



Sexuality, sex and gender diversity

SSGD people face stigma, discrimination, and marginalisation at rates higher than their heterosexual, *cisgender* peers. This may manifest as ostracism, rejection, bullying, and harassment, physical and sexual violence, and pressure to conform to gender norms. Exclusion and discrimination may be multiplied for SSGD people who are also members of other marginalised populations (for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or those living with disability).¹

While more accurate national statistics will not be available until analysis of the 2021 Australian census, 1.7% of newborns are *intersex*, 8% of people living in Australia are *gender diverse*, and 14.7% of women and 6.8% of men are *same-sex attracted*.² These figures are increasing as visibility and inclusivity allow more people to identify as *sexuality, sex and gender diverse* (SSGD). These categories are not mutually exclusive or homogenous: gender diverse people have different sexual orientations, and *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex* people may be *gender fluid*.

These behaviours may be performed by family members, peers, strangers, employers, teachers, and health practitioners. Many SSGD people internalise these experiences as feelings of shame, guilt, inadequacy, and internalised, homophobia, biphobia, interphobia and/or transphobia.^{3,4} As a consequence, almost half of all SSGD people in Australia conceal their *gender* or *orientation* for fear of encountering further prejudice.⁵ In addition, they are more likely than average to experience harm from alcohol and other drug use, mental ill-health (particularly anxiety, depression, and suicidality), be unemployed and/or homeless,⁶ live in poverty, have experienced food insecurity, and be subject to family violence.⁷

SSGD people, particularly those who are transgender and intersex, are more likely than other groups living in Australia to delay or avoid seeking health care.⁸ While the reasons for this are complex, 25.2% of SSGD Victorians reported experiencing unfair or discriminatory treatment by nurses, doctors and other staff in health care settings in 2020.⁹ In addition, many intersex people have pain and scarring from non-consensual childhood genital surgery and forced hormone use in order to fit the gender *binary*, often without explanation or consultation, and now have feelings of resentment and distrust about health practitioners.¹⁰

Other barriers to equitable access to healthcare services are the relative lack of specific resources, discriminatory policies and processes, and poor education and information for health care practitioners about working with SSGD people. As a result of all these factors, SSGD people are less likely than other people living in Australia to have preventive health checks or early intervention for treatable cancers and chronic diseases, and have a higher rate of multiple chronic diseases.^{11,12}

It is the position of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. All people have a legal, moral and fundamental right to be treated fairly and equitably, regardless of sexuality, sex, gender, or other personal characteristics.¹³
2. All people have the right to equitable access to healthcare and positive health outcomes, and to be treated with dignity and respect in all healthcare settings, including disability and aged care. This includes using their nominated names and pronouns.
3. Inequity, stigma and discrimination have physical and psychological health effects. Addressing these issues is therefore a human rights, health care, and union issue. Prejudice and unlawful discrimination have no place in the union movement.
4. It is the responsibility of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing* to be informed about SSGD, and the effects of stigma on people's physical and psychosocial health.
5. Organisations should have mandatory training on SSGD and inclusive practice.
6. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should actively promote inclusivity in healthcare, including data collection. This includes offering gender options additional to male or female and gender-neutral honorifics such as Mx, within the healthcare setting.

*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled)



Glossary of terms¹⁴

Assigned sex at birth: the discernment of a baby's sex at birth based on their genitalia; in most cases this correlates with a child's anatomical sex and phenotype.¹⁵

Bisexual: a person who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one sex. Often this term is shortened to 'bi'.

Brotherboy: see Sistergirl in this glossary

Cisgender: describes a person whose gender conforms to the dominant social expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Equity: is about fairness, and making sure all people have access to the same opportunities. This does not involve treating everyone the same. Rather, it involves recognising that everyone is different and providing individuals and communities with the things they need to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities.

Gay: a person whose emotional and sexual attraction is toward people of the same sex. The term is most commonly applied to men, although some women use this term.

Gender: the socially constructed and hierarchical categories assigned to individuals on the basis of their apparent sex at birth.¹⁶

Gender binary: the belief that *gender* falls into two, and only two, categories based on assigned sex at birth.

Gender conforming: behaviour and modes of presentation that match the dominant social expectations of the sex someone was assigned at birth.

Gender diverse: a broad term that encompasses a diversity of gender identities and gender expressions including: bigender, trans, transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, gender questioning, gender diverse, agender and non-binary. Gender diverse refers to identities and expressions that reject the belief that gender is determined by the sex someone is assigned at birth.

Gender expression: the way someone chooses to publicly express their gender, through name, pronoun, clothing, haircut, mannerisms etc. This may be *gender conforming* or *gender non-conforming*.

Gender identity: has a specific meaning under State and Commonwealth Equal Opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation. In broad terms, however, it refers to a person's deeply felt sense of being a man or a woman, both, neither, or in between.

Gender non-conforming (synonyms: gender variant, gender queer, gender diverse, gender non-conforming, gender-atypical): presentations that involve behaviour and modes of presentation that do not match the dominant social expectations of the sex someone was assigned at birth.

Gender norms: cultural expectations of how people should dress, behave, and the appropriate roles and positions of privilege in society based on assigned sex at birth.¹⁷

Intersex: an umbrella term that refers to traits that include a wide range of different underlying variations. Intersex people have innate sex characteristics that don't fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies, and that create risks or experiences of stigma, discrimination and harm. These can be determined prenatally, at birth, during puberty and at other times, such as when trying to conceive a child. Each trait has its own characteristics and differing degrees of expression. An intersex person's gender identity may be male, female or non-binary.¹⁸

Lesbian: a person who identifies as a woman whose emotional and sexual attraction is toward other women.

LGBTQIA+: an abbreviation for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex* and *agender/aromantic/asexual*.

Misgendering: describing or addressing someone using language that does not match that person's gender identity or expression. For people with intersex variations, this may include a presumption that they have a non-binary gender identity, or that they identify exclusively as a man, or a woman.

Non-binary: a model of the relationships between sex and gender that does not assume a radical division between sex (a person is either male or female but not both or neither) and gender (a person is masculine or feminine but not both or either). People who are non-binary may have sex characteristics that do not fit a binary



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model of male or female or may express their gender in ways that do not match the dominant social expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Phobia: fear, hatred or intolerance of people who are or are perceived to be bisexual (*biphobia*), homosexual (*homophobia*), intersex (*interphobia*) or transgender (*transphobia*) that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse. These feelings may be internalised by people who are SSGD.

Pronouns: a word chosen to publicly express a person's gender identity that includes he or she, as well as gender-neutral pronouns such as they, ze, hir and others. Some people may use more than one pronoun (e.g. he/they).¹⁹

Queer: is often used as an umbrella term that includes non-heteronormative gender identities and sexual orientations. The term has also been used as a critique of identity categories that some people experience as restrictive and limiting. For some older LGBTI people the term is tied to a history of abuse and may be offensive.

Questioning: a person who is not sure about or is exploring their *gender identity* and/or *sexual orientation*. People who are gender questioning may express their gender in ways that do not match the expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth or they may reject gender categories all together.

Same sex attracted: sexual and/or emotional attraction toward people of one's own sex. This includes lesbian, gay and bisexual people and people who may be questioning their sexuality, or do not want to label themselves. The term has also been used to describe young people whose sense of sexual identity is not fixed and experience sexual feelings toward people of their own sex.

Sex/sex characteristics: a person's physical characteristics relating to sex, genitalia, chromosomes, hormones or secondary sex characteristics that emerge at puberty.

Sexuality, sex and gender diverse (SSGD): any person who is not heterosexual and *cisgender*.

Sistergirl/Sistagirl: some Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities use various terms to describe or identify a person assigned female or male at birth and identifying or living partly or fully as another gender. In these communities, Sistergirls have a distinct cultural identity and often take on female roles including looking after children and family. Other communities will use different terms to describe gender diversity. These include Brotherboy which is sometimes used to describe an individual assigned female at birth who has a male spirit. However, in other Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities Brotherboys is used as a generic term to describe a group of men who relate to each other – 'my brothers' – and similarly Sistergirls is used to describe a group of women.

Transgender: a person whose gender identity or expression is different from their assigned sex at birth or those who sit outside the gender binary. The terms male-to-female and female-to-male may be used to refer to individuals who are undergoing or have undergone a process of gender affirmation. Transgender and trans are older terms and may now be seen as less inclusive than *trans and gender diverse*.

Transition: the process by which a trans or gender diverse person affirms their gender. Transition may include some or all of the following: cultural, legal or medical adjustments; telling friends, family and/or colleagues; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; or surgical intervention. For some trans and gender diverse people the social context of transition may be more important than the physical aspect of transitioning. A person's gender identity is valid regardless of whether or not they modify any of these characteristics.

This is an incomplete glossary of terms that relate to sexuality, sex and gender. Current terminology in this area is evolving rapidly, and these definitions and concepts may change in future. Note that some sexuality, sex and gender diverse people may not identify with or use the terms used in this document.

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