

How to Support Trans Clients

Tips on client consultations:

Trans people often delay accessing services due to concerns about client confidentiality, discrimination and the lack of knowledge service providers have regarding trans health. Reassuring trans clients that confidentiality will be maintained by all staff within the service is important.

Confidentiality is a high priority for trans clients.

The high levels of discrimination, violence, workplace harassment, social isolation and rejection from family and friends increase trans clients' concerns for confidentiality within services. Disclosing the trans status of a client or non-client, without express permission, is an invasion of privacy and may breach client confidentiality. This could cause a serious threat to the personal safety or harm to the professional life of your client.

Surgical status

Surgical status, whether pre-operative, post-operative or non-operative, can be a sensitive issue. Unnecessary questioning about surgical status or a client's bodily state is intrusive and may cause offense.

If questions regarding surgical status are medically necessary, ask these questions with sensitivity and treat this information as highly confidential.

Social support and mental health

Both national and international research indicates that significantly high levels of suicide, self harm, depression and anxiety exist in trans communities. Addressing gender identity and trans related issues can be extremely isolating. Families, friends and the general community have little understanding or awareness of these issues. As a result many trans people experience rejection from their families and friends, leave their employment, encounter discrimination and verbal and physical abuse.

If a trans person is not able to pass as their presenting gender, (i.e. other people can identify they are a trans person), experiences of social stigma, discrimination and abuse are likely to increase greatly, impacting negatively on their mental health and self image. This is especially relevant when a trans person first starts to transition.

Ensure clients can access resources to assist their loved ones understand what being trans is all about, as well as support from other trans peers!

Creating Inclusive Services for Trans Clients

Creating inclusive service environments can increase trans clients' confidence in the quality of care that your service will provide. Small changes can make a big difference!

1. Display visible resources

Provide inclusive resources and media in waiting rooms (e.g. Gay press or trans newsletters). This indicates that the service is supportive of trans clients.

2. Provide visible diversity and confidentiality statements

Display visible anti-discrimination statements that include gender identity and sexuality as well as race, ethnicity and disability. This indicates that the service is accepting and supportive of trans clients.

3. Inclusive client consultation forms

Include an optional category for 'transgender/trans' or 'FTM and MTF' or 'other', on client history forms, alongside the categories for male and female. This will allow the option for clients to disclose their transgender histories when they first enter the service.

4. Don't expect clients to educate you!

Trans health issues can be daunting. However it is not the responsibility of the client to educate you. Seek out information on mental health, physical well-being and hormonal therapy that you may need to support your client.

5. Contact local trans support services

Make links with trans support groups, trans phone counseling services and website resources. These contacts can provide support to staff addressing gender identity issues with clients, as well as clients seeking further support.

6. Staff training and organizational policies

Provide staff with sexuality and gender identity training on inclusive service provision and specific health needs. Ensure gender identity is included in relevant policy guidelines, and trans people are included in specific target populations. Ensure gender identity issues are included in staff induction training. Invite guest speakers from the trans community to talk to staff about trans health and wellbeing.