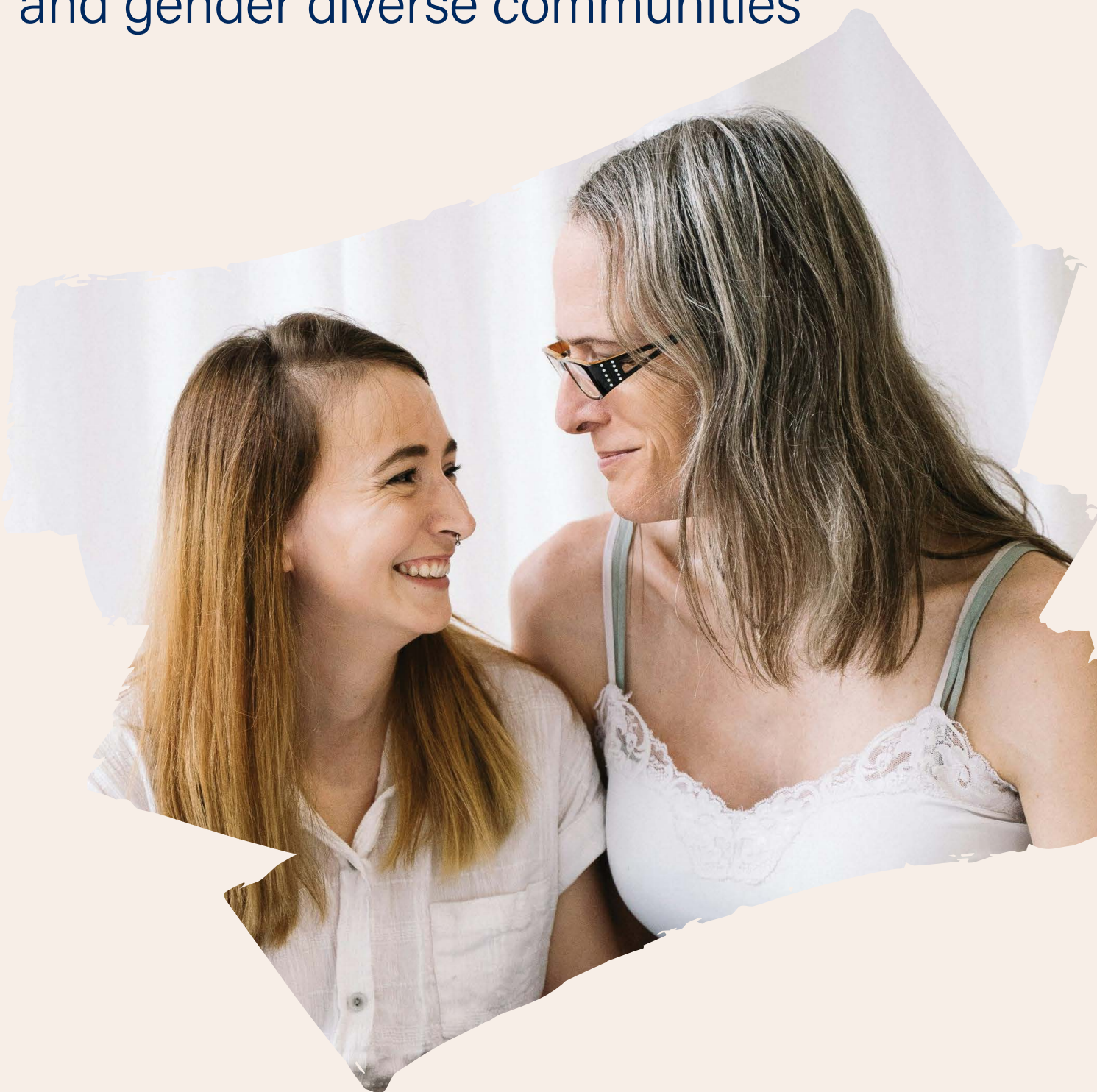


# Guide for media reporting on Violence against transgender and gender diverse communities



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For more information on reporting on violence against women visit: [media.ourwatch.org.au](https://media.ourwatch.org.au).

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Visit [www.dss.gov.au](https://www.dss.gov.au) for more information.

Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

## About these guidelines

**These guidelines support media organisations and individuals in Australia to report on violence against transgender and gender diverse people and communities.** The guidance is relevant to all media types and platforms.

Our Watch led the creation of these guidelines in consultation with Transgender Victoria, the Trans Justice Project, Zoe Belle Gender Collective, Black Rainbow, ACON, Rainbow Health Australia and Transcend Australia, as well as representatives from the community and the media.

The *Guidelines for reporting on violence against trans and gender-diverse people* is part of a suite of resources Our Watch has developed for media professionals to support good practice in reporting on violence against women.

For more information on [preventing violence against LGBTIQ+ people](#), or for other tips and guidelines for reporting on violence against women go to [s go to: media.ourwatch.org.au](https://media.ourwatch.org.au).

**“Trans and gender diverse people are an intrinsic and vibrant part of human diversity. They also experience rates of violence at much higher rates than the general population. Media reporting which is informed and respectful of trans people and their experiences is fundamental to changing attitudes and ensuring equality for all in our society. I encourage all media representatives to read and use these guidelines in your reporting to improve and strengthen your work.”**

**Dr Anna Cody,**

Sex Discrimination Commissioner



# Why these guidelines matter

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia. Primary prevention means stopping violence before it starts by addressing its underlying drivers. There is significant overlap in the gendered drivers of violence against women and [the drivers of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, queer and asexual \('LGBTIQA+'\) people, including transgender and gender diverse people](#)\*. These drivers include gender inequality.

Trans and gender diverse people experience [high rates of discrimination and gender-based violence](#), including domestic and family violence, sexual violence and harassment, in both private and public spaces, including workplaces, universities and online. [Most of this violence is perpetrated by cisgender men](#)<sup>^</sup>.

Violence against trans and gender diverse people may be normalised, minimised, condoned or accepted because there are messages in society that trans people's bodies, identities and relationships are not worth as much as others.

These messages perpetuate discrimination and create a culture where violence against transgender people is seen as acceptable or justified.

The media has a powerful role to play in challenging attitudes and beliefs that dehumanise or devalue trans and gender diverse people. It can also draw attention to discrimination faced by trans and gender diverse communities, and can counter harmful myths that shape how the public views responsibility for violence.

Highlighting positive stories and experiences of trans and gender diverse people can shift societal perceptions and promote greater acceptance and understanding. Media can also empower these communities by providing a platform for their voices to be heard and respected.

Everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to live in dignity, and be safe, free from harassment, intimidation or discrimination.

Equitable, accurate and respectful reporting on trans and gender diverse communities plays a pivotal role in reducing violence and fostering a more gender-equal and inclusive society.

\* In these guidelines the phrase **transgender and gender diverse people**, is shortened to **transgender, trans** or **trans and gender diverse people**. This includes all people whose gender differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. This term includes transgender men, transgender women, non-binary people, and people who use different terms for their gender.

<sup>^</sup> **Cisgender** refers to people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

*For more information on language, visit the Victorian State Government's LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Language Guide.*



# Quick tips for media reporting on violence against **Transgender and gender diverse communities**

## The media has a role to play in:

- ✓ Supporting the human rights and dignity of trans and gender diverse people.
- ✓ Raising awareness about inequality and violence experienced by trans people.
- ✓ Reducing stigma and marginalisation.
- ✓ Countering negative stereotypes which contribute to inequality and violence.
- ✓ Accurately representing the diversity of the transgender community.
- ✓ Sharing current recommended terminology and evidence.

## Interviewing sources

- Centre trans and gender diverse voices in stories about them and use expert, informed voices.
- Ensure your interactions with case studies and sources are respectful, sensitive and transparent throughout the reporting process. Take time to establish relationships and build trust.
- Avoid assumptions about names, gender and pronouns. Ask your interviewee their name and pronouns and only use those details.
- Be mindful of their safety online and in person and develop a safety plan to ensure they aren't at risk of being further targeted for violence. Check in with your sources after the story is published.

## Responsibilities in reporting

- Where practical acknowledge your positionality in your reporting to mitigate personal and societal biases.
- Avoid referring to someone's transgender experience if not relevant to the story. However, a lack of reporting on violence against this community also leads to missed opportunities for the public to understand why it occurs.
- Consider if it is necessary to use 'coming out' narratives.
- Avoid reporting that reduces a trans or gender diverse person's experience to physical appearance only.
- Understand that your story may receive backlash. Put backlash mitigation and response strategies in place. Look after yourself, your sources, and your colleagues.

## Key statistics

- In [the largest study of Australian LGBTIQ+ people's health and wellbeing](#), almost four in ten non-binary participants, three in ten trans men and one in five trans women reported experiencing physical violence from a family member.
- In a [national study on sexual health](#), **over 50% of trans and gender diverse people reported experienced sexual violence or coercion**. This is compared to around 13% of the general population.
- In a recent [national study](#) about anti-trans violence, **1 in 2 trans people had experienced anti-trans hate**; and, **1 in 10 trans people had experienced anti-trans violence**.

## Respectful and evidence-based reporting on violence

- At the heart of your reporting is a person. Describe violence in a fair and accurate way, without graphic or sensationalist language such as 'butchered', 'hacked', 'mutilated' and so on.
- Ensure your language is respectful and your framing keeps the perpetrator in view, to acknowledge violence is always a choice.
- Does your reporting or quotes from sources reinforce harmful stereotypes or use victim-blaming or perpetrator-excusing language? Consider whether it is necessary to quote sources who use demeaning and problematic language.
- Where legally possible, link violence to the evidence base. Draw links between violence against trans people and gender inequality, rigid gender stereotypes and high levels of transphobia. Use statistics to demonstrate prevalence and to contextualise the story.
- Consider the impact of images on survivors of violence, their families and other members of the community. Avoid clichéd photos or descriptions of transgender people, including 'before and after' images.
- Include references to appropriate LGBTIQ+ inclusive support options for those experiencing violence, as well as other services, including for perpetrators concerned about their behaviour.

## Reporting to prevent further violence

- Diversify story selection to show that trans people are involved in all facets of public life.
- Improve media representations by positively reporting on transgender people, their relationships, community connections and contributions.
- Incorporate trans and gender diverse people into your source base to consult on a range of stories.



## Key concepts

Understanding and defining gender, sex and sexuality is not as simple as it may first appear.

Gender is understood and practiced differently in different cultures, times and contexts, with the language used to describe it changing in response.

Definitions of sex may also vary depending on the identity, understanding and experience of groups and individuals across contexts and settings.

[Acknowledging these limitations](#), we can say **gender** is someone's innate sense of self, lived identity or gender expression; **sex** can refer to a legal marker, visible or invisible sex characteristics, and roles in reproduction; and **sexuality** describes someone's intimate, romantic or sexual attractions to others.

Evidence shows that trans and gender diverse people exist in all cultures and throughout history, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Like all people, transgender people have diverse experiences, including race, class, ability and sexuality. Be careful not to reduce their experience or identity solely to gender.

**Gender terms in different cultures** may have nuanced meanings that are not easily translated. There may be specific cultural contexts and terminologies that require time and care to understand. Listening to each community's recommendations and approaches is important. Do not use these terms unless a person has indicated they want to be referred to this way.

**"People working in media have a powerful opportunity to change the story for trans and gender diverse people. All too often, media reporting is mired in harmful gender stereotypes and misconceptions, contributing to a vicious cycle of exclusion and violence. We can instead tell stories which are accurate and nuanced, and contribute to better understanding and respect between all our communities."**

**Belinda O'Connor,**

Manager Prevention and Strategy, Rainbow Health



**“When reporting on and interviewing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, acknowledge that cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality are diverse across cultures which are more than 50,000 years old. These perceptions exist in combination with binary settler-colonial understandings. Observe Indigenous-led representations, be attentive to descriptive cues, and be inclusive of Indigenous language where possible and safe to do so.”**

**Andy,**  
Black Rainbow

- **Culturally specific identity markers** like **Sistergirl, Brotherboy, Two Spirit**, and **Fa’afafine**, center Indigenous cultural identity within the scope of gender, sex and sexual diversity, and may be used to promote cultural pride and belonging.
- Some organisations use LGBTIQA+SB to include Sistergirl and Brotherboy.
- Statistics on the number of transgender and gender diverse individuals in Australia are difficult to estimate as data collection bodies have not captured this data on a whole-of-population level. Prioritise LGBTIQA+ population research by reputable organisations, e.g., [Private Lives](#).
- **Gender affirmation**, which is recommended over the term ‘transition’, is a process where a trans or gender diverse person takes steps to live as their affirmed gender, rather than the gender assigned to them at birth. Paths to gender affirmation vary widely and may or may not include changes to documentation (legal affirmation), surgery or hormone therapy (medical affirmation), or changes in names, pronouns, and appearance (social affirmation). There are [decades of research on the positive outcomes of gender affirmation](#) experienced by those with supportive environments.
- [Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender](#) took effect in 2013, enabling any adult to choose to identify on legal documents as male, female or X.

## **Did you know?**

A range of Commonwealth and State laws make it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their gender. Publishing content that harasses, intimidates, or incites violence against LGBTIQIA+ people can result in serious penalties for journalists, including prison. Ensure your reporting and supporting quotes do not harm, humiliate or incite violence against transgender and gender diverse people.

# What drives violence against trans and gender diverse people?

- **Gender inequality** is a key driver of violence against trans and gender diverse people. This includes rigid attitudes, behaviours and views about gender and a belief that people must conform to heterosexuality and their sex assigned at birth (**heteronormativity** and **cisnormativity**).
- When attitudes in society devalue or dehumanise trans and gender diverse people, perpetrators may feel they can perpetrate violence against them without risk of punishment.
- Some perpetrators of violence are motivated by prejudices, hostility or hatred towards people who do not conform to gender expectations and social norms. Violence can also be driven by political beliefs that seek to undermine the human rights, safety and access to healthcare of trans and gender diverse people. Trans women and non-binary people are especially affected. These forms of violence may be called **transphobic** or **anti-trans violence**.
- Cisnormativity and racism compound to contribute to the high rates of violence against transgender people of colour and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- There may also be [other drivers present such as sexism, transmisogyny, ableism, classism, settler-colonialism and so on.](#)

## When reporting

In line with [Press Council Advisory Guidelines](#), avoid placing unnecessary focus on someone's gender or mentioning their transgender experience if it is not relevant to the story. However, a lack of reporting on violence against this community also leads to missed opportunities for the public to understand the harm it causes and why this violence occurs.

Where legally possible, link to research that demonstrates the prevalence and dynamics of violence against trans and gender diverse communities.

Acknowledge that:

- Trans and gender diverse people face inequality and discrimination in the legal recognition of their identities, as well as access to housing, employment, and health care. [For example](#), 31.9% of trans women reported ever experiencing homelessness compared to 19.8% of cisgender women and 16.8% of cisgender men.



- A complex historical context of gender and sexuality law enforcement in Australia continues to disproportionately discriminate against trans and gender diverse people. Exercise sensitivity when reporting on incarceration, and avoid inappropriate references to sexualised violence, while acknowledging the specific challenges faced by transgender people while in police custody or the prison system.

**“When I do interviews, I give them a small insight into the history of fa’afafine. I have ancestors who have walked the walk and talked the talk for me to exist, to exist in my Samoan culture, as a fa’afafine. They’re not terms that were just born yesterday. They were there through historic times, through uncolonised times as well.”**

**Amao Leota Lu,**

Samoan fa’afafine, trans woman Elder and consultant



## Media representations and story selection

The media has a role to play in accurately representing the diversity of the transgender community. Equitable representation supports better public understanding and promotes pride for trans and gender diverse people.

Conversely, harmful stereotypes and negatively framed stories can have a traumatising impact on the community, and may reinforce misconceptions about responsibility for violence, or even encourage further violence.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transgender people and trans women of colour are often reported on in particularly sensationalist or victim-blaming ways. This can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and further increase the violence, discrimination and marginalisation these groups experience.

### Consider your reporting on trans and gender diverse people experiencing violence

- [Where appropriate or legally possible](#), include contextual information that humanises trans people beyond their gender.
- Ensure that your reporting treats the deaths of trans and gender diverse individuals and cisgender individuals with equal importance, attention and respect.

## Story selection to improve representation and prevent future violence

Story selection can provide an opportunity to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote understanding and inclusivity. This can help create a more supportive environment for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

- Portray transgender lives beyond narratives of trauma.
- Represent them as people first, with a diverse range of life experiences, backgrounds and occupations, positive relationships and community connections.
- Showcase the richness of transgender people's contributions to society, including success stories that foster positive representation. If searching for unique stories, work with transgender and LGBTIQ-led organisations to explore stories of the activism and leadership roles of trans and gender diverse people, emphasising their contribution to broader human rights issues.
- Shed light on underrepresented relationships, for example between trans women and cisgender men, by sharing healthy and positive stories that depict acceptance within family structures and communities.

### **Pro-tip**

Intersecting social identities, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, and so on, shape the way we understand and engage with the world. Disclosing these identities in a [positionality statement](#) acknowledges the perspective you bring to your work.

**“Journalists need to treat trans women with the same dignity and respect they would offer all victims of violence. Tragically, there has been quite a number of trans women killed in the last 10 years and the ones that do hit the media are very sensationalised, focusing on the violent nature of the death or using a sexualised framing. This dehumanises and robs trans women of their dignity. Other deaths are completely ignored, and attention is never given to how the family violence system has failed trans and gender diverse people. There needs to be equity across reporting.”**

**Jackson Fairchild,**  
Zoe Belle Gender Collective

## **Did you know?**

Trans women in relationships with cisgender men face unique challenges. Cisgender men may be conflicted by their attraction, concerned about social stigma, or may hold misogynistic attitudes, all of which can contribute to some men perpetrating violence against their trans partners. Promoting healthy relationships between trans women and cisgender men helps to promote public understanding, leads to greater acceptance and inclusion for these couples, and reduces violence. The attitudes of family and friends can play a key role in either reinforcing stigma or supporting respectful relationships. For further stories, tips and resources on relationships between trans women and cisgender men, see [Transfemme](#) by the Zoe Belle Gender Collective.

## **Problematic topics**

Be mindful when reporting on the topics below, as they may contribute to negative public attitudes and drive further violence against this community.

- A story that is not of public interest outside of the transgender experience of the individual.
- Focusing on a person's gender affirmation by framing it as 'before and after' when this is irrelevant to the story, done without consent, or done with the intention to sensationalise or objectify the person.
- Reporting that equates being trans solely to physical appearance. For example, describing certain features as masculine or feminine, such as mentioning someone's height or the sound of their voice.
- Oversexualisation, objectification or fetishisation of trans bodies and experiences, especially in relation to trans women.
- A hyper-focus on medical care and trans bodies, especially when reporting on young people.
- Narratives that imply trans people are being deceptive about their gender.
- Implications that being trans or gender diverse is a mental illness that needs treatment, e.g., through conversion therapy.
- Narratives that imply that trans people are perpetrators of violence, when in fact they are more likely to be victims.
- Narratives that explore 'both sides of the debate' This can normalise the idea that transphobic beliefs are a 'matter of opinion.'

## Language and framing

- Stay updated on [current language recommendations](#) provided by LGBTIQ+ organisations that are led by, and provide support for, trans and gender diverse people.
- Ensure your language is not outdated, derogatory or dehumanising. Be cautious about reporting terms considered reclaimed slurs, even if they are used by those within the community.
- Don't assume someone's gender. For example, use gender neutral language like 'partner' unless advised otherwise.
- If it is necessary and appropriate to the story to discuss anatomy, use generic terminology like *genitals* or *reproductive organs*, rather than gendered terms.

## Use a respectful and appropriate tone

- Treat trans and gender diverse victim-survivors with dignity and respect, as you would any other victim of crime.
- Avoid unnecessarily graphic and sensationalist language and advise sub-editors to do the same.
- Also apply this to the headline and lead sentence, subediting, social media, follow-up articles or commentary, as well as accompanying images, video, soundtrack or audio.

**"Trans people - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - are facing unprecedented attacks on our rights, our bodies, and our very existence. One weekend recently, I received over 200 anti-trans, racist attacks on social media in my work role as a Professor in Critical Indigenous Studies. These kinds of attacks have increased enormously over the last two years, to the extent that being publicly trans guarantees threats of violence. Attacks like this are rarely covered in the media, and instead anti-trans rhetoric questioning our rights to exist are often front and centre in media discourses."**

**Prof Sandy O'Sullivan,**

Aboriginal trans person and Professor of Indigenous Studies



## When reporting on violence

- Use active language with perpetrators as the focus, and acknowledge violence is always a choice. For example, 'Man found guilty of multiple counts of coercive control against their partner.'
- Check if your reporting or the quotes used victim-blame or excuse perpetrators. Do they justify, trivialise or downplay violence?
- Check if framing places undue emphasis on the actions or choices of the victim-survivors of violence, thereby suggesting they were responsible for the violence.
- Check if the framing suggests that the victim/survivors' transgender identity is the cause of the violence, rather than the perpetrators' transphobic attitudes and beliefs.

## To prevent further violence

- Frame being trans and gender diverse as a personal experience, not a political agenda or ideology to be debated.
- Use affirmative, community-centred narratives instead of deficit framing.

**"Words can be deadly. While those four words may sound simple enough, the emotional energy that they unleashed for me writing them in response to the sensationalist coverage of the murder of Mayang Prasetyo in 2014 was overwhelming. How we tell stories matters, particularly when engaging with people from minority communities. While empathy and accuracy can help build trust and engagement with our audiences, sacrificing professionalism for the sake of sensationalist clicks and views can result in the exact opposite."**

**Kate Doak,**

Journalist and Sports Producer






## Reframing language

It is important to use appropriate and current language when reporting on trans and gender diverse people. You can refer to terminology guides from Australian governments and LGBTIQ+ organisations (see below in Further Reading).

Here are some suggestions for reframing problematic language:

Problematic term	Recommended term 
Opposite sex	<b>Person of another gender</b>
Biological sex	<b>Assigned male or female at birth</b>
Transgendered, 'he is transgendered'	<b>Transgender</b> , 'he is a transgender man'
'She is LGBTIQ+'	LGBTIQ+ is an umbrella term for a community and human rights movement, not an individual.
Transition	<b>Gender affirmation</b>
Preferred pronouns	<b>Pronouns</b> (emphasises the legitimacy of a person's gender identity)
Identifies as	<b>Is</b> (e.g., She is a trans woman; they are non-binary)
Transgender debate	<b>Backlash, anti-trans or transphobic rhetoric</b>
Men and women/ladies and gentlemen	<b>People of all genders/folks</b>

## **Practical example**

When Marcus Volke brutally murdered his wife Mayang Prasetyo, who was a transgender woman, some reporting focused on unnecessary and explicit details of violence, sexualised her in a series of swimsuit poses, and investigated her sex work and personal life as a way to justify or understand this violence. In reporting, she was referred to as 'the shemale' (a transphobic slur).

Mayang Prasetyo's gender identity, occupation, medical history and country of origin were not to blame for the violence she experienced. **Her husband's decision to use violence was the cause of her death.** A better headline might be: 'Man brutally killed wife.'

# Building relationships and interviewing sources

- Ensure that trans individuals are centred in stories about them.
- Prioritise trans and gender diverse voices as experts on transgender issues.
- No single trans person can represent or speak for the whole community. If you cannot ensure a range of community perspectives across race, culture, language, sexuality, ability or disability, and economic status, then acknowledge a source's perspective is one of many.
- As members of a community that experience high rates of violence, expert sources may have lived experience and should be interviewed with a trauma-informed approach.
- The list of recommended Australian trans and gender organisations at the end of this guide may have experts and trained advocates who can provide media comment.

## Names, status and pronouns

- Avoid assumptions, and feel confident to ask – *How do you want me to refer to you? What name would you like me to use? What title do you use – Dr, Mr, Mx, etc.?*
- If they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, ask – *How would you like to be described? What terms do you want me to use?*
- Use only the details your source has given regarding full names, pronouns, physical identity, and location. Individuals may use different identity markers publicly than they use in other situations, including at different points in their lives.
- Ensure you have agreed-upon titles, particularly if your publication uses a formal journalistic quote structure. For example, 'Mr/Mx/Ms Nguyen.'
- Allow the use of aliases for safety and be clear with sources in advance when anonymity is not possible. For more on safety, look at [Safety for sources](#).
- They/them pronouns are not new, so an explanation for audiences is not necessary.
- Treat their name with the same respect as any other person's name. Do not use phrases that cast doubt on a trans or gender diverse person's name, e.g., *she wants to be called or he calls himself*.

- Do not use a trans person's birth name (or 'dead name') without explicit consent. If a dead name is used in court, refer to it briefly, for example, 'The victim, legally known as Michael, was known in their life as Melissa'
- Only include a person's transgender status and/or assigned sex at birth if it's relevant to the story.

### **Pro-tip**

Avoid referring to a trans person who has significant career experience and education as an 'activist'. Allowing them to define how they want to be described gives trans people the recognition they deserve.

## **Establishing relationships with expert sources**

Trans and gender diverse people, including expert sources, may approach media with caution due to personal experiences of violence, discrimination, and a concern for the impact on the broader trans community that may result from inaccurate or harmful reporting.

Establish relationships and build community confidence by:

- Attending events in person and proactively building relationships with trans communities before crises.
- Getting to know who the experts are.
- Establishing a history of equitable and informed reporting on trans and gender diverse communities that you can share to establish your credentials in good faith.

**"Provide the questions that you want to ask in writing and allow a reasonable turnaround time to respond. Offer the quotes that you use, if not the whole story, for the person to vet before you publish. Establish your bona fides by saying, 'I need this story. We'll try to accommodate whatever timeline you have but our timeline is this. Here are the questions. You'll have the right to review the article and make your quotes before we publish! Guardian Australia will do exactly that. And that's what I regard as good behavior by the press when they're reporting on transgender people."**

**Michelle McNamara,**

Transgender Victoria

When reaching out:

- Be clear about the scope and intention of the story, including what you hope to achieve, and any risks they may face.
- Ensure the source knows they will be treated respectfully throughout the reporting process and their needs will be addressed sensitively.
- Reaching out to people via social media is now standard journalistic practice but can be problematic. Investigate if they are trained to discuss complex issues relating to violence or able to speak for the community. Be clear about what speaking to media may involve and impacts on them personally.

## Respectful interviewing processes

Sharing a personal or traumatic story can be empowering for individuals with lived experience of violence and can assist in advocacy. However, they may feel extremely vulnerable knowing their story will be in the public eye. Ensure your interactions are respectful, sensitive and transparent throughout the reporting process.

- Encourage them to connect with a trans organisation for support and media coaching, so they understand their rights and how to manage their story and personal details.
- Ask – *what is on and off the record? Are any areas of discussion off limits?* Seek permission before inquiring about sensitive or controversial topics.
- Discussing health matters is generally considered private for all communities. Do not ask personal health questions, including about a transgender person's genitals, hormones or surgical history. Avoid implying they are lying or deceptive in your reporting if they choose to keep their health history confidential.
- If in doubt, consider how your questions would sound if you asked them to a cisgender person. For example, would you ask the same questions about their body, relationships or appearance?
- Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and respect cultural protocols and practices when engaging sources from different cultural and racial backgrounds. Seek advice from community members on the cultural protocols of naming or using the image of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who has died.
- If possible, share your story with sources and case studies in advance of publication.
- Individuals may face further social and economic challenges when their story is made public. Extend your organisation's Employment Assistance Program to them or fund specialist mental health support, particularly if they are contributing to a story about violence. Offer them information about



LGBTIQA+ services such as QLife, and check that they have networks to support them if there is any negative backlash.

- Check in with your interviewees post-publication to see if you could have approached or handled anything differently.
- [Explore more about interviewing survivors](#) on the Our Watch website. Foster an open and empathetic environment, allowing sources to guide the conversation and share their experiences at their own pace.

## **Pro-tip**

Incorporating trans and gender diverse people into your source base to consult on stories across rounds is a great way of adding richness to your story. Just as you would interview people with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives for most stories, including trans voices in stories about non-trans topics helps to normalise that trans people exist and are involved in all facets of public life.

**“Journalists need to be aware how risky it is for us to talk to the media. We get hate calls and threats of violence, including death threats. We can lose our jobs and our funding. Sometimes journalists interview people who don't understand the risk or the level of violence, abuse, transphobia that may come following publication. We've seen the harm that has occurred because the media has not taken care of their source or our community.”**

**Starlady,**

Zoe Belle Gender

## **Safety for sources**

[Research shows](#) that the trans community has significantly poorer mental health outcomes than the general population and less access to appropriate support services.

- Be mindful of the potential risks and negative consequences of your reporting on the safety and well-being of the trans and gender diverse community beyond the story's life cycle, and weigh public interest against potential harm caused.

- When survivors of violence tell their stories, it may be easy to identify them particularly if they come from small communities or rural and regional areas. Consider what details you include about the incident and those involved. Ensure you have sought legal advice and that your reporting will not impact any legal proceedings.
- ‘Outing’ someone as transgender can have severe consequences for their safety, relationships and employment. Some trans and gender diverse people may be out in certain contexts but may not want to be out publicly.
- Ensure your source is aware of the risk of backlash and provide advice about how to manage online abuse, including hiding online profiles if necessary.
- Share your organisation’s policies on managing online backlash and available support.
- Ensure they are aware that anything shared publicly may become available on search engines or social media, be syndicated to other outlets, or be mis/quoted in other contexts.
- When reporting on trans people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, ask about any risk to them of cultural, familial, and religious persecution, or discriminatory laws in the countries they may have migrated from. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or their family may be at risk of community specific backlash, including family and community payback or punishment. Co-develop strategies to mitigate harm to them.

## Reporting on young people

- Adhere to Press Council advice around minors and ensure that people under 16 are not interviewed or photographed unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult provides informed consent.
- Exercise caution when involving family in stories about transgender adolescents, especially if any violence is alleged. Relationships may be complicated, and people may not be out to all family members. Don’t place pressure on adolescents to disclose information to family members, acknowledging that trans and gender diverse people can experience violence within their family home. Get consent from the young person before interviewing or quoting their family members.
- Give transgender adolescents the chance to have editorial input and review the story before publication.
- Follow all safety guidelines above and ensure a trans young person understands the possible risks of backlash to a public story about them.
- Where possible, interview media trained transgender adolescents and families. For example, Transcend Australia trains trans young people and families to work with media and supports them to share their story safely.

## Using cisgender sources in reporting

Allyship is important in amplifying minority voices, especially when non-trans or gender diverse people take an active role in advocating for and on behalf of the community. However, some cisgender sources may inadvertently perpetuate harmful norms or contribute to misinformation.

- If reporting on a trans victim of violence, avoid over-reliance on police or medical accounts in favour of comment from reputable LGBTIQ+ advocates or organisations.
- In incidents of violence against trans and gender diverse people, a victim's co-workers, neighbours, or even friends and family won't always know that the person is transgender. They may use the wrong name or pronouns. Consider whether you should quote these sources, and if the information is correct and complete.
- Verify the allyship of cisgender sources with LGBTIQ+ community members and leaders. If concerns are raised, do not use these sources.

### **Did you know?**

Trans or gender diverse people who have just come out publicly may be considered newsworthy, but they may not be prepared for media attention, nor equipped to speak on broader issues facing this diverse community. Where possible, consider engaging sources who have leadership roles in the community or who are representatives from trans and gender diverse organisations.

# Images

Images can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to marginalisation. Be sensitive, thoughtful and respectful when choosing images, especially in reporting on violence against trans and gender diverse people.

Ask yourself what the chosen imagery says about a person and consider its impact on other members of the community and/or those with lived experience of violence.

Prioritise the use of photos provided by your source, so they can select images that align with their identity and comfort level. Always seek permission before using images from social media.

Consider if your imagery:

- Sensationalises or minimises violence or harassment.
- Is sexualising or demeaning. For example, any naked or personal photos published with the intention of portraying the victim-survivor in a sexualised or sensationalised way (e.g., photos of a person in revealing clothing when they did not consent to this being distributed publicly). Do not use images, cartoons or videos designed to mock the way a person looks.
- Is disempowering or victimising, or reinforces the idea that only physical violence is serious. Avoid 'clenched fists' and 'cowering women' imagery, and do not ask those with lived experience to 'look sad' or 'helpless' in photos.
- Is relevant. For example, don't use stock imagery featuring famous trans and gender diverse individuals or film characters unless directly relevant to the story.
- Acknowledges and respects cultural sensitivities related to image use, especially concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Use of 'before-and-after photos' (photos of a person before and after they affirmed their gender):

- **Only** use if explicit consent is obtained.
- Consider if it is sensationalist or irrelevant. For comparison, consider if it would be relevant to use a cisgender person's childhood photos in an article about them as an adult.

# Disinformation and backlash

**Dis- or misinformation**, such as negative misconceptions and harmful representations of trans and gender diverse people, may be both purposely and inadvertently spread. [Disinformation in the media and online can lead to an increase in anti-trans hate and violence.](#)

- Ensure you are not inadvertently spreading inaccurate or disproven theories which might lead to hate and violence against trans and gender diverse people. Use your reporting and evidence-based quotes by expert sources to counter these theories and beliefs.
- Counter your own biases or blind spots by using a trusted second pair of eyes or even contract a sensitivity reader in advance of publication.
- If you report on anti-trans groups, fact-check them and their statements.
- Anti-trans groups may be difficult to recognise, as they may present as 'pro woman', 'pro parent's rights' or 'pro-religious freedom.'

Expect that your reporting on trans and gender diverse people may garner significant attention, including potential **backlash** from anti-trans and anti-LGBTIQA+ groups.

- [Use this Backlash guide](#) to develop a backlash strategy with your organisation to protect yourself, your sources, and others online. Seek support from the [eSafety Commission](#) where needed.

**“Disinformation particularly impacts trans kids because their parents are in charge of so many of the decisions that affect their lives. We recently heard reports that some young people whose parents watched an anti-trans media story on TV then cancelled their appointments with gender clinics. Another child was preparing to come out to their parents but decided not to because of their parents’ reactions to the same program. We know that trans youth experience really high rates of family violence, with harmful disinformation further fuelling violence against trans children.”**

**Jackie Turner,**  
Trans Justice Project



## Consider if your reporting

- Magnifies individual cases that do not reflect the experience of the majority of trans and gender diverse people.
- Perpetuates harmful perspectives in the name of playing devil's advocate or producing 'balanced' reporting.
- Exaggerates risks associated with gender affirming healthcare. For example, emphasising or repeating inaccurate gender-affirmation surgery regret rates despite [regret rates being exceptionally low](#) compared to surgeries as a whole.
- Perpetuates harmful and disproven myths about LGBTIQ+ people being perpetrators, rather than victims of violence.

## Online safety

- Positive comments and messages of support on a story can provide valuable acknowledgement to the trans and gender diverse community from the wider public. However, some comments may contribute to further harm.
- Ensure harmful online rhetoric and dialogue are not normalised. Use word filters on social media and prioritise online safety by strictly moderating comment sections.
- Actively hide or delete harmful online comments. Disable comment sections if unmoderated.
- Use trigger or content warnings in your reporting where needed.

## Look after yourself and your colleagues

You and your colleagues may experience vicarious trauma from reporting on violence, or you may receive backlash or online abuse for your stories.

- [Explore our website to find ways to support your safety and wellbeing.](#)
- Create systems of support together with other colleagues reporting in this area.
- You may have colleagues who are in a relationship with someone who is trans and gender diverse, or they could be transgender, but are not 'out' at work. Support colleagues to feel safe by advocating for equality in the workplace. E.g., workplace inclusion programs.

## Support options

LGBTIQ+ people may prefer to access support and services that understand their unique circumstances and challenges. [Research shows](#) that trans and gender diverse people are much more likely to want to access specific services than other parts of the LGBTIQ+ community. Qlife and Rainbow Door helplines receive an increase in calls by trans and gender diverse people in distress as a result of poor media reporting.

When reporting on incidents of violence against trans and gender diverse people, always include details of LGBTIQ+ specific support services in conjunction with mainstream services. For example:

- If you or someone you know is affected by sexual assault or harassment, family or domestic violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732. In an emergency, call 000.
- Qlife, the largest national support service for LGBTIQ+ specific support, provides anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral for people in Australia.
- Full Stop Australia's Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Line provides free 24/7 telephone and online counselling if you or someone you know has experienced violence or abuse: 1800 497 212
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wanting to speak to someone from their communities can contact 13YARN.
- Men who are concerned about their own behaviour can contact the [Men's Referral Service](#) on 1300 766 491.

# Further reading

## Our Watch resources

- Our Watch. (2019). National Media Reporting Guidelines. [https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/09000510/OW3989\\_NAT\\_REPORTING-GUIDELINES\\_WEB\\_FA.pdf](https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/09000510/OW3989_NAT_REPORTING-GUIDELINES_WEB_FA.pdf)
- Our Watch Action. (2024). Preventing Violence Against LGBTIQ+ People. <https://action.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-prevention/preventing-violence-against-lgbtqi-people/>
- Our Watch. (2021). Change the Story. <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/18101814/Change-the-story-Our-Watch-AA.pdf>

## Research

- Rainbow Health Australia. (2020). Pride in Prevention Evidence Guide. <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/figshare-production-eu-latrobe-storage9079-ap-southeast-2/29088549/PrideinPreventionEvidenceGuide.pdf>
- Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M. & Lyons, A. (2020). Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.
- ANROWS. (2020). Crossing the line: Lived experience of sexual violence among trans women of colour from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec22305dc6caa06d376e009/t/5ee7705a27fc162ae13e9725/1592225951311/RP.17.03-Experiences+of+trans\\_women+and+DV\\_RR.PDF](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec22305dc6caa06d376e009/t/5ee7705a27fc162ae13e9725/1592225951311/RP.17.03-Experiences+of+trans_women+and+DV_RR.PDF)

## Disinformation and backlash

- VicHealth. (2018). Encountering Resistance: Gender Equality. VicHealth. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.pdf>
- Trans Justice Australia. (2023). Fuelling hate: Anti-trans abuse, harassment, and vilification. <https://transjustice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Fuelling-Hate-Anti-Trans-Abuse-Harassment-and-Vilification-WEB-SINGLES-1-1.pdf>
- Transcend. (2024). Tip Sheet: Transcending Disinformation. [https://transcend.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Tip-Sheet\\_Transcending-Disinformation\\_Final\\_V1\\_February2024.pdf.pdf](https://transcend.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Tip-Sheet_Transcending-Disinformation_Final_V1_February2024.pdf.pdf)

## Other resources

- TransFemme. (2024). Home. <https://www.transfemme.com.au/>
- ACON. (2024). Say It Out Loud. <https://sayitoutloud.org.au/>
- University of Queensland. (2022). The critical role of family support in accessing gender-affirming health care. <https://stories.uq.edu.au/policy-futures/2022/the-critical-role-of-family-support-in-accessing-gender-affirming-health-care/index.html>
- Callander D, Wiggins J, Rosenberg S, Cornelisse VJ, Duck-Chong E, Holt M, Pony M, Vlahakis E, MacGibbon J, Cook T. (2019). The 2018 Australian Trans and Gender Diverse Sexual Health Survey: Report of Findings. Sydney, NSW: The Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney. <https://www.kirby.unsw.edu.au/research/reports/2018-australian-trans-and-gender-diverse-sexual-health-survey-report-findings>

## Language and messaging guides

- Rainbow Health Australia. (2021). Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide. [https://www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au/content/2\\_queer-family-violence-sector-network/prideinpreventionmessagingguide.pdf](https://www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au/content/2_queer-family-violence-sector-network/prideinpreventionmessagingguide.pdf)
- Victoria State Government. (2023). LGBTIQ+ inclusive language guide. <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/LGBTIQ%2B-inclusive-language-guide.pdf>
- Rainbow Health Australia. (n.d.). Glossary. <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/rainbow-tick/2558116415-1650953507/glossary.pdf>
- TransHub. (2024.). TransHub. <https://www.transhub.org.au/>
- ACON. (2019). TGD language guide. [https://www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/TGD\\_Language-Guide.pdf](https://www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/TGD_Language-Guide.pdf)
- Australian Press Council. (2023). Advisory Guidelines: Reporting on persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status. <https://presscouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Advisory-Guideline-Reporting-on-persons-with-diverse...Feb-2023-updated.pdf>

## Sector organisations available for comment

State	Organisation	Focus	Website
NSW	ACON	Community health, inclusion and HIV responses	<a href="http://www.acon.org.au">www.acon.org.au</a> <a href="http://www.transhub.org.au">www.transhub.org.au</a> <a href="http://sayitoutloud.org.au">sayitoutloud.org.au</a>
Victoria	Transgender Victoria	Leading body for trans and gender diverse advocacy	<a href="http://tgv.org.au">tgv.org.au</a>
National	Rainbow Health Australia	Research, evidence and advocacy	<a href="http://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au">rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au</a>
National	Transcend Australia	Peer navigation and peer support services, community support, education, resources and youth leadership opportunities for trans, gender diverse and non-binary young people, their parents, and carers	<a href="http://transcend.org.au">transcend.org.au</a>
National	Black Rainbow	Outreach, knowledge sharing, research and advocacy for trans and gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	<a href="http://blackrainbow.org.au">blackrainbow.org.au</a>
National	Trans Justice Project	Strategy, campaigning, training, advocacy, evidence and research	<a href="http://transjustice.org.au">transjustice.org.au</a>

# Our Watch



Preventing violence  
against women