



Explainer: Trans and gender diverse people in Australia

In Australia, we believe in fairness, compassion and respect for all. These values guide our commitment to human rights, and they apply to everyone - including transgender and gender diverse people.

Trans and gender diverse people in Australia are part of our communities, our workplaces and our families. They should have the same safety, dignity and opportunities as anyone else.

This explainer outlines what it means to be transgender or gender diverse. It also covers the laws, systems and policies that protect the human rights of trans and gender diverse people. It aims to build understanding, address common concerns and show how we can support everyone's dignity and safety – without leaving anyone behind.

About being trans or gender diverse

What does being trans or gender diverse mean?

Trans and gender diverse people have gender identities that are different from their sex registered at birth.

For example, a trans man may be someone who was assigned female at birth and lives as a man.

Trans and gender diverse people have always existed. Records of trans and gender-nonconforming people can be found all over the world, with some going back as far as 5,000 years. Many cultures recognise diverse genders today and have unique names for them.

In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Brotherboy is a term for people who were assigned female at birth and live as men, and Sistergirls are people assigned male at birth but live their lives as women. Sistergirls and Brotherboys have distinct cultural identities and roles. Trans people have long



been a part of First Nations communities, and these identities reflect deep and diverse cultural understandings of gender.

There is no single way to be trans or gender diverse. Gender affirmation, or transitioning, is a deeply personal journey. Not all people choose or need the same path. It may involve:

- **Social changes** like using a new name, asking people to use different pronouns or changing their clothing or hair.
- **Hormone treatment** - some people may start hormone treatment, like oestrogen or testosterone. This will lead to changes to the person's body.
- **Legal updates** to identity documents, such as passports and drivers' licences.
- **Other healthcare** - some people may access other gender-affirming healthcare like surgery to change their bodies or speech therapy to change their voices.

Being trans or gender diverse is about gender, not [sexual orientation](#). Trans people can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or have any other sexual orientation. A person's gender and who they are attracted to are different aspects of identity.

What is the difference between sex and gender?

Sex is based on a [person's sex characteristics](#), such as their chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. While typically based upon the sex characteristics observed and recorded at birth, a person's reported sex can change over the course of their lifetime and may differ from their sex recorded at birth.

Gender is a social and cultural concept. It is about social and cultural differences in identity, expression and experience as a man, woman or non-binary person. Non-binary is an umbrella term describing gender identities that are not exclusively male or female.



Gender includes the following concepts:

- **Gender identity** is about who a person feels themselves to be
- **Gender expression** is the way a person expresses their gender. A person's gender expression may also vary depending on the context, for instance expressing different genders at work and home
- **Gender experience** describes a person's alignment with the sex recorded for them at birth i.e. a cis experience or a trans experience.

Gender norms reflect society's expectations about how women and men should behave, express themselves, and take on roles within families and society. These gender roles and how they are recognised can differ among cultures and communities.

Note: although sex and gender refer to different things, these terms are commonly used interchangeably, or in ways that overlap, including [in legislation](#). For example, trans and gender diverse people may go through a process to change their sex or gender marker on their birth certificate to M (male), F (female) or X (non-binary/unspecified/other).

What is the difference between trans and intersex?

Sometimes, people mix up trans and gender diverse people with other groups, which can lead to confusion and potentially cause harm.

One example is people who are born with variations in sex characteristics, sometimes referred to as '[intersex](#)'. People with intersex variations are born with physical or biological traits – like chromosomes, hormones or reproductive organs – that don't fit typical ideas of what male or female bodies look like. These variations aren't always obvious at birth and sometimes aren't discovered until puberty or later in life.

It's important to know that being born with an intersex variation is different from being trans or gender diverse.

- Variations of sex characteristics (intersex) is something a person is born with



- Trans or gender diverse is a matter of how someone feels about their gender identity, which may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

What do you have to do to change legal documents if you are trans or gender diverse?

Australian laws increasingly recognise gender diversity and provide pathways for updating legal documents. This helps make sure that trans and gender diverse people are recognised and respected in everyday life, from accessing services to travelling overseas.

The process for changing the sex or gender marker on official records like birth certificates depends on the state or territory where your birth was registered, and requirements can vary.

In some states and the Northern Territory, you'll need to provide supporting medical evidence, such as a letter from a doctor or psychologist confirming your gender identity.

NSW and WA removed requirements for surgery or hormone therapy in 2025. This means that medical interventions are no longer required in any state or territory. Tasmania allows gender to be removed from birth certificates altogether. These reforms make the process more accessible and recognises that many trans and gender diverse people do not desire (or cannot afford) gender affirming surgeries.

When the Australian Government collects personal information about people, [it prefers to collect information about their gender](#), and information about their sex is usually not required. The [Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender](#) allow people to update their official Australian Government documents without needing to take hormones or have surgery.

For more information, check the relevant state or territory registry or visit the Australian Government's guidance on updating personal records.



What is gender dysphoria?

[Gender dysphoria](#) is the distress or discomfort that may occur when a person's sex and gender identity do not align. Being treated as the wrong gender by other people can cause intense emotional pain, anxiety, isolation and can significantly impact a person's mental health.

What is gender euphoria?

[Gender euphoria](#) is the joy, comfort, or sense of rightness someone feels when their gender is seen, affirmed, or expressed in a way that matches who they truly are. It is the opposite of gender dysphoria. [Research shows that feelings of gender euphoria can result in better mental health and quality of life.](#)

What is it like being a trans person in Australia?

[ABS data shows that less than 1% of the Australian population are trans or gender diverse.](#)

Many trans Australians thrive in workplaces, schools, and communities that embrace diversity. [Research shows](#) that gender affirmation – social, medical, and legal – improves mental health and wellbeing, and supportive environments – such as family, schools and communities – improve later-life mental health outcomes for trans young people.

More Australian organisations and services are adopting inclusive policies. In 2025, [Redbridge polling surveyed over 1,000 Australians and found:](#)

- **89%** agree or strongly agree that LGBT people deserve to live with dignity and respect
- **91%** agree or strongly agree that trans people should have the freedom and choice to live their lives in the way that makes them happy
- **81%** agree or strongly agree that trans people deserve the same rights and protections as other Australians.

However, many trans people face multiple forms of discrimination every day. These include:

- Being stared at, excluded or harassed in public.



- Losing jobs, housing or relationships after coming out as trans – [research shows 1 in 3](#) trans people in Australia have experienced homelessness and 19% are unemployed – more than 4 times the national average.
- Facing discrimination in access to work, healthcare, education and services – **33%** of trans people in Australia have faced employment discrimination, and over **56%** have faced discrimination in healthcare settings.
- Experiencing violence and abuse, often without any kind of support services that meet their specific needs.

Trans people need protection from discrimination so that they can live their lives safely with respect and dignity.

Trans and gender diverse people and the law

What are the legal rights of trans and gender diverse people in Australia?

In Australia, trans and gender diverse people have the same legal rights as everyone else. Australian law recognises that gender is based on more than just biology. It considers how people live, how they feel about themselves and how they express themselves to the world.

The [Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#) protects people from discrimination based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status and other grounds. Under the Act, you can't exclude or mistreat someone for these reasons in areas of public life, such as education, employment, buying something at a shop or accessing services unless a relevant exemption applies.

These protections help ensure that trans and gender diverse people are treated with fairness and respect.



It's important to understand that protections against sex discrimination and gender identity discrimination can often overlap. The Sex Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination against someone because they are a man or a woman. For example, if a trans woman is refused a job because she is a woman, this would be unlawful sex discrimination unless an exemption applied.

Read more about trans and gender diversity in legislation in our [legal explainer here](#).

How do we protect everyone's rights?

In Australia, everyone has the right to live free from discrimination, feel safe and be treated with dignity.

Human rights protect all of us.

Here are some examples of how human rights support everyone:

- **Safety:** everyone deserves to be safe and live a life free from violence and abuse. Ending gender-based violence and discrimination means ending it for everyone.
- **Fairness:** promoting the rights of all women, including trans women, involves challenging unfair systems. Many women's organisations support the inclusion of trans and gender diverse people in women's services and spaces because they see it as part of the bigger fight for gender justice and equality.
- **Respect:** respecting different identities and experiences does not make other identities and experiences less valuable or important. Human rights are about making sure everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

Some people have raised concerns about how including trans people could affect their own rights and sense of safety. One area where this comes up is in women-only spaces. Under the Sex Discrimination Act, it is generally against the law to treat someone unfairly because of their gender identity in areas of public life. This means that excluding a trans woman from services or spaces that are for women would likely be considered discrimination.



Sometimes, treating people differently is allowed under the law - but only in specific circumstances. The Sex Discrimination Act does allow for some exceptions, but these are limited and must be justified under the law. One example is competitive sport, where distinctions based on gender identity are allowed if strength, stamina, or physique are relevant to the competition. Any situation where different treatment is allowed must meet specific legal criteria.

Read more about exceptions [here](#).

How can we make sure everyone is included?

- **Listen with empathy:** we know that many women experience violence, and this can be impacted by their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and migration status. We need to make sure everyone is treated with respect and dignity.
- **Focus on facts:** the media can make these issues seem more divisive than they are. Most trans people just want to live in peace, like everyone else, and [most Australians think that trans people deserve the same rights and protections as other Australians](#).
- **Build solidarity:** when we support each other, we strengthen the fight against all forms of discrimination.

Trans people and violence, abuse and discrimination

[Research from the Trans Justice Project](#) shows that trans people - especially trans women - experience high rates of violence:

- **1 in 10** trans people have experienced anti-trans violence, including physical and sexual assault.
- Over **50%** of trans and gender diverse people have been forced into sexual acts they did not consent to.
- **3 in 10** trans men and **1 in 5** trans women have experienced physical violence from a family member.
- [According to research from ANROWS](#), **28%** of culturally and linguistically diverse trans women have experienced sexual assault more than **10 times** since age 16.



The Trans Justice research also revealed the online abuse and hate that trans and gender diverse people have faced in recent years. Social media and parts of the media in Australia have become hotspots for targeted abuse, misinformation and harassment.

- **1 in 2** trans people in Australia have experienced online hate.
- **1 in 6** have experienced online abuse.
- **7 in 10** reported a spike in abuse during public events or media coverage that targets trans people.

The impact of this can lead to:

- increased violence and harassment towards trans people
- higher rates of self-harm and suicide
- exclusion from healthcare, education, and public spaces
- fear and isolation, especially for young trans people.

[Reports have shown](#) experiences of trans people being bullied, doxxed (when someone's private information is shared online without their permission), stalked, threatened with violence, sexually assaulted and being encouraged by people online to die by suicide.

These figures show the need for compassion, specialised support and inclusion.

Trans and gender diverse people and healthcare

What are the key health issues affecting trans and gender diverse people?

Trans people in Australia face serious health challenges – not because of their gender identity, but because of discrimination, exclusion and lack of access to care.

Trans people experience worse mental health than the general population. Being trans can mean losing family, friends, jobs and community. This can lead to trans and gender diverse people having limited or no support systems when they face the rejection and discrimination that can often come with being trans. [Research](#) shows **43%** of trans people in Australia have attempted suicide, **63%** have self-harmed and **73%** have been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives.



Other key issues include:

- **Access to gender-affirming healthcare:** many trans people struggle to access respectful, affordable and timely care. Delays and denial of proper care can worsen mental health and wellbeing.
- **Access to general healthcare:** trans and gender diverse people often face barriers to general healthcare because of discrimination, biases and a lack of inclusive training for healthcare professionals. This can lead to delayed diagnoses, untreated conditions, and building mistrust of the healthcare system, even when seeking care for routine or urgent medical needs.
- **Sexual health:** trans people often face stigma in sexual health services. Many report inconsistent access to HIV/STI testing and inclusive care, which can impact their overall health.

What is gender-affirming care?

Gender-affirming care is a broad term for the support and healthcare that helps trans and gender diverse people live as their true selves. It covers medical, psychological, surgical and social support tailored to each person's needs.

Examples of gender-affirming care may include:

- hormone therapy (like taking testosterone or oestrogen supplements)
- mental health support from affirming psychologists or counsellors
- vocal training to help someone feel more comfortable with how their voice sounds
- help with changing names and gender markers on official documents
- access to gender-affirming surgery, if someone chooses it.

Gender-affirming healthcare is supported by Australia's leading medical bodies and based on best practice. Some of Australia's leading medical bodies have supported the principles of gender-affirming care, including:

- [The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners](#)
- [The Royal Australasian College of Physicians](#)
- [The Australian Women's Health Alliance](#)
- [The Australian Medical Association](#)



- [The Australian Professional Association for Trans Health](#)

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is developing new [national clinical guidelines](#) for the care of trans and gender diverse people under 18 years with gender dysphoria. The review will look at latest evidence to make sure treatments (such as puberty blockers) are safe, effective and based on best practice.

What is gender-affirming surgery?

Gender-affirming surgery is one part of gender-affirming care. Not all trans people want, need or can afford surgery. Gender-affirming care is about supporting the whole person, not just changing their body.

There are [different types of gender-affirming surgery](#). Some people may choose to have reconstructive chest surgery, like breast augmentation or removal of breast tissue, facial surgery or surgery on their vocal cords. It can also include surgery on a person's genitals.

Before surgery, there are several steps that people must take, which might include a mental health assessment with one or more mental health professionals (depending on the surgery), a physical medical assessment and informed consent. This means the person must understand how the surgery works, the risks involved, the recovery process and then agree they still want to go ahead.

[It is not legal in Australia to perform most gender-affirming surgeries on people under 18](#). The only surgery allowed is breast reduction surgery for trans men, and only in very extreme circumstances, with the consent of their parents.

There are limited public options for gender-affirming surgery. Most surgeries are done in private hospitals and can be very expensive, and access can be very difficult because of long wait times.