

A resource to support services to be fully accessible to clients who are LGBTIQ and are experiencing domestic and family violence, including sexual violence

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) people experience domestic and family violence in similar but not identical ways as heterosexual people. Therefore there is a real need for domestic violence services and support in the ACT to be fully accessible to people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities.

Because the ACT does not have any LGBTIQ specific domestic and family violence (DFV) services or programs it is important that mainstream and DFV services are supported to build their capacity to respond appropriately and to broaden the service options for LGBTIQ people to access in relation to this issue.

Local ACT research by the Women's Centre for Health Matters confirmed that there is a need to increase the visibility and availability of LGBTIQ friendly supports. Many of the respondents in the research said that more could be done to make LGBTIQ people feel welcome / entitled to use services and supports for DFV, and that services needed to be actively promoted to the LGBTIQ community.

Based on the literature and the feedback received appropriate access includes:

- knowing that they can contact organisations and get help that is appropriate;
- knowing that the policies and practices of those organisations don't impede them gaining access;
- having policies and procedures in services that help and ensure that LGBTIQ clients can participate fully and have their needs met;
- getting a referral to an appropriate service and having relevant targetted information available to help them make an informed decision;
- entering a service and being able to use it safely;
- having access to all the necessary information in appropriate ways while accessing the service; and
- having their needs met by staff who are appropriately trained and supported to understand and meet their needs.

The following principles were developed and summarise the key aspects that (from the research and feedback from LGBTIQ people in the ACT) are most important to ensure that the LGBTIQ community can access DFV services in the ACT. Under each of the following Principles, there are ideas for consideration by services about how they might improve their accessibility for the ACT's LGBTIQ community.

Good Practice Principles for improving accessibility for LGBTIQ clients

Principle 1. Service information about the domestic violence/crisis service should be accessible to LGBTIQ clients (Getting the message out about the service).

A service needs to have clear messages in its service information that shows that it welcomes diverse sexualities and genders and that the confidentiality of LGBTIQ clients will be respected. The visibility of resources and information which are LGBTIQ specific will also send a clear message that the service is inclusive and accessible, and allow individuals to determine how LGBTIQ friendly a service is.

Ideas to consider

Promotional material about the service lists LGBTIQ people as a client group, and is welcoming to people of diverse sexualities and genders, including:

- in advertising material about the service which is placed in other organisations or provided to clients
- on the service website
- on social media - social media is essential to access LGBTIQ people who do not identify or engage with the LGBTIQ community.

Any external promotional materials used by the service are LGBTIQ inclusive, and includes inclusive language and LGBTIQ specific information.

The imagery used in promotional materials about the service represents the diversity of those accessing the service and includes LGBTIQ people.

The service promotes its services to the LGBTIQ community, and is listed and advertised in local LGBTIQ press or websites.

Principle 2. The physical environment should be appropriate and accessible for LGBTIQ clients (Getting to the service, Getting around inside the service).

The service needs to have a welcoming physical environment that shows it is inclusive and accessible to LGBTIQ clients so that individuals can see that it is an LGBTIQ friendly service.

Ideas to consider

There are materials on display in waiting areas that indicate that the service is safe and welcoming for LGBTIQ clients, including:

- LGBTIQ posters, stickers and/or symbols
- LGBTIQ related service information and information leaflets

Information is clearly displayed that explains the service's commitment to confidentiality about any disclosures of sexual orientation.

The common spaces inside the service are safe and accessible for LGBTIQ clients (for example unisex toilets).

Principle 3. Communication with LGBTIQ clients should meet their different needs and be culturally appropriate etc (Getting help to access and provide the information required to access the service).

Processes for accessing a service such as telephone services, reception and intake processes, and forms send a clear message about how LGBTIQ friendly a service is and how welcome LGBTIQ clients will be when they are trying to access the service.

Documentation is also an important aspect of ensuring inclusive LGBTIQ communications and access, because both individual clients and staff can be concerned about how and what information to document in regards to LGBTIQ status.

And LGBTIQ clients need to feel comfortable interacting with and providing relevant information to staff, and to know that they are welcome to discuss their sexual orientation, gender identity and relationship status.

Ideas to consider

Forms and processes used to access the service can be adapted to use inclusive language and to allow optional self-identification in relation to gender identity, sexual orientation, and marital/ partnership status. (Commonwealth Government guidelines recognise that any person might identify as male, female or otherwise, and three gender classifications are in place – M, F and X.)

The language used in forms and interviews is inclusive and gender neutral and doesn't assume heterosexuality. For example:

- Intake forms and interviewing processes are inclusive for clients who may have same-sex partners, are not cisgendered, and have not experienced violence at the hands of a male partner;
- There are no assumptions that a female client has a male abuser or that a male client is the abuser;
- 'Preferred contact for emergencies' is more inclusive than 'next-of-kin';
- Clients can use their preferred gender; and
- Staff use the pronoun that the client has asked the service to use.

Sexual orientation and/or gender identity is not assumed, regardless of how clients present, until they disclose these details to the service.

When interviewing clients, staff use open and inclusive questions that are gender neutral. For example:

- Do you have a partner? is used instead of 'wife', 'husband', 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'.
- Are you in a relationship? Instead of marital status
- What is your partner's name? What is your partner's gender?

Once they disclose, clients are asked if they want other people to know if they are LGBTIQ, and who else knows about about their sexual orientation and gender identity. For example:

- What is your name and pronoun preference? Are there times where you would like me to use different pronouns or a different name (e.g., with other service providers, your family, the court)?
- Are you “out” about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
- Has your partner threatened to “out” you?
- Do you risk losing your job if you employer learns of your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?

If a client does not feel safe about letting other people know that they are LGBTIQ then it is not disclosed to anyone (even to other staff or other service providers).

Principle 4. Service policies, procedures and practices should be inclusive of and appropriate for LGBTIQ clients (Complying with policies, procedures and practices for accessing services).

Policies, procedures and practices (including specific programs and services) need to be LGBTIQ inclusive and culturally sensitive. They should be designed and delivered in ways that acknowledge and accommodate the range of clients in relation to not only culture, language, age, gender, and disability but also sexual orientation. Record keeping and privacy and confidentiality are significant issues for all clients, but for LGBTIQ clients there may be the added concern of being ‘outed’.

Ideas to consider

The service has written privacy and confidentiality policies which address sexual orientation and gender identity.

The service has a policy on when it is and is not appropriate to collect information on a consumer’s sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are included in the service’s anti-discrimination policy for staff hiring.

The service’s policies are clear that homophobic, transphobic or heterosexist comments or behaviour from staff, clients and volunteers are not tolerated and are dealt with promptly.

The service’s policies in relation to record keeping include seeking a client’s consent when recording information about their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex condition.

The service’s policies in relation to privacy and confidentiality include:

- a written confidentiality statement that specifically addresses the concerns of LGBTIQ clients;
- informing LGBTIQ clients why information is needed, how it will be used and stored, and to whom it will be made available;
- reassuring LGBTIQ clients that information and discussions are confidential and where there is a need to share client information or records their consent must be given; and
- respecting a client’s right not to disclose.

The organisation's complaints process and documents use LGBTIQ inclusive language.

The service delivers specialised programs as needed for LGBTIQ clients, or adapts current programs and services to be more appropriate. For example, group discussions with clients about domestic and family violence do not focus on heterosexual relationships only.

Principle 5. Domestic violence service workers should have an awareness of the issues of domestic and family violence for LGBTIQ clients, and the skills to work with LGBTIQ clients (Getting appropriate support from services and staff).

The attitude and skills of staff are major factors in decisions made by LGBTIQ clients about whether to access support and services for domestic and family violence. So staff need to be appropriately trained and supported to understand and meet the needs of LGBTIQ clients accessing the service, and aware of the importance of responding in a positive and respectful way to disclosure by LGBTIQ clients.

Ideas to consider

Staff have been trained about LGBTIQ and domestic and family violence issues, including how the dynamics of violence might differ.

Staff understand their responsibilities in relation to service delivery to LGBTIQ clients.

Principle 6. Partnerships should exist between the services and LGBTIQ services (as well as sexual assault, police, justice and health services) to ensure improvements in access for LGBTIQ clients escaping domestic violence and to improve the service response and referrals provided (Getting access to coordinated, linked services).

Providing supportive environments for LGBTIQ clients requires good coordination and links with LGBTIQ services in order to meet the special needs of LGBTIQ clients. Referrals play an important part in ensuring appropriate service responses, so it is important to establish good networks with LGBTIQ organisations and services in order to draw on the expertise and resources of these organisations.

Increased liaison between the LGBTIQ and the domestic and family violence support services can also increase learning from each other which can also improve service practices and accessibility. For example LGBTIQ services may not have knowledge or expertise on domestic and family violence issues for their clients.

Ideas to consider

The service has built trust with LGBTIQ clients by networking with relevant organisations, and looking at improving their service response through collaboration with LGBTIQ services.

Staff are aware of the service system, support networks, referral options and resources available to support someone who identifies as LGBTIQ and can refer them to relevant information and resources.

Connections have been built with local LGBTIQ organisations and groups in the ACT - such as A Gender Agenda, AIDS Action, university and youth queer groups and others.

Principle 7. Data and feedback should be collected on the use of the service by LGBTIQ clients, and be used to improve services (Giving information and feedback to help improve services).

A service can ensure it is meeting the need of its LGBTIQ clients by monitoring the impact of service design, development and delivery on them.

Ideas to consider

Services can record data on the number of LGBTIQ clients accessing their services.

Services can examine the barriers to access to their service for LGBTIQ clients, through client feedback and service evaluation, including ideas for improvement.

Principle 8. Leadership and management practices should be in place that show a commitment to access for LGBTIQ clients, and to ensure that planning includes the needs of LGBTIQ clients (Management planning and commitment).

Many domestic and family violence services or programs have mission statements and policies that are specific to women and their children. This may lead the LGBTIQ community to believe that those services are not available or accessible to them.

Ideas to consider

Build policy documents with your Board that clearly establish the position of your organisation on people of diverse genders and sexualities and your organisation's commitment to LGBTIQ issues.

Consider a publically available charter, position statement or policy that specifically states that the service is inclusive and supportive of LGBTIQ clients. (See the example at Attachment based on an aged care service in Queensland (Care Connect) which has a specific, publically available charter outlining their commitment to providing a sensitive service.)

Statements about the organisation's commitment to valuing diversity explicitly refer to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Wherever possible, invite representatives from the LGBTIQ community to nominate for the Board or committees.

Ensure the service has written policies that clearly reflect its commitment to LGBTIQ populations and that challenge discrimination and homophobia, and that these are promoted.

Include LGBTIQ clients in developing standards and responsive services.

The organisation's risk management processes are inclusive of LGBTIQ clients.

Example wording for organisational approach to delivering services to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) Community

At (name of organisation) we value the diversity and contribution of the LGBTIQ community. We want to ensure that you have access to services and supports that help you live independently.

Our staff are trained in LGBTIQ-specific cultural awareness and have experience working with the LGBTIQ community. Our staff respect your life choices, relationships and privacy.

Our commitment to the provision of an inclusive service

- We strive to deliver a non-discriminatory service.
- LGBTIQ people, their partners and families can expect to have their rights respected.
- Our inclusion policy welcomes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people.
- We understand the differences between sexuality, sex and gender identity.
- We commit to using language and content that is relevant.
- It is our policy to respect confidentiality where legally and ethically possible.
- We acknowledge the importance of gender identity and promise to treat transgender people in full accordance with their gender identity.
- It is our policy to ensure that we provide the best possible referral service to all people, including people of the LGBTIQ community.
- We may, from time to time, specifically promote those parts of our services that are most relevant to the LGBTIQ community.

This charter of inclusion is a sign of our commitment to creating a fair and equitable service for all.

Should an issue regarding sexuality, sex and gender identity arise, we will act in good faith on any feedback provided.

Questions to assess the LGBTIQ-inclusiveness and accessibility of services in the ACT supporting people experiencing domestic and family violence

The following questions are designed to assist services to assess how inclusive their service is of LGBTIQ clients. The questions are based on *the Good Practice Principles for Improving Accessibility for LGBTIQ Clients* and aim to assist services to determine where and what improvements may be required.

Principle 1. Service information about the domestic and family violence service should be accessible to LGBTIQ clients (Getting the message out about the service).

- Does your service promote its services to the LGBTIQ community or advertise in local ACT LGBTIQ publications?
- Does your website and social media content include material about LGBTIQ people as a client group?
- Are the external promotional materials for your service LGBTIQ inclusive?
- Do promotional materials about the service contain inclusive language and images, and LGBTIQ specific information?
- Would an LGBTIQ person find their experience of domestic or family violence represented in your organisations materials?
- Does the service use LGBTIQ inclusive language in its corporate publications?

Principle 2. The physical environment should be appropriate and accessible for LGBTIQ clients (Getting to the service, Feeling comfortable inside the service).

- Would a client entering your service know that they were welcomed to disclose as an LGBTIQ person?
- What signs and information is available in your reception area that would indicate that your service is LGBTIQ friendly?
- Does your service have LGBTIQ material on display at its service such as posters and pamphlets?
- Does the service display information about a commitment to confidentiality that includes reference to disclosures of sexual orientation?
- Does the service have a gender neutral bathroom available?

Principle 3. Communication with LGBTIQ clients should meet their different needs and be culturally appropriate etc (Getting help to access and provide the information required to access the service).

- Are staff aware of and trained in responding in a positive and respectful way to disclosure?

- Does the service have forms and processes that allow disclosure and self-identification of gender identity and sexual orientation?
- Is the language used in the service's forms and processes open, inclusive and gender neutral?
- Do the questions or language used assume heterosexuality?

Principle 4. Service policies, procedures and practices should be inclusive of and appropriate for LGBTIQ clients (Having culturally appropriate policies, procedures and practices for LGBTIQ people accessing the service).

- Does the service have a written confidentiality statement that includes LGBTIQ clients?
- Does the service have a policy on when it is and is not appropriate to collect information on a consumer's sexual orientation and gender identity?
- Are LGBTIQ clients informed that information about sexual orientation or gender identity is confidential, and told how information will be used and stored?
- Do staff check how LGBTIQ clients would like their information recorded and disclosed?
- Does the service have processes for identifying and responding to breaches of safety for LGBTIQ clients?

Principle 5. Domestic and family violence service workers should have an awareness of the issues of domestic and family violence for LGBTIQ clients, and the skills to work with LGBTIQ clients (Getting appropriate support from services and staff).

- Does the service advertise job vacancies in the LGBTIQ media, or publications?
- Does the service cover the issues and policies relating LGBTIQ clients when inducting new staff or volunteers?
- Does the service ensure all staff and volunteers have training about LGBTIQ-inclusive practice and safety?
- Are staff and volunteers trained in how the dynamics of domestic and family violence for LGTBIQ clients and how this may differ?
- Does the organisation keep up to date with current trends in LGBTIQ research and service provision and use that information to improve services for its LGBTIQ clients?
- Does the organisation participate in forums about the provision of services to LGBTIQ clients?

Principle 6. Partnerships should exist between the domestic and family violence services and LGBTIQ services (as well as other key services like sexual assault, housing, legal and health services, and police) to ensure improvements in access for

LGBTIQ clients escaping domestic and family violence and to improve the service response provided (*Getting access to coordinated, linked services*).

- Does the service collaborate or link with LGBTIQ services?
- Does the service outreach into the LGBTIQ community?
- Are staff aware of the appropriate service options, networks and resources for referring LGBTIQ clients to?

Principle 7. Data and feedback should be collected on the use of the service by LGBTIQ clients, and be used to improve services (*Giving information and feedback to help improve services*).

- Is the service being accessed by LGBTIQ clients?
- Does the service monitor its LGBTIQ clients to identify changing needs and possible service improvements?
- Does the service work with LGBTIQ clients (or the LGBTIQ community) to identify their needs?
- Does the service use this information to develop more LGBTIQ inclusive services?

Principle 8. Leadership and management practices should be in place that show a commitment to access for LGBTIQ clients, and to ensure that planning includes the needs of LGBTIQ clients (*Management planning and commitment*).

- Does the service have a publically available commitment or charter showing that it is inclusive and supportive of LGBTIQ clients?
- Does the service encourage individuals in the LGBTIQ community to nominate for the Board or committees?
- Does the service have written policies that reflect a commitment to the LGBTIQ community?
- Does the service Include LGBTIQ clients in developing appropriate standards and responsive services?
- Is the service's risk management process inclusive of LGBTIQ clients and include strategies to identify and manage potential risks for LGBTIQ clients?