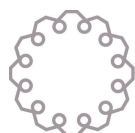

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LGBTIQA+ INCLUSION IN HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

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Disclaimer

This is not an exhaustive inclusive-practice guide, and has been created to complement the Zoe Belle Gender Collective's LGBTIQ+ training packages in homelessness and housing and provide a more simplified and accessible tip sheet to remind service providers of best-practice. For more extensive best-practice tips and managerial tools, please see the Melbourne University's LGBTI Homelessness website (<http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/resources/for-service-providers/>), which include a comprehensive [LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practice Guide for Homelessness and Housing Sectors in Australia](#).

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Creating a welcoming environment

- Communicate your individual inclusive practice by wearing visible LGBTIQ+ symbols of support (e.g. pronoun badges, rainbow/trans flag lanyard, badge or ribbons).
- Demonstrate organisational inclusive practice by displaying LGBTIQ+ inclusive materials (eg. posters, flags and resources) on your website, promotional materials and physical spaces.
- Celebrate LGBTIQ+ days of significance (e.g. IDAHOBIT, Wear It Purple Day, Trans Day of Visibility).
- Engage in and support LGBTIQ+ cultural events in your region.
- Create networks and partnerships with LGBTIQ+ organisations and communities to strengthen relationships and referral pathways.
- Consider the different identities within the LGBTIQ+ umbrella and ensure visibility of all different communities are represented (e.g. include intersex, bisexual, trans and non-binary flags or symbols).
- Create LGBTIQ+ identified positions and employ LGBTIQ+ peer workers.

Client-centred and driven care

- You can't tell someone's sexuality, gender identity or intersex status based upon how they look or sound, their mannerisms, who they are in a relationship with or the information on their legal identification. Avoid making assumptions.
- Keep in mind that someone's LGBTIQ+ identity is just one aspect of their identity and there may be other important aspects of their identity or lives that should be considered, including but not limited to cultural background, religion, disability, HIV status, socioeconomic status, age, etc.
- In supporting LGBTIQ+ clients always make sure that the process is client-centred and driven to ensure autonomy and their rights of self-determination. Explore the client's individual priorities and goals.
- Inquire whether the client wants support in regards to their gender identity, sexuality, and/or intersex status or not, and if so what type of support is appropriate.
- Explain all the types of support and advocacy you could potentially offer to ensure the client is informed about what is available to them. This might include general services you provide, as well as LGBTIQ+ specific programs or supports or resources e.g. supporting them to change their legal name, referral to a social support group, etc.

- Always seek permission from the client before making any decisions or disclosures.

Access and intake

- Create multiple opportunities for clients to disclose their gender, sexual identity or intersex status if they wish to and ask if they would like it recorded in their file/client notes.
- Ensure that intake and screening forms allow clients and staff to accurately record their gender identity, sexuality and intersex status. This can be done by providing an extensive list of different identities for clients to choose from and/or a blank space for people to self-describe their identity (*see page 12 of the GALFA TGD Pilot Project Model of Care guide for examples on how to create inclusive intake forms*).
- Ensure you make disclosure optional by providing a 'prefer not to say' option.
- Provide 'I don't know' option for people who may be exploring their gender and sexuality or people who may not know about their intersex status. Offer additional support if needed.
- You should have professional capacity to clearly explain basic LGBTIQ+ terminology including knowledge on gender, sexuality and intersex status.
- Explain why you are collecting information on LGBTIQ+ identities and who has access to this information. Clarify if the client would like this information recorded.
- It's important to establish the level of support your client has around their LGBTIQ+ identity. You may have a higher duty of care to people who have just come out, have limited supports and community connection or other vulnerabilities.

Using inclusive language

- Reflect the language that clients use to self-describe their identities. If you're unfamiliar with any language that your client uses, take notes and engage in research or secondary consultation, rather than expecting your client to educate you.
- Politely ask if you are unsure about a person's affirmed name and pronoun, whilst maintaining awareness that this information may be confidential or sensitive, and discretion may be important.
- If you make a mistake about a person's name, pronouns, gender or sexuality, politely apologise and make an effort to remember.
- Use inclusive language to avoid making assumptions in situations where someone has not yet disclosed the language they use to describe themselves or their relationships (e.g. 'partner/spouse' instead of girlfriend/boyfriend or husband/wife, 'they' instead of 'she' or 'he', parent instead of mother/father and child instead of daughter/son).
- Actively share your pronouns with clients and other staff. Pronouns can be shared on your email signature, in meetings and by wearing a pronoun badge.

Managing Confidentiality

- Disclosure may put a clients safety at significant risk. Be aware that some people may not want to or may not feel safe to disclose their LGBTIQ+ identity.
- Explicitly state your organisation’s policies on confidentiality.
- Seek permission and clarify with the client before sharing their LGBTIQ+ status with anyone else (including staff, external agencies, other clients, family/friends).
- Be aware managing LGBTIQ+ people’s confidentiality/disclosure may be complex. For example, some LGBTIQ+ clients may feel comfortable being ‘out’ in certain spaces but not in others. Processes may need to be developed to ensure confidentiality is managed correctly. Check in regularly.
- Consider what information your client may/may not want disclosed about their identity (including names, titles and pronouns) in:
 - interactions with other staff and external services (including referrals)
 - interactions with your clients significant others
 - interactions with other service users or residents
 - their mail or other written or digital correspondence

Addressing risks and safety

- LGBTIQ+ people may have safety concerns when accessing your services including fear of physical and verbal abuse, sexual assault, privacy and confidentiality concerns, being “outed”, experiencing discrimination, being denied access to facilities, services, and programs (in particular faith based or gendered settings).
- Check in with your LGBTIQ+ client whether they have any safety concerns and where possible ensure they are addressed and their identities are affirmed.
- Have a zero tolerance policy on discrimination & harassment and display this around physical spaces, resources and on your website. Actively address and challenge discrimination.
- Record incidents of discrimination based upon gender, sexuality or intersex status by others including individual clients, staff, family and significant others, neighbours, landlords, and services. Properties should be monitored and evaluated for safety risks.

- Inform clients of their rights (including right to safety) and complaints pathways, including anti discrimination legislation and victimisation protections.
- TGD people's bodies, in particular, are often objectified, sexualised and subject to abuse. TGD people may be put at risk when services reject them from accessing care or housing. Advocate for TGD people's right to be safe and affirmed.
- Be aware that discrimination exists within the LGBTIQ+ community, including; racism, ableism, transphobia, biphobia etc. This means you can't always assume that LGBTIQ+ services and programs will be inclusive or safe for all LGBTIQ+ people.

Determining appropriate housing and services

- TGD people should be offered gendered housing options, sleeping arrangements and bathroom facilities based upon their self-determined gender identity and NOT based upon their presentation, how they look or sound, or their bodies (i.e. medical affirmation/hormones/surgeries). Do not assume what gendered spaces a trans and gender diverse person may feel safest in accessing, all options with the client should be discussed and all decisions should be client led. This is in line with the definition for gender identity protected under the federal *Sex Discrimination Amendment Act 2013*.
- TGD people are often asked inappropriate and intrusive questions about their bodies and medical status when trying to access housing or housing support i.e. whether they've had hormone replacement therapy or gender affirming surgeries. Under the *Equal Opportunity Act (2010)*, interrogating people about their physical characteristics may be considered sexual harassment.
- When looking for appropriate and safe accommodation or housing for your LGBTIQ+ clients, it might be important to screen or vet other clients, potential housemates, landlords and neighbours for homophobia, biphobia or transphobia.
- Some gender-based services have exemptions or exceptions under the law that allow them to exclude certain gender identities from accessing or working at their service (e.g. women's refuges). However, these services must include trans people who identify with the gender that they offer support to (i.e. women's services must accept trans women and men's services must accept trans men) as gender is self-determined under federal law.
- If your service has gender-based exemptions or exceptions, remember that you do not always have to use them! Consider the implications and risks associated with excluding vulnerable LGBTIQ+ clients from your service, that there may not be any other services available to them.

- Develop mechanisms to overcome barriers for TGD to be included in gendered programs and services. Some examples of this include:
 - explicitly state that TGD people are welcome to gendered programs or services and discuss with individual clients what they would prefer.
 - allocate rooms in housing facilities that aren't gendered.
 - if a program or service is gendered, consider whether it needs to be.

TGD People, Gendered spaces and amenities

- Gendered spaces, amenities and programs may create additional barriers or accessibility issues for TGD clients and staff (e.g. housing non-binary people in binary gendered accommodation).
- Don't make assumptions about what amenities a client should or may want to use, instead inform them of all available options (for example, don't assume TGD people will want to use all gender/unisex toilets, or pressure them to do so).
- Ensure the design and signage of amenities (toilets, change rooms, etc.) are inclusive of TGD people and add this to new build/renovation policies. Consult trans and gender organisations about the implementation and design. All gender/gender neutral amenities should be available to anyone who may wish to access them.

Considering Cultural and Religious Diversity

- Educate yourself on how colonisation in many parts of the world, especially Australia, has disrupted traditional cultural understandings of gender, sexuality and intersex variations.
- Many cultures have their own terms for LGBTIQ+ people; for example, sistergirls and brotherboys exist in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some people may not identify with Western LGBTIQ+ language.
- Recognise that cultural identities, obligations, expectations, behaviours, and expressions of LGBTIQ+ people across the world may differ from Western LGBTIQ+ culture. Don't expect people to conform to Western LGBTIQ+ cultural narratives.
- Faith and culture may be an integral part of a person's identity and community. Don't make assumptions about how someone's cultural identity or religion affects their relationship to their LGBTIQ+ identity.
- Offer to provide resources and referrals that are inclusive of a client's cultural identity or faith e.g. referral to an LGBTIQ+ faith or multicultural group.

- Be aware that some refugees and asylum seekers may be seeking asylum due to persecution of their LGBTIQ+ identity and that it is a protected status.
- Confidentiality may need to be navigated carefully when using interpreters. It may be important to offer over the phone translators or translators from interstate to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Assisting with TGD Affirmation

- There may be significant barriers for TGD people wanting to affirm their gender identity, especially for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness (e.g. it may be unsafe for a trans woman to wear feminine clothes while sleeping rough).
- TGD people often experience high amounts of pressure to meet cisgender beauty standards and gendered stereotypes. 'Passing' refers to when TGD people are read by others as cisgender. Housing and homelessness services should never pressure TGD people to 'pass' or meet these gender stereotypes.
- Some trans and gender diverse people may want assistance in their gender affirmation. Gender affirming support may include:
 - Providing access to TGD resources and information, and connections to TGD or LGBTIQ+ social support groups (including online), peers, workshops and events.
 - Assistance in accessing gender affirming items e.g. take people shopping for clothing that help affirm their gender identity, helping people get access to binders or bras.
 - Provide access to inclusive workshops eg. makeup & hair tutorials, clothes swaps etc.
 - Assistance in navigating and offering discretionary funding for legal affirmation, including a name change.
 - Assist people accessing gender affirmation plans for schools and workplaces.
 - Assistance in accessing medical affirmation for those who want it, or linking them in with inclusive/TGD-friendly medical providers.

Making appropriate referrals

- If you're not the appropriate service for a particular client, actively support them through warm referral processes.
- Ask the client if they'd prefer to access a LGBTIQ+ or mainstream service.
- Familiarise yourself with support services relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities. Some of these are listed on <http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/> however it can be very useful to develop a list of localised LGBTIQ+ friendly supports, services and workers (e.g. local GPs and social

support groups).

- Ensure that LGBTIQ+ clients are being referred to services that will affirm and respect their identities. This will require checking in with services to assess their LGBTIQ+ cultural competency (e.g. inclusive intake forms, recently attended LGBTIQ+ training, have LGBTIQ+ policies or peer workers, etc). Offer tools and resources to external agencies to help them to engage in LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice.
- Ensure that clients are familiar with feedback and complaint avenues if necessary.

Links for more information

<http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/>