



# FROM BLUES TO RAINBOWS

The mental health and well-being of gender diverse  
and transgender young people in Australia

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# FROM BLUES TO RAINBOWS

## KEY FINDINGS

### The mental health and well-being of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia

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September 2014

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#### Suggested citation

Smith, E., Jones, T., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Mitchell, A., & Hillier, L. (2014). From Blues to Rainbows: Mental health and wellbeing of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia. Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society



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## The research

- 189 gender diverse and transgender participants.

In 2013, gender diverse and transgender young people from across Australia completed a survey about their gender identities, mental health and well-being needs, and the things that helped them to care for themselves and others.

This research was funded by *beyondblue* and guided by a community advisory group.

## Gender

- 1/3 young people identified with non traditional genders, and preferred the pronoun 'they'.
- Instead they nominated genders such as genderqueer (16%), genderfluid (10%), agender (7%), and androgynous (4%).
- 50% of the young people identified with a gender that was 'opposite' of the social expectation given their sex assigned at birth.
- 11% identified as gender questioning.

Recognising this diversity, and allowing young people to affirm their own gender, in their own way, stands out as extremely important for these young people.

## Transition

- 77% of young people had or were socially transitioning (i.e. changed names, clothes, or pronouns)
- 27% had or were currently undergoing medical transitioning (i.e. hormones, surgery).

Many of the young people did not necessarily view transition as a simple process of 'leaving' one gender and 'arriving' at another. Some participants did view transition as an affirmation of an identity of 'man' or 'woman', while others described a process of affirming their gender-neutral or gender fluid identity(ies).

40% were unsure about, or did not want to undergo medical transitioning.

## Sexuality

- 50% identified as queer or pansexual.
- "Heterosexual", "homosexual" and "gay" were the far less common identities.

The young people overwhelmingly identified with sexuality identities that were not determined by the gender identity of their (potential) partners, such as queer or pansexual, with 11% nominating bisexual as their current sexual identity.

The young people were least likely to identify with the terms homosexual (2%), asexual (3%), gay (5%), or heterosexual (5%).

Given the diversity of sexual identities, schools and service providers should refrain from making assumption about young people's sexual identities and should use gender neutral terms when referring to individual's partners.

## School

- 66% reported receiving inappropriate sexuality education.
- 55% reported receiving inappropriate puberty education.

Young people were less likely to experience harassment and bullying from classmates when their teachers used appropriate language and respected their privacy. The young people were more likely to engage in alternative education settings, such as TAFE or distance education, than the general population.

## Abuse, harassment and discrimination

- 2/3 had experienced verbal abuse because of their gender identity(ies)
- 21% had experienced physical abuse.
- 90% of the young people who had experienced physical abuse had thought about suicide.

They were most likely to experience abuse or harassment on the street (43%) followed by at school (38%). They were most likely to avoid public toilets (65%), change rooms (60%) and clothing stores (52%). Young people who had experienced abuse, harassment or discrimination had high rates of self-harm thoughts (80%), self-harm (70%), and suicidal thoughts (81%) and actions (37%).

## Mental health and professionals

- 45% of the young people experienced anxiety
  - 40% had experienced depression
  - 40% had experienced stress
- 66% had seen a mental health professional in the 12 months prior to the participating in the survey. 60% of these young people were overall satisfied with their experiences. However, 53% of the young people had had at least one negative experience with a health professional due to their gender identity (for example using inappropriate language, not feeling validated). Young people who avoided mental health professionals did so for a variety of reasons, including financial reasons (32%), negative past experiences (30%), feeling as though they won't be understood (33%) and worried that their parents/carers would find out (28%).

## Protective factors, activism, and knowledge

- 98% of young people relied on websites to gain knowledge on gender identity.

Many of the young people participated in marches and rallies (55%), created blogs (30%), wrote to local members of parliament (23%), and made posters (23%). They gained knowledge from research (91%) websites (98%), peers (77%) and support groups (57%). When parents were supportive, young people fared better on a range of indicators such as depression and access to mental health professionals. Specialist support services, both online and offline, were important for many young people's health.

## Implications

Gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia are living amazing and diverse lives. They are expressing gender identities in new and unique ways. While advocating for themselves and their peers, they are also continuing to experience high levels of abuse and discrimination. This discrimination has a clear impact on mental health and well-being.

Creating supportive family lives, schools, health services, community spaces, and support services can and will make a massive difference to transgender and gender diverse young people.



## Chloe

**22 years old Trans Woman**

I had a group of internet friends that have been very helpful, particularly with the extra layer of anonymity that it provides, allowing me to more easily discuss personal matters



## Alex

**15 years old Agender**

Finding someone with a similar gender identity to you is a super experience, it makes you feel less weird and alone.



## Noah

**16 years old Androgynous**

Educate teachers on non-binary gender; stop splitting into groups based on gender (PE is really bad for this); be more aware of non-binary genders in health class.



## Theo

**14 years old Non-Binary**

I like the sense of community that comes from talking to people with the same kinds of experiences as me.