

SELF ADVOCACY GUIDE FOR ACCESSING HEALTHCARE

Safety & Wellness Guides for Queer Zimbabweans

Navigating the healthcare field can feel overwhelming whether it's the stress of booking an appointment, the anxiety of sitting in a waiting room, or the fear of being misgendered or dismissed. For sexual and gender minorities, these challenges can be even more intense due to stigma, a lack of understanding, or outright discrimination. Maybe you've had to explain your identity to a doctor who just didn't get it, or you've struggled to find a queer-inclusive provider who actually listens.

That's where self-advocacy comes in. Knowing your rights, preparing ahead, and trusting your instincts can make all the difference in getting respectful, affirming, and competent care. This guide offers simple, practical tips to help you show up for yourself and feel more in control in medical spaces because you deserve care that sees and respects all of who you are.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Understanding your rights in healthcare settings is the first step in advocating for yourself. Here are some key rights you should know:

- **Non-discrimination:** Healthcare providers are not allowed to discriminate against you based on your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- **Privacy:** You have the right to confidentiality regarding your sexual orientation and gender identity. Healthcare providers should respect your privacy and maintain your medical records securely.
- **Informed Consent:** You have the right to make decisions about your own healthcare, including understanding the risks, benefits, and alternatives of any treatment or procedure.

FIND LGBTQIA+ FRIENDLY PROVIDERS

Seek out providers who are knowledgeable and supportive of LGBTQIA+ health needs. Some healthcare professionals are part of organizations or networks that focus on LGBTQIA+ healthcare and inclusion.

- GALZ has a reliable directory of LGBTQIA+ healthcare providers

PREPARE FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

Being prepared helps you feel more in control and confident during medical visits. Consider these steps:

- **Write down your concerns:** Before your appointment, write down any symptoms, questions, or concerns you want to address. This helps ensure you don't forget anything important.
- **Bring a list of medications:** Include any prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and supplements you are taking.
- **Document your medical history:** Make sure your healthcare provider knows about your past medical history, including surgeries, treatments, and any experiences related to gender transition (if applicable).
- **Know what you want to share:** Decide in advance how much you feel comfortable sharing about your sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual health needs. It's your choice whether or not to disclose.

ASK QUESTIONS & CLARIFY

You have every right to understand what's going on with your body and the care you're receiving. Medical settings can be intimidating, but asking questions helps you take charge of your health.

- **Break down the jargon:** If your provider uses medical terms that are confusing or unclear, don't be afraid to say, "Can you explain that in simpler terms?" or "What does that mean for me?"
- **Check for LGBTQIA+ inclusive care:** Ask how the clinic or provider supports LGBTQIA+ patients. Questions like, "Do you have experience working with queer or trans patients?" or "How do you ensure inclusive care?" can help you gauge how safe and affirming the space is.
- **Speak up about what you need:** Whether it's using your correct name and pronouns, discussing your sexual health openly, or requesting a support person in the room, your comfort matters. The more you ask, the more you empower yourself to get care that aligns with who you are.

SET BOUNDARIES AND ASSERT NEEDS

Set clear boundaries to ensure your medical care is respectful and meets your needs:

- **Name and pronouns:** Clearly state how you'd like to be addressed, including your preferred name and pronouns. If a provider uses incorrect terms, gently correct them.
- **Discuss privacy:** Be clear about who you want to be in the room with you during examinations or procedures. You may feel more comfortable having a trusted friend or advocate present.
- **Request respect for your gender expression:** If you are undergoing gender transition, ask your provider to respect your gender expression in all aspects of your care (e.g., during physical exams, using gender-affirming language).

BRING A SUPPORT PERSON

If you feel it would be helpful, bring a trusted friend, family member, or LGBTQIA+ advocate to your appointment. This person can:

- Support you emotionally and help you feel more comfortable.
- Take notes during the visit to help you remember the information provided.
- Speak up for you if needed, especially if you feel overwhelmed or unsure.