LGBTIQA+
inclusive
language guide

VICTORIA
State
Government

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<equality@dffh.vic.gov.au**>

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Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for public sector employees. Use it to ensure you use inclusive language for LGBTIQA+ people.

The guide aims to support public sector entities and their employees. We all have a responsibility to make Victoria a safer, fairer and more inclusive place for everyone.

Language is very powerful. It can be discriminatory, harmful and limiting. It can also provide people with the ability to describe their identities and experiences. We should always be mindful how we communicate with other people.

Language is always evolving

This inclusive language guide is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. Definitions and meanings change over time as language evolves and as our understanding of who we are evolves. Meaning also varies across languages other than English and there are not always direct translations.

While this guide focuses on LGBTIQA+ inclusive language, it is important to remember that many different aspects can make up a person's identity and experiences. This can include race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or sexuality, income or social status, age, ability or disability, or migration status.

A list of resources is available at the end of this guide with more extensive information about other types of inclusive language.

What does the term 'LGBTIQA+' mean?

The Victorian Government uses the acronym LGBTIQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual). This is an inclusive umbrella abbreviation of diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics.

Everyone has a sex, gender and sexuality, which relate to our bodies, identities and how we express ourselves.

Communities included within this commonly used umbrella term have distinct experiences and needs, and different histories of identity and organisation. In Australia, the term has arisen in recognition of common experiences of legal and social marginalisation on the basis of dominant social norms around sex, gender and sexuality.[1]

The plus sign indicates that there are many different terms used to describe identity, which are not all covered by the letters LGBTIQA.

Why are we adding the 'A'?

The A is for asexual. This refers to a person who may experience partial or no sexual attraction but may or may not experience romantic attraction towards others. Asexual people can be of any gender or sexual orientation.

The Victorian Government is adopting the reference to asexual people, making its standard acronym LGBTIQA+. This addition responds to feedback from communities. It also ensures that the language we use remains inclusive and representative.

Some communities include other terms such as aromantic and agender in the A. Our new acronym does not specifically call out these terms. We capture them within the +. The term 'ace' is often used as an umbrella term for these identities.

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1 Rainbow Health Victoria, 2020, 'Research Matters: What does LGBTIQ mean?', available at: https://rainbowhealthaustralia. org.au/media/pages/research-resources/research-matters-what-does-lgbtiq-mean/4107366852-1654154418/research-matters-what-does-lgbtiq-mean.pdf

Why can't I see the term I'm looking for?

Definitions and meanings of sexuality and gender continue to change over time. This guidance does not provide an exhaustive list of definitions. Each of the terms in this guide may be written or spoken about in different ways.

If you are unsure about specific terminology, ask the people and communities you are supporting. This ensures that language reflects their needs and identities. You can also consult the list of resources at the end of the guide for more information.

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is when we use words in ways that show our respect for people of all different backgrounds.

Inclusive language is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups. It does not deliberately or inadvertently exclude people.

Inclusive language is about welcoming all people to take part in and contribute to our workplaces, schools, communities and services.

LGBTIQA+ inclusive language is a way of acknowledging and respecting the natural diversity of sex, gender and sexuality.

LGBTIQA+ inclusive language can come in three forms:

- **verbal** (for example, through spoken language)
- **written** (for example, through surveys or intake forms)
- **visual** (for example, through the display of LGBTIQA+ flags)

Why is inclusive language important?

How others describe us has an enormous impact on our health and wellbeing. A lack of inclusive communication contributes to discrimination that can prevent LGBTIQA+ people from accessing help.[2]

Using inclusive language can help to build trust between the Government and LGBTIQA+ communities. It also helps to address the discrimination that LGBTIQA+ people may face.

When we use inclusive language, it encourages the wider Victorian community to use it too.

Our workplaces should also reflect the Victorian Public Sector Values and Code of Conduct. These include demonstrating respect and promoting human rights.[3] *Pride in Our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32* notes that government policies, programs and services should be safe, inclusive and accessible for all Victorians.[4]

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2 Brooks et al. 2018; Smith, Jones & Ward, 2014, cited in: Australian Institute of Family Studies, February 2022, https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/inclusive-communication-lgbtiq-clients

3 Victorian Public Sector Commission, https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-values/

4 Pride in Our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32, https://www.vic.gov.au/pride-our-future-victorias-lgbtiq-strategy-2022-32.

Key terms

Gender

Gender is part of a person's personal and social identity. It refers to a way a person feels and sees themselves. It can be about differences in identity, expression and experience as a woman, man or gender diverse person.

Gender diverse

Gender diverse is an umbrella term for a range of diffetrent genders. There are many terms gender diverse people may use to describe themselves. Language in this area is dynamic and always changing, particularly among young people. Some examples include genderfluid, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, bi-gender and non-binary.

Non-binary

Non-binary is a term for people whose gender sits outside of the spectrum of man or woman or male and female. A person who is non-binary might feel like they have a mix of genders, or like they have no gender at all.

A person might identify solely as non-binary or relate to non-binary as an umbrella term. They might consider themselves as genderfluid, genderqueer, trans masculine, trans feminine, agender or bigender.

Trans or transgender

Transgender refers to someone whose gender does not exclusively align with their sex recorded at birth. Not all trans people will use this term to describe themselves.

Cis or cisgender (pronounced 'sis')

Cisgender refers to a person whose gender is the same as their sex recorded at birth. Not all cisgender people will be aware of this term or use it to describe themselves.

Sistergirl and brotherboy

Sistergirl and brotherboy are terms used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe transgender people. Using these terms can validate and strengthen their gender identities and relationships. Sistergirls and brotherboys might be non-binary, female or male.

Sistergirl describes gender diverse people that have a female spirit and take on female roles within the community, including looking after children and family. Brotherboy describes gender diverse people that have a male spirit and take on male roles within the community.

Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may also use these words. – For example, lesbian and heterosexual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may refer to themselves as 'sistagirls', 'sistas' or 'tiddas', which has the meaning of the word 'sisters'. Gay Aboriginal men may also refer to themselves as sistas.

In broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the terms 'sistagirl' and 'brothaboy' are used as terms of endearment for women and men with no reference to gender diversity.

It is important to note that not all First Nations people who are transgender use these terms.

Sex

Sex refers to a person's biological sex characteristics. This includes their sex chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.

Sex recorded at birth

Data collection often refers to sex recorded at birth. This is based upon a person's sex characteristics and reproductive organs observed at, or soon after, birth.

Variations of sex characteristics

Some people are born with a variation to physical or biological sex characteristics including chromosomes, hormones or anatomy. These are often called intersex variations. There are many different intersex variations that can be identified prenatally, at birth, puberty or adulthood.

People with intersex variations use a range of different terminology to name their bodies and experiences. Some use the term 'intersex', which

is signified by the 'I' in LGBTIQA+ communities. Others do not connect to the term 'intersex' or with the acronym LGBTIQA+.

People with variations of sex characteristics are usually assigned male or female at birth or infancy, just like everyone else. Intersex people can have any gender identity or sexuality.

You can read more about the diversity and health needs of the intersex population at (i) Am Equal. It outlines the future directions for Victoria's Intersex community. You can also learn more at the Intersex Human Rights Australia website.[5]

Endosex

Endosex refers to people whose sex characteristics meet medical and social norms for typically 'male' or 'female' bodies. Not all endosex people will be aware of this term or use it to describe themselves.

Sexuality or sexual orientation

Sexuality or sexual orientation describe a person's intimate, romantic and/or sexual attractions to others. It can include sexual identity (how a person thinks of their sexuality and the terms they identify with).

It can also include attraction (romantic or sexual interest in another person) and behaviour or relationships.

These attractions may be towards someone of the same gender or sex, another gender, all genders, no gender or a combination.

There are many different terms used to sexuality. Some people may choose to describe their sexuality in terms of feelings, behaviours or experiences such as 'same sex' or 'gender attracted'. Others may choose to use no term at all. Sexuality may be fluid for some people and change over time. For others it can be the same throughout their life.

Asexual

Asexual refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction but may or may not experience romantic attraction towards others. Asexual people can be any gender or sexual orientation.

Lesbian

Lesbian refers to a woman (cis or trans) or gender diverse person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to women.

Gay

A gay person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. This term is often used to describe men who are attracted to other men, but some women and gender diverse people may describe themselves as gay.

Bisexual

A bisexual person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of their own gender and other genders. The term ‹bi+› or multi-gender attracted (MGA) are sometimes used to describe communities of people who are attracted to multiple genders.

Pansexual

A pansexual person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of all genders and regardless of gender.

Queer

Queer is often used as an umbrella term for diverse genders or sexualities. Some people use queer to describe their own gender or sexuality, as an identity that does not correspond to heterosexual norms. For some people, especially older people, 'queer' has negative connotations, because in the past it was used as a discriminatory term.

Questioning

Questioning refers to people who are exploring or questioning their gender or sexual orientation. People may not wish to have one of the other labels applied to them yet, for a variety of reasons. It is important these people feel welcome and included in LGBTIQA+ communities.

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5 Victorian Government, (i) Am Equal, 2023, https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/i-am-equal; Intersex Human Rights Australia, https://ihra.org.au/

Heterosexual

Heterosexual is another word for 'straight'. It generally refers to men who are attracted to women, or women who are attracted to men.

Rainbow families

Rainbow families are families where LGBTIQA+ people are parents, co-parents and carers. This includes soon-to-be parents, donors and surrogates.

Rainbow families come in all different shapes and sizes. They can be sole parents or carers and can live across one or many homes. They can also be of diverse sex, gender, ability, race, culture, and spirituality.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes how a person's attributes and circumstances combine to shape their life. This can include their privilege and experiences of discrimination or disadvantage.

Intersectionality helps us to better understand inequality. It highlights how different forms of inequality can combine and compound each other. This can include inequality related to sexuality, gender, age, class, or race.

Taking an intersectional approach to policy analysis means that government services better account for the specific and varied needs of the community. It supports more effective services that respond to interconnected and overlapping forms of discrimination and inequality for the whole community.

Take the example of employment discrimination experienced in the trans community. Traditional policy approaches would tend to make generalised observations about trans people. These observations often fail to account for the significant diversity within the community. An intersectional approach would look at differences in employment discrimination that are experienced by different kinds of trans people – such as trans people of colour, trans people with a disability, and trans people of different genders.

Taking an intersectional approach in Australia requires a recognition of the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Non-Aboriginal people have benefitted from the colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, and Australia's laws, policies, systems and structures have and continue to omit Aboriginal people, resulting in and entrenching systemic racism. Despite this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities remain strong and resilient.

Top five principles

1. Move beyond assumptions

Assuming that everyone is heterosexual or cisgender can have negative impacts on the lives of LGBTIQA+ people. It is good practice to avoid making assumptions about people based on their appearance or stereotypes.

Accept and respect how people define their gender and sexuality. Ask them how they wish to be addressed. If you are speaking on behalf of a group, consult widely to ensure language is reflective of the whole group.

2. Acknowledge diversity

LGBTIQA+ people are diverse. LGBTIQA+ communities are not homogenous.

We should always use language with care and consideration and an awareness of the diversity within and between groups and people. For example, acknowledging diversity means referring to 'LGBTIQA+ communities' rather than just one community.

When using inclusive language, it is important to consider the intersections of a person's identity. These are different aspects that make up someone's identity and experiences, such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income or social status, age, ability or migration status.

3. Respect privacy

We all have a right to privacy. Everyone has the right to choose what information they want to disclose. Someone may or may not want to inform others of personal information relating to their gender and/or sexuality. It may be illegal to force someone to share this information. You should not share or discuss anyone's personal information without their explicit consent.

Allow yourself to be led by how someone talks about themselves, their family and their relationships. Ask or be guided by them about who to share this information with.

4. Share your pronouns

Pronouns are the words we use instead of someone's name when we talk about them, such as she/her, he/him, they/them. Some people use more than one pronoun, such as she/they or he/they. Using someone's correct pronouns is an essential part of showing respect and inclusion. Normalising the sharing of pronouns can make a big difference to the inclusion of trans and gender diverse people. Sharing your pronouns can signal to your colleagues and others that you are someone who understands and will also respect their pronouns. You can do this by wearing a pronoun badge, introducing yourself with your pronoun/s, or adding your pronoun/s to your email signature.

Like all words people use to describe their identity, pronouns can look different for everyone and can change over time. If you are unsure about someone's pronouns, use the gender-neutral terms 'they' and 'them' or the person's name until you have a chance to confirm with them privately. Some people do not use pronouns but prefer the use of their name instead.

Sharing pronouns is optional. While some people are comfortable sharing theirs, others may not be, and it is important that no one feels pressured. Furthermore, some people's pronouns may be context specific. For example, someone might not use their pronouns in a particular environment or around particular people because they do not feel safe or comfortable to do so.

5. Learn from mistakes

It's okay to make mistakes. People may worry that they will offend someone or be embarrassed if they use the wrong term, name or pronoun, particularly for trans and gender diverse people.

It's important to try to use respectful language but some mistakes are understandable, particularly when you are learning. If you make a mistake:

- acknowledge the mistake and move on – use their correct gender, pronouns, or name at the next opportunity.
- don't dwell on it, this may make someone feel more uncomfortable.
- try to avoid making the same mistake again – repeated mistakes indicate a lack of respect and can be very distressing. If it continues, it could constitute bullying or discrimination.
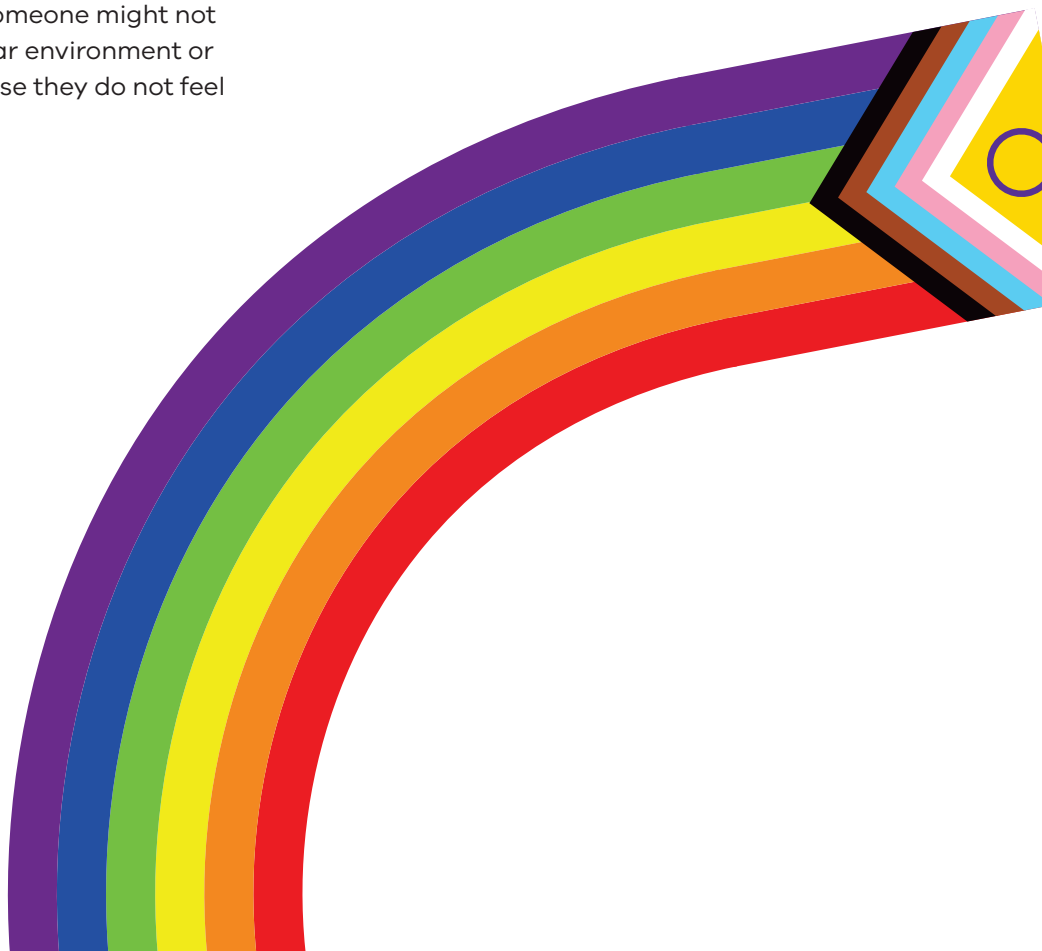
Data collection interim advice

Work is underway to improve LGBTIQA+ data collection

As part of Priority Area 3 in Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32, we will aim to:

- introduce LGBTIQA+ data standards across the Victorian Government
- develop guidance materials on how to collect, analyse and report on data by government and government-funded services.

The Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) is working on a project to improve and standardise how, and for what purpose, VPS departments collect personal demographic data from their employees.

The focus of this work is to define a set of consistent whole-of-VPS collection standards and indicators that government uses in its workforce data standards reporting.

The standards will be underpinned by clear and consistent approaches to why data is collected, what it is used for and how it is shared. They will not be applicable when collecting data from the public via government services – it is only for government workers.

Good practice advice is also offered under standard five of Rainbow Tick. Rainbow Tick is a quality framework developed by Rainbow Health Australia that helps health and human services organisations show that they are safe, inclusive and affirming services and employers for LGBTIQ communities.[6]

What to do if you're making changes to your systems

If you are planning to make any changes to your systems, we recommend you email the Equality Unit for updated timelines on the VPSC's work.

See External References below for links to resources on data collection available in other jurisdictions.

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6 Rainbow Health Australia, Rainbow Tick: a framework for LGBTIQ cultural safety, available at: https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/rainbow-tick.

LGBTIQA+ specific resources

Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022–32

https://www.vic.gov.au/pride-our-future-victorias-lgbtiq-strategy-2022-32

In 2022, the Victorian Government released Victoria's first whole-of-government LGBTIQA+ strategy, Pride in Our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32. It provides the vision and plan to create equality and inclusion for Victoria's diverse LGBTIQA+ communities within all aspects of government work over the next decade.

Departmental Pride Networks

Many departments in the VPS have a Pride Network or group that advocates for their LGBTIQA+ employees. Contact your HR department to find out if your organisation has one.

Equality, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

If you have any questions, you can contact the Equality team at **equality@dffh.vic.gov.au**. You can also contact the Commissioner for LGBTIQA+ Communities at **LGBTIQACommissioner@dffh.vic.gov.au**

Inclusive Victorian health service data collection

Guidance developed by the Department of Health provides information on changes to the 2024-25 Victorian health service data reporting requirements.

https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/inclusive-collection-and-reporting-of-sex-and-gender-data

Gender affirmation in Victorian public sector workplaces

https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/gender-affirmation

The Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) has released the Gender affirmation in Victorian public sector workplaces guidance for VPS managers who are supporting employees to affirm their gender.

Inclusive language for managers

https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/toolkits/wellbeing/activities-tools/why-inclusive-language-matters-as-a-manager/

The VPSC has published information on diverse inclusive language for managers, covering the diversity of inclusive language that managers can use with their work teams.

External references

Inclusive language guides

There are a range of other inclusive language guidance, published by different organisations, publicly available.

Amnesty International Inclusive Language and Events Guide
https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Inclusive-Language-Guide-_May-2023-1.pdf

Australian Institute of Family Studies Inclusive Communication with LGBTIQ+ Clients
https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/inclusive-communication-lgbtiq-clients

Australian Institute of Family Studies Glossary of common terms
https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/22-02_rs_lgbtiqa_glossary_of_common_terms_0.pdf

Diversity Council Words at Work
https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_wordsatwork_overall_guide_0.pdf

Intersex Human Rights Australia Inclusion Guide
https://ihra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/key/Intersex-inclusion.pdf

Oxfam Inclusive Language Guide
https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621487/gd-inclusive-language-guide-130323-en.pdf?sequence=9

The Equality Project LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Language Guide for the Workplace
https://www.theequalityproject.org.au/blog/lgbtiqa-inclusive-language-guide

TransHub - Language
https://www.transhub.org.au/language

Rainbow Health Australia, Research Matters
https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/research-resources/research-matters-what-does-lgbtiq-mean/4107366852-1709686054/research-matters-what-does-lgbtiq-mean.pdf

A guide to using your pronouns at work
https://www.idahobit.org.au/allyship/a-guide-to-using-pronouns-at-work

A helpful guide explaining how to use pronouns to encourage an inclusive workplace.

(i) Am Equal: Future directions for Victoria's Intersex community
https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/i-am-equal

Released in 2021, *(i) Am Equal: Future directions for Victoria's Intersex community* outlines the government's commitment to the development of an intersex protection system.

Data standards guidelines

A number of data standard guidelines are available online.

ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables
https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release

Canberra LGBTIQ Community Consortium Guide to LGBTIQ-inclusive Data Collection
https://genderrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/LGBTIQ-Inclusive-Data-Collection-a-Guide.pdf

Government of South Australia Data Collection and Gender Guidelines
https://dhs.sa.gov.au/about-us/open-government/internal-policies/diversity-and-inclusion/how-to-collect-gender-data

Vic.gov.au - Data collection standards - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities
https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-family-violence-data-collection-framework/data-collection-standards-lesbian-gay-bisexual