



MENTAL HEALTH NGO SUBSECTOR COMMISSIONING: FEEDBACK PAPER

LGBTIQA+

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ACT Commissioning for Outcomes
2022- 2024

“In popular culture LGBTI refers to sexual orientation, gender identity/history and intersex status and has also been used to mean anyone who is not cis-gendered (not their birth gender) or heterosexual (attracted to someone of the opposite sex, defined on a binary as either female or male). Not everyone in the LGBTI community fits neatly within one of the letter categories and people’s affections, affiliations, and identity may move over time as they and the society around them changes.” – National LGBTI Health Alliance¹

WHAT WE KNOW

The LGBTIQ+ community is a broad, widely varied and ever-changing community. It is inclusive of all individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and the ‘+’ (plus) refers to various expressions of sexual, gender, relationship and bodily diversity. The term ‘LGBTIQ+’ refers to a wide, varied community that is ever changing. Consultation has highlighted the need for inclusive services that can support our fellow LGBTIQ+ identifying Canberrans. This community is broad and each individual cohort has distinct challenges, experiences and needs.

Compared to the general population, LGBTIQ+ people are nearly six times more likely to experience and be diagnosed with depression and young LGBTIQ+ people (aged 16 to 28) are five times more likely to have attempted suicide than the general population². While there are no exact statistics, research suggests that as many as 11 in 100 Australians may have a diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity³. However, despite the higher than average rates of mental illness, LGBTIQ+ people are underrepresented in mental health and suicide prevention services⁴. Though this may be due to a lack of personal disclosure, among other potential reasons, it represents a concerning divide.

As part of this, To explain A 2019 study found that 71% of LGBTIQ+ participants did not engage with crisis mental health services due to an expectation that they would experience discrimination, either due to previous negative experiences or perceived stigma⁵. The Productivity Commission equally found that LGBTIQ+ Australians do not access or seek help from mental health services due to perceived and actual discrimination and stigma.⁶

Question: What steps could be taken by community NGO services to indicate or provide safe and inclusive environments, to increase engagement with LGBTIQ+ people?

For example:

- **Displaying pride flags on service websites and in offices**
- **Using appropriate and inclusive language**

In addition, there are a number of other challenges and barriers that can impact the access of LGBTIQ+ people to health services, these include⁷:

- reduced awareness and knowledge among healthcare staff;
- Limited health literacy
- Internalised homophobia
- Discrimination and/or exclusion

Question: Which of these barriers, or others you can identify, are the biggest barriers for:
a) LGBTIQ+ people to access and engage with NGO services; and
b) NGO services to provide inclusive, culturally sensitive and appropriate care for LGBTIQ+ people?

POLICY AND FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

Below is a list of Policies, Frameworks and Guidelines that relate to individuals represented in this priority group, and are relevant to the current commissioning process.

National and Community

- Beyond Urgent: The National LGBTIQ+ Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy⁸;
- Going Upstream: A Framework for Promoting the Mental Health of LGBTI People⁹;
- Cultural Competency Implementation Framework: Achieving Inclusive Practice with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex (LGBTI) Communities¹⁰;
- National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards¹¹;
- National Safety and Quality Mental Health Standards for Community Managed Organisations¹²;
- Mental Health Statement of Rights and Responsibilities¹³;
- National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement¹⁴.

Australian Capital Territory

- Accessible, Accountable, Sustainable: A Framework for the ACT Public Health System 2020-2030¹⁵;
- Guidance to Support Gender Affirming Care for Mental Health¹⁶;
- Capital of Equality Strategy: Action Plans¹⁷; and
- ACT Wellbeing Framework 2020¹⁸.

The Cultural Competency Implementation Framework: Achieving Inclusive Practice with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex (LGBTI) Communities outlines a national, best practise framework developed by LGBTIQ+ Health Australia¹⁵. LGBTIQ+ Health Australia provide a national voice on policy for LGBTIQ+ people and this framework outlines principles for best practise service delivery.

These principles include:

1. Recognise that it is important to increase cultural competency;
2. Recognise and affirm sexual orientation, sex and gender diversity and intersex status;
3. Foster a safe, welcoming environment and inclusive services; and
4. Make a commitment to dynamic, ongoing change.

This cultural competency framework could be used to address a lack of access to and engagement with health services, which is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Cultural competency is widely acknowledged as a preliminary step when considering accessible and appropriate services for LGBTIQ+ people. *The ACT Guidance to Support Gender Affirming Care for Mental Health*¹⁶ also provides practical steps for delivering gender affirming care supporting transgender and gender diverse people, tailored for mental health services in the ACT context.

Question: What support do community services need to ensure they are culturally competent for LGBTIQ+ people?

Question: For community services that have tried to be more accessible for LGBTIQ+ people, what approaches have been successful? What approaches have been less successful?

Question: How can the NGO sector be supported to provide inclusive services to the LGBTIQ+ community?

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Most people and services understand the need for cultural competency training when working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, it is important to consider that each cohort in the LGBTIQ+ communities also have their own distinct cultures.

Through this commissioning process the mental health commissioning team wants to identify the specific characteristics or design of mental health NGO services that can support our community. To do this, it will be important that commissioned and funded services are safe, culturally competent, appropriate and able to support anyone in our community who is seeking help, including LGBTIQ+ people. The commissioning process aims to create a representative, collaborative and accessible services sector and reduce service gaps to improve the mental health of Canberrans.

The commissioning process will be an ongoing process moving forward and will ensure that these service improvements will be adaptable, ever changing and our mental health sector continues to be representative, collaborative and accessible.

A number of ways to support LGBTIQ+ people to access mental health services have been discussed in this paper, including: creating a welcoming environment, using inclusive language, and improved awareness and cultural competency training, including for gender affirming guidelines. The Commissioning team is also considering broader service design questions as part of the Design phase including the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ lived experience workers.

Lived Experience Workers

Lived experience workers are staff within a service that provide peer support and advocacy to service users, including carers. They are employed to provide their lived experience to service users, providing a unique understanding of the experiences of those they support. These individuals are valuable as they have different skills and knowledge to clinical mental health staff, psychologists and support workers. Lived experience workers can facilitate LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in non-specific community services and help the community to know where safe spaces exist.

Question: What kind of services should be promoting LGBTIQ+ lived experience workers?

Question: How can LGBTIQ+ people be supported to engage with courses and opportunities to become lived experience worker?

Question: Of the options described in this paper, or any others you can identify, what are your top priorities for community services and design for LGBTIQ+ people?

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Through Commissioning there are a number of Principles in the Blueprint that we expect all services to achieve. Alongside these, there will be a number of outcomes that will drive service delivery and reporting.

Noting that LGBTIQ+ is a broad group with each cohort having distinct needs and cultural experiences, it is important to identify and consider specific outcomes that have impacts for these communities. These may be used in commissioning or future work as the sector becomes more accessible.

Question: What do we need to measure to make sure we have the right services and supports for LGBTIQ+ people, and that those services and supports are having a positive impact on people's lives. For example:

- Improved cultural competency in NGO services; or
- Positive feedback from consumers around the accessibility of mental health community services

Question: What challenges do NGO services face for recording and measuring data relating to LGBTIQ+ outcomes and engagement?

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TERMS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronyms:

ACTHD ACT Health Directorate

ART Assisted Reproductive Technology

HRT Hormone Replacement Therapy

NGO means Non-Government Organisation

Definitions

Asexual means someone who is not sexually attracted to others

Bisexual means someone who is sexually attracted to two genders

Cisgender means someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth

Lesbian means women who are sexually attracted to other women

LGBTIQ+ is an umbrella term used to refer to the diversity of individuals that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer identifying. The '+' refers to other sexualities and genders not captured by the other letters.

Gay means men who are sexually attracted to other men

Gender affirming surgeries and/or procedures means surgeries or procedures that alter a person's physical appearance in order to have an individual's appearance align with their gender identity

Gender diverse is an umbrella term that is used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework

Intersex means people born with physical or biological sex characteristics that are more diverse than binary definitions for male or female bodies

Pansexual means people who are attracted to people of multiple gender



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