



The California Health Interview Survey
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group
Summary of 2025-2026 Working Group Recommendations

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2025-2026 CHIS Working Group Members

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025-2026 California Health Interview Survey's (CHIS's) Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Working Group was assembled in January 2024 to review CHIS's current SOGI practices and develop recommendations for changes to current practices, testing of survey questions, and/or possible modifications to the 2025-2026 cycle CHIS survey. The Working Group met twice through Zoom, on February 12 and March 11. During these meetings, the committee discussions focused on three topics:

1. Coding of open-text responses to the gender identity question;
2. Terminology to use when referring to the population whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth;
3. Proposals for new SOGI questions or modifications to existing SOGI questions.

Each of these topics is covered in greater detail in this report, but can be summarized as follows:

Coding of Open-Text Responses

The working group reviewed the full range of open-text responses that CHIS received in the 2015-2023 waves of data collection along with a proposed coding rubric developed by CHIS staff. This coding rubric reclassified open-text gender identity responses using categories that ensure that the constructed variables that identify transgender respondents in the CHIS data are coded consistently and accurately. The working group reviewed CHIS upcoding rules and identified several ways in which these could lead to inconsistencies in coding similar responses or may not reflect the respondent's intent. They suggested modifications to these rules to improve the coding of open-text gender identity responses.

Terminology

When reviewing the coding of open-text responses, several working group members expressed concern with the use of the "transgender" label when referring to the population whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Although this terminology is accurate in the strictest sense (i.e., is consistent with the most common definition of "transgender"), not all people who fall in this category would consider themselves to be transgender. In addition, because "Transgender" is listed as a gender identity response category, the use of this term to refer to both those whose gender identity is "Transgender" and the overall population of people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth creates confusion.

The working group considered four possible terms that could be used to refer to this population: 1) transgender; 2) non-cisgender; 3) gender minority; and 4) gender expansive. After weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each term, the working group endorsed using the terminology "transgender/gender expansive" to refer to this population in CHIS documentation.

Proposals for New or Modified SOGI Questions

The working group developed three proposals for new questions to add to the 2025-2026 cycles of CHIS. In recognition of the budgetary constraints CHIS faces, the universe for each of these proposals is a subset of the overall transgender population and provides new information that helps us to better understand either: 1) how individuals choose to classify their gender identity given a limited set of response options or 2) how methodological differences in data collection affect who is identified as transgender/gender expansive.

Based on preliminary data from the 2023 CHIS, about 2% of the CHIS adult sample would be asked to complete at least one of the new questions; while about 0.3% of CHIS adult respondents would be asked to complete two of the new questions. No respondent would be asked all three of the new questions.

Working group members were asked to approve each proposal independently and were allowed to provide feedback or suggest modifications to question wording. All three proposals were approved by working group members, although some members also suggested modifications to one or more proposals and one working group members expressed concern about one of the three proposals. Working group members were also asked to rank the proposals in order of importance/significance to enable CHIS staff to decide which proposals to prioritize if only a subset of the proposals could be implemented.

The three proposals in ranked order are:

Rank 1: Test removal of “Transgender” as a gender identity response category

Universe: Those who report their gender identity is “Transgender”

Q. Thank you. We have recorded your gender as Transgender. In some surveys, Transgender is not listed as a gender. We are interested in how you would answer the following question where Transgender is not listed:

What is your current gender?

(NOTE: CATI interviewers should read all categories)

- Female
- Male
- Nonbinary
- I use a different term: [immediately adjacent free text entry box]
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

Modifications proposed by working group members: One member suggested replacing “gender” with “option” in the first sentence both because not all surveys use the term “gender” in the question and because it (hopefully) reduces the likelihood this would be interpreted by the respondent as questioning their gender. Another working group member suggested modifying the second sentence to read: “We are interested in how you would categorize (or identify) yourself in a survey where Transgender is not listed:” in order to make clear that this follow-up was not being asked to question the respondents gender identity response on the original question.

Rank 2: Measure transgender identity

Universe: All respondents whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth who did **not** report their gender identity as “Transgender” AND all respondents who selected “Prefer Not to Answer” or “Don't Know” in response to either question in the two-step gender identity sequence.

Q: Some people identify as trans or transgender, meaning they have a different gender identity from their sex assigned at birth. Do you think of yourself as trans or transgender?

- Yes
- No

Modifications proposed by working group members: One committee member suggested that if the budget allows, it would be preferable to also ask this question of respondents whose are considered cisgender based on their responses to the two-step gender identity sequence in order to help identify false negative

responses from transgender respondents who are uncomfortable with the two-step question sequence; however, CHIS staff expressed concern that it would not be possible to distinguish these from false positives from cisgender respondents who do not understand the terminology or misreport.

One committee member was concerned that this question could be used to treat nonbinary and gender-expansive respondents who do not identify as trans as if they were cisgender and recommended that a “Prefer Not to Answer” response be allowed; however, most committee members preferred to omit the “Prefer Not to Answer” response because it discouraged those who had already selected this response when answering the two-step gender identity sequence from providing a response, and thus reduces the value of asking the question. This measure would not be used in the construction of the CHIS measure identifying transgender/gender expansive respondents.

Rank 3: Classification of open-text responses into main response categories

Universe: All respondents who provide an open-text gender identity response.

Q: We have recorded your current gender as [INSERT: open-text gender identity response]. If you had to place your current gender in one of the following categories, which would you choose?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Nonbinary

Working group members also approved using responses to this question to screen cisgender responses (i.e., Male/Female responses to this question that are the same as sex assigned at birth) from receiving the two-step gender identity confirmation question. This would prevent those who provided protest or irrelevant responses from being asked the confirmation question. However, these respondents would no longer have a second chance to rethink and correct their response. Moreover, if some transgender/gender expansive respondents would default back to their binary sex at birth (e.g., if their original response indicated they were questioning their gender identity) this would prevent these respondents from confirming their transgender/gender expansive gender identity.

Modifications proposed by working group members: One working group member suggested replacing the second sentence of the question with the following: “For statistical purposes, you may also be grouped with a larger category. Which of the following gender groups would you choose:” and also suggested listing the gender categories alphabetically (which would also be consistent with listing by population size).

Table summarizing populations that would receive each question

Population	Questions	Notes
Trans: Gender Identity is Binary Gender	Rank 2	About 30ish adult respondents based on 2023
Gender Identity is Transgender	Rank 1	About 20ish adult respondents based on 2023
Gender Identity is Non-Binary	Rank 2	About 100-110 adult respondents based on 2023
Gender Identity is Write-In	Rank 2 and Rank 3	About 60ish adult respondents based on 2023; Write-in respondents whose P2Q response indicates they are cisgender would not be asked the confirmation question or P3Q
SAAB=DK, Prefer not to answer OR Gender Identity=DK, Prefer not to answer	Rank 2	About 200 adult respondents based on 2023; If Gender Identity response is “Transgender” skip PQ3