

# Collecting race, ethnicity and language data

## Staff FAQs



This document provides answers to frequently asked questions from healthcare staff.

### How do I ask patients about their race, ethnicity, and language?

Let the patient know you have a few simple questions you would like to ask, and explain your reason for asking:

"I have a few simple questions to ask you about yourself. I am gathering this information to ensure that you are receiving the best quality of care."

### Why are we asking patients for their race, ethnicity, and language?

Available data on our patients' race, ethnicity, and language may be inaccurate or incomplete. Better patient data will help us identify healthcare disparities so we can focus our quality improvement work and improve the quality of care we provide to our diverse population.

### Should we ask patients for their race, ethnicity, and language each time they come to the hospital?

Follow your organizational policy and procedure on how often you should confirm the patient's race, ethnicity, and language annually. Identify if your electronic health records will remind you to confirm race, ethnicity, and language after a certain time or if you will be prompted to ask the patient these questions.

### What should I do if a patient refuses to answer the race, ethnicity, and language questions?

You can record these as "declined."

### Is it okay to record race, ethnicity, or language based on what I see or hear when speaking to the patient?

No. All information on race, ethnicity, and language needs to be self-reported by the patient or their caregiver. Self-reporting is the most accurate and consistent source of information.

### How should I address a patient concerned that we will ask their immigration status when we ask for their race, ethnicity, and language?

Reassure the patient that you are not asking race, ethnicity, and language questions to determine the patient's immigration status. The patient's responses to the questions are protected by the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA) and will not be reported to the authorities.

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## Sample scripts



This tip sheet provides scripted answers to patients' frequently asked questions. To provide the best possible service and ensure that all patients receive the highest quality of care, we are asking all patients about their race, ethnicity and language.

### Why do we ask about race, ethnicity, and language?

We collect race, ethnicity, and language data so that we can review the treatment that all patients receive to ensure delivery of high-quality care. Additionally, we use race, ethnicity, and language data to better understand our community; be culturally sensitive to the workforce and our patients; identify and address healthcare disparities; know how to improve our language and accessibility support; and appropriately target quality initiatives.

### What do race and ethnicity have to do with health?

Data on our patients' race, ethnicity, and language help us identify and address differences in patient access and outcomes. We use the data to monitor and better understand diseases and conditions that most affect patients in our community, so we can ensure we have the expertise and resources necessary to elevate the quality of care we provide to our diverse patient population.

### Who will see the information? How will it be shared?

We limit access to patient information, including patients' race, ethnicity and language, to instances where the information is necessary to provide care. Patient demographic data is protected by HIPAA, and we have dedicated teams in place, such as the Information Security Department, to help safeguard your information.

### Who are you collecting this information from?

We are asking all patients for this information.

### Do patients have to provide their race, ethnicity, and language?

No. Answering is voluntary but will help us better serve all patients. If you decline, please note that we may ask again at subsequent visits.

### If I have been seeing my doctor or provider for years, don't you have this information already?

We may have this information, but we want to make sure it is accurate so we can continue to provide great care.

### Are you trying to find out if I am a U.S. citizen?

No. The information is confidential and used only to improve healthcare. We will not ask about your citizenship or documentation.

### Isn't it illegal to ask me these questions?

No. The 1964 Civil Rights Act allows hospitals and healthcare organizations to collect information on patients' race, ethnicity and language to improve healthcare quality. Many healthcare agencies are required to collect this information.

### Can't you tell by looking at me?

Every person is different. We do not make any assumptions based on how a person looks.

### What if I belong to more than one race?

We will document that in your record.

### How does this benefit me?

By answering these questions, we get to know more about our patients. This information helps us to better serve you and your community and ensures that we provide high-quality care.