

Inclusive communication guide

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan 2023-2027

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IrsiCaixa

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Introduction

IrsiCaixa, in line with its commitment to promoting inclusion, diversity, and the elimination of stigmas in communication, has developed this guide to encourage the use of inclusive and non-stigmatizing language. The guide addresses a broad range of topics, including the representation of people living with diseases such as HIV and the visibility and respect for LGTBIQ+ identities.

Since its foundation in 1995, IrsiCaixa has worked to advance equality in education, foster innovation and knowledge transfer, promote health and well-being, and strengthen the dialogue between the scientific community and society. With the conviction that **language is a key tool** in achieving these goals, this guide provides specific guidelines and practical resources to help ensure that communication reflects inclusion, diversity, and respect.

This initiative represents an important step toward creating equal opportunities, combating discrimination in all its forms, and fostering a more inclusive culture. The guide is designed to be a valuable resource for society at large, particularly the scientific community, by offering strategies that can be **seamlessly incorporated into everyday communication**.

By addressing common questions and providing concrete examples, this guide helps users craft messages that promote inclusion and respect **without compromising clarity or coherence**. We invite everyone to adopt these principles as part of their communication practices, **contributing to a cultural shift that benefits all**.

Foundations of inclusive language

It is important to keep inclusion and non-discrimination in mind from the beginning of writing or delivering an oral presentation. This way, we can avoid corrections and more easily maintain the coherence, precision, and style of the message.

Inclusive language for the LTBIQ+ community

To give visibility and respect to the diversity of gender identities, sexual orientations, and differences in sexual development, it is essential to use appropriate terminology. We should avoid generalizations or assuming that terms like "gays and lesbians" represent the entire LGTBIQ+ community.

To reinforce this idea, the following glossary provides key **definitions to help understand and correctly use related terms**:

- **Asexual.** A person who does not experience sexual attraction to anyone.
- **Biphobia.** Aversion toward bisexuality or bisexual people.
- **Binarism.** A social construct that categorizes activities, behaviours, emotions, and anatomy into two genders: male and female.
- **Bisexual.** A person who feels sexual and emotional attraction to both men and women.
- **Cisgender.** A person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological characteristics.
- **Gender expression.** A person's social behaviour, independent of their birth sex or gender identity.
- **Gender dysphoria.** A condition of discomfort or discrepancy with the gender assigned at birth. Medical term.
- **Gay.** A man who feels sexual and emotional attraction to other men.
- **Gender.** A set of culturally-based characteristics related to behavioral and identity patterns that socially define distinctions between men and women. It is a sociocultural construct that evolves over time and should not be confused with sex. While society often links masculine gender to male sex and feminine gender to female sex, these concepts are not equivalent.
- **Heterosexual.** A person who feels sexual and emotional attraction to individuals of the opposite sex.
- **Homophobia.** Aversion toward homosexuality or homosexual people.
- **Homosexual.** A person who feels sexual and emotional attraction to individuals of the same sex.
- **Gender identity.** A person's self-perception of their gender. It relates to the roles socially assigned to men and women, does not necessarily align with biological sex, and is unrelated to sexual orientation.
- **Intersex, person with intersex variations or DSD (Differences in Sexual Development).** A person with a set of variations in sexual characteristics that do not entirely fit the standard notions of male or female. It is not a pathology.

- **Lesbian.** A woman who feels sexual and emotional attraction to other women.
- **Lesbofobia.** Aversion toward lesbianism or lesbian women. Often included under the term homophobia.
- **LGBTIQ+.** Acronym for *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer*. The "+" represents other identities and orientations.
- **Sexual orientation, sexual-affective orientation.** A person's tendency to feel emotional and sexual attraction to another person or people. While heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality are the most discussed orientations, there are others.
- **Queer.** A person who, according to queer theory, does not conform to the traditional binary division of genders and rejects identifying exclusively with a specific gender or sexual orientation. This theory supports the existence of more than two genders and challenges the concept of gender as a limiting construct of human nature.
- **Gender role.** A set of behaviours and activities socially attributed to each sex, which vary across cultures.
- **Sex.** A set of biological characteristics (genetic, anatomical, and hormonal) that establish the distinction between men and women. It does not necessarily determine behaviour and should not be confused with gender.
- **Transphobia.** Aversion toward transgender or transexual people.
- **Transgender.** A broad concept that includes people with gender nonconformity, such as transsexuals or those who do not identify strictly as male or female according to traditional conceptions, regardless of whether they have undergone surgery.
- **Transexual.** A transgender person who identifies with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth based on their biological characteristics. Being transsexual does not imply a specific sexual orientation (a transsexual person can be gay, lesbian, heterosexual, or bisexual).

Recommendations when speaking about HIV and related topics

Below are some language suggestions for communicating about HIV and related topics. These suggestions, proposed by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), aim to eliminate any stigmatizing language from our messages regarding HIV and related subjects.

Key terms to avoid

Use these alternatives...	...Instead of these	Here's why
People/person living with HIV, people/person with HIV	HIV positives, HIV-infected people	"Infection" carries the stigma of being contagious, a threat or unclean.
HIV acquisition, transmission	HIV infection	

Research participant/volunteer	Subject, patient	“Subject” is dehumanizing and denotes a hierarchical system where a group of people are subject to the will of another.
HIV elimination/eradication/clearance	Sterilizing cure	The term "sterilizing" has a negative connotation.
Perinatal/vertical transmission	Mother-to-child transmission	The preferred terms do not place blame on pregnant people.
Person/population with greater likelihood of..., high incidence population, affected community	At-risk or high-risk person/population	The population does not possess an inherent risk.
Key population/engage or prioritize a population	Target population	The preferred terms emphasize community-oriented, participatory approaches to ending an epidemic instead of paternalistic, top-down approaches.
People who are underserved by [specific service/resource], underrepresented, population(s) experiencing discrimination/racism/transphobia	Hard-to-reach population/individuals	“Hard to reach” places the blame on the individuals and communities in question. The preferred terms put the onus on the health sector rather than communities.

Stigmatizing terms and alternatives

Use these alternatives...	...Instead of these	Here’s why
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference	“Preference” suggests that non-heterosexuality is a choice, a concept often used to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ communities.
Condomless sex	Unprotected/unsafe sex	The preferred terms are more specific, accurate, and remove judgment.
Has multiple sexual partners	Promiscuous	Avoid “promiscuity” and its derivatives as it is an unnecessary value judgment.
Internal condom	Female condom	<p>“Condom” should be used more generically, but when there is a specific reason, internal or external condom can be used. Some transgender men and nonbinary people may use internal condoms, and people of all genders can use internal condoms for anal sex.</p> <p>People of all genders may cut condoms to create dental dams.</p>

External condom	Male condom	<p>“Condom” should be used more generically, but when there is a specific reason, internal or external condom can be used. Some transgender men and nonbinary people may use internal condoms, and people of all genders can use internal condoms for anal sex.</p> <p>People of all genders may cut condoms to create dental dams.</p> <p>Preferred terms help to reduce passivity.</p>
Probability, possibility	Risk	Preferred terms help to reduce passivity.
People/persons with concomitant hepatitis or concomitant tuberculosis	Tuberculosis or hepatitis co-infected people/ participants	<p>“Co-infect” and its derivatives carry the same stigma as “infect.”</p> <p>The name of the disease was officially changed due to concerns that the original name could be construed as discriminatory and racist. Monkeypox still refers to the name of the virus, but efforts should be made to just say the virus that causes mpox rather than use monkeypox. Mpox is not capitalized unless it begins a sentence.</p>
Mpox	Monkeypox	

Bibliographic references

Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya, Generalitat de Catalunya, i Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya. Recomanacions sobre el tractament de les persones lesbianes, gais, bisexuals, transgènere i intersexuals (LGBTI) als mitjans audiovisuals.

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). HIV Language Guide.