



**A GUIDE TO PROVIDING
GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE
IN HEADSPACE SERVICES**

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THIS RESOURCE WILL HELP YOU:

- understand what gender-affirming care is and why it is important
- identify ways that you and your service can be inclusive and responsive for trans and gender diverse young people (12–25 years)
- access other practical resources that can support your practice with young people and their family, carers and supporters.

This resource was developed for all professionals working in headspace services, including non-clinical and clinical staff, students, and volunteers. While headspace professionals are the target audience, information herein is also applicable to other health professionals working in (enhanced) primary care settings. A separate [gender-affirming medical care](#) resource has been developed for General Practitioners working in headspace and other youth mental health services.

This resource uses the language *trans* and *gender diverse* to describe people whose gender differs from the gender presumed for them at birth. This includes gender identities such as trans men or trans women, non-binary, gender questioning, agender, gender queer, Brotherboys and Sistergirls.



GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE: WHAT IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Gender-affirming care is health care that holistically attends to trans and gender diverse people's physical, mental, and social health needs and well-being while respectfully affirming **gender identity**. Gender-affirming care is the responsibility of all professionals working in health and mental health settings, not just those in specialist settings or those who can provide gender-affirming medical care (such as GPs).

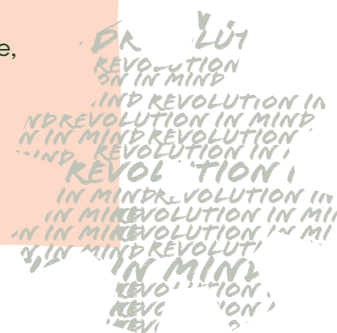
Trans and gender diverse young people have higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicidality compared with cisgender young people.(1) This is connected to the higher rates of discrimination and violence trans and gender diverse young people can experience in schools, workplaces, health settings and family contexts.(2, 3) However, despite this elevated need for health supports, many trans and gender diverse young people report feeling isolated from medical and mental health services.(4, 5) In Australia's largest study with trans and gender diverse young people, 60 per cent of participants reported feeling isolated from medical and mental health services and 48 per cent had a history of suicide attempt. (3) Non-affirming experiences in health care settings can heighten young people's distress, which can lead to disengagement with these services, or a delay or refusal in seeking care.(6) This means that working in a gender-affirming way is essential to help young people both engage and stay engaged with health care. In Australia, it is also against the law to discriminate against anyone based on their gender.(7)

Gender affirmation can look different across cultures and across time. There are many ways in which a young person can affirm their gender identity, which youth mental health professionals can help to support. These can be grouped into three broad categories: social affirmation, legal affirmation, and medical affirmation (or gender-affirming medical care).

- **Social affirmation:** changes that a trans or gender diverse young person can make in their social life to express their gender.
- **Legal affirmation:** the process of aligning information within government and legal systems with one's gender. It may include changing names or gender markers on identification such as a birth certificate, passport or Medicare card.
- **Gender-affirming medical care:** access to medical interventions designed to affirm an individual's gender identity. Medical interventions for gender affirmation include puberty suppression, hormone therapy and surgery. See [here](#) for an evidence review of the link between gender-affirming care and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

WHAT CAN I DO TO BE MORE GENDER INCLUSIVE AND AFFIRMING?

- Share your pronouns when introducing yourself to young people. This can indicate your openness and understanding of the importance of pronouns for affirming gender.
- Don't just ask queer or trans-looking people about their pronouns. You cannot tell if someone is trans or cis by how they look.
- With their consent, use the trans or gender diverse person's chosen name, pronouns, and the gender with which they identify in all files, case notes and correspondence. Instead of describing trans and gender diverse young people using 'assigned female/male at birth,' use the language that young people use to describe their gender. For example, "Jane is a trans woman who uses she/her pronouns".
- Notice how common using they/them pronouns is when we don't know someone's gender. For example, we might ask, "How old are they? What suburb do they live in?".
- If you make a mistake with someone's name or pronouns: acknowledge, apologise, and move on. Do not make a big fuss as this puts the responsibility on the young person to make you feel better. If you hear a young person being misgendered by someone else, correct the person by saying for example, "[person] uses she/her pronouns".



Learn more of the fundamentals about gender diversity, affirmation and youth mental health with these resources

- **Gender diversity and youth mental health: 101** (online learning module; Orygen) – This module is designed for people who work in youth mental health services to build their knowledge and skills in providing gender-affirming care.
- **Gender diversity and language** (factsheet; Orygen) – This factsheet aims to help professionals working with young people to build an understanding of the importance and impact of language in relation to gender diversity as well as commonly used terminology. It also demonstrates how this terminology can be used in practice.
- **Intersectionality and youth mental health** (factsheet; Orygen) – This factsheet provides a brief overview of intersectionality as a concept, its history, and what it means for youth mental health.
- **Journeys: Affirming gender diversity in young people** (videos; Orygen) – These videos build awareness of lived experiences of gender diversity in the context of youth mental health.





APPLYING A GENDER-AFFIRMING APPROACH WHEN WORKING THERAPEUTICALLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth mental health practitioners can utilise several frameworks and approaches to build strong and responsive therapeutic relationships with trans and gender diverse young people. Practitioners working in therapeutic roles will already have many of the skills needed to work in a gender-affirming way, which is inclusive and responsive to the experiences and needs of trans and gender diverse young people. For example:

- Person-centred care – Using a person-centred approach, you can support a young person's power and autonomy around their exploration of gender identity and decision-making about gender affirmation.
- Trauma-informed care – Not all trans and gender diverse young people will directly experience trauma, but it's essential to recognise the reality of transphobic systems, as well as bullying and violence that can contribute to post-traumatic stress responses in trans and gender diverse young people.
- Reflective practice – When working with trans and gender diverse young people it is essential to reflect on your own beliefs and attitudes about gender. This reflection should examine ways in which you may have internalised cis-normativity, and ways of acting and thinking that are based on assumptions that being cisgender is the norm.

TIPS FOR APPLYING A GENDER AFFIRMING APPROACH WHEN WORKING THERAPEUTICALLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



- Work with your colleagues to ensure a young person's chosen name is used consistently at your service. A 2018 study found that an increase by just one context in which a chosen name was used predicted a 29% decrease in suicidal ideation and a 56% decrease in suicidal behaviour amongst trans and gender diverse young people.(8)
- Pronouns and names can be practiced when speaking about the young person in case discussions and supervision. Commit to seeing the young person as they see themselves even when you're not in the same physical space.
- Ask your team leader, centre manager or community engagement officers what internal and external trans and gender diverse community supports and organisations you can refer to locally or with whom you can collaborate.

Mental health practitioners can learn more about gender-affirming care with these resources:

- **Gender-affirming mental health care:** (clinical practice point; Orygen) – This resource aims to advance knowledge and practice in gender-affirming care; it assumes prior knowledge in youth mental health.
- **Considerations for the care of trans and gender diverse young people** (clinical tips; headspace) – This resource offers clinical guidance for healthcare providers on delivering inclusive and supportive care for trans and gender-diverse young people.
- **The trans and gender diverse support referral matrix (Emerging Minds)** – This resource is designed to help health and social service professionals connect trans and gender diverse children, young people, and their family, carers and supporters with appropriate support services across different Australian states and territories. Standards of Care

Standards of care for trans and gender diverse young people aged under and over 18 years have been developed by Australian and global experts. These outline current best practice and are relevant to mental health and general health professionals. They provide guidance on assessment, intervention, safety, and other considerations for working with trans and gender diverse young people.

- For young people under 18 years of age: [**Australian Standard of Care and Treatment Guidelines: For trans and gender diverse children and adolescents**](#)⁽⁹⁾
- For young people over 18 years of age: [**World Professional Association for Transgender Health \(WPATH\) Standards of Care**](#)⁽¹⁰⁾

Resources for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trans and gender diverse young people

Some Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal young people may use different terminology to express their gender diverse identity, such as Brotherboy and Sistergirl, which involves having a masculine or feminine spirit and taking on corresponding cultural roles within their community.

- [**Working with young people who are LGBTQIA+ and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background**](#) (video; headspace)
- **Walkern Katatdjiri** (Rainbow Knowledge) website and reports:
 - **Phase 1 community report** – Insight into the perspectives and experiences of some Aboriginal LGBTQIA+ young people living in the Perth metropolitan region.
 - **Phase 2 national survey community report** – Findings from a national survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIA+ young people's mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.
- **VACCHO** – The peak representative for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria. VACCHO in collaboration with Wurru Wurru Health Unit have developed online training aimed at empowering health and wellbeing workers with knowledge and skills to provide culturally safe, responsive and effective care to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy (LGBTQIASB+) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Rainbow Mob).

- [**Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project**](#) – For related articles on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIA+ peoples, including young people.
- [**Links to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific LGBTQIASB+ groups, services and organisations around Australia.**](#)





WORKING WITH FAMILY, CARERS AND SUPPORTERS OF TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE

Family support and acceptance can be a significant positive influence on the mental health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people, including reducing risk of self-harm and suicide.(11-13) Family, carers and supporters may have a range of responses to their young person being trans or gender diverse, from supportive through to rejecting, abusive and violent, so careful consideration of family, carer and supporter involvement in care is essential.

There is also a lot of misinformation online about gender diversity and gender affirmation. It is important to encourage parents to seek their own support through a reputable service like Transcend, who can point family, carers and supporters toward evidence-based information and family peer support.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FAMILY, CARERS AND SUPPORTERS OF TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE



- Family, carers and supporters can experience a range of initial responses to hearing that their young person is trans or gender diverse. Reassure parents that many other parents have felt the same way and encourage them to express these feelings with people other than their young person (who may be looking to their family for support).
- If family, carers and supporters express guilt (e.g. “What did we do wrong?”, “This is my fault”), reassure them that having a trans or gender diverse young person is not related to bad parenting, divorce, abuse, or neglect. Gender diversity has been part of human existence throughout time and across cultures.
- If family, carers and supporters express fear for the young person’s safety, validate this feeling and acknowledge that there are parts of the world that are not safe for trans and gender diverse people. This is one of the reasons that family support is so important.
- If family, carers and supporters express fear for the young person’s quality of life (e.g. “Life will be so hard for them!”, “How will they find a partner?”), reassure them that the world is filled with trans and gender diverse people who have friends and partners who love them.
- Family, carers and supporters might express apprehension about gender affirmation and want to wait until the young person is older. Remind them that research shows doing nothing is not a neutral option, there can be significant negative mental health impacts of gender not being affirmed.

These tips were developed in conjunction with Dr Tram Nguyen, Royal Children’s Hospital Gender Service.

Learn more about working with family, carers and supporters of trans and gender diverse young people

- **Gender-affirming mental health care: working with families** (clinical practice point; Orygen) – Designed to help mental health practitioners work more effectively with family, carers and supporters of trans and gender diverse young people. It aims to build key knowledge and skills, and provides information about further education and support.
- **Supporting trans or gender diverse children and their families with gender affirmation: A guide for GPs and paediatricians** (Emerging Minds) – This resource is designed to guide practitioners through a conversation with a family and their young person who is exploring their gender identity and who might be trans or gender diverse. It is both a checklist for you to use in your organisation, and a conversation guide.
- **Transforming Families** – An academic community collaboration supporting parents of gender diverse children. Research, resources and support for family.
- **Transcend Australia** – A national community-led organisation providing family and peer support services, education, resources and advocacy programs.





CREATING WELCOMING AND AFFIRMING ENVIRONMENTS

To meaningfully engage with mental health and wellbeing supports, young people must feel safe and comfortable. All youth mental health services must create accessible and affirming physical and digital spaces for trans and gender diverse young people from the first point of engagement. This applies to appointment and intake systems, waiting and activity areas, as well as clinical spaces. Every staff member at a youth mental health service has a role to play in creating welcoming and affirming environments through their words, actions and the processes they support young people with.

TIPS FOR CREATING AFFIRMING SPACES



- If you are helping a young person to complete intake forms, avoid making assumptions about their gender by asking in an open way – for instance, “Some of these questions might seem obvious, but we ask all the same questions of everyone – how do you describe your gender?”.
- Enable leaders to support access to up-to-date training and professional development opportunities for all staff to build appropriate skills and knowledge about working with trans and gender diverse young people and communities.
- Be proactive about creating opportunities to integrate and consolidate knowledge and skills from training or professional development through regular discussions of language and best practices for working with trans and gender diverse young people. For example, in team meetings and supervision.

Learn more about creating welcoming and affirming environments for trans and gender diverse young people:

- **Creating welcoming environments** (TransHub) – This resource offers ways that health services can make trans and gender diverse people feel welcome in every interaction.
- **Inclusive and gender-affirming youth mental health services** (toolkit; Orygen) – This resource aims to help services to provide responsive and inclusive environments for young people.
- **Suicide prevention in LGBTQA+ young people: Best practice guidelines for clinical and community service providers** (The Kids Research Institute Australia) – Part 1 of this resource outlines principles for creating and affirming and inclusive environment for LGBTQA+ young people.
- **Inclusive workplaces** (workshops; Minus18)
- **Creating a welcoming and safe organisation for trans and gender diverse children and their families: a checklist for allied health services** (Emerging Minds)



SYSTEM ADVOCACY FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

You and your service have the power to advocate for safe, inclusive and gender-affirming care for young people across health, education and community services and systems. This includes actively removing access barriers, supporting trans rights, raising awareness in your service and local community. In addition to reporting negative experiences in health systems, many trans and gender diverse young people report experiences of discrimination at school.⁽³⁾ Your actions, even if they seem small, can go a long way to shaping broader thinking and action, to make the systems that support young people more inclusive and affirming.

TIPS FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE ADVOCACY



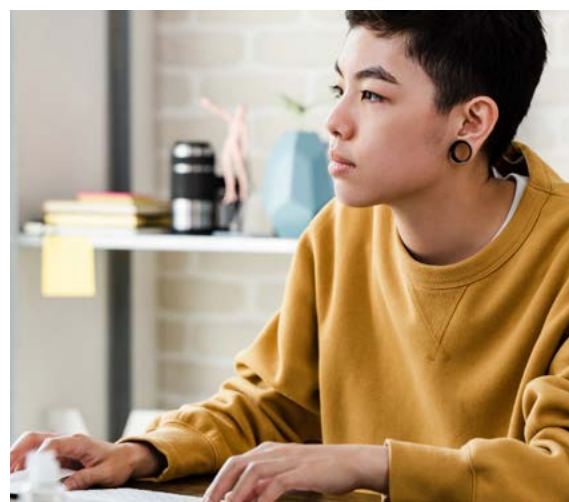
- Publicly celebrate and promote significant dates for trans and gender diverse young people (via digital platforms and onsite), for instance *Transgender Day of Visibility* or *Wear It Purple Day*.
- Participate in relevant forums aimed at improving the quality of services and care for trans and gender diverse young people, for example, professional associations, community organisations, local primary health networks.

Learn more about advocacy and allyship:

- [Allyship confidence kit](#) (Transgender Victoria)
- [Guideline: Transgender people at work](#) (Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission)

Tips and guidance for schools:

- [Guide for schools: supporting and affirming gender diverse students](#) (Transforming Families)
- [A guide for schools](#) (Transcend)
- [Inclusive strategies to build gender inclusion in your learning community](#) (BeYou)
- [Inclusive classrooms \(Minus 18\)](#) – workshops for students and teachers (at a cost).



FURTHER LEARNING

There are many ways to engage with further learning. In addition to all the resources listed above, here are some suggestions for further learning designed in Australia for different settings, by leading community, health and mental health organisations.

Professional membership

The Australian Professional Association for Trans Health (AusPATH) offers membership to health and mental health professionals, which includes an online community of practice and up-to-date resources and events about gender-affirming care.

Online training for primary care providers

- [Primary Health care for Trans, Gender Diverse, and Non-Binary \(TGDNB\) People](#) (free; jointly developed by North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and the University of Melbourne; AusPATH endorsed)
- [Asking Questions on Gender and Sexuality eLearning](#) (low-cost; developed by the AIDS Council of NSW [ACON])
- [Trans Vitality: Trans-Affirming Practice eLearning](#) (low cost; developed by ACON)

- [Trans and Gender Diverse Sexual Health Care e-learning](#) (free; developed by Australasian Society for HIV Medicine [ASHM] and ACON)
- [Open access online course on LGBTQIA+ health for medical students and health professionals](#) (free; developed by Wavelength, brought to you by Australian Medical Students' Association Queer)
- Thorne Harbour Health developed the [Trans and Gender Diverse in Community Health \(TGDICH\) Training Project](#), which offers interactive online training packages as well as in person training options for clinicians based in Victoria.

Online training for mental health providers

- [Mental health care for TGDNB people](#) (free; jointly developed by North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and the University of Melbourne; AusPATH endorsed)
- [Gender Diversity and Youth Mental Health 101](#) (free; developed by Orygen)
- Several online learning modules are available, at a cost, from the [Australian Psychological Society website](#)

AUSTRALIAN SPECIALIST GENDER SERVICES

In most states and territories in Australia, young people can access specialist gender-affirming medical care through hospital-based services. Some of these services provide secondary consultation to health professionals and can be a useful source of information and support for those working with young people.

Victoria:

- [Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service](#) – up to 16 years;
- [Monash Health Gender Clinic](#) – aged 16+;
- [Victorian Trans and Gender Diverse Community Health Services](#) – aged 18+;
- [Orygen Trans and Gender Diverse Service](#) (headspace) – 12–25 years;
- [Wodonga Gender Service](#) – 3–17 years

Queensland:

- [Queensland Children's Gender Service](#) – under 17;
- [Metro North Gender Service, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital](#) – aged 17+

New South Wales:

- [Sydney Children's Hospitals Network Trans and Gender Diverse Service Westmead](#) – up to 16 years (currently under development);
- [True Colours, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District](#) – aged 16–24;
- [Transgender and Maple Leaf House Gender Diversity Service at John Hunter Children's Hospital, Newcastle](#) – aged up to and including 24 years.

South Australia:

[Women's and Children's Hospital Paediatric Gender Clinic](#) – aged up to 17 years;

Western Australia:

[Gender Diversity Service at Perth Children's Hospital](#) – aged up to 18 years; Gender Diversity Service at East Metropolitan Health Service – aged 18+

Tasmania:

- [Tasmanian Gender Service](#) – up to 18 years;
- [Tasmanian Sexual Health Clinic](#) – aged 17+

Northern Territory:

[Northside Health NT](#) – all ages

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Trans and gender diverse young people can access further LGBTQIA+ information, crisis support and importantly peer support via:

- www.qlife.org.au
- www.charlee.org.au/
- www.switchboard.org.au/
- www.tgv.org.au
- www.transhub.org.au
- www.minus18.org.au
- <https://my.headspace.org.au/online-communities/372936/>
- Local trans and gender diverse community peer networks e.g. Queerspace in Victoria www.queerspace.org.au/qspacenetwork/
- AusPATH and TransHub websites list trans and gender diverse friendly health service providers across Australia:
 - <https://auspath.org.au/providers/>
 - www.transhub.org.au/doctors

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Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

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