



Department
of Health

Providing affirming services for people who engage in sex work.



Health and social services providers who choose to wear the **“I promote health for sex workers”** pin, should review this document before wearing the pin. The pin is intended to communicate your efforts to provide nonjudgmental, safe, and affirming services to people who may be involved in sex work. It is important to reflect on your knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to serving those who are currently or formerly involved in sex work. The items below include information, suggestions, and resources to support your efforts while demonstrating unconditional high regard for your patients or clients.

- The design of the pin intentionally includes symbols that people involved in sex work will likely recognize. The umbrella represents sex worker resistance to discrimination. The red high heel is understood by many to be a universal symbol for sex work.
- One working definition of a sex worker is: An adult who receives money, resources, or goods in exchange for consensual sexual services, erotic performances, and other sexual entertainment, either regularly or occasionally.
- Sex work includes, but is not limited to, engaging in activities such as: working as an escort; working in the adult film industry; erotic massage; exotic dancing; providing sexual content via online and social media platforms or phone chatlines, as well as survival sex -- trading sex to meet the basic needs of daily life.
- It is important to use non-stigmatizing language when referring to sex work and sex workers. The best term to use is “sex work” or “person involved in the sex trade.” It is best practice to avoid using terms such as hooker, prostitute, hustler, streetwalker, call girl, or other stigmatizing terms. However, it’s best to respect a person’s choice if they use one of these terms to self-identify.
- People who engage in the sex trade do not have a specific look; they could be of any race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation. They may be people with disabilities, or people of any size, shape, economic status, or age.
- People engaging in sex work may be forced to engage in nonconsensual sexual activities. When someone involved in sex work reports sexual assault, they should be afforded the full range of compassionate, nonjudgmental services. This includes evaluation of physical injury, forensic evidence collection (if desired), testing, post-exposure prophylaxis if indicated, and referrals for emotional support.
- It is important to include in clinic operations, the implementation of a self-completed sexual history form. It should include questions related to recent sexual partners and exchange of sex for money, goods, or services. This can circumvent the stigma sex workers may feel when speaking with health care providers.
- As a result of stigma, people involved in sex work may feel uneasy about receiving mental health services -- which leaves many people to struggle alone. Using a harm reduction approach and trauma-informed care can help create a supportive environment.
- Don’t make the health care or social services appointment about sex work if that is not why they are there. In addition to sexual health care, people involved in sex work will want care for their health in ways that aren’t related to sex work. This includes being brought up to date on all vaccines, cancer screenings, and all medical issues.
- People involved in sex work often prefer walk-in appointment options that reduce the barrier of having to call ahead for an appointment.

Resources for Working with Sex Workers

Some sex workers may be victims of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is forcing a person to work against their will in commercial sex, which could include prostitution, escort services, erotic dancing establishments, massage parlors, or pornography. To report activity that you suspect is related to human trafficking, please call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center's 24/7 hotline at 1-888-373-7888.**

Regardless of how much experience you have working with people involved in sex work, it is important to continually educate yourself about your patient's needs and experiences. Books, articles, websites, discussion groups, and talking with sex workers about their experiences -- these are just a few ways to enhance your familiarity with sex workers to better understand their health care needs.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG):

www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2017/06/obgyn-awareness-of-sex-workers-health-risks-during-routine-visits-is-essential

Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP):

<https://www.nswp.org/>

National Harm Reduction Coalition:

<https://harmreduction.org/issues/sex-work/>

National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) --

Sex Worker Fact Sheet (NASTAD):

<https://nastad.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/PDF-Fact-Sheet-Sex-WQorker-Centered-Harm-Reduction.pdf>

World Health Organization (WHO):

www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/populations/sex-workers



**Department
of Health**