



Frequently Asked Questions: Sex Data Element

What is the Sex data element?

This is a data element that was introduced as part of the 2026 HUD Data Standards. It is located in the client profile and has the following response options:

A screenshot of a web form showing a dropdown menu for the "Sex" field. The dropdown is open, displaying the following options: "-Select-", "Male", "Female", "Client doesn't know", "Client prefers not to answer", and "Data not collected". A mouse cursor is hovering over the "-Select-" option.

Sex is a distinct question from Gender. Someone's sex is not an indication of their gender. Someone's gender is not an indication of their sex.

Is this question required? Do I need to answer it?

The new Sex data element is required at a federal level for programs funded by HUD, VA, PATH and RHY.

Multnomah County does not require this question as part of the Multnomah County Data Quality Plan. The Data Quality Plan applies to *all* Multnomah programs in HMIS, regardless of funding source. That said, different funding sources can come with additional requirements, as is the case here. Please speak with your agency leadership if you have questions about this.

If the Sex question is only required for certain federal funds, why does my agency require it for all programs?

This question may or may not apply to your agency. Please speak with your agency leadership if you have questions about this.

If your agency requires collecting the Sex question for all programs, it might be for a few reasons.

First, participants in your agency may begin in a program that does not require the question and then move to another program that does require it. Collecting the question in all programs may help to ensure that data are not missed, where required.

Second, requiring different data elements for different programs increases complexity. Increased complexity can lead to confusion and mistakes. We rely on agencies to take the right approach for their own programs.

Why did HSD decide not to extend the requirement for this question to all programs?

The new Sex question promotes the misinformed and harmful rhetoric of the current federal administration. Not only does Sex disregard diverse gender identities that are deeply rooted in many cultures, it also uses regressive language that has already been identified by the most impacted communities as inaccurate and damaging.

We also understand why an agency may choose to collect the question, despite it being at odds with agency values. Given that all social service agencies face resource constraints, agencies need to do what they deem to be most strategically advantageous in order to preserve service delivery.

What if I'm not comfortable asking this question as part of the intake process?

We understand that asking this question may be uncomfortable or harmful. We recommend that all agencies have an internal dialog about how to best handle this situation.

If you are required to ask it, we recommend first asking participants if they are comfortable answering the question at all. If they say “no”, the answer to the Sex question should be marked as “Client prefers not to answer”. Participants should always have the ability to either self-report an answer or decline to answer a question. For the large majority of HMIS questions, a client may prefer not to answer and still expect to receive the services for which they are eligible.

Here is one example of how this might look on an intake form:

SEX

Are you comfortable answering which biological sex you were assigned at birth? (If “No”, select “Client prefers not to answer”.) If “Yes”, ask the following:

Which of the following available options would you like me to enter for you?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Male | ☐ Client doesn't know |
| ☐ Female | ☐ Client prefers not to answer |
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What if I still have questions or concerns that were not addressed by the FAQ?

We recommend directing questions to the data lead at your agency and/or your supervisor. If you still have questions, contact hmishelp@multco.us

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