

## TOOLKIT

# INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-AFFIRMING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### AT A GLANCE

The toolkit was developed to help youth mental health service leaders and their teams to:

- reflect on the current level of inclusivity for trans and gender diverse young people within their service; and
- learn strategies to create an inclusive and responsive service for young people of all genders.

The aim of the resource is to help services to provide responsive and inclusive environments for young people. Although the principles and strategies within the resource may overlap with those which promote safety for trans and gender diverse professionals, this is not the primary aim and other resources should be consulted.

### HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Cultural responsiveness and inclusivity practices are pertinent to a range of different experiences and identities, for example, ability, neurodiversity and sexuality. This resource primarily discusses these concepts in relation to gender identity and intersecting social identities. It is important to consider this resource along with other diversity and inclusion approaches for young people. For more information see Orygen's suite of [diversity and inclusion resources on our website](#).

This resource is not an exhaustive document but a starting point. We encourage you to continue your reading, learning and ongoing reflective practice. Please refer to the **Where to from here?** section of this document for links to additional resources to support your ongoing learning.



### A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Language related to identity is constantly evolving. The language used in this resource has been informed by young people with lived expertise in gender diversity. Young people you support may use different language. Respect can be shown by using the language young people use for themselves. For more information on how this resource was developed, see the fact sheet: [Collaborative development of gender diversity and youth mental health resources: an example of community-academic-health partnership](#).

For a glossary of key terms related to gender diversity and youth mental health, see the fact sheet: [Gender diversity and language](#).

## WHY ARE TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE INCLUSIVE SERVICES IMPORTANT FOR YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH?

To promote access to and engagement with mental health services, trans and gender diverse young people need to feel safe, and receive inclusive and affirmative care within these services. It is the responsibility of all mental health services, not only those with a specialised focus on trans and gender diverse people, to ensure that young people of all genders have access to the services and programs they need. It is critical that a gender-affirming approach be used with all young people and in every point of engagement, and that assumptions should not be made about someone's gender based on appearance, mannerisms or behaviour.

While there are many healthcare professionals who are knowledgeable, supportive and provide gender-affirming care, misgendering, microaggressions, experiences of stigma and transphobia when accessing health care are still frequently reported. (1, 2, 3) These negative experiences within services can affect the mental health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people and can lead to reluctance to seek help in the future. (4) This gap in the availability of culturally safe, inclusive and affirmative services can lead to trans and gender diverse



young people delaying help-seeking or not seeking care from the mental health system, which may contribute to poorer mental health.

For more information about misgendering and microaggressions, a glossary can be found in the [Gender diversity and language fact sheet](#).

Creating a culturally safe service supports mental health and wellbeing by allowing young people to express all aspects of their identity when accessing care. This requires taking an intersectional approach to trans and gender diversity inclusion, to acknowledge the interaction and overlap between gender and other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, faith, ability and more. Ensuring services are safe for trans and gender diverse young people with intersectional identities can support them to navigate their identity across contexts, enable them to express their authentic self, and to be recognised and embraced wholly. For more information on intersectionality and what it means for youth mental health, see this fact sheet: [Intersectionality and youth mental health](#).

\* Cultural safety concerns all aspects of the service, from the reception staff to the Board. Cultural responsiveness supports the environment of care to be genuinely inclusive from the first point of contact to the leadership.

### FAMILY

Family and kinship means different things to different people and across cultures, and might include chosen family, partners, carers or parents, extended family, other people in caring or support roles. Family play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people. Family support matters to young peoples' mental health outcomes and acts as a significant protective factor against suicidality. Creating a service culture that is supportive, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the family and friends of trans and gender diverse young people can contribute to better outcomes for young people, families and communities more broadly.

Implementation of an intersectional lens can benefit family by recognising and embracing all aspects of their identities in service provision. Culturally safe environments that embed an intersectional lens can enable services to find strategies that work for diverse families, their cultures and lived experiences.

Young people and their family may be supported by youth mental health services through supporting connections with community and peer groups.

For more information about working with friends and family of trans and gender diverse young people see our fact sheet [In this together: Families and carers can ask. Supporting trans and gender diverse young people in youth mental health](#) and the clinical practice point: [Gender-affirming mental health care: Working with families](#)

## PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE AND AFFIRMING SERVICES

How services plan, implement and evaluate gender inclusive and affirming care for trans and gender diverse young people may differ from one service to the next. This will depend on their governance structures, their wider organisational policies and procedures, as well as the preferences and needs of the communities they service. However, there are some principles of inclusive services which can guide youth mental health service leaders in this journey.



## GROW

### Grow a diverse, competent youth wellbeing workforce.

Understand your workforce's knowledge and capabilities in inclusive and gender-affirming practice and determine needs for professional and workforce development. Create a culture of reflection, ensuring space and support for staff to build awareness of their beliefs and attitudes about gender.

Examine your recruitment and retention procedures. Consider how you might facilitate the recruitment of staff with diverse experiences and identities at all levels of the service, including trans and gender diverse staff. Implement an intersectional lens to ensure that the workforce is diverse with a nuanced understanding of multiple marginalisations. Recognise and address how Anglo-hetero and cis-normative assumptions/biases impact organisational culture and practices to create a safe and inclusive workplace for all staff.

### STRATEGIES

- Support all client-facing staff to understand and practice the principles of inclusion, for example, the importance of language, pronouns and self-stated name. Information on inclusive and gender-affirming practice should be communicated to all staff and supported through processes and relevant infrastructure, such as client/health databases. To learn more complete Orygen's online learning module [Gender diversity and youth mental health 101](#).
- Provide up-to-date training and professional development opportunities to all staff to build appropriate skills and knowledge in gender-affirming care.
- Provide follow-up training and professional development with opportunities to integrate and consolidate knowledge and skills, for example, regular discussions of language, affirmative and best practice in clinical environments such as clinical review and supervision.
- Review recruitment and retention strategies with consideration to valuing diversity, intersectionality and equity. This may include; reviewing the language and imagery used in advertising and position descriptions, where positions are advertised, promotion of inclusive mission statement, strategy or initiatives.
- Consider introducing trans and gender diverse peer support roles or how trans and gender diverse young people could be encouraged and supported to become part of the peer support workforce.





## WELCOME

**Welcome people of all genders through inclusive social, physical, and digital/ data environments.**

Consider how your service can be welcoming to people of all genders. This should include consideration of how trans and gender diverse young people may experience your service's physical environment and ensuring access to essential facilities. Look at your organisation's online presence and how you can communicate to trans and gender diverse young people.

Services should also consider how they can welcome people whose gender identities may not match with the Western construction of genders, and allow for room to embrace the arrays of gender identities that exist in the world. This may include Sistergirls and Brotherboys from Australian First Nations Peoples, fa'afafine and fa'afatama from Polynesian culture, hijra from South Asian cultures and non-binary or gender fluid people. Use an intersectional lens to ensure the needs of trans and gender diverse young people with intersectional identities are being met, allowing young people to bring all aspects of their identities without fear.

When considering intake and data collection processes it is important to balance inclusive questions about gender with the right to privacy. Consider how a young person's autonomy and right to confidentiality can be respected in decisions about who within the service is aware of their gender identity.

Messaging safety without appropriate processes and actions can increase the risk to young people accessing services. It is therefore essential that any messaging is embedded in genuine processes and actions to support safety throughout the service experience.

## STRATEGIES:

- create psychological safety through visual signifiers (posters, pronoun badges, flags, brochures, imagery);
- acknowledge and celebrate significant dates for trans and gender diverse young people (via digital platforms and onsite);
- ensure access to gender neutral bathrooms (and change rooms for staff);
- create and implement inclusive data collection, for example, self-identifying gender and pronouns, ability to use self-stated name, and make changes upon request without intrusive questioning;

- ensure that all questions are relevant. Provide explanations about how the data will be used, stored and how young people will be consulted when information is shared; and
- ensure that information on how to amend personal information is easily available and safe.



## CARE

### Care for gender diverse young people using culturally-appropriate, intersectional and affirmative approaches.

Care provided to trans and gender diverse young people needs to utilise an intersectional lens, integrating culturally responsive, trauma-informed, person-centred, family-inclusive and gender-affirming approaches. Approaches should be informed by the understanding that young people may have multiple intersecting social identities, for example, gender, culture, ability and neurodiversity and experience of multiple marginalisation that can contribute to additional stress. To learn more about intersectionality see our fact sheet: [Intersectionality and youth mental health](#).

Importantly, gender-affirming care takes a de-pathologising approach to gender diversity as part of identity and not as a disorder. Services should have an awareness of the historical and ongoing harms caused by the mental health system through the pathologising of trans and gender diverse identities and bodies. Consider how your service can foster a culture that promotes reflective practice, continuing professional development and implementation of best practice guidance by all staff, for example, WPATH and AusPATH endorsed standards of care for children and adolescents available from the Royal Children's Hospital - see the **Resources** section of this document.

### STRATEGIES

- ensure staff are knowledgeable and skilled to deliver gender-affirming and other best practice care, for example, trauma-informed, person-centred care;
- consider processes and resources available to support ongoing reflective practice and professional development;
- consider systems to support the integration of gender-affirming care, for example, changes to intake forms and processes; and
- implement an intersectional lens as an integral part of care to ensure that all young people feel safe and able to celebrate all aspects of their identities. For example, this may include being able to observe their faith and cultural practices as part of care. For more information see our clinical practice point [Gender-affirming mental health care](#).



## CONNECT

### Connect gender diverse young people and their families and friends to other wellbeing supports.

Consider how your service can build respectful, strong and sustainable relationships with trans and gender diverse young people and their families. It is also invaluable to build strong relationships and partnerships with community organisations who already have ties to networks of trans and gender diverse young people and their supports.

It is important to appreciate that not all supports and services will be appropriate for all trans and gender diverse young people. Working with community organisations that specialise in intersectionality can help to ensure trans and gender diverse young people with intersectional identities are included and embraced by service providers and mental health practitioners.

### STRATEGIES

- develop strong connections to specialist trans and gender diverse organisations and services to facilitate timely referrals and make linking young people with appropriate supports easier;
- consider how your service can implement peer support structures to support young people and their families;
- consider collaborating with community organisations, with a view to sustainable partnerships; and
- implement an intersectional lens and consult with community organisations specialising in intersectionality.

The needs of trans and gender diverse young people with intersectional identities must also be considered when creating a culturally safe service. Engaging with community-led organisations such as the [Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council \(AGMC\)](#) can help to ensure cultural responsiveness applies to all LGBTIQ+ communities including multicultural and multifaith communities.

## EMPOWER

**Empower gender diverse young people to actively and meaningfully participate in service development and delivery.**

Participation of trans and gender diverse young people can give service insight into diverse voices and perspectives. This can facilitate decisions about service improvement and potential learning and development needs of staff. To ensure meaningful participation and safeguard the young people involved, it is important that these strategies and structures incorporate principles of youth participation. For more information, download this toolkit [How to partner with young people.](#)

### STRATEGIES

- Include young people with diverse and intersectional identities in advisory or steering groups.



## LEAD

**Lead system-wide culture change committed to inclusive care.**

Foster a culture of inclusion, driven by strong leadership and represented in organisational values. Advocate for safe, inclusive and gender-affirming care for young people across the healthcare system and social services, in which gender diversity is de-pathologised. Incorporate an intersectional lens so that diversity in all its forms is front of mind. Implement inclusive leadership based on human rights and social justice principles.

### STRATEGIES

- Ensure inclusion is represented in organisational values and/or mission statements, and use an intersectional lens to implement equity and justice.
- Advocate for safe, inclusive and affirmative care for trans and gender diverse young people across the healthcare system and social services, and all the intersectionality that exists within communities.
- Advocate within political and cultural spaces. Publicly demonstrate your service's support and solidarity with all trans and gender diverse young people.
- Participate in relevant forums aimed at improving the quality of services and care for trans and gender diverse young people, for example, professional associations, community organisations, local primary health networks.
- Provide opportunities for trans and gender diverse young people to meaningfully contribute to the development and implementation of strategies and resources to promote their safety and dignity when engaging with services.
- Support managers to reflect on their practice and the culture within their teams. Build the capacity of managers and clinical leads to address feedback or experiences of discrimination, and to navigate complex relational dynamics, experiences and reactions.

## IMPROVE

**Improve policies and processes through continuous quality improvement.**

Consider your journey towards building an inclusive and affirmative service for trans and gender diverse young people. Assess what resources are required to progress in this journey and to create sustainable change. Consider how you will evaluate your service's progress and how will it include the voices of trans and gender diverse young people, their family and friends, and all the intersectionality that exists within the community.

### STRATEGIES

- consider adapting routine feedback mechanisms to collect demographic information so that specific feedback from trans and gender diverse young people can be identified and acknowledged. Use this information to assess how the service is performing in providing care and build it into decisions about services improvements;
- integrate systems with existing quality improvements systems and align with national health strategies for LGBTIQ+ people;
- incorporate an intersectional lens to ensure that programs and services have been designed to cater for the unique needs and lived experiences of trans and gender diverse youth with intersectional identities; and
- commit to ongoing quality improvements.

## INCLUSION IS A LEGAL ISSUE

Ensuring that mental health services are inclusive of trans and gender diverse young people is also a legal issue. Under Australian state and federal laws, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. This includes both direct and indirect discrimination.

**\*Mental health services must take positive action to eliminate discrimination against trans and gender diverse people.**



## THE SEX DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT

The Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 includes sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status as grounds on which someone can be discriminated against.

The Sex Discrimination Act should be considered in combination with other relevant acts, such as the Racial Discrimination Act 1984, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Age Discrimination Act 2004, to ensure services are inclusive and safe for young people with intersectional identities.

Direct discrimination is treating another person, or group of people, less favourably on the basis of their background or certain personal characteristics, including their sexual orientation or gender identity or intersex status. For example, this might include refusing services based on a person's gender identity.

Indirect discrimination is imposing, or proposing to impose, a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to, disadvantage people, such as those with a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status, and which is not reasonable in the circumstances. For example, requiring use of a birth name for all communications/not having options to use a self-stated name.

## FORMAL ACCREDITATION

Mental and general health services with sufficient resources may consider applying for Rainbow Tick accreditation to develop and demonstrate processes and structures for LGBTQIA+ cultural responsiveness. Rainbow Tick accreditation requires independent assessment and a commitment to ongoing quality improvement. Not every service will have the means to pursue the Rainbow Tick accreditation. However, accreditation demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement in safe and inclusive practice for LGBTQIA+ people. The Rainbow Tick standards can be found on [Rainbow Health Victoria website](#).

**“Knowing that a service has Rainbow Tick accreditation means I don't have to be hyper vigilant trying to figure out whether or not this service is safe for me to access. Instead I can focus on getting the most from the service like everyone else without the fear of discrimination.”**

**MAC ZAMANI, YOUNG PERSON**

## CASE EXAMPLE

### headspace Ballarat's journey to Rainbow Tick Accreditation

JANELLE JOHNSON, MANAGER

#### WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO START THE PROCESS OF RAINBOW TICK ACCREDITATION?

Our lead agency, Ballarat Community Health, was very motivated and we support a large number of LGBTIQ+ young people. We wanted our services to be safe, supportive and approachable. We knew that we were doing some things well but could do some things better. And we wanted to be able to say and know that we were doing the right things rather than just thinking that we were.

#### WHERE DID YOU START?

We started by looking at the Rainbow Tick framework and documentation, and by finding where we might have gaps. We also wanted to work closely with young people from the beginning, co-designing the outcomes. It was vital to have the support of the Board and our leadership so that it was a whole organisation approach, not just one part of the organisation.

#### WHAT DID YOU LEARN ALONG THE WAY?

That not everyone has the same concept of inclusive and safe organisations and that education is very important.

It has been really positive to hear from other community partners, as it encouraged them to look at how to make their organisations more inclusive, and the community was able

to get behind it. The young people involved in headspace Ballarat's program ZAQUE and in collaboration with Ballarat Hub Inc created a guide to help other organisations in the community to go down the same path called 'Road to the Rainbow Tick'. Young people from headspace's youth advocacy group were also able to help other community partners by auditing their receptions to help make them safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ+ young people.

Since going through our Rainbow Tick accreditation, four other organisations in the community have gone through Rainbow Tick accreditation. Even for those that don't choose to go through the process of accreditation, as they might not have the resources, the framework can be a helpful starting point to understand what is appropriate.

#### WHAT IMPACT HAS THIS HAD ON THE ACCESSIBILITY AND SERVICE THAT YOU PROVIDE FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE?

The process has tightened our processes, bringing inclusivity to the forefront in all areas from publicity, planning activities, waiting rooms, our website and Facebook. It has led to the development of the Safe Project in waiting rooms across Ballarat Community Health, as well as the introduction of gender neutral toilets. These changes have led to many more trans and gender diverse young people accessing services, which in turn, has allowed us to build specialised support, including headspace Ballarat becoming a Health Equal Youth (HEY) partner, having a HEY youth worker and running ZAQUE (a youth social group for LGBTIQ+ young people and allies). Ballarat Community Health has created a Trans and Gender Diverse Health Clinic and now has a Transgender Peer Navigator.

#### WHAT HAS THE FEEDBACK BEEN FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES?

We ran workshops for families, parents and carers of gender diverse young people, in which they provided feedback to us about what has been helpful and what other supports would be beneficial. From this, we found out that parents and carers wanted further opportunities to meet together in a more structured manner, as well as the opportunity to communicate with one another and ask questions via a closed Facebook group. They also wanted more information on other services, for example, where they could access appropriate binders, clothing stores and hairdressers that were safe and supportive. They reported that they enjoyed and valued being able to speak with a psychologist to learn about mental health supports and gender affirmation.

#### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER SERVICES?

It is important that the whole organisation is educated and is on board, so that everyone knows about the process and what it means before starting. I would encourage services to get support, either through linking with organisations in your community that have gone through the process or by attending Rainbow Health Victoria's How2 training.

#### WHERE TO FROM HERE?

There are several organisations that have developed comprehensive and reflective resources that may assist your journey. We would encourage you to explore these resources, and set regular tasks in relation to reflection, practice and evaluation for your individual, team and/or service goals.

## RESOURCES

- [Rainbow Health Victoria, Rainbow Tick Standards](#)
- [Rainbow Health Victoria, Rainbow Tick Standards: A Framework for LGBTIQ Cultural Safety](#)
- [Cohealth, A practical guide to trans, gender diverse and non-binary inclusion](#)
- [Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council LGBTIQ+ terminologies in your own language](#)
- [TransHub, Creating welcoming environments](#)
- [YACVic youth participation](#)
- [LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, National LGBTI Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy](#)
- [The World Professional Association for Transgender Health \(WPATH\) Standards of Care \(Version 7\)](#)
- [Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents](#)

## ORYGEN RESOURCES

- [Trans and gender diverse young people](#)
- [Cultural diversity and mental wellbeing](#)
- [Youth participation with young people from multicultural backgrounds](#)
- [Tips for creating a youth-friendly reception](#)
- [Co-designing with young people](#)
- [Program evaluation: laying the right foundations](#)

## REFERENCES

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