



Surrey and Sussex

Protected Characteristics Training- Rationale and Equalities Impact

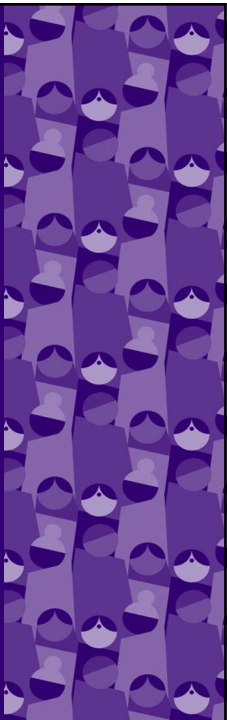
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Context and Background



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NHS England's statement on information on health inequalities:

- The Health and Care Act 2022, Equality Act 2010, and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires the Sussex Health and Care System to reduce inequalities in access, experience, and outcomes. This legal duty is supported by the availability of good quality data which is not only complete but accurate.
- Improved recording enables better identification of inequalities and targeted action.
- Disaggregated reporting supports understanding of unwarranted variation between population groups.
- Reliable data underpins planning, commissioning, and service improvement.
- Good quality ethnicity diversity data enables appropriate risk stratification as well as the delivery of equitable and personalised care.

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Local Drivers and Current Position:

- On the 4th of September 2025, the NHS Sussex Finance Outcome Committee endorsed the development of a co-designed, Sussex-wide staff training programme aimed at strengthening capability and confidence in demographic data collection.
- The training is aimed to support the ethical and accurate collection of protected characteristic data, increase staff confidence, and embed good practice into everyday service delivery. The training should also improve patient trust, consent and messaging by providing a simple, consistent explanation for patients alongside a standardised approach for handling refusal, distress, safeguarding concerns.
- The training will also improve patient trust, consent and messaging by providing a simple, consistent explanation for patients ("why we ask", "how it's used", confidentiality, and the option to decline), alongside a standardised approach for handling refusal, distress, safeguarding concerns, or responses such as "I don't identify with these options".

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The Working Group

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Background

- The Protected Characteristics Training Working Group was established in January 2026 to co-produce a consistent, practical training offer across Sussex. The intention is to build on work already happening within our organisations, agree a shared baseline for best practice, and support local implementation without duplication.
- The Group meets fortnightly and represents our Providers, Voluntary and Community Sector Partners and our Sussex Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Leaders Alliance.
- Cross sector representation ensures sharing best practice, understanding the complexity of collecting good quality data, capturing patient perspectives and the granularity of data.
- Together, we aim to Improve understanding of why inequality data matters, Clarify the difference between completeness and accuracy, Equip staff to ask sensitive questions with confidence and dignity, Embed good practice examples, Share a clear commitment to prioritise and improve the collection of data and Develop consistency in approach for recording patient data.

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Purpose of the Working Group

- Ensure NHS Sussex can meet its duties under the Health and Care Act 2022, Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty by improving the completeness and accuracy of protected characteristic data.
- Build a standardised, system-wide training and engagement approach so staff record demographic information consistently and confidently across providers.
- Reduce reliance on “Not stated” and “Unknown” through practical improvement actions and ongoing assurance.
- Strengthen the system’s ability to understand and address variation in access, experience and outcomes.

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What we heard – Key Themes

Staff:

- Unclear on why it matters
- Lack confidence in how to ask
- Time and system pressures

Patients/Public:

- Trust and data use concerns
- Want clear explanation and choice
- Frustrated by repetition

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The Training Offer: What Good Looks Like

For staff:

- Understand why this matters
- Feel confident asking appropriately
- Apply a consistent approach

For patients:

- Understand why they are being asked
- Feel respected and able to choose
- Greater trust in how data is used

For the system:

- Improved data quality
- Reduction in “unknown/not stated”
- More meaningful insight to address inequalities

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Proposed Outcome

- A Sussex-wide training offer (core content with flexibility for local adaptation)
- A concise fact sheet for frontline teams (how to ask, how to record, and how to respond when someone declines)
- A shared collaborative platform to collate and maintain existing resources across Sussex (e.g., scripts, leaflets, e-learning modules, communications materials, and digital prompts)

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