** A commonplace verbal, behavioral, or situational occurrence that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to members of an oppressed group. Microaggressions can be intentional, or they can be implicit.<sup>4</sup>

**National Origin:** Where a person or family is from, including birthplace, ethnicity, ancestry, culture, and language. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with nationality and country of origin.<sup>9</sup>

**Neurodiversity:** The diversity of the human mind and the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning. Neurodiversity includes both neurotypical and neurodivergent people. A neurodiverse group would be one with multiple neurotypes present.<sup>10</sup>

**Neurodivergence:** A term created by [autistic sociologist Judy Singer](#) to describe having a mind that functions in ways that diverge from the dominant or “typical” (neurotypical) societal norms. Neurodivergence is extremely broad and includes (but is not limited to) people with sensory or developmental disorders (autism, ADHD), learning or cognitive disorders (dyslexia, dyscalculia), mental health conditions (bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety), neurological conditions (Tourette syndrome, traumatic brain injuries), genetic conditions (Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome), and intellectual disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

**Nonbinary:** An adjective used by people who experience gender outside of the binary categories of “man” and “woman.” It is not the same as being transgender. Nonbinary is a very personalized umbrella term that can be used in many ways to express one’s gender. A few examples you may see or hear are agender, bigender, demigender, or pangender, as well as the shorthand term “enby.”<sup>16</sup>

**Obesity:** As defined by the [George Washington University Stop Obesity Alliance](#), “Obesity is a highly prevalent chronic disease characterized by excessive fat accumulation or distribution that presents a risk to health and requires lifelong care. Virtually every system in the body is affected by obesity. Major chronic diseases associated with obesity include diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The body mass index (weight in kg/height in meters<sup>2</sup>) is used to screen for obesity, but it does not displace clinical judgment. BMI is not a measure of body fat. Social determinants of health, race, ethnicity, and age may modify the risk associated with a given BMI. Bias and stigmatization directed at people with obesity contributes to poor health and impaired treatment. Every person with obesity should have access to evidence-based treatment.”

**Prejudice:** A negative attitude or judgement toward another person or group formed in advance of any experience with that person or group. Prejudices can be learned and unlearned.<sup>4</sup>

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Pronouns:** A word used instead of a noun or phrase. Common pronouns include I, me, she, he, they, them, us, etc.

**Queer:** An adjective used by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves as not exclusively heterosexual or cisgender. The word “queer” was once used as a derogatory name for LGBTQ+ people but has since been embraced by some (not all) LGBTQ+ people as acceptable. It should be used carefully and thoughtfully.<sup>16</sup>

**Race:** A social construct created to establish the superiority of some groups of people over others. Race designations and how racial categorizations are enforced (racism) have changed over time. There is no genetic or biological basis for race.<sup>12</sup>

**Racism:** A system of racial prejudice combined with social and institutional power that grants advantages and power to one group over others and systemically oppresses people of color. Racism is different from prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. It can be individual, cultural, institutional, and/or systematic.<sup>12</sup>

**Sex:** The biological and physiological characteristics that are used to classify someone as male or female. It is not the same as someone’s gender identity.<sup>6</sup>

**Sexual Orientation:** The scientifically accurate term for someone’s physical, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to other people. It is not the same as gender identity.<sup>16</sup>

**Social Determinants of Health (SDOH):** The conditions all around us in which we are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. SDOH can impact a person’s health in many ways; they can affect your health risk, health outcomes, and your overall quality of life and well-being. SDOH are usually non-medical factors and outside of your control. They include (but are not limited to):

- job opportunities with fair income and paid leave
- high-quality education
- healthy and affordable food
- affordable housing in safe neighborhoods
- transportation that is accessible and affordable
- literacy and language skills
- community and social support

SDOH are often influenced by long-standing policies and systems and should include experiences with racism and discrimination in their analysis.<sup>17,18</sup>

**SOGI:** An acronym for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, sometimes used in academic publications, surveys, or research. It includes all gender identities and all sexual orientations.<sup>16</sup>

**Stereotypes:** A set of generalizations, beliefs, and expectations about the qualities and characteristics of the members of a population group or social categories. Stereotypes are usually negative, exaggerated, resistant to revisions, and can influence perceptions and judgments.<sup>4</sup>

**Structural Racism:** A system that reinforces and perpetuates racism through policies, practices, cultural representation, or other norms. Structural racism works within the major systems we all exist in and rely on, such as politics, health care, education, criminal justice, and the economy. Systemic racism and structural racism are closely related, but structural racism considers the historical, cultural, and socio-psychological aspects of our society.<sup>19</sup>

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Systemic Racism:** In many ways, “systemic racism” and “structural racism” are synonymous. If there is a difference between the terms, it can be said to exist because a structural racism analysis pays more attention to the historical, cultural, and social-psychological aspects of our currently racialized society.<sup>19</sup>

**Transgender:** The scientifically accurate term to describe someone whose gender identity is different from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. This is not dependent on someone’s physical appearance, sexual orientation, or medical/surgical history. A transgender person may have additional or different terms to describe themselves more specifically.<sup>16</sup>

**Two-Spirit:** American Indians and Alaska Natives who are male, female, and sometimes intersex individuals who combine activities of both men and women with traits unique to their status as Two-Spirit people.<sup>16</sup>

**Underrepresented:** Not represented fairly or adequately. Can be used to describe communities or groups of people but must be put into context (ex: people of color were underrepresented at the Minority Health Month planning meeting.)<sup>19</sup>

**Under-resourced:** A community or group lacking access to major resources such as fair income, safe housing, healthy and affordable food, transportation, education, and access to health care. Should only be used in a literal sense (ex: the neighborhood is under-resourced in terms of access to grocery stores.)<sup>20</sup>

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Please use the following pre-approved guidance for any marketing and communications opportunities or materials development. This Pocket Guide is intended to be used by American Cancer Society (ACS) and American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) team members and volunteers. It can also be used and shared with any external partners.

## Additional resources available to all team members:

- [Inclusive Language & Writing Guide: Full Version](#)
- [ACS Brand Refresh Tools, Templates, and Guides](#)
- [ACS Editorial Style Guide](#)
- [Health Equity Key Messages](#)
- [The Facts On Our Fight](#)
- [Cancer Facts and Figures](#)
- [ACS Marketing Toolkit](#)
- [The health equity landing page on cancer.org](#)

## General Tips

- **Whenever possible, invite people from the communities you are writing about to co-create your materials with you and provide input as subject matter experts and/or testers.**
- Recognize that not all communities can adopt health recommendations or can take action in complying with clinical guidelines due to a lack of resources and other systemic barriers, such as structural racism.
- Avoid using stereotypes or promoting stigmas in your words and images — this includes outdated terminology.
- Choose culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive words and images that are relevant to the community you are trying to reach.
- Use language that's inclusive, clear, consistent, and plain.
- Use the everyday terms, names, titles, and labels that are preferred by the community you're writing for and about when it's relevant to the story you're telling.
- Use the correct identity perspective preferred by the specific community or person you are referring to, whether person-first or identity-first.
- Acknowledge that communities and individuals ultimately own their own stories and that their voices must always be centered, prioritized, and given credit/attribution.

## Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin

- All races should always be capitalized, including White.
- When working with external partners such as stakeholder groups, health care organizations, or community members, please work with them to determine their preferred terminology. **If you ever have any concerns or questions regarding situations where preferred terminology or style differs from ACS guidance, [please contact the DEI Team.](#)**

## Race, Ethnicity and National Origin, continued

- The recommendation for general or broad use in the United States is **American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) people. Try to be specific about a person’s or community’s tribal or national affiliation (ex: member of Blackfoot Tribe, member of Navajo Nation, Inuit people).**
- The recommendation for general or broad use is **Hispanic/Latino people.** This is what is used by many of our partners and [Hispanic/Latino organizations such as UnidosUS](#). Latina is the feminine form, and Latinx is the gender-neutral form.
- The recommendation for general or broad use is **Black people and African Americans.** The terms Black and African American are sometimes, but not always, interchangeable.
- The recommendation for general or broad use is **Asians, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, abbreviated as AANHPI.** Try to be specific about someone’s race and ethnicity rather than using AANHPI as a blanket term for all population groups. Pacific Islanders should only be used for people who are ethnically Pacific Islanders. Do not use Native Hawaiian to refer to all people who live in Hawaii (Hawaii residents). Only Native Hawaiians should be referred to as Hawaiian.

## Disability Status

- Care should be taken not to elaborate a story about someone with a disability using overly heroic or inspiring jargon (i.e., “struggles with,” “champion,” “is strong for enduring,” “cheery despite disability”). This can reinforce negative stereotypes that everyone with a disability is expected to live up to inspiring or extraordinary expectations. This type of false or exaggerated narrative can cause unintended harm.
- Be aware that some people with disabilities prefer person-first language, where personhood is listed before the disability (e.g., a person with cystic fibrosis). Other disabled people may prefer identity-first language, where the disability is listed first (e.g., a blind person, an autistic person). **Use person-first as the default when you don’t know someone’s preference.**
- **Refer to “a person with a disability/people with disabilities” (or disabled person if you are writing about someone who prefers identity-first language).** Terms such as handicapped, handi-capable, differently abled, dis-ABILITY, challenged, special needs, lame, impaired, or crippled should never replace “disability.”
- **Refer to “a person without a disability/people without disabilities.”** Terms such as able-bodied, body ability, normal, or whole should never replace “people without disabilities.”

## Sexual Orientation

- Use **“LGBTQ+ people” or “LGBTQ+ communities”** for general audiences. You may see additional letters in the acronym depending on the organization or individual. For example, you may see A added for asexual or I for intersex. Check with your community partner for their preferred acronyms.
- Avoid terms such as “identifies as,” “sexual lifestyle,” or “sexual preference” that imply being LGBTQ+ is a choice.

## Gender Identity

- **Use gender-affirming/gender-conscious language.** This means using gendered language when it is relevant to your audience or content (e.g., your target audience is very specific, such as Black women between the ages of 18-40) and gender-neutral language when it is not (e.g., screening for everyone, everywhere). Test materials with your priority audience regarding gender-focused content.
- Using an individual's shared pronouns is a sign of respect and honor. It helps normalize gender-inclusive terms and identities for everyone.

## Other Topic Areas

- **Use “older adults” or the numeric designation for the age group (people 65 and older)** instead of “old people,” “seniors,” or “the elderly”.
- **Avoid talking about obesity using a stigmatizing or negative frame.** Instead of saying “obese or overweight person,” use neutral, person-first language (person with obesity, person living with obesity, person with high weight).
- **Avoid using victimizing terms when talking about cancer such as “a victim of,” “suffering from,” or “afflicted by”.** Instead, use affirming and person-centered language such as “cancer survivor,” “person with cancer,” or “person being treated for cancer”.
- **Use “limited” instead of “low” when writing about topics such as literacy, income, or education.** The exception would be when comparing “low” to “high,” and “low” is more grammatically appropriate.
- **“People who are marginalized,” “people who are historically excluded,” “people who are disinvested” are preferred instead of “vulnerable,” “special,” or “at-risk people”.**
  - **Use care and thoughtfulness when working with terms such as “under-resourced,” “under-represented,” or “underserved”.**
    - “Under-resourced” and “underserved” should only be used when specifically calling out resources (e.g., food, access to care, transportation).
    - “Under-represented” should only be used when specifically talking about population groups in context (e.g., being under-represented in clinical trials).