

# LGBTI fact sheet 2a - Introduction

## Sexuality, gender and sex are important to everyone

Ageist stereotypes often portray older people as lacking sexual interest (1) however, sexuality and gender are relevant to everyone.

- Sexuality and gender identity are expressed "in the way we speak, smile, stand, sit, dress, dance, laugh and cry" (2). Both are integral to who we are, what we believe and feel, how we behave, express ourselves and how we respond to others throughout our lives (3-5).

### Sexuality

- The basic human need for companionship, relationships, intimacy and touch continues when a person has dementia.
- Addressing sexuality in older people can be difficult or uncomfortable for some aged care staff, particularly where generational differences exist (5-7).
- For older people with dementia the situation is even more complex: they face the 'double jeopardy' of being old and cognitively impaired, which can make it difficult for the person to communicate their needs to others and advocate for themselves (8).
- A person's sexuality includes but is not limited to their sexual orientation and attraction to others and there are many different ways that an individual can experience and express these aspects of who they are.

- This diversity includes people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) as well as people who identify as heterosexual or 'straight' and are of binary gender, for example man or woman (see glossary).
- Some people experience sexuality as fluid and changing throughout their lives.
- Sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex or intersex status are not a choice or a 'lifestyle'; they are fundamental to who we are (9).

### Key LGBTI terminology & definitions

- LGBTI is an acronym that refers to a group of people with diverse relationships, sexualities, gender identities or bodies. It includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, and/or intersex people.
- The many gender identities, sexualities and bodily variations that people have may not be captured by these five letters and all terms can mean something unique and specific to the person using them.
- Some older people may not use any of these labels to identify their sexual orientation, gender or body diversity.
- The letters may also be used in different orders (e.g. GLBTI) and sometimes it may be appropriate to use only a few or one of the letters depending on the context. For example, when referring exclusively to sexual orientation or sexuality, 'LGB' may be appropriate whereas when referring to

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gender identity 'T' would be most appropriate.

- 'I' should always be included where appropriate, but there are times where it may be appropriate not to include them, such as when referring specifically to gay and lesbian relationships.
- Key terms relevant to the content of the eLearning module and these fact sheets are defined below. Refer to the glossary for definitions of other terms.

## Key terms

**Gender identity** – describes people's own understanding of who they are in relation to the social roles, attributes and behaviours based on society's definitions of 'women' and 'men'. This is distinct from their physical characteristics. Gender expression refers to how we express ourselves with regard to gender, e.g. hairstyle, clothing.

**\*Note:** for most people, gender identity and biological sex (assigned at birth) are aligned, but for some (e.g. transgender people) they are in conflict. Others may identify as androgynous (combination of masculine and feminine characteristics) and some reject any gender categories (e.g. gender queer, no gender).

**Sex** – is the biological and physiological characteristics typically associated with 'female' and 'male'. This includes chromosomal configuration, hormonal profile, reproductive organs, sex characteristics at birth and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, body hair and voice.

**Sex characteristics** – refer to the physical parts of the body that are related to body development/regulation and reproductive systems. Primary sex characteristics are gonads, chromosomes, genitals and hormones. Secondary sex characteristics emerge at puberty and can include the development of breast tissue, voice pitch, facial and pubic hair. 'Sex characteristics' is more accurate than 'biological sex', 'biologically male' or 'biologically female'.

**\*Note:** 'man' and 'woman' are gender terms whereas 'male' and 'female' are sex terms, derived from biology relating to anatomy and chromosomes.

**Sexuality** – describes a central aspect of being human throughout life which encompasses emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions towards others, often describing the gender of people with whom someone builds relationships.

**Sexual orientation** – refers to a person's feelings or self-concept, direction of interest, or emotional, romantic orientation or sexual attraction toward others.

**Lesbian person** – refers to a woman who identifies as or whose primary sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction is toward other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women.

**Gay person** – refers to a man who identifies as or whose primary sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction is towards other men. The term can also refer to a person whose primary sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction is toward people of the same gender. Some women also use this term. Avoid using the word

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'homosexuals' as it is an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

**Bisexual person** – refers to a person who identifies as, or whose primary sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction is toward people of multiple genders. Bisexual means the potential for involvement with multiple genders. This can be sexually, emotionally, in reality or in fantasy. Some bisexual people may have concurrent partners and others may relate to different genders at different times. Most bisexual people do not need to be involved with more than one gender at a time to feel fulfilled.

**Trans/Transgender person** – are umbrella terms that describes a person whose gender identity is not typically associated with their assumed sex at birth. 'Trans' is a widely accepted term used for trans women, trans men and trans non-binary people.

Transgender does not imply any specific form of sexual attraction in that transgender people identify variously as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or asexual. It is important to note that the story of 'boy becomes girl' or vice versa does not describe the experience of all transgender people. A range of variations on this story may be the reality for some transgender people. Transgender may include all gender non-conforming people including gender-queer people and transsexual, although 'transsexual' is an older term currently considered less acceptable.

**\*Note:** At any point in their transition transgender people may not identify as transgender but rather as a woman, man, neither or both.

**Gender diverse** – refers to people whose understanding or performance of their gender does not conform to social expectations based on their sex assigned at birth.

**Intersex person** – describes a person who is born with physical sex characteristics that are more diverse than medical and social norms of 'male' or 'female' bodies. Many intersex traits are natural manifestations of human bodily diversity which can involve sexual anatomy, hormones and/or chromosomes.

Stereotypes and society often establish expectations of what it means to be biologically female or male, but some people are born with variations of sex characteristics which do not fit into medical expectations of being exclusively biologically female or biologically male. This is called intersex. Intersex status is about biology not sexuality or gender identity. Many intersex people are heterosexual.

At least forty known genetic and other variations are included in the term intersex. Many intersex people identify as male or female however intersex people have a broad range of gender identities and the term does not imply any specific form of sexual attraction. Intersex is sometimes promoted as a 'third sex' category however most intersex people do not wish to be considered a 'third sex'.

**Heterosexual person** – or 'straight' person refers to a person whose primary sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction is to people of the 'opposite' sex.

References for key terms (10-25)

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## Additional points on terminology

- It is important to recognise that no one term or definition for LGBTI concepts is the only term or definition. Terminology outlined in this resource is not intended to be universally accepted or applied. Those providing care need to listen to LGBTI peoples and use their individually preferred terms.
- The individual needs of LGBTI peoples need to be taken into account when considering the diversity within these groups. Each of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities may have its own needs, as do the individual people who identify as part of these groups (26).
- Some older people may not use these or any labels to identify their sexual orientation, gender and body diversity. Transgender and intersex people may live and identify as heterosexual and may not feel connected to LGBTI communities BTI communities (27).
- Other LGBTI peoples may identify with multiple groups, for example a transgender person who is a lesbian.
- LGBTI peoples however share the experience of being part of a group likely to have been subjected to exclusion and discrimination during their lifetime (12).
- Where services are not providing LGBTI-inclusive care, discrimination continues (28, 29). LGBTI-specific knowledge and skills can assist care providers to better support the health and wellbeing of LGBTI people with dementia and their carers by

responding to their unique needs (12, 22, 30-34).

## Older LGBTI peoples - important statistics

- Reported numbers of older LGBTI Australians are likely to be an underestimation because they can be reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status (12, 35). This is also due, in part, to the lack of inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in routine data collection (19, 36, 37).
- The invisibility of older LGBTI people contributes to the lack of data on the numbers of LGBTI people with dementia and those caring for them (30).

**\*Note:** Estimates indicate that up to 11% of Australia's population identify as LGBTI (12, 38, 39). In a 100-bed aged care facility this could equate to up to eleven residents.

- The invisibility of older LGBTI peoples in aged care means service providers may be unaware of how to meet the special needs of these clients, residents or patients (28, 40).
- Between 1996 and 2011 the number of same-sex couples reported in Australia has more than tripled which may reflect growing social acceptance in recent decades and a willingness for same-sex couples to be open about the nature of their relationship (35).
- It is estimated that by 2051 there will be 500,000 LGBTI people aged over 65 years living in Australia (40).

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- Computer-assisted telephone interviews of 10,173 men and 9,134 women aged 16-59 years from all States and Territories of Australia found that 0.9% of men and 1.4% of women identified as bisexual (27, 41, 42).
- Reporting accurate numbers for the transgender population is complicated by the diversity within this group (21). Estimates suggest between 0.1% and 0.3% of the Australian population are transgender and 8.4% could be defined as gender diverse (27).
- The current best estimate of the number of transgender adults in the US population is approximately 1 in every 250 adults (43).
- A nationally representative survey of New Zealand high school students found that 1.2% identified as 'transgender' and 2.5% were unsure about their gender (44).
- Reported numbers of transgender people are increasing with time and the availability of more direct methods of population estimation (21, 43, 45).
- As intersex people are frequently 'invisible' in society it is often assumed that those born with intersex variations are rare (46, 47).
- While it is difficult to establish exact prevalence numbers approximately 1 person in 2000 has a variation of sex characteristics making intersex differences about as common as having red hair is in the general population (48).
- Little research has been undertaken on the additional issues and needs of LGBTI peoples from minority groups such as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, those from culturally and

linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and people living in regional or remote areas (9).

**\*Note:** Australia's overall ageing population predicts an increase in the demand for aged care services by older LGBTI peoples (48).

- While those who are part of LGBTI populations differ, and groups within LGBTI communities may have specific needs (26), important aspects of their lived experience and history of discrimination are shared (12).

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See *Fact sheet 1 – Overview* for details.