

LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Practice Guidelines



MISSION
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LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Practice Guideline

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Introduction

Acknowledgement of Country

Mission Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of this Country, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present for they hold the memories, the culture and dreams of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.

Acknowledgements

This guideline represents the collective input and efforts of many individuals. The Practice Quality team extends our gratitude to everyone who has contributed insights and feedback, with special thanks to the members of the Pride Collective, for their time, input and support in the development of this guideline.

This guideline builds on the work of LGBTQIA+ advocates who have (and continue to) call for the freedom and rights LGBTQIA+ people have in Australia today. While we may not know the names, stories, challenges and pressures faced by Mission Australia staff who have found ways to shift the organisation forward in the past, we are grateful for their efforts. We affirm our hopes and intentions to build on the work of those who dared to dream before us and will continue long after we have left. We all have a part to play in this wider story of positive change.

If you have any feedback on this guideline, please email practicequality@missionaustralia.com.au

Mission Australia's Statement of Commitment

Inspired by Jesus Christ, Mission Australia exists to meet human need and to spread the knowledge of the love of God. Mission Australia is deeply committed to fostering diversity and inclusion across all levels of our organisation, including among clients, employees and stakeholders. This commitment, rooted in our Founding Purpose, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy, explicitly includes LGBTQIA+ people. This guide reflects Mission Australia's dedication to creating inclusive workplaces for LGBTQIA+ staff and for providing safe and welcoming services for LGBTQIA+ service users.

The Mission Australia Strategy 2025-30 commits to strengthen our ethical, sustainable and inclusive practices. This guideline is one of many ways in which we are working towards this goal.

The Diversity and Inclusion Reference Group 'Belonging @MA' is representative of the diverse makeup of Mission Australia's workforce and plays a key role in shaping our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The strategy aims to move beyond measuring diversity towards nurturing a genuine sense of belonging.

Additionally, grassroots groups such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge Group and the Pride Collective help drive positive change and champion inclusivity. The Pride Collective, comprising LGBTQIA+ staff and allies has been instrumental in developing this practice guideline.

Evidence shows that diversity, inclusion, and affirmation enhance job satisfaction and innovation. It is well recognised that LGBTQIA+ people are over-represented in experiences of homelessness, mental ill-health and alcohol and other drug concerns – all areas where Mission Australia provides support services.

Recognising time and place

The LGBTQIA+ acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and the plus symbol represents members of the community who identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that is not included within the LGBTQIA acronym. It is an inclusive way of representing gender and sexual identities that letters and words cannot yet fully describe.

The acronym has evolved over time, with additional letters added and reordered. At time of writing Mission Australia uses LGBTQIA+, but we recognise this acronym will continue to evolve and encourage staff to use the latest terms.

Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure Mission Australia services are consistent in providing safe, inclusive and affirming practices for LGBTQIA+ service users, ensuring everyone feels valued and respected, and empowering staff to take meaningful action in line with our core values.

This guideline covers working with LGBTQIA+ service users, which includes clients, tenants, residents, consumers, participants etc. and applies to Mission Australia's community services and housing workers. While it focuses on LGBTQIA+ people, the principles and expectations outlined are applicable more broadly, reflecting our commitment to providing safe and inclusive services for all.

Part one provides guidance on best practices for inclusive environments and services. It acknowledges the evolving nature of our understanding of gender and sexuality and the need for continuous learning and development.

Part two sets a future direction, aimed at ensuring everyone feels valued, respected, and supported, in line with our core values of compassion and respect.

Christian Values and LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

Mission Australia is a non-denominational Christian organisation and acknowledges the harms and injustices that have been (and in some cases continue to be) committed against LGBTQIA+ people under the banner of religion. We universally oppose any harmful actions, beliefs and positions taken against LGBTQIA+ people.

At Mission Australia, there is zero tolerance for harassment, bullying and other unlawful behaviour towards LGBTQIA+ service users, staff and communities. This is addressed through our Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Code of Conduct, Good Working Relationships Policy, Grievance Management Policy, Sex Discrimination Sex-Based Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy, Speak Up and Speak Out Statement and Work Health and Safety Charter and Policy.

We support, encourage and celebrate our diverse workforce and inclusive workplace culture, which includes a commitment to respecting and affirming gender and sexuality. Mission Australia upholds the rights of every person to be treated with respect and fairness while performing their work. We recognise that a diverse workforce with a broad range of lived experience and perspectives can better understand, support and engage the people we service and the communities in which we work.

Part One: Creating Inclusive Services

Australia's LGBTQIA+ communities are vibrant, diverse, and resilient. Individuals within these communities contribute significantly to the nation's cultural, social, and political life. The Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that between 5% and 12% of the population identifies as LGBTQIA+, with even higher representation among younger Australians¹. This growing visibility reflects a broader societal shift toward inclusion and recognition of diverse identities.

Despite these positive shifts, LGBTQIA+ individuals often experience discrimination, harassment and violence due to their gender and sexual orientation, both within their families and wider community. These experiences can lead to feelings of 'otherness', loneliness and social isolation², increasing the rate of homelessness, mental ill-health and substance-use concerns³.

Mission Australia's 2024 Youth Survey highlighted gender diverse young people face significantly higher rates of mental health conditions (53% compared to 19% of females and 10% of males), greater concerns about cost of living (63%), LGBTQIA+ issues (61%), and discrimination (43%). They also experience more frequent financial and housing instability, bullying, and barriers to achieving study/work goals. These challenges are compounded by lower levels of community and family connection⁴.

LGBTQIA+ individuals can encounter legal issues related to:

- Family law - gender identity, domestic and family violence, surrogacy and parenting rights
- Criminal law
- Administrative law and government decisions
- Employment law and civil law - discrimination and human right issues.

They may also face barriers when seeking services, including a lack of understanding from workers, fear of potential discrimination and a lack of specialist supports.

Signs of inclusive practices

- Service information and forms use gender-neutral language.
- Privacy and confidentiality principles are upheld and clearly communicated.
- People feel comfortable to ask for each other's pronouns and respect them.
- There are visual cues to signal that the service is welcoming and safe for LGBTQIA+ people (e.g. pride flags, posters, pronoun badges).
- Amenities cater for people of diverse genders (e.g. all-gender bathrooms).
- Staff recognise intersectionality and are responsive to the needs of the individual.
- Staff are knowledgeable about gender identity and sexual orientation and understand these may continue to evolve over the individual's lifetime.
- LGBTQIA+ staff and service users can be their authentic selves.
- Staff are committed to inclusion and ongoing learning to best support LGBTQIA+ people.

¹ The Australian Human Rights Commission (2025) **Statistics About LGBTQIA+ Rights**.

<https://humanrights.gov.au/education/stats-facts/statistics-about-LGBTQIA-rights>

² The State of Queensland, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts. (2024) **Pride in our Communities**. <https://www.tatsipca.qld.gov.au/our-work/community-support/lgbtqia-initiatives/queensland-lgbtqia-strategy/pride-our-communities-2024-2032>

³ StreetSmart Australia. (2023). **LGBTIQ+ and Homelessness**. Retrieved from

<https://streetsmartaustralia.org/homelessness-and-lgbtqia/>

⁴ McHale, R., Brennan, N., Boon, B., Richardson, E., Rossetto, A., & Christie, R. (2024). *Youth Survey Report 2024*. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

- Safeguards are in place to promptly and effectively address behaviours which fall outside of organisational expectations.
- Services collect information on gender identity and sexual orientation (where clients are comfortable sharing) to ensure support is holistic and to better understand community needs⁵.
- The voices of clients are actively listened and responded to.

LGBTQIA+ people have the right to access generalist or specialist services. Inclusive generalist organisations:

- promote rights and equality;
- develop strong connections with LGBTQIA+ specialist organisations to improve service access⁶; and
- participate in events and celebrations of significant days for the LGBTQIA+ community⁷.

Ensuring Confidentiality and Privacy

Privacy and confidentiality are crucial for LGBTQIA+ people due to their unique circumstances. They may not be 'out' to family, friends or communities, and disclosing their identity without consent can lead to discrimination, rejection and violence. Ensuring privacy creates a safe space for people to seek support and work with dignity and respect, free from fear of being outed or judged. Explaining the service's approach to privacy and confidentiality builds trust by assuring that personal information and identities are protected. Clear communication about these practices ensures everyone understands their rights and the measures in place, empowering people to feel secure, supported and able to fully engage.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality means that different parts of our identity, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality and spirituality, all mix together⁸. This mix affects how we experience life, including both positive and negative events. In diverse and inclusive organisations, staff are aware of intersectionality and how everyone's experiences are shaped by it.

Recognising and Challenging Biases and Stereotypes

Biases, intentional and unintentional, are often expressed through language. By being mindful of our language choices, we can overcome some of the unintentional biases we hold and the prejudices that fuel them.

- **Heteronormativity:** The assumption that people are heterosexual unless stated otherwise. It is also the bias that heterosexuality is the 'normal' or 'correct' sexual orientation⁹.

⁵ Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. *LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Practice and Data Collection Guide*. (2021), <https://goodshep.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Good-Shepherd-LGBTIOA-Inclusive-Practice-Guide-2021.pdf>.

⁶ Rainbow Health Victoria. (2023). *LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in Mainstream Organisations*. <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/>

⁷ LGBTIQ+ Health Australia. (2020). *LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practice Guide for Homelessness and Housing Sectors in Australia* https://www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/homelessness_and_housing_inclusive_guide

⁸ Diversity Council Australia (2023) *What is Intersectionality?* <https://www.dca.org.au/resources/di-planning/what-is-intersectionality>

⁹ Blakers, Jesse (2022) *The Suffocating Blanket of Heteronormativity*. <https://www.canberra.edu.au/uncover/news-archive/2022/june/the-suffocating-blanket-of-heteronormativity>

- **Cisnormativity:** The assumption that everyone identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. Inclusive services actively avoid making assumptions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Stereotypes:** Generalised beliefs or assumptions about a group of people based on their characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation. These beliefs often do not reflect the true diversity of individuals and can lead to unfair judgements and biases.

Techniques for Recognising and Challenging Biases and Stereotypes

- Include your pronouns when introducing yourself in meetings to signal that you recognise and respect people's pronouns.
- Pay close attention to the words you and others use to identify and reduce gendered language. *Gendered language* includes terms that assume or reinforce specific genders, like using 'guys' to refer to a mixed gender group. If you catch yourself using a gendered term like 'guys' or 'ladies' when referring to a group, apologise and replace it with a non-gendered term like 'everyone'.
- If you notice someone else use a stereotype, and you feel comfortable, gently draw their attention to it.

Tip: As a team, agree to spot and cut down on gendered language. Help each other notice it and support each other to use inclusive language. Celebrate when it becomes the norm.

Chosen Family

LGBTQIA+ people sometimes refer to their 'chosen family' comprised of friends they have made who are accepting, kind and caring. This chosen family can offer a sense of belonging, understanding and unconditional support, creating a supportive community that affirms and values their identity and experiences.

Tip: Chosen family can be a great source of resilience for LGBTQIA+ people. With client consent, involve them in the development and review of case plans, treatment plans, wellbeing and exit plans as they form part of the client's informal support network.

Welcoming Environment

When designing services, best practice is to consider privacy, safety and security of every individual.

Written content on websites, brochures and newsletters can be the first point of contact for LGBTQIA+ people, therefore content must be inclusive to reduce any potential barriers to accessing services¹⁰.

In the physical service environment, visual cues such as pride flags, pronoun badges and inclusive posters can signal to LGBTQIA+ people that the service is a welcoming and safe space for them. Additionally, service welcome packs, referral-in documents, and rights and responsibility documents should explicitly reference the service's commitment to keeping LGBTQIA+ people safe. Setting clear expectations for service users and staff reduces the likelihood of needing to address anti-LGBTQIA+ statements, discrimination, harassment or bullying.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2022) *Inclusive Communication with LGBTIA+ Clients*. <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/inclusive-communication-lgbtqi-clients>

Service users are accommodated in alignment with their affirmed gender identity. This includes access to women's services for transgender women in compliance with anti-discrimination laws and affirms the rights of trans and gender diverse service users. Best practice for ensuring inclusivity in residential services is to offer options for people to choose from, such as male, female and all-gender bathrooms and bedrooms. Privacy, safety and security are also important factors to consider. Residential services may have physical limitations, such as existing building design, which restrict the ability to offer all-gender options. In these circumstances, services can discuss the situation and options with the individual and seek their input on where they would feel most comfortable. Services should ensure that all service users, including existing residents, are supported in understanding and respecting inclusive practices.

Where concerns arise, services use trauma-informed, person-centred approaches to ensure the safety and dignity of all clients. Concerns should be addressed through education and dialogue, not by limiting the rights or choices of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Choice and control are key factors in best supporting LGBTQIA+ people. Some additional options may include converting a disability-access bathroom to an 'all genders' bathroom or introducing a shower room sign-up sheet to give people peace of mind that they will have privacy in specific bathrooms.

In Domestic and Family Violence accommodation settings, services balance the safety and dignity of all clients. Transgender women have the right to access women's services. Where concerns are raised by other residents, staff use trauma-informed conflict resolution, education, and individual safety planning to support all parties without exclusion.

Prominently displaying rights and responsibilities information to service users, which clearly states the service affirms the gender, sexuality and pronouns of the individual and the expectation that all service users and visitors also do so, can help to mitigate any concerns expressed by other service users should the person's gender not align with their physical appearance.

Where concerns arise between residents regarding gender identity or inclusion, staff should follow a structured conflict resolution protocol. This includes de-escalation, education, mediation, and where necessary, referral to external support services.

Tip: Involve service users in the design of services. Their input can help to identify opportunities that staff may overlook or not consider.

Inclusive services recognise that without proper training, staff might unintentionally harm LGBTQIA+ people. For example, a service displaying a rainbow sticker to signal inclusivity might give someone a sense of welcome and safety. However, if they encounter disrespectful or harmful behaviour inside, such as being repeatedly misgendered, it undermines the message of inclusivity and can create a hostile experience.

Promoting Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Affirming the gender, pronouns and sexuality of service users is crucial for promoting emotional wellbeing. Listening without judgement is a vital approach for promoting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people for several reasons:

1. **Validation and Acceptance:** when individuals feel heard and accepted, it validates their experiences and identities. This can significantly boost their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

2. **Building Trust:** listening fosters a safe environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. This trust is crucial for effective communication and support.
3. **Reducing Stress and Anxiety:** judgemental attitudes can increase stress and anxiety, making individuals feel misunderstood or marginalised. By listening without judgement, we help alleviate these negative emotions.
4. **Encouraging Open Dialogue:** this approach encourages open and honest dialogue. It can lead to better understanding and more effective support for the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people.
5. **Promoting Inclusivity:** helps create an inclusive environment where everyone feels respected and valued.

Navigating Legal and Ethical Considerations

Staff must be aware of legal obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), and State-based Anti-discrimination and Human Rights legislation, and relevant tenancy laws. These laws protect individuals from discrimination based on gender identity and require services to provide reasonable adjustments.

Ethical practice involves affirming and supporting people's gender and sexual identity, rather than attempting to change them.

Inclusive services have a zero tolerance for harassment, bullying and other unlawful behaviour towards LGBTQIA+ clients, staff and communities¹¹. All staff are responsible for recognising and responding to discrimination in the workplace.

Any anti-LGBTQIA+ statements, discrimination, harassment or bullying must be addressed promptly, with a focus on education, safety and respect.

LGBTQIA+ Children and Young People

Staff working with gender diverse children and young people should not express opinions about gender-affirming medical treatment such as hormone blockers (to delay puberty) or gender-affirming hormones. Instead, staff should support the child or young person (and their family) to connect with LGBTQIA+ inclusive specialist health services and follow medical advice. Staff can support children and young people expressing gender non-conformance by encouraging the family to:

- use the names and pronouns that the child or young person expresses;
- support the child or young person's gender expressions through clothing, hairstyles and activities; and
- connect them with LGBTQIA+ specialist services.

For further information on supporting trans and gender diverse people, the website [Transhub](#) has a range of information and resources.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Standards

Inclusive services may elect to undertake accreditation against relevant standards for benchmarking and accountability.

¹¹ Andrews, C., & McNair, R. (2020). *LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practice Guide for Homelessness and Housing Sectors in Australia*. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne. Funded by the National LGBTI Health Alliance and Pride Foundation Australia.

In Australia, the **Rainbow Tick Standards** are a quality framework designed to help health and community services organisations, or individual or groups of services within an organisation to create safe and inclusive environments for the LGBTQIA+ community, focusing on organisational capability, workforce development, and culturally safe services¹². Mission Australia services can choose to apply for Rainbow Tick accreditation of their service, in which case the first step is to complete the Initial Self-Assessment tool, and make any improvements that it highlights. Services exploring Rainbow Tick Accreditation can seek support from the Practice Quality Team.

Tip: Services are encouraged to use the [Rainbow Tick Initial Assessment Tool](#) to identify areas of strength and areas requiring attention.

¹² Rainbow Health Australia. (2021). *Rainbow Tick standards: A framework for LGBTIQ cultural safety*. <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/rainbow-tick/3214906303-1709686053/rainbow-tick-standards-a-framework-for-lgbtiq-cultural-safety.pdf>

Part Two: Implementing the Practice Guideline

To build an inclusive environment that supports LGBTQIA+ individuals, it is essential to focus on continuous professional development and training.

The implementation of this Practice Guideline will be supported by a comprehensive plan aimed at embedding LGBTQIA+ awareness and inclusive practices throughout Mission Australia service delivery. This will be achieved through a combination of training recommendations, policy updates, practice support, data collection and analysis, all informed by current best practices. The National Manager, Practice Quality will lead the application of this plan in collaboration with the Pride Collective. It will include the following core components:

1 Training

Sourcing and recommending foundational and ongoing training opportunities for service delivery staff and leaders to enhance their understanding of LGBTQIA+ inclusive practices. This will help service delivery staff at Mission Australia to understand key concepts, considerations and a shared language to support continuous improvement.

2 Policy Revisions

Reviewing and updating relevant strategies, frameworks, policies, procedures and forms related to staff and service users for LGBTQIA+ inclusion will occur through a gradual process, in line with standard review cycles.

3 Practice Support

Providing resources and support to staff to help implement inclusive practices effectively. This includes sharing information on inclusive practice standards, guidance on creating a supportive and welcoming environment, and strengthening connections with local LGBTQIA+ specialist organisations.

4 Inclusive Physical Spaces

Mission Australia is committed to developing Design Guidelines for our leasehold, freehold and community housing properties, which will include guidance on considering the needs of LGBTQIA+ people in building and fitout design. Existing service sites are encouraged to refer to these guidelines and assess whether any practical changes can be made to enhance inclusion. For example, by providing gender-neutral bathrooms and displaying inclusive signage.

5 Systems, Service User Voice and Data Collection

Integrating the collection and reporting of LGBTQIA+ data into existing systems, client voice initiatives and data collection activities to better understand the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people accessing our services. An important part of this initiative will involve upskilling service delivery staff to confidently explain the purpose of collecting this information, how it will be used, and the measures in place to protect individuals' privacy.

Conclusion

Creating and sustaining an LGBTQIA+ inclusive services starts by making simple yet impactful changes as opportunities arise. It is important to celebrate the positive changes as they occur, as small incremental changes can lead to significant impact in the future. A truly LGBTQIA+ inclusive service culture will take time, and these guidelines mark a significant step in Mission Australia's journey towards this aim.

Resources for Further Reading

Mission Australia's [LGBTQIA+ Resource Hub](#) is a Teams site open to all staff and contains resources and links to useful websites. It has been compiled by and is maintained by members of the Pride Collective.

The Child and Youth Safe team has created a set of [Scenarios for Working with LGBTQIA+ Children and Young People](#). These scenarios have been designed to provide guidance and encourage reflective practice for individuals and teams on ways to enhance practice.

Mission Australia is a member of [Diversity Council Australia](#), the peak body for diversity and inclusion. All staff can [register for a user account](#) and access resources on their website.

The [Equality Project](#) website contains a non-exhaustive list of significant LGBTQIA+ national and international events.

Appendix A - Key Terms

Affirmation the act of validating and supporting someone's gender identity, pronouns, and sexuality. Affirmation is crucial for promoting emotional wellbeing and creating an inclusive environment where individuals feel respected and valued.

Chosen Family refers to the supportive community of friends that LGBTQIA+ people create, who offer a sense of belonging, understanding and unconditional support. This chosen family can be a great source of resilience and affirmation for LGBTQIA+ individuals

Cisnormativity is the assumption that everyone identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. Inclusive services actively avoid making assumptions about people's gender identity.

Heteronormativity is the assumption that people are heterosexual unless stated otherwise. It is also the bias that heterosexuality is the 'normal' or 'correct' sexual orientation. Inclusive services actively avoid making assumptions about people's sexual orientation.

Inclusive Practice refers to the intentional and proactive efforts to create an environment where LGBTQIA+ clients and staff feel welcomed, respected and valued. This involves recognising and addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, ensuring equal access to services and opportunities, and fostering a culture of acceptance and support in alignment with our values.

Intersectionality means that different parts of our identity, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, spirituality, and financial situation all mix together. This mix affects how we experience life, including both positive and negative events. In diverse and inclusive organisations, staff are aware of intersectionality and how everyone's experiences are shaped by it.

LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and the plus symbol represents members of the community who identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that is not included within the LGBTQIA acronym. It is an inclusive way of representing gender and sexual identities that letters and words cannot yet fully describe. The acronym has evolved over time, with additional letters added and reordered. At time of writing Mission Australia uses LGBTQIA+, but we recognise this acronym will continue to evolve and encourage staff to use the latest terms.

Rainbow Tick is a quality framework designed to help health and human services organisations create safe and inclusive environments for the LGBTQIA+ community. It focuses on organisational capability, workforce development, and culturally safe services.

Stereotypes are generalised beliefs or assumptions about a group of people based on their characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. These beliefs often do not reflect the true diversity of individuals and can lead to unfair judgements and biases.

Zero Tolerance is a policy stance that does not permit any form of harassment, bullying or unlawful behaviour towards LGBTQIA+ clients, staff and communities. This is addressed through various organisational policies and procedures to ensure a safe and respectful environment for all people.