

# **TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE INCLUSIVE-CARE GUIDE**

## **FOR HOSPITAL BASED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS**

This inclusive-care guide has been prepared by the Zoe Belle Gender Collective and the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

The aim of the guide is to minimise harm and ensure respectful care for Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) patients.

Hospitals have a legal and ethical obligation to provide care that is safe and supportive for TGD people.

Stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings causes many TGD people to under-utilise hospital services and delay seeking essential treatment.

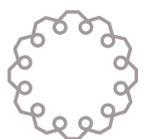
Recent Australian research<sup>1</sup> found that 41.3% of TGD people have avoided seeking emergency care when they have needed it, largely due to fear of transphobic harassment.

TGD people have the right to access healthcare. Experiencing barriers to care puts peoples' health and lives at risk.

### **TGD PATIENTS MAY EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING RISKS:**

- misgendering
- breaches in confidentiality
- verbal and physical abuse
- objectification and sexual harassment
- assumptions about bodies and medical histories.

<sup>1</sup>Kerr, L., Fisher, C.M., Jones, T. 2019. TRANScending Discrimination in Health & Cancer Care: A Study of Trans & Gender Diverse Australians, (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 117), Bundoora: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.



## INCLUSIVE CARE

### Respectful communication

- Best practice is to first introduce yourself with your own pronouns. e.g., “Hi I’m Melanie. I use she/her pronouns”.
- TGD people have a right to be addressed with the name and pronoun/s of their choice. Don’t make assumptions about a patient’s gender identity based upon their name, how they look, or how they sound.
- Give patients the opportunity to tell you their pronouns, affirmed name and gender identity. It’s best to ask your patient in a private setting what pronouns they use
- Avoid using gendered language (e.g., mrs, mr, she, he) until the patient tells you how they like to be addressed. This is especially important with the increasing use of phone and online consultations and telehealth.
- TGD people have the right to use bathrooms and wards of their affirmed gender, even if it’s not reflected on their Medicare card.
- If you need to refer to someone’s legal name instead of their affirmed name (e.g., administration of medication), respectfully explain to the patient why this is necessary.
- TGD people are often treated disrespectfully or in a degrading way in medical settings. Be aware of derogatory or humiliating language and behaviour, abruptness, rudeness or gossip.
- Inappropriate behaviour from staff or clients should immediately discussed with your manager and logged as an incident (e.g. on RiskMan).

### Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure must be managed according to the patient’s directions

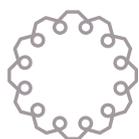
- The privacy and confidentiality of patients must always be maintained.
- Some TGD people may wish to keep their TGD history or experience private.

Be aware that information such as surgical status, medical history or personal information on legal documents can reveal someone’s TGD identity or history.

- Disclosure of TGD identity can put a patient at risk of family violence, homelessness, discrimination, physical and verbal abuse. Don’t assume TGD patients have disclosed to their family, friends, visitors, or other service providers.
- Always seek permission/informed consent to disclose identifying information to other staff, patients and significant others. This may be especially important during handover.
- Offer for your TGD patient’s preferred name/pronouns to be visible on communication devices (e.g. electronic records, hand-over sheets, patient whiteboard).
- Protect patient’s privacy in shared spaces/wards. Remember that curtains aren’t soundproof.

### Inform clients about available support & complaints systems

- Take TGD peoples’ complaints seriously.
- Consider who could be an ally or support person for the immediate needs of your patient.
- Consider nominating a staff member such as the NUM or LGBTIQ+ ally, to ensure proper and consistent management of the patient’s care.
- Check in regularly to ensure the patient’s care is appropriate and respectful.
- Where possible, allocate nurses who have experience working with TGD people. Seek advice from the patient about their nursing preferences.



## Consider patient safety and room assignment

- Be aware that TGD patients may be at risk of discrimination, including physical violence, verbal abuse and sexual harassment from other staff, patients and visitors.
- Don't make assumptions about a patient's room assignment or nursing preferences.
- Ask the patient if they have any safety concerns. e.g., having their TGD identity shared with others without consent, or being placed with someone transphobic.
- Ask which room the patient would like to be assigned in relation to gender and the attitudes of other patients. Take into consideration privacy and safety mechanisms.  
e.g., closeness to the front desk for increased monitoring.

## Bodies can be a sensitive subject for TGD people

- Body dysphoria is the distress or discomfort some TGD people feel about aspects of their bodies and/or how they are perceived by others.
- For some TGD people having extra privacy may be important, including for washing, exams, changing bandages and dressings.
- TGD people may use different language to describe their bodies/body parts.  
e.g., trans men might use chest rather than breasts, whether they've had surgical interventions or not.
- Where medically relevant, sensitively check what language the patient uses around their body. This may be important when working directly with a particular area of a patient's body—or needing to refer to it for medical reasons (e.g., chest or breast screening).

- Don't gender body parts.  
e.g., call a cervix a cervix rather than part of the female reproductive system.
- Practice sensitive care by offering people choice and autonomy during medical examinations and procedures. e.g., placing and removing ECG dots on your patient's chest could be done by the patient.

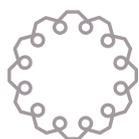
## Be aware that TGD people's bodies are often objectified, sexualised and subject to abuse

- Don't ask invasive questions about a patient's surgical history, gender affirming medications such as HRT, or TGD experience, unless it is clearly medically relevant.
- Asking unnecessary, intrusive questions around a patient's physical characteristics could be considered sexual harassment under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.
- If you need to ask about your patient's surgical history, TGD experience and/or body, clearly explain why that information is relevant to their care and who that information will be shared with.
- Don't bring in students without explicit permission.

## Support access to personal items that assist gender presentation

- It may be important to provide or help your patient gain access to gender affirming clothing and items such as bras, binders and underwear, make-up and wigs, or shaving equipment.
- Check in with the patient about who would be most appropriate to assist.

The Zoe Belle Gender Collective and Melbourne Health would like to acknowledge the work of Lambda Legal's Creating Equal Access to Quality Health Care for Transgender Patients: Transgender-Affirming Hospital Policies, which helped inform the best practice presented in this document.



## TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE REFERRALS, RESOURCES & COMPLAINT PATHWAYS

### LGBTIQA+ Organisations and Services

Zoe Belle Gender Collective  
[www.zbgc.org.au](http://www.zbgc.org.au)

Drummond Street Services  
“Queerspace”  
[www.queerspace.org.au](http://www.queerspace.org.au)

Thorne Harbour Health  
[www.thorneharbour.org](http://www.thorneharbour.org)

Rainbow Health Victoria  
[www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au](http://www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au)

Rainbow Network  
[www.rainbownetwork.com.au](http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au)

Transgender Victoria  
[www.transgendervictoria.com](http://www.transgendervictoria.com)

National LGBTI Health Alliance  
[www.lgbtihealth.org.au](http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au)

QLIFE  
(LGBTIQA+ phone & web chat  
counselling service and for  
consultation)  
1800 184 527  
[www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)

Rainbow Door (LGBTIQA+  
specialist helpline and  
secondary consultation)  
1800 729 367  
[www.rainbowdoor.org.au](http://www.rainbowdoor.org.au)

### Legal Complaints and Support:

Australian Human Rights  
Commission  
[www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)

Victorian Equal Opportunity &  
Human Rights Commission  
[www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)

St Kilda Legal Service  
[www.skls.org.au](http://www.skls.org.au)

Roberta Perkins Law Project  
[www.lgbtiqlegal.org.au/  
roberta-perkins-law-project](http://www.lgbtiqlegal.org.au/roberta-perkins-law-project)

### Victorian Trans & Gender Diverse Community Health and Medical Affirmation Services

[www.yourcommunityhealth.org.au/service-access/trans-and-gender-diverse-health](http://www.yourcommunityhealth.org.au/service-access/trans-and-gender-diverse-health)

Your Community  
HealthEquinox Gender  
Diverse Health Centre  
(03) 9416 2889

Monash Gender Clinic  
(03) 9556 5216

Royal Children’s Hospital  
Gender Service  
(03) 9345 5034

AUSPATH (about > service  
providers)  
[www.auspath.org](http://www.auspath.org)