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Accessibility:

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place Melbourne
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This document is available at http://www.vic.gov.au/equality
Designed by The Designery
MINISTER FOR EQUALITY

The Victorian Government is committed to equality for all Victorians. The Inclusive Language Guide was created to provide public servants with the right tools to communicate in our diverse work environments. Language has the power to empower individuals and strengthen relationships. Through issuing this Guide, the Victorian Government acknowledges and celebrates our differences.

It is the responsibility of the Victorian Government to keep people safe. This includes Victoria’s LGBTI communities. The Guide is one of the ways in which we are addressing and eradicating homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

The Victorian Government also has a responsibility to promote a high performing public service that is safe and inclusive. A public sector workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves will provide better insight into policy and program development. This will improve service delivery outcomes for the broader community.

The Guide has been developed with the assistance of the Victorian Government LGBTI Taskforce and other community advocates. I would like to thank them for their contribution.

I trust that all Victorian Public Sector employees will find this Guide to be a useful resource in making the Victorian Public Sector more inclusive, and improving outcomes for LGBTI Victorians.

Martin Foley MP
Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Equality
Minister for Creative Industries

COMMISSIONER FOR GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Language matters. The Inclusive Language Guide is a vital resource to help break down prejudices and stereotypes. It will equip people with the correct terminology to promote safer spaces for LGBTI Victorians that extend beyond the workplace.

There are many vulnerable people in Victoria who struggle to access services. Cultural competence within the public sector is critical in ensuring that Government services are inclusive, respectful and responsive. This guide will improve the capacity of the Victorian Public Sector to provide inclusive services to all LGBTI communities.

While this resource was developed for the Victorian Public Sector, I encourage other organisations and individuals to make use of the guidance it provides.

Ro Allen
Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality
This inclusive language guide has been developed to provide guidance to the Victorian Public Sector regarding language and LGBTI communities. LGBTI stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex. Inclusive language supports the Victorian Public Sector values of Integrity, Respect and Human Rights. By using inclusive language when referring to LGBTI persons, the public sector will reflect these values within both the sector and the community it serves.

Inclusive language ensures everyone is treated with respect as such language is free from words or tones that reflect prejudice, discrimination or stereotypes. Gender and sexuality are experienced and expressed in many different ways, and using language that excludes or stereotypes can cause unintentional harm to LGBTI individuals. This includes ‘positive’ stereotyping of LGBTI people.

LGBTI communities experience poorer health outcomes and reduced social engagement due to actual or feared prejudice. Respectful, inclusive language lessens those fears, thoughtless or disrespectful language heightens them. It is important to show respect to how people describe their own bodies, genders and relationships, even where they are not present.
KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

• Sexual orientation, sex and gender identity are all separate concepts.

• Sexual orientation is used to describe a person’s romantic and/or sexual attraction.

• Sex refers to a person’s biological characteristics. A person’s sex is usually described as either male or female. The designation of a person as either male or female on the basis of their biological characteristics takes into account their chromosomes, genitals, hormones and neurobiology. Some people have both male and female characteristics, or neither male nor female characteristics.

• Gender identity refers to the way in which a person understands, identifies or expresses their masculine or feminine characteristics within a particular sociocultural context.
**TERMINOLOGY: SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

**Lesbian** This refers to a woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to other women.

**Gay** This refers to someone who is romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same gender identity as themselves. It is usually used to refer to men who are attracted to other men but may also be used by women.

**Bisexual** This refers to a person who is romantically and sexually attracted to individuals of their own gender and other genders.

**Asexual** This refers to someone who does not experience sexual attraction. They may still experience feelings of affection towards another person.

**Pansexual** This refers to people who are romantically and sexually attracted to people of all genders.

**Queer** Queer is an umbrella term used by some people to describe non-conforming gender identities and sexual orientations.

**TERMINOLOGY: INTERSEX**

**Intersex** This refers to the diversity of physical characteristics between the stereotypical male and female characteristics. Intersex people have reproductive organs, chromosomes or other physical sex characteristics that are neither wholly female nor wholly male. Intersex is a description of biological diversity and may or may not be the identity used by an intersex person.
TERMINOLOGY: GENDER IDENTITY

Trans (Transgender)  This refers to a person whose gender identity, gender expression or behaviour does not align with their sex assigned at birth. In Australia, at birth children are assigned male or female. Male children are raised as boys and female children are raised as girls. A person classified as female at birth who identifies as a man may use the label trans, transman or man. Similarly, a person classified as male at birth who identifies as a woman may use the label trans, transwoman or woman.

Gender diverse and non-binary

This refers to people who do not identify as a woman or a man. In the same way that sexual orientation and gender expression are not binaries, gender identity is not a binary either. It is important to challenge our thinking beyond the binary constructs of male and female.

Some people may identify as agender (having no gender), bigender (both a woman and a man) or non-binary (neither woman nor man). There is a diverse range of non-binary gender identities such as genderqueer, gender neutral, genderfluid and third gendered. It is important to be aware that language in this space is still evolving and people may have their own preferred gender identities that are not listed here.

Brotherboys and Sistergirls

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may use these terms to refer to transgender people. Brotherboy typically refers to masculine spirited people who are born female, and Sistergirl typically refers to feminine spirited people who are born male.

Cisgender

This refers to people whose gender identity is in line with the social expectations of their sex assigned at birth. It is a term used to describe people who are not transgender.
HOW TO USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Use appropriate terminology

It is important to remember that you should only refer to people’s sexual orientation or gender identity with the appropriate terms. Although terms such as ‘dyke’ and ‘fag’ may be used by LGBTI people themselves, this terminology is likely to be seen as derogatory if used by someone who is not part of the subgroup. Furthermore, using the word ‘gay’ to refer to negative situations or phenomenon unrelated to sexual orientation is offensive and unacceptable.

Avoid heteronormativity/heterosexism

Heteronormativity is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual (straight), and that this is the norm. Heterosexism is the belief that non-heteronormative sexual orientations or gender identities are unnatural. Avoid using language which assumes all relationships are heterosexual, as this denies the experiences of same sex couples. It is better to use the word ‘partner’ than ‘wife/husband’ where the gender, sexual orientation or relationship status of a person is unknown. When someone mentions their children, remind yourself that this doesn’t necessarily mean they are in a heterosexual relationship, and avoid making assumptions.

Avoid misgendering

Misgendering is using language to refer to a person that is not aligned with how that person identifies their own gender or body. Most but not all intersex and trans people who identify as male prefer to be referred to as ‘he’. Most but not all intersex and trans people who identify as female prefer to be referred to as ‘she’. Some people prefer to be described with their first name only or a non-binary pronoun such as ‘they’ rather than a gendered pronoun. Others prefer no pronoun at all.

Also be aware that some gender neutral pronouns exist, such as ‘zie’ and ‘hir’. If unsure, you can ask someone directly what their preferred pronoun is in a respectful manner. Where possible, check privately to reduce discomfort. If you do make a mistake, apologise promptly and move on, it will likely make the person feel more uncomfortable if you dwell on the mistake. Try to avoid making the same mistake again.
Avoid offensive questions

Most people would find it inappropriate to be asked questions about their genitals or breasts. It is therefore not appropriate to ask questions about whether a trans person has had surgery. Similarly, most people would find it inappropriate to be referred to with reference to their anatomical or medical history. In the same way trans people should not be referred to with reference to whether or not they have had surgery.

Respect people’s experiences

A trans or gender diverse person may refer to their gender affirmation rather than transition. They may prefer the phrase gender affirmation as it aligns with how they have always identified. Transitioning implies that they are changing from one gender to another. It is important to use respectful language in line with the person’s own experiences. Some refer to ‘aligning’ their body and gender rather than transitioning.

There can be diversity within diversity

People who identify as LGBTI may also identify with other diversity groups such as CALD or disabled. Language used should not assume primacy of one dimension. The diversity within any one element of L,G,B,T or I needs to be respected.
Include non-binary options on forms and databases

Sex and gender-restrictive forms and databases with only ‘male’ and ‘female’ may exclude trans, intersex and gender diverse people from participating. Identify ways to change systems so they are more inclusive of non-binary people.

For the majority of people (around 98%), there is a correlation between their sex and gender (e.g. their sex is female and their gender is female). The conceptual difference between the two concepts is therefore not well understood by the general public, and they are often used interchangeably in legislation and the media.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has introduced a new Standard for Sex and Gender Variables with the following standard tick box question module for sex. The ‘Male’ response option is shown first due to tradition in the ABS and alignment with other collections.

☐ What is your sex? Please [tick/mark/select] one box.
  ☐ Male
  ☐ Female
  ☐ Other, please specify ……………………………

The gender question module mirrors the above:

☐ What is your gender? Please [tick/mark/select] one box.
  ☐ Male
  ☐ Female
  ☐ Other, please specify ……………………………
RESOURCES


Hirst, J 2015, The Gender Fairy, Oban Road Publishing, Australia.


Sisters and Brothers NT, Identities, viewed 18 December 2015, <http://sistersandbrothersnt.com/>
