

A Health Worker's Guide to Trans and Gender Diverse Health

Why learn more about trans and gender diverse health care?

Trans and gender diverse people are people who have a different gender to the one they were assigned at birth. Trans and gender diverse people need treatment for physical, mental or chronic illnesses like any other population group but they may also seek out gender affirming healthcare.

Gender affirming care, as defined by the World Health Organization, encompasses a range of social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions “designed to support and affirm an individual’s gender identity” when it conflicts with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Not all trans and gender diverse people will disclose that they are trans in a medical setting especially if it’s not relevant to the care they’re seeking. Because of this, understanding trans issues is important regardless of the client as it allows health workers to be proactive instead of reactive in treating all clients.

While estimates of what percentage of the population are trans and gender diverse differ, 2.3% of Australian secondary students between Years 10 and 12 identify as trans or gender diverse¹.

Trans and gender diverse mental health

It is accepted that gender diversity is not a mental illness.

The World Health Organisation changed ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ to ‘Gender Incongruence’ within the International Classification of Diseases (ICD11) to reflect this. Some trans and gender diverse people experience gender dysphoria, however, having gender dysphoria is not a pre-requisite to be trans and gender diverse. There are other experiences that may indicate to someone that they are trans and gender diverse, such as experiences of gender euphoria, which are positive emotions from affirmation of gender.

Gender dysphoria is distress or discomfort due to the incongruence of a person’s gender identity. Supporting people with gender dysphoria can be done through building resilience strategies, providing information and helping a person access affirming treatments (if desired), and developing [non-medical gender euphoria](#) or self-care strategies. It is important to remember that not all trans and gender diverse people want the same health outcomes, and it’s best not to assume a client wants a certain treatment because of their gender identity.

Trans and gender diverse people are at greater risk of poorer mental health outcomes than their cisgender peers (someone that is cisgender identifies with the gender that is assumed of them at birth, for example, someone who was assumed female at birth and identifies as a woman). This is not because they are trans and gender diverse and not only because of any potential gender dysphoria.

As highlighted by ACON’s TransHub, **the primary cause of these disproportionate mental health outcomes is stigma, isolation and discrimination which trans people face².**

This is a form of minority stress, in which marginalised people more broadly face poorer physical and mental health outcomes due to the discrimination they face.

Discrimination and providing appropriate support

Discrimination and stigma is common for trans and gender diverse people, including in health care settings. 41% of trans people have had negative experiences with GPs³. These experiences may cause reluctance and noncompliance, therefore building a good relationship with trans and gender diverse people is important and can be achieved through openness and practising the strategies highlighted in the following sections.

If a practitioner feels they’re unable to provide appropriate care to trans and gender diverse clients, it is their responsibility to refer clients to a practitioner who is.

“ Inclusion goes beyond saying the right things and having a rainbow flag on the wall. ”

Working with trans and gender diverse people

The following suggestions provide guidance on the do’s and don’ts of working with trans and gender diverse people.

Do:

- Use a person’s chosen name and pronouns regardless of what is on file.
- Access a trusted website (like those listed here) if you have any questions about what it means to be trans, and the experience of being trans and gender diverse.

Do (continued):

- Recognise that it's OK if you don't know the answers, and it's okay if you do have to ask trans and gender diverse people, as long as it's relevant and done respectfully.
- Respect that trans and gender diverse people are the experts of their own lives and are often very knowledgeable around trans and gender diverse issues.
- Accept when trans and gender diverse people choose to not disclose that they are trans or gender diverse, or choose not to answer a question about their body or experiences as a trans and gender diverse person.
- Reflect on what gender means to you, the assumptions you might make based on someone's gender expression, and how this might impact the care you provide.
- Contact the Gender Connect Country SA team for information and support about how to support trans and gender diverse people.

Do NOT:

- Assume that being trans and gender diverse, or using gender affirming medicines, is causing any health or mental health concerns without adequate assessment.
- Request to perform physical examinations of primary or secondary sexual characteristics (e.g. genitals, breasts) in relation to preparation or impact of hormone replacement therapy.
- Invalidate or diminish someone's experiences when they discuss how gender diversity impacts them, their relationships or mental health.
- Invalidate a person's identity due to how they present.

Examine your internal and client systems:

- Does the system allow people to input pronouns?
- Does it allow for multiple sets of pronouns, or for people to write their own pronouns in?
- Does it allow you to register someone's chosen name?
- Do all systems bring attention to the fact this person has a chosen name to ensure they're being referred to by the correct (chosen) name by administration AND practitioners?
- Does it allow for you to specify that a person is trans or gender diverse – even if this person has already changed their legal gender?

Resources

For potential referral options, visit Trans Health SA: www.transhealthsa.com

For online learning on trans and gender diverse health care visit:

- www.auspath.org.au/2021/06/13/e-learning-module-trans-incl-gender-diverse-and-non-binary-primary-care
- www.shinesa.org.au/activity/intro-tgd-online/

For templates including approval or referral letters for gender diverse clients, visit: www.transhub.org.au/downloads

For current information on processes of providing care to gender diverse people, visit: www.auspath.org.au/standards-of-care

References

1. Fisher, C. M., Waling, A., Kerr, L., Bellamy, R., Ezer, P., Mikolajczak, G., Brown, G., Carman, M. & Lucke, J. (2019). 6th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018, (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 113), Bundoora: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.
2. Transhub. (n.d.). Is Being Trans A mental Illness?. ACON. www.transhub.org.au/101/mental-illness
3. Riggs, D.W., Coleman, K. & Due, C. (2014). Healthcare experiences of gender diverse Australians: a mixed-methods, self-report survey. BMC Public Health 14(230). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-230>

Contact Gender Connect Country SA

Gender Connect Country SA is a free service for people in country SA who have questions about being or supporting those who identify as trans, gender diverse or gender questioning.

Monday – Thursday
3:00 pm – 8:00 pm
(Closed Public Holidays)

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08 7099 5390

Email
genderconnectcountrysa@shinesa.org.au

WebChat
shinesa.org.au/gender-connect