
CASE STUDY

COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER DIVERSITY AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES: AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC-HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

In 2021, Orygen published a suite of resources about gender diversity and youth mental health.

The resources were developed through a collaborative stakeholder engagement process that started in 2019. This case study provides an overview of how the project was developed. It also recognises the invaluable contributions from young people, families and professionals working across community, health and academic sectors, without whom this work would not be possible.

The published resources aim to support the youth mental health workforce to work responsively and affirmatively with trans and gender diverse young people. The full suite of resources can be found [on our website](#).



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Orygen is a world-leading research and knowledge translation organisation with a mission to reduce the impact of mental ill-health on young people, their families and society. Through the delivery of research, policy development, innovative clinical services and evidence-based workforce development and education, Orygen's vision is for young people to enjoy optimal mental health as they grow into adulthood.

Orygen's knowledge translation (KT) division focuses on growing the capacity of Australia's systems, services and professionals who support young people with emerging and existing mental ill-health. The Australian Government Department of Health supports the team to achieve this through funding the development of translational resources for the youth mental health workforce, based on knowledge gained through clinical, research, and lived experience. These resources focus on: increasing mental health awareness; promoting early recognition and help-seeking; building capacity for partnerships; supporting best practice; and reducing the impact of mental ill-health in young people.

One of the areas identified as a capacity need for the Australian youth mental health workforce is gender diversity and youth mental health. In July 2019, Orygen's KT division commenced work on a project to develop resources in this area, to help mental health professionals work safely, effectively, and affirmatively with trans and gender diverse young people.



For this work, gender diverse and gender diversity are used as umbrella terms to include the many different ways people can experience and perceive gender, including people who identify as trans/transgender, people questioning their gender, genderqueer, non-binary, and others.

We note that trans and gender diverse identities are not reflective of, or underpinned by, mental ill-health or any mental health condition.

However, trans and gender diverse young people experience disproportionately high rates of mental ill-health including anxiety, depression, deliberate self-harm and suicide attempts.(1), which relates to social and systemic responses to trans and gender diverse identities.(2)

Although not all trans and gender diverse young people will require mental health support, it is imperative that the mental health workforce has the capacity to provide gender-affirming care to these young people.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

To build the capacity of the youth mental health workforce to work safely, effectively, and affirmatively with trans and gender diverse young people and their families, this project aimed to:

- Identify key youth mental health workforce and service knowledge and practice needs related to gender diversity.
- Develop resources designed to:
 - enhance youth mental health workforce knowledge and skills related to working with trans and gender diverse young people;
 - support clinical services to adapt their environments to include, affirm and celebrate gender diversity; and
 - build capacity for partnership across youth mental health and gender diversity sectors, and with trans and gender diverse young people.
- Disseminate translational resources to appropriate workforces and services nationally.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS EARLY

In developing these resources, Orygen recognised from the outset the essential need to partner with experts with professional and lived experience.

Building on existing connections, Orygen established an early partnership with Telethon Kids Institute to help develop the overall approach for this project. Telethon Kids Institute played a key role in connecting the Orygen project lead to experts in the area of gender diversity and youth mental health. Following individual consultation with a range of experts, it was decided to establish an expert working group combining representatives from leading organisations in gender diversity and youth mental health.



MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY

Young people with lived experience of gender diversity and mental ill-health were invited to guide the development of resource content by participating in interviews or focus groups to initially inform resource content and by reviewing and providing feedback about the resources. Young people were invited to participate in videos about gender diversity and mental health.

To participate in this project, interested young people completed an expression of interest that:

- provided an overview of the project, including each of the planned resources;
- enquired about what resource/s they would like to contribute to;
- asked what type of activities they were willing to participate in, for example, an interview/ focus group, reviewing written resource content and/or participating in filming for video content; and
- enquired into their availability to participate during the project period.

To support the preferences and needs of young people, youth advisors had the flexibility to come in and out of the project at any time, if needed. Consideration was given to different ways of being involved, depending on what the young people found worked best for them. For instance, young people could choose whether to be involved in videos, to provide feedback on resource content either anonymously or to be acknowledged, and the method for providing feedback they preferred, for instance, meeting to discuss or providing written comments. To assist the KT team to support the wellbeing and participation of young people in the project, all youth advisors completed wellness plans that helped staff to identify topics to avoid in consultation, to recognise signs that a young person might be feeling overwhelmed or stressed, and made staff aware of strategies that young people could use to relax and to support their wellbeing when feeling stressed. Family members with lived experience as a parent of a gender diverse young person were invited to contribute to videos designed to share lived experiences of gender affirmation and supporting trans and gender diverse young people accessing support for their mental health. Family members also offered feedback on written resources designed to support family engagement with young people's mental health care. Family members were reached by connecting with family peer support networks.

In recognition of the work, time and insight provided, young people and family members were reimbursed for their participation and the invaluable contributions they provided to this project.

For tips on how to partner with young people see Orygen's toolkit:

[How to partner with young people.](#)

BRINGING TOGETHER THE EXPERTS: EXPERT WORKING GROUP

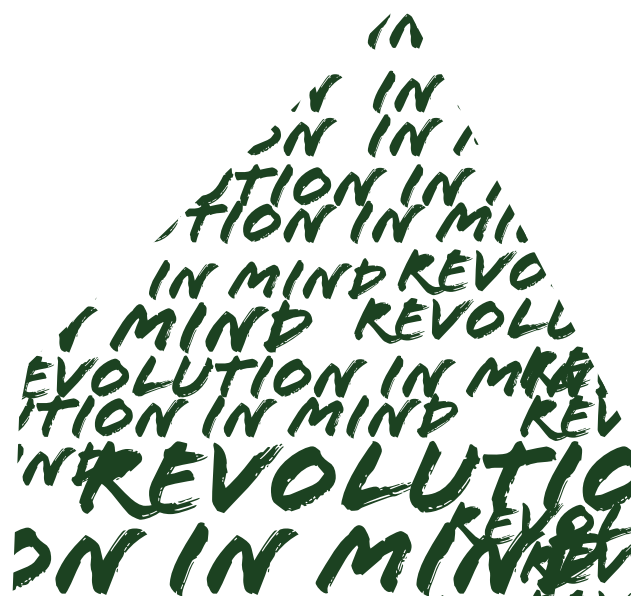
An expert working group combining professional and lived expertise was established to inform the development of the gender diversity and youth mental health resources.

The expert working group was consulted to:

- identify the needs of the youth mental health workforce for working with trans and gender diverse young people;
- provide advice on strategies for delivering the resources, including strategies for broader consultation with trans and gender diverse young people and/or the youth mental health workforce;
- share knowledge and experiences across sectors to build understanding on how to establish respectful partnerships between trans and gender diverse communities and health professionals;
- identify advocacy opportunities to build the youth mental health workforce capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people; and
- promote project activities and resources with community, health, academic, government and/or policy networks.

The expert working group included trans and gender diverse young people aged 16–25, professionals with lived experience, representatives from Orygen's KT team, experts in implementation, policy or advocacy and others with professional experience related to gender diversity, for instance, workforce training. The working group met four times during the development of the resources between July 2019 and June 2021

To account for people's changing commitments and roles, the terms of reference for the working group allowed new members to join and existing members to withdraw over the course of the project.



IDENTIFYING GUIDING FRAMEWORKS AND APPROACHES

One of the first tasks of the expert working group was to identify relevant frameworks and approaches to guide the development and content of the resources. The table below provides an overview of the frameworks and approaches, and how they would be reflected in project processes and outputs.

TABLE ONE: Frameworks and approaches identified by the expert working group, that informed the approach to the development and the content of the resources.



Photo The Gender Spectrum Collection

FRAMEWORK/APPROACH	PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS WILL REFLECT THIS BY:
Gender affirmative	Aligning with principles of the gender-affirmative model; (3, 4), (a) gender variations are not disorders; (b) gender presentations vary across cultures; (c) gender involves an interweaving of biology, development and socialisation, and culture and context; (d) gender may be fluid and is not always binary; and (e) if there is pathology in the form of mental ill-health, this more often stems from societal reactions rather than from within the young person.
Person-centred	Emphasising that young people are experts in their own lives, can play an active role in the design and delivery of their mental health care, and are each on their own journey with mental health and gender.
Family-centred	Recognising the evidence for the benefits of working with family of trans and gender diverse young people, when it is possible and appropriate.
Intersectional	Emphasising that gender intersects with ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic status and other social identities at the individual level to reflect systems of privilege and oppression at social-structural levels.
Strengths-based	Focusing on the resilience, connection and strength of trans and gender diverse young people rather than risk, vulnerability and pathology.
Trauma-informed	Acknowledging that trans and gender diverse people may have had personally or vicariously traumatic experiences with health providers that present barriers to accessing care for their wellbeing.
Public health-based	Recognising the social determinants of health, including risk and protective factors for trans and gender diverse young people and their families.
Rights-based	Acknowledging that discrimination and inequity are major issues for many trans and gender diverse young people experiencing mental distress.
Recovery-oriented	Embracing the unique personal experience, process, or journey that is defined and led by the young person experiencing mental ill-health.
Developmentally-informed	Considering the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of the young person.
Multidisciplinary	Emphasising that mental health care and support is not a one-person job: it must be integrated across primary care providers, school, and other professionals and organisations that support the wellbeing of young people.

FLEXIBLE CONSULTATION

In addition to lived experience advisors and the expert working group, Orygen consulted with a range of experts individually to understand the needs of the youth mental health workforce. This helped to identify whether similar projects or resources already existed or were in development, and opportunities for disseminating the final resources. In recognition of competing demands, people were given the opportunity to contribute at times outside of the structured expert working group meetings.

SUPPORTING PRIVACY

Those who contributed to the project via interviews, focus groups, within the expert working group meetings or through written feedback, were asked whether their name or any direct quotes they provided could be shared on any of the resources. Individuals who participated in videos completed an informed consent form to allow for sharing of the content.

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Due to limitations set by COVID-19, meetings with collaborators and the expert working group were conducted via videoconference. This allowed for accessibility and inclusion of people from across Australia.



GOING FORWARD

Orygen is committed to the continuous improvement and development of our processes to create resources for the youth mental health workforce.

Collaborators involved in this project will be invited to complete an evaluation questionnaire to help Orygen understand their experiences of being involved in this work and how processes for collaboration might be improved in the future.

Recognising that the evidence for gender affirming care and the mental health of trans and gender diverse young people is growing rapidly, and that language and needs of community are dynamic, Orygen is committed to reviewing the content of all resources every year to ensure that they include the most up-to-date information. We are also identifying ways of gaining meaningful feedback on the utility, accessibility, and content of resources published through this project.

Orygen is also identifying ways to stay connected with all the collaborators and partners in this work, and to build on partnerships established and strengthened during the development of the resources, including research and workforce development projects, youth participation opportunities, and more.

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