Tip Sheet

LGBTIQ Inclusion for COVID-19 Remote Services

We would like to acknowledge the difficult time we all face with the current public health crisis caused by coronavirus (COVID-19). Overall, older people and those with underlying health conditions are more at risk. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) communities are known to have significant health disparities, which might influence disease outcomes. These include a greater risk for HIV, certain cancers, asthma, obesity and cardiovascular disease, and higher smoking rates.

The current situation is understandably causing stress and uncertainty throughout all our communities. Within this, LGBTIQ communities experience poorer mental health and higher rates of suicide and self-harm, and could be at greater risk in relation to experiences of anxiety, depression and isolation.

Accessing available health and community support services is more important than ever for LGBTIQ communities. But barriers to accessing services – for example, expecting or experiencing discrimination – may be heightened at times of stress and upheaval.

Rainbow Health Victoria has created this tip sheet to assist in providing safe and inclusive remote services to LGBTIQ people due to the impact of COVID-19.

If there is anything we can do to further support you, please contact us at rainbowhealthvic@latrobe.edu.au

Safe and Welcoming Services

Moving to remote service delivery, such as phone, video or chat, means that clients may not see physical signals you would normally use to help them feel safe and welcome, such as posters, pride flags, brochures or bathroom signs.

Here are some suggestions:

- Social media messages reassuring LGBTIQ people that your service is here to support them
- Follow LGBTIQ community organisations and community groups on social media, and share their posts and resources
- Add a section to your hold music affirming your support for LGBTIQ communities
- Wear a pride lanyard on video consultations, if you have one
- Wear a pronoun badge. If you don't have one, you can use a sticky label.

Respectful Communication and Cultural Safety

Using the correct pronouns and name for staff and clients is more important than ever. We know that misgendering (using the wrong pronoun for someone) increases stress and contributes to poor mental health. Fear of being misgendered can be a barrier to service access.

It can be harder to establish someone's gender and pronouns without physical cues. Refresh staff on the importance of not assuming gender based on voice, using the right name (especially if your computer systems tend to misname clients), and avoiding terms like 'sir', 'madam', 'Mr' or 'Mrs' when you haven't established the language a person uses that aligns with their identity. Offer to share your pronouns, and where possible, discreetly inquire about clients' pronouns.

Services should consider how group agreements may change over video chat. For training and group sessions this could include mapping out new ways of taking turns, asking questions, listening, and completing exercises, and providing a copy to participants. We would encourage you to get feedback from your clients on your remote services to continuously improve your practice.

Intersectionality

Clients may experience a range of barriers to service, such as:

Gender	Homelessness	Age
Sexuality	Substance use	Race
Disability	Sex work	Culture
Intersex status	Mental health	Religious background

This tip sheet focuses mainly on LGBTIQ people, but may also be useful for clients with different or multiple intersectional experiences.

Practice

Organisations and practitioners will already have a range of skills and experience in supporting clients adjusting to change or coping in crisis. These skills can be readily applied to current circumstances. The following questions are provided to help prompt reflection:

- What might our clients be experiencing at this time?
- What can I do to help them adjust to circumstances and stay safe?
- What resources and supports do they have, and how can I support them to access these?
- What might get in the way of them accessing services?
- What can I do to help them feel safe and included when accessing services?
- How might they need me to advocate for them?
- What additional support might I need to support my clients?

Advocacy

Many clients will be using other services too, and may need extra support. Some may experience heightened anxiety or additional barriers to services, and lack informal supports, such as family or friends. Be sure to ask them how they feel accessing other services, and consider ways to support them. This might include checking in with other services about their inclusive practice framework, and forwarding this resource to support inclusivity.

Risk Assessment and a Strengths-Based Approach

Take the time to tune into the physical, psychological, social and economic risks your clients may be experiencing, and help them develop and maintain a plan to stay safe.

LGBTIQ communities may experience poorer mental health. Homelessness and unemployment are more common. Long periods at home under stressful circumstances may increase risk of family violence. Young people at risk of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the home may be less safe.

Remember to take a strengths-based approach that helps them tune into their internal and external resources and support them in staying connected. It's also very affirming to check in about how their communities and networks are doing, including their family of choice.

Confidentiality

Not everyone lives with family or housemates who know about their gender, sexuality or intersex variation, or what services they are accessing. Before starting a phone or video session, confirm via text or email that the person has a safe and private space to talk, and ask if they have any privacy concerns before going ahead.

Connection and support

Rapport is important when clients are feeling isolated. If handing a client over to another staff member, remember to take the time to let them know about the unique support needs of your client, and include suggestions about how to build rapport with them. Take time to build a connection with new clients.

RHV training is now available remotely: enquire at www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au/training-programs.