



Explainer: Trans young people in Australia

What is the experience of being a trans young person in Australia?

Transgender people are people whose gender identities are different from the sex they were registered as at birth. Around [2-3% of young Australians aged 11 to 18 years identify as transgender or gender diverse](#).

Every child and young person has a right to dignity, respect for their identity and a say in decisions that affect them. These rights are protected under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which Australia has agreed to. But for many trans young people in Australia, these rights are hard to realise.

What is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The UNCRC is an international agreement that sets out the rights every child (anyone under 18) in the world have. It says they have the right to be safe, healthy, educated, and treated fairly, and that governments must protect these rights and help them grow up in a supportive environment. Australia has agreed to the Convention, which means the government has promised to uphold these rights in Australian laws and practices. The Convention helps to guide policies on education, health, child protection and justice. It helps to ensure children's voices are heard in decisions that affect them. It also helps to hold Australia governments accountable for how they treat children and especially marginalised groups like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children in care.

In [one national survey](#), 9 in 10 LGBTQIA+ young people said they had faced bullying or violence because of who they are, leaving many feeling isolated and unsupported. This can deeply affect their mental health, safety, and access to equality.

With better understanding, stronger protections, and inclusive practices, every young person in Australia can grow up safe, respected, and free to be themselves.



What are the rights of trans young people in Australia?

Trans young people in Australia have the right to be safe, respected, and treated equally – just like everyone else. These rights are protected by both federal and state laws, though the protections can vary across states and territories.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child and young person should be listened to, treated without discrimination, and that their best interests must be a priority in all decisions that affect them, including lawmaking.

The [Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#) is an Australian law that says it's unlawful to discriminate against someone because of their gender identity. States and territories also have their own laws which protect against discrimination. Some offer stronger protections than others. For example, Tasmania, Victoria, and the ACT protect against discrimination on the grounds of gender identity in education, employment, and services.

Schools: Trans students have the right to a safe environment. Schools have a duty to have policies and guidelines in place that protect students from harm, including discrimination. It is important to trans students' inclusion and safety that they can:

- wear the uniform that matches their gender identity
- use whichever toilets make them feel safe, and
- be a part of group activities in a way that respects their identity.

Healthcare: Trans young people should be treated with respect and without discrimination when seeking healthcare.

Public spaces: Trans young people have a right to feel safe and welcome in public.

Privacy and identity: Trans young people have the right to use their chosen names and pronouns, keep their medical and personal information private and change gender markers on official documents (with parental consent and depending on state laws).





How do the rights of trans young people intersect with the rights of other people?

Human rights are about recognising the inherent dignity in all of us. Supporting the rights of trans young people doesn't take away anyone else's rights - it makes sure they have the same protection, respect, and opportunities as others. When rights are upheld equally, everyone benefits from a society that values inclusion and treats all people with dignity.

What does 'inherent dignity' of a child mean?

Inherent dignity means seeing the child first, not their difference. It means making sure every policy and interaction reflects that they are valued and respected by their families, their peers, their communities and their society.

How can we respect a child's inherent dignity day-to-day?

Respecting identity: Using a child's chosen name and pronouns and recognising their gender identity in school records and healthcare.

Protecting from harm: Making sure trans children are safe from bullying, discrimination and violence, because their dignity means they should never be humiliated or degraded.

Listening to their voice: Giving trans children a say in decisions about their lives (in education, healthcare, even social settings).

Equal access: Ensuring they have the same opportunities as other children, like being able to participate in sports, use facilities and access healthcare without any barriers. This may mean proactively creating opportunities for trans children.

Affirming worth: Training teachers, doctors and parents/caregivers to treat trans children with respect and empathy, not as problems or exceptions. This is about seeing the whole child.



Here's how rights can intersect in this area:

Parents and families: parents and families have both rights and responsibilities. While parents have the responsibility to guide and care for their children, this doesn't mean having a right over them. Their duty is to act in their child's best interests, and their right is to receive support from the government to help them do that. This includes supporting their child and respecting their right to express their identity and access healthcare. It's important that parents can access [accurate information](#) so they can get the support they need from the government.

Schools and communities: schools have a duty to protect all students. Inclusive policies help create environments where everyone feels safe, heard and respected. This includes toilet facilities that meet everyone's needs and sports that are fair and safe for all.

Religious and cultural beliefs: Australia has agreed to international treaties which protect people's freedom of religion. This means people can hold and express their beliefs, including views about gender. Many faith traditions emphasise respect and dignity for all, though there are often different perspectives within religious communities on issues such as sexuality and gender.

Under the Sex Discrimination Act, religious schools currently have exemptions that allow them, in some circumstances, to make decisions about staff and students based on characteristics like gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, or pregnancy.

The [Australian Law Reform Commission has recommended changes](#) to remove exemptions that allow discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, or pregnancy by religious schools. It also proposes allowing religious schools to prefer staff of the same faith where this is reasonable and proportionate. This approach aims to balance freedom of religion with the right to equality, non-discrimination and the best interest of the child.

Impact of violence, abuse and discrimination

[Research shows](#) that transgender young people in Australia face high levels of violence, abuse and discrimination, and the effects can be serious and long-lasting.



- Over [70% of trans young people report](#) being verbally harassed, and many experience physical threats or assault
- Trans young people are often targeted online, and threatened with violence or death
- [A recent eSafety report](#) showed 83% of trans young people had experienced cyber bullying compared to 53% for cis young people, and 74% of trans young people had experienced online hate, compared to 27% for cis young people
- Many trans young people report being rejected or unsupported by their families, which increases the risk of mental health issues and homelessness
- Trans young people often face barriers to education and medical care, including misgendering and the refusal of treatment.

The impact this can have on the mental health of a trans young person is profound:

- Trans young people experience depression and anxiety at rates up to ten times higher than their non-transgender peers
- Up to [86% of trans young people have self-harmed](#), and they are 15 times more likely to have attempted suicide than other young people
- Many trans young people report feeling unsafe in public, at school, and even at home.

What are the key health issues affecting trans young people?

The wellbeing of young people is shaped by the support they receive. When they are supported to be themselves by their families, schools and healthcare systems, they can thrive. But many trans young people face barriers that impact their mental health, physical health and social lives.

Mental health is one of these barriers, but others include:

Gender dysphoria: when young people don't identify with the body they were born with, it can cause emotional pain and withdrawal and limit participation at school and in their social lives. Feelings of distress can increase during puberty.

Access to healthcare: many trans young people struggle to access the care they need. Long wait times for gender clinics, geographic barriers (such as living in a rural area), legal hurdles and politicisation of gender-affirming care can all negatively impact trans young people in Australia.



Social isolation and stigma: trans young people may face rejection from family and friends, bullying and harassment, and a lack of safe spaces to express their true selves.

What does gender-affirming care mean for trans young people?

As children and young people grow, they begin to form a sense of who they are – emotionally, socially and cognitively. For trans young people, this process includes understanding and expressing their gender identity.

Gender-affirming care supports this healthy development by allowing them to live as their true selves, rather than forcing them to hide or deny who they are. When young people feel affirmed, they are more likely to thrive – building confidence, resilience and a strong sense of belonging.

Supporting gender-affirmation can include:

- **Social support:** Using chosen names, pronouns and clothing
- **Medical care:** Access to temporary puberty suppression, gender affirming hormone therapy and mental health support
- **Legal recognition:** Updating documents and protecting rights.

This care improves mental health, reduces distress and helps young trans people feel safe, respected, and supported to be themselves. Not all trans young people seek medical treatment. Gender-affirmation looks different for everyone.

Can trans young people have gender-affirming surgery?

It is **not legal** in Australia to perform most gender-affirming surgeries on people under 18 years in the public health system. The only surgery allowed is breast reduction surgery for trans men, and only in very extreme circumstances.

What are puberty suppressants?

Puberty suppressants (also known as puberty blockers) are medicines that temporarily pause the physical changes that happen during puberty, like breast development or a deeper voice. They're officially called gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) agonists, but most people just call them puberty suppressants.

People can only start these when they are about to start puberty. They are also prescribed for other medical reasons, like when puberty starts early for some people (known as 'precocious puberty').



These medicines work by stopping the brain from sending signals to the body to produce sex hormones like oestrogen or testosterone. This means things like periods, facial hair or voice changes don't start or continue while the medicine is being used. That's why people often say puberty suppressants let kids 'press pause' on puberty.

Like other prescription medicines, they should be prescribed by a doctor who can discuss whether they are appropriate in a person's individual circumstances and what the person can expect if they take them.

Why are puberty suppressants used?

Puberty suppressants are used to help young people with gender dysphoria - a condition where someone feels distress because their gender doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Sex assigned at birth means the label given to a baby when they are born, usually based on their physical characteristics.

For example, if a baby is born with a penis, they are typically assigned "male" at birth; if they have a vagina, they are usually assigned "female." This is different from gender identity, which is how a person understands and experiences their own gender later in life.

For some young people, puberty can make this distress worse. Puberty suppressants give them and their families more time to explore how they feel and decide on the next steps, like whether to start gender-affirming hormone treatment later.

This treatment is supported by major medical organisations, including:

- [The Australian Medical Association \(AMA\)](#)
- [The World Professional Association for Transgender Health \(WPATH\)](#)
- [The Endocrine Society](#)



How do children and young people access puberty suppressing medications in Australia?

Accessing puberty suppressing medications in Australia is not simple – they are never available over the counter. Puberty suppressants come at the end of a careful, multi-step process involving medical assessments, specialist referrals, and informed consent. This is to ensure that decisions are safe, informed and tailored to each young person’s needs. While these safeguards are important, they also mean that access can be complex and slow, even though timely treatment can make a huge difference to a trans young person’s wellbeing.

To start puberty suppressants in Australia, a person who is under 18 must:

1. Be diagnosed with [gender dysphoria](#) by a qualified mental health professional.
2. Have a medical assessment from a general practitioner, paediatrician, adolescent physician and endocrinologist, including a discussion about future fertility and fertility preservation options.
3. Be in the early stages of puberty (this is checked by a doctor).
4. Have agreement from their medical team, the young person and their parents or guardians.

If there is any disagreement between the young person, their parents, or doctors, the case must go to the Family Court of Australia before treatment can begin.

[A recent evidence review](#) by the Sax Institute found that puberty suppressants are safe, effective and reversible when used under medical supervision. If the treatment is stopped, puberty resumes.

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 NHMRC’s review will look at the latest evidence to ensure treatments such as puberty suppressants are safe, effective, and based on best practice. Interim advice is expected in mid-2026, with full guidelines due by 2028. The process includes expert input, public consultation, and a focus on transparency and evidence.



What is gender affirming hormone therapy?

Gender affirming hormone therapy (GAHT) means taking oestrogen or testosterone to help a person's body develop the physical traits that match their gender identity. This treatment can improve mental health, body comfort and overall wellbeing.

These hormones can lead to changes like:

- Breast development, softer skin, reduced body hair, changes in fat distribution (from oestrogen)
- Deeper voice, facial and body hair growth, increased muscle mass (from testosterone)

Some effects of gender affirming hormone therapy are reversible, others are not. The Australian standards of care recommend fertility counselling before anyone commences gender affirming hormone therapy. This is part of the informed consent process. In Australia, young people usually start gender affirming hormone therapy after they turn 16, but this depends on individual circumstances. Most people who start on hormone therapy are adults who did not use puberty suppressants.

As with puberty suppressants, access to gender affirming hormone therapy for young people under 18 years requires:

- A diagnosis of gender dysphoria
- A medical assessment and informed consent
- In most states, parental consent
- In some cases, court approval.

As of 2025, access to gender affirming hormone therapy for people under 18 years in Australia is not consistent across the country. It depends on the state or territory, and whether the treatment is sought through public or private healthcare.