ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

TGV operates across land belonging to the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Taungurong, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Wathaurung peoples of the Kulin Nation. Transgender Victoria pays its respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledges that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Transgender Victoria also acknowledges the long history of gender diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and all the Sistergirls and Brotherboys past, present, and emerging.

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OBJECTIVE

This report provides an overview of the legislative, medical, and social histories of trans and gender diverse (TGD) people in Victoria. Understanding the history of marginalised groups is vital to inform the development and implementation of policies and programs to support social inclusion and overcome disadvantage. Exploring the history of transgender people in Victoria exposes:

- structural and legal barriers that have disadvantaged TGD people;
- processes that led to legal, health and social reforms to improve the lives of transgender Victorians;
- strategies that transgender people deployed – either as individuals, within organisations or as activists – to challenge discrimination and support each other;
- successes and shortcomings of past reforms;
- changing priorities, challenges and needs of TGD people in Victoria

TERMINOLOGY

One of the biggest challenges when working with gender diversity, past and present, is the constantly evolving language and terminology. In many cases the signifiers of identity used in the past are considered offensive by today’s standards; yet, today’s preferred terminology did not exist in the past. Indeed, one point this report will cover will be the ways that debates over language played out among transgender Victorians. Labels can make individuals uncomfortable; a word one person may use to self-identify may be considered offensive to another person.

This report uses terminology around trans and gender diversity that is considered best practice, following the “Trans-Affirming Language Guide” developed by TransHub and ACON. It also avoids terms like ‘cross-dresser’, instead using the expression ‘dressing’ to refer to people who wear clothes generally associated with a sex other than that assigned at birth. However, when referring to historical documents, it references the terminology of the time. When drawing on oral histories, the report will use the self-identifiers that the interview participants used for themselves, even if those words do not reflect current terminology.
The report draws on research funded by Australian Research Discovery grant DP180100322: “Transgender Australians: The History of an Identity.” The main sources come from:

- oral history interviews with TGD Victorians, especially past and present activists
- oral history interviews with health practitioners who played significant roles in the history of transgender healthcare provision in Victoria
- newspaper reports, accessed through Trove (National Library of Australia), interview participants’ personal archives and online database Factiva
- personal archives kept by activists, which include newspaper and magazine articles; organisational records from past and present transgender organisations (e.g. Seahorse Victoria, Transgender Victoria, Victorian Transsexual Coalition, YGender); correspondence with parliamentarians or bodies like the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; committee minutes of LGBTQ+ advisory groups or organisations
- papers in the Public Records Office Victoria, National Archives of Australia and University of Melbourne Archives
- mainstream newspapers, the LGBTQ+ press and personal papers kept at the Australian Queer Archives (formerly Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TRANS-HISTORICITY OF VICTORIA UNTIL WORLD WAR II

BARON WEARS WOMAN’S CLOTHES

From his earliest childhood Baron von Zobelitz, a member of a very ancient but very poor German Family, showed pronounced inclination to don girls’ clothes and to play with dolls and ply his needle. These eccentricities have him much trouble, for his father was a violent man, and the son was obliged to put up with much very harsh treatment and severe whippings at frequent intervals. As soon as he could claim a will of his own he flatly refused any longer to wear male clothing, and began to make women’s clothes for himself, since his furious parents refused to buy him any. Now, by a decision of a Berlin court, he has been converted into “Countess Geraldine von Zobelitz,” and is entitled to dress as such. He is a ladies’ tailor and he makes the ladies’ clothing not only for himself, but also for the whole of the family, and he has the smallest waist in Prussia. He won the prize for small waists at a competition some time ago at which the competitors appeared in masks. None suspected that he was not a lady of society. The case aroused great interest in Berlin. Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, an authority on such matters, says, transvestism has been and is common in all ages and all countries. It is an instinctive desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex.
Aboriginal people have occupied present-day Victoria since time immemorial. Dispossession, massacres and colonial practices like child removal and the banning of Aboriginal languages made it difficult for Aboriginal Elders to pass knowledge down across generations. Of course, Aboriginal people also found ways to adapt and develop their culture. While most Victorian Aboriginal languages and cultures have no longer spoken, those languages and knowledge continue to live in the land, the trees and the waterways. Aboriginal communities now work with anthropologists, ecologists and historians to revitalise traditional practices. We know that Aboriginal cultures are highly gendered, with particular roles for men and women. Stories or places are designated for men or women only. Notwithstanding such binaries, we know from other Aboriginal mobs that there was likely space for a third gender in pre-colonial Aboriginal societies. For instance, languages from central and northern Australia have words for a third gender.16 We also know that there were no constraints for a third or non-binary genders, now often adopting the Native American term Two-spirit. Writing on these long traditions, many gender diverse Aboriginal Victorians are now adopting the Tiwi Island terms sistergirl or brotherboy to identify their genders in the twenty-first century.17

The first permanent white colonisers in Victoria settled around Portland in 1834; Melbourne was founded in 1835, and Victoria remained a relatively small colony of pastoralists for the next fifteen years. The sudden influx due to the influx of immigration, economic growth and transformed Melbourne into a boomtown. It was in the subsequent decades that some of the first cases of people who identified with a gender other than that assigned at birth were being defined, managed and treated by legislation designed to prosecute sex workers, homeless people and other victims generally associated with poverty. Most men charged for vagrancy for dressing tended to argue that they dressed as a joke, as part of a bet or as one-off incident. Most were convicted and fined, though there are a few cases from this period where judges accepted defence arguments that there was nothing offensive about dressing as a woman in public.16

Digging into some cases suggests that these people were not just dressing as women as a joke, but rather felt a genuine desire to be seen as women. Some offenders admitted to dressing on more than one occasion. Some were caught in private quarters, such as a farmer from Geelong arrested at a police station in 1878, with Evans recorded on the birth certificate as the father.

After that child was born, Evans fell into a depression and was admitted to the Bendigo Hospital Lunacy Ward in 1879, after that child was born, Evans fell into a depression and was admitted to the Bendigo Hospital Lunacy Ward in 1879, with Evans recorded on the birth certificate as the father. The third wife had a child in 1878, with Evans released at the end of 1879, ostensibly again living as Ellen Tremayne. For the next year, Tremayne/Evans participated in cross-dressing for a short time, and called out like a woman, and fell apparently in a faint, and recovered almost immediately and was taken to the cells, where he was given male attire to put on.17

From the late 1800s through the 1930s, newspapers regularly featured stories about men arrested for being dressed as women. Usually they were charged under provisions of the Vagrancy Act or laws against ‘offensive behaviour’, which was legislation designed to prosecute sex workers, homeless people and other people associated with poverty. Most men charged for vagrancy for dressing tended to argue that they dressed as a joke, as part of a bet or as one-off incident. Most were convicted and fined, though there are a few cases from this period where judges accepted defence arguments that there was nothing offensive about dressing as a woman in public.16

Newspapers from the 1930s reported on cases of transvestism in Brisbane and Perth. While there were no reported cases from Victoria, these examples represent an important shift that would become more pronounced after the Second World War: people who identified with a gender other than that assigned at birth were being defined, managed and treated by the growing psychology and psychiatry professions.

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Percy Douglas Baynes, 1935

Many transgender people today similarly describe an urge to dress from as early as their childhood, sometimes in private at home, but also venturing in public. By the 1930s, Australian sexologists were drawing on international discourses about sexuality and gender and even had two terms to describe the phenomenon of males who had an inexpressible urge to dress as women: eunism or transvestism. Australia’s first mention of transvestism was in a short 1912 press story about a German baron whom a Berlin court granted permission to call a countess and to dress as a woman. The article from Melbourne’s Age stated:

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In 1951, psychiatrist Dr Herbert Bower began treating patients at Melbourne’s Royal Park Mental Hospital whose gender identity was different from their sex assigned at birth. Two overseas developments then had a profound influence on transgender history: the global publicity around American Second World War veteran Christine Jorgensen’s transition from male to female in 1953, and the publication of American psychiatrist Dr Harry Benjamin’s seminal text Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes. These two related events created a language through which transgender people could begin to articulate their struggles with gender. At the same time, these two historical moments solidified the medicalisation of transgender that had begun with the pre-war sexologists. By defining ‘transsexualism’ and ‘transvestism’, doctors were also setting the parameters of who was trans; anyone outside their narrow definitions was not a ‘true transgender’.

To fit the psychiatric criteria of a ‘true transsexual’, a person had to see themselves as a heterosexual woman trapped in a male body. They had to desire to dress conservatively in dresses and skirts and to conform to stereotypical gender norms of white, respectable, middle-class women. They had to desire gender affirmation surgery and seek to disappear into society afterwards, keeping their transgender identity a secret.

It is not clear when Melbourne’s first gender affirmation surgery happened, though a memo from 1985 suggests that it was in 1969. We know that before 1976, psychiatrist Professor Richard Ball was seeing transgender patients and referring them to surgeon Dr Hunter Fry. Fry was performing surgeries at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, usually early on Saturday mornings. A newspaper article about transgender people from 1981 also mentioned that the Victorian Health Department ran a Transsexualism Consultative Clinic which saw over 700 patients from 1969.

In the early 1970s a GP referred a transgender patient to Dr William Walters, an obstetrician at the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. Walters did some research and referred that patient to an endocrinologist and surgeon. See other GPs across Australia began to refer patients to Walters, and he saw that there was a clear need for a coordinated specialist clinic to work with transgender patients. He brought a controversial proposal to his supervisor Dr Carl Wood to set up a gender dysphoria clinic at the Queen Victoria Hospital. They sought legal advice because they were uncertain if it was legal to treat transgender patients. Walters’ term as director there were about 100-150 patients on the books. Almost all patients were trans women; most were from educated backgrounds with professional jobs; they came from all over Australia, New Zealand and even other countries in Asia.

The doctors at the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic had strict expectations that dictated the transition process. GPs would refer patients to the clinic. Psychiatrists affiliated with the clinic would meet the patients and assess if they were ‘true transsexuals’. Those who met the criteria could be prescribed hormones from an endocrinologist and were required to meet the ‘real life test’ to have surgery: to live full-time in their affirmed gender for two years. 24/7. This meant wearing dresses and skirts; adopting a female identity; divorcing their wives. The desire for legal gender affirmation surgery and the fear of public prejudice led many women to wrongly lose their jobs. Others, which would make it harder to afford the hormones, specialist appointments and surgery. After surgery, many women then availed themselves of the Lincoln Institute Speech Pathology Clinic to learn voice modulation. The relationship between the Lincoln Institute (now La Trobe Communication Clinic) and the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic began around 1980.

Those transgender women who did not fit the clinic’s ideas of a ‘true transsexual’, or those women who did not want surgery or who could not afford it, had fewer options. They may find a friendly GP, like Dr Harry Imber who practiced in St Kilda in the late 1970s, and then in Melbourne’s CBD. Imber was known as someone who would be friendly to transgender clientele, including sex workers, and was willing to prescribe hormones. Indeed, Imber was one of the few doctors who practiced who received the same amount of care and treatment as their cisgender counterparts. After transgender patients about the effects and risks of hormones, and letting them decide their own course of treatment.

Imber was also a member of a short-lived group from about 1978-83 headed by Dr Walters, known as the Australian and New Zealand Committee on Transsexualism. This group held its first annual meeting in 1979, bringing together GPs, psychiatrists, endocrinologists, surgeons, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other specialists working in transgender health. The organisation had about 30-40 members.

In 1987 Dr Walters accepted a position at the University of Newcastle, and surgeons affiliated with the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic stopped performing surgeries for patients without private health insurance. Doctors associated with the clinic complained to the press, and it was not until eighteen months later, in May 1989, that the Victorian government resumed funding the clinic for up to ten surgeries per year – even while there were waiting lists of well over thirty-five people. Around that time, the surgeons began performing most gender affirmation operations at the Masooda Private Hospital.

Psychiatrists Dr Trudy Kennedy and Herbert Bower became the new directors of the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic. The clinic relocated to Monash Medical Centre, and from 1995 became operationally aligned to the Mental Health Program at Monash Health. Many transgender people who transitioned in the 1980s-90s remember Kennedy and other staff at the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic as being particularly rigid in their expectations of gender conformity and brash in their demeanour. They recall feeling they had to conform to Kennedy and others’ expectations, essentially playing the game to meet the requirements to have gender affirmation surgery. The psychiatrists’ role as gatekeepers reflected global medical practices towards transgender people, and it has led to a lot of resentment and distrust of the health profession among many members of the transgender community.

From the 1990s to the early 2000s a small number of GPs, especially gay or bisexual GPs who were themselves coming from a community that had long been defined and marginalised by the psychology and psychiatry professions, began to shift away from the gatekeeper model of transgender healthcare. Still, the number of trans-friendly GPs was small, and they tended to be in inner-urban Melbourne. It would not be until the mid-2010s that more GPs, still mostly in Melbourne, began to become educated about prescribing hormones. Reflecting global trends, the psychiatry profession has slowly become more understanding of gender diversity rather than the old ‘true transsexual’ versus others model. Still, the Monash Gender Clinic follows World Health Organisation guidelines which require psychiatrists to prescribe gender affirmation surgery, and many transgender people are wary of the medical profession’s ongoing role as gatekeepers.
Notwithstanding the press coverage of Christine Jorgensen, there was little transgender visibility in Australia before the 1970s. Newspapers still reported cases of dressing, especially in tabloids like Truth. Usually there was a salacious aspect to the reports, such as a suicide, sex work, or other crime. By the late 1960s occasional newspaper reports mentioned Australian ‘transsexuals’, such as Toye de Wilde from Brisbane, who were travelling overseas for gender affirmation surgery. Such newspaper reports tended to be exploitative and did not paint a positive picture of transgender Australians – although there were positive exceptions in longer feature articles published in magazines such as Pix-People.

From the 1950s-70s there was not a defined transgender subculture per se, but many transgender people found themselves welcomed within the underground camp scene (as homosexuality was referred to then). Dressers would visit establishments such as the Australia Hotel or venues in St Kilda, especially around Fitzroy Street. St Kilda was also the site of many transgender sex workers, particularly around Greens Street. Sex workers regularly had to contend with the threat of violence from both their clients and police. Regular police patrols or undercover members of the vice squad would arrest transgender sex workers and charge them with prostitution and/or committing acts of gross indecency.

Drag was one art form which transgender people could perform to experiment with diverse gender expressions. This is not to conflate drag with transgender; drag is about performing different genders, but the performers still usually identify with their sex assigned at birth. However, during the 1960s-70s especially, when there were few other options for dressers in public, drag was an entry point for some transgender people to express their authentic selves.

In the 1970s the media increased its coverage of transgender women in Australia. The majority of reports continued to be sensationalised and appeared in newspapers like Truth or Melbourne’s Sun, but there was also a subtle shift in other areas of reportage. Often transgender people participated in these reports and, under the sensational headlines, many articles were sympathetic portrayals of the struggles of transgender Australians. Several older transgender women remember seeing feature stories about ‘transvestites’ or ‘transsexuals’ in magazines like Cleo, which were more respectful and represented transgender women’s voices.

The ABC produced a Four Corners episode about transsexuals in 1974 that was respectful in tone,22 and throughout the 1970s and ’80s the ABC ran occasional news stories or programs about ‘transsexuals’ and ‘transvestites’. They even broadcast an episode of Open File in 1983 titled ‘Call of the Frock’; this thirty-minute documentary featured a few transgender women at various stages of transition, including following one woman as she underwent gender affirmation surgery at Melbourne’s Queen Victoria Hospital.23

The role of media is complex for transgender men and women who were young or adolescent in the 1970s-80s. Many oral histories recollect seeing a respectful newspaper, magazine article, a television program on the ABC, or a program like the 1985 Channel Nine documentary Tommy Doesn’t Exist Anymore.24 Some oral histories even remember seeing sensationalised articles in mainstream newspapers or magazines like Australasian Post, Pix-People or Woman’s Day, but these features still had an important effect: they gave language, voice and a sense of connectedness to people struggling with their gender identity. What was usually an internal, private struggle had a name, and transgender people realised they were not alone.25

The 1970s also witnessed the birth of Australia’s and then Victoria’s first known transgender organisations. Inspired by the United Kingdom’s Beaumont Society, a group of dressers founded the Seahorse Society in Sydney in 1971. Seahorse held social gatherings once a month and, for the first three decades of its history, primarily identified as an organisation for heterosexual men who enjoyed dressing (or used the term ‘transvestite’). To become a member, someone needed to contact the association and then answer a series of questions through a questionnaire and interview process. This was meant to protect the members’ privacy and to ensure that people were serious in their membership applications.

While Seahorse was based in Sydney, its membership was national and there were representatives dubbed ‘counsellors’ based in the other states. Some of the Melbourne members had gatherings at a house in Kew dubbed the ‘Kew Castle’. Occasionally, other ‘transvestites’ placed advertisements in the newspaper looking for like-minded individuals, and they managed to connect with each other and hold social gatherings. These groups came together as a Melbourne branch of the national Seahorse, but they felt that they needed their own organisational structure and leadership to direct local activities. In September 1975, five or six members founded Seahorse Victoria; the initial membership list drafted in October 1975 had twelve names.

Seahorse Victoria continued to hold monthly meetings, published a monthly newsletter and its membership grew to over sixty within a few years. The organisation actively supported members’ wives by inviting them to gatherings and organising special wives’ meetings. Seahorse maintained a library of books and articles relating to all things transgender (or, in the terminology of the era, ‘transvestite’ and ‘transsexual’). In September 1980 Seahorse published its first shopping guide, listing beauty salons, clothing stores, shoe stores, electrolysis providers, wig shops and cosmetic shops which were friendly to transgender customers.

The group did its first ABC radio interview and television spot on Channel 9 in early 1976, which led to increased membership. Over the years Seahorse would advertise in the gay and lesbian press and occasionally the mainstream press, such as purchasing an advertisement in the Australasian Post in 1982 and Pix-People and the Bendigo Advertiser in 1984. The club rotated meeting venues across a number of motels, restaurants, homes and pubs in inner-city Melbourne.

The number of paid members usually hovered around the sixty mark, and normally between twenty-thirty people attended the monthly meet-ups. The group also organised special events like mini-balls, the first being the Cup Eve Ball in 1976. The first annual Seahorse Ball was held in 1987, and it is still a major event on the Seahorse calendar.26 That said, many oral histories remember that dressing was dangerous business in 1970s-80s Victoria. If someone drove to or from a meeting dressed, they feared being spotted, attacked, or even police harassment. Most members would pack their clothes in their cars and would dress at the venue to minimise risk.

Less is known about a rival group to Seahorse Victoria: The Elaine Barrie Project. The group started sometime around 1979 and was a breakaway group which met more frequently at The Hub – a community centre in West Melbourne operated by John Willis, pastor of Christ’s Community Church. In the early years there were some personality clashes between the leadership of Elaine Barrie Project and Seahorse, but these differences eased through the 1980s. The Elaine Barrie Project published a bi-monthly newsletter entitled Nu-Scene.
The VTC leadership worked closely with doctors at the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic and prepared logical, though unresourced, submissions for use by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs bodies. In 1983 representatives of the VTC were invited to attend a meeting of the Victorian Equal Opportunity Advisory Council to discuss matters of concern. The meeting was an informative session, with one member even sending a personal letter to the VTC saying:

“I FELT THIS AFFECTIONATE BOND WITH YOU, ALSO, BECAUSE I WAS INSPIRED BY YOUR PERSONAL COURAGE. THANK YOU FOR A POSITIVELY POIGNANT AND PERSONALLY RICH EXPERIENCE.”

The VTC subsequently prepared a submission to the Victorian Attorney General on the proposed Equal Opportunity Bill 1983. The submission called for anti-discrimination protections to be extended to both ‘pre-operative’ and ‘post-operative’ transgender individuals, recommending the addition of ‘sexually reassigned to the groups afforded anti-discrimination protection. The submission identified other areas in need of reform:

- Birth certificates
- Identity documents including passports, driver’s licences, bank books, certificates or diplomas of qualifications, employment references
- Identification requirements for credit and loans, registration with the Commonwealth Employment Service, employment in the Commonwealth Public Service or admission to tertiary institutions

The submission also noted areas of sex-based discrimination that affected transgender women just as much as cisgender women: marriage, social security benefits, health costs (including surgery), and laws relating to rape and sexual assault. The Victorian Equal Opportunity Advisory Council wrote to Premier John Cain endorsing the proposal to add ‘reassigned sex to the Equal Opportunity Act,’ but the government did not do so.

At the Commonwealth level, the VTC sent letters to the Department of Social Security, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Department of Health and Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. They made submissions to the Law Reform Commission about the proposed Sex Discrimination Bill 1984.

Where the VTC was most effective was in advocating for standardized processes and procedures for transgender people to obtain passports in their affirmed genders. Until 1983 there were inconsistent approaches to issuing passports to transgender people, with some women successfully having them issued in their affirmed genders and others rejected. The Commonwealth government introduced new rules on issuing passports from June 1983. These regulations were more rigid about required documentation, including the need to produce a birth certificate. This worried transgender people and prompted the VTC to make representations to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In April 1983 the Consular and Passports Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs wrote to the VTC advising that under current law and the revised passports policy, passports must include a sex indicator and it must align with the birth certificate. Transgender people could obtain a Document of Identity in lieu of a passport which did not include a sex marker, but only some countries would accept this. The VTC followed up with Attorney General Gareth Evans, making a submission advocating both for legal recognition of sexually reassigned persons, and for anti-discrimination protections. On 21 November 1984, the Attorney General approved a significant reform: transgender people who had undergone gender affirmation surgery could have their affirmed gender recognised on their passports – as long as they provided written medical evidence which explicitly noted that this advice was for the purposes of passports only.

The VTC continued its advocacy and support for transgender Victorians, producing a list of doctors, employment, medical, religious, accommodation and self-help services; instructions for changing name by deed poll; an explanation for how to change passport or other travel documents; advice on driver’s licences; and advice confirming that the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs would not discriminate against transsexual migrants. The archival trail for the Victorian Transsexual Coalition ends in 1985.
The passports issue was a symptom of a much broader challenge confronting transgender people: legal recognition. Essentially, there were three legal areas where transgender people needed law reform:

1. **Mechanisms to Recognise their Affirmed Gender for Identity Purposes.**

   This was the law criminalising male homosexual acts, and its deployment against transgender women was a symptom of a larger societal (mis)construction of the era that transgender women were actually gay men who liked to dress as women.

   Those who had undergone hormonal and surgical changes that made them women and therefore sexual relations with men were not homosexual.

   After a series of acquittals, several county court judges wrote to the Chief Secretary (a government minister whose portfolio included Police and Emergency Services) and asked that they stop prosecuting transgender women for acts of gross indecency because they were all being acquitted.

   The other change that ended the policing of dressing was the Vagrancy Act to charge dressers.

   The third issue is all the more remarkable because there was no explicit law against dressing.

   In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries police would use the Vagrancy Act to charge dressers. By the 1970s it was less common to arrest people for dressing, but it did still happen, usually when linked to sex work and/or under the crime of committing an act of gross indecency.

2. **Anti-Discrimination Laws,**

   Concerns about the legal status of transgender women in 1976. The Commonwealth Attorney General was also posing pragmatic questions about the legal status of transgender women in 1976. He referred the matter to the Family Law Council, which in July 1978 produced a report entitled “Birth Certificate Revision of the Sexually Reassigned.” The paper canvassed international precedents and did not make any concrete recommendations for birth certificate reform, but it did highlight an important premise: for any legal issues involving transgender people ranging from child custody disputes to marriage to inheritance, their sex recognition all came back to the birth certificate. As such, state governments would need to pass legislation to allow transgender people to change their birth certificates, or to provide some alternative form of gender/sex recognition.
In August 1984, a sub-committee of officers from the Commonwealth, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia proposed a framework which, while not altering birth certificates, would create a new ‘Certificate of Reassignment’. This could be granted after a person underwent gender affirmation surgery at an approved hospital and would that, for all purposes, that person would be recognised in law in their affirmed gender.

Those transgender people who underwent gender affirmation surgery before the legislation that had surgery overseas could apply for a Certificate of Reassignment from a Gender Reassignment Committee and then obtain a court order to recognise their affirmed gender.20

Victoria played a leading role in advocating for this legal framework and became the first state to draft legislation in December 1984. The proposed Sexual Reassignment Bill went out to consultation with the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General; Victorian Health Commissioner; Health Department; and Department. In December 1985 the press reported on the Victorian government’s intention to introduce the Sexual Reassignment Bill. The Attorney General, Jim Kennan, was reported as saying “it’s a very real human problem for them. It’s a question of the law recognising the reality.”21

The consultations continued through 1987, but for reasons unknown, the legislation was never introduced into the Victorian Parliament. Only South Australia proceeded with the legal framework and in 1989 passed its own Sexual Reassignment Act. Western Australia passed similar legislation in 2000.

With legal recognition stalled, and with the Victorian Transsexual Coalition no longer operating, there was little push for further legal reform. That changed when the Law Reform Commission of Victoria began a review into the Equal Opportunity Act in 1990. Its published report noted: “The discussion papers proposed that the ground of sexuality should include transsexuality. No submission opposed this. However, transsexuality is a matter of gender identity rather than sexuality. The Commission therefore recommends that it be prohibited as a discrete ground.”22


The review was particularly interested in updating the law to widen the categories protected from discrimination (at that time, sex, marital status, race, disability, single or de facto status and parenthood).

In the bipartisan committee’s sights were sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and carer status. A small number of transgender people saw this review as an opportunity to include transsexualism (to use the language of the time) as well.

In the bipartisan committee’s sights were sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and carer status. A small number of transgender people saw this review as an opportunity to include transsexualism (to use the language of the time) as well.

The government did not make any changes to its proposed amendments, so the Equal Opportunity Act continued to exclude transgender protections after 1996.

Though the push for anti-discrimination was unsuccessful, it did teach the new generation of activists spearheaded by Julie Peters an important lesson: if they wanted the government to take them seriously, they needed to form an organisation.

For instance, one wrote:

“I HAVE MY OWN COMPUTER CONSULTANCY BUSINESS WHICH HAS BEEN RUNNING SINCE 1981. I LOST A NUMBER OF CLIENTS AT CHANGE-OVER, BUT FORTUNATELY, DUE TO SOME WONDERFUL SUPPORT BY ONE MAJOR CORPORATION AT THE MANAGEMENT LEVEL, I AM STILL IN BUSINESS AND CURRENTLY HAVE CONTRACTS WITH TWO LARGE ORGANISATIONS... HOWEVER, THIS KIND OF SUPPORT IS STILL PATCHY ACROSS BUSINESSES AND DEPENDS SOLELY ON THE ATTITUDES OF THE MANAGEMENT INVOLVED. I KNOW A NUMBER OF OTHER CASES IN WHICH TRANSGENDER EMPLOYMENT AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THEIR TRANSEXUALITY.”

Another submission raised numerous challenges confronting transgender people including psychiatrists’ gatekeeper approach to deciding who was a ‘true transsexual’; challenges changing identity documents including driver’s licences and birth certificates; religious discrimination; and employment discrimination.

Anna Langley outlined numerous examples of employment discrimination she experienced since her transition and concluded her submission saying:

“I BELIEVE PROTECTION UNDER THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT IS NECESSARY TO ALLOW TRANSEXUALS TO REACH THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL PERSONALLY AND AS HEALTHY MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY. BOTH BECAUSE OF THE DIRECT LEGAL PROTECTION AND MORE IMPORTANTLY BECAUSE OF THE INCREASE IN SELF-ESTEEM FROM KNOWING THAT WE ARE PROTECTED AND SO WE CAN GAIN A HIGHER SELF REALISATION AT A YOUNGER AGE AND NOT NEED TO RELY ON THE USE OF THE LEGAL PROCESS.”

The final submission was from a group called R.A.W.: the Sexually Reassigned Women’s Action Group. The crux of the submission’s argument was

“THAT SEXUALLY REASSIGNED WOMEN MUST BE INCLUDED IN HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION AND BE LEGALLY ACCEPTED AS FEMALES AND NOT JUST BE LEGALLY ACCEPTED AS TRANSEXUALS.”

R.A.W. argued that to consider transgender people to be anything other than their affirmed gender represented a form of vilification and harassment.23

The final report of the Review of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 made no mention of transsexuality. Anna Langley and activist Julie Peters continued to agitate for any amendments to the bill to include protections for transgender people. Langley wrote a powerful opinion piece in the Melbourne Star Observer in February 1994 arguing:

“TRANNSYS LIKE MYSELF SUPPORT AND CELEBRATE THE ADVANCES GAYS AND LESBIANS ARE MAKING TOWARDS GENDER RECOGNITION OF THEIR EQUALITY AS HUMAN BEINGS. AT THE SAME TIME TRANNSYS LIKE ME LOOK IN DISMAY AS OUR CONCERNS ARE USED AS THE SACRIFICIAL BARGAINING CHIPS OF THE QUEER COMMUNITY. WHEN THE TIME COMES TO COMPLY, OUR ISSUES ARE QUICKLY JETTISONED. THE QUEER COMMUNITY CANNOT CREDIBLY CLAIM EQUALITY WHILE DENYING IT TO A SUBSET OF OUR OWN. WE BELONG IN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY BECAUSE WE ARE AUSTRALIANS. WE HAVE THE SAME OBLIGATIONS AS EVERY OTHER AUSTRALIAN, BUT ARE STILL DENIED RIGHTS THAT OTHER AUSTRALIANS ENJOY.”

When the Kennett Government introduced amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act in 1995 which did not include transgender people, Langley wrote to her local member of parliament:

“...THE CURRENTLY PROPOSED AMENDMENT WOULD PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF ‘A PERSON’S LAWFUL SEXUAL ACTIVITY’. WHILE THIS WOULD BE A GREAT STEP FORWARD FOR THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITIES, WHETHER IT WOULD, OR EVEN COULD, COVER TRANSEXUALS IS NOT CLEAR...I BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE ACT CLEARLY AND UNAMBIGUOUSLY PROHIBITS DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF A PERSON’S GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER STATUS. THIS SHOULD NOT BE CONDITIONAL ON WHETHER A PERSON HAS HAD REASSIGNMENT SURGERY, SINCE THIS PRE-OPERATIVE WAITING PERIOD IS ONE WHERE TRANSEXUALS FACE DISCRIMINATION HEAD ON, WITHOUT ANY KIND OF LEGAL OR DOCUMENTARY SUPPORT.”

HISTORICAL FIGURES OF NOTE

ANNA LANGLEY
SHE/HER
TRANSGENDER ADVOCATE & ACTIVIST

ORGANISATIONS

R.A.W. - SEXUALLY REASSIGNED WOMEN’S ACTION GROUP
ADVOCATING FOR LEGAL RECOGNITION OF THOSE WHO HAD GENDER AFFIRMATION SURGERY

KEY ISSUES

MECHANISMS TO RECOGNISE TRANS INDIVIDUALS’ AFFIRMED GENDER
LEGAL REFORM
REFORMS TO ENABLE ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS REFLECTING GENDER IDENTITY

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS
LEGAL REFORM
PURSUING REFORMS UNDER THE VICTORIAN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT

ENDING POLICING OF DRESSING
LAW REFORM
IN PART RESULTING FROM DECRIMINALISATION OF HOMOSEXUAL ACTS
At the same time as the Review of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984, Peters and Langley were becoming more active at the grassroots. Langley was enrolled in a degree at the University of Melbourne, and both she and Peters fought for inclusion of transgender peoples in the student union and women’s spaces. Indeed, they devoted much of their energy in the mid-1990s to arguing against what are now popularly known as trans-exclusionary radical feminists, or TERFs: women who purport to be feminists but argue that trans women are not real women.

Drawing on research in mathematics, sociology and women’s studies, Peters and Langley regularly wrote assignments, presented at student forums, delivered speeches and wrote articles in the gay and lesbian press advocating for the inclusion of trans women in women’s spaces. Langley even addressed a panel at the Network of Women Students in Australia (NOWSA) conference in 1995, during which she showed how complicated it was to define who was a woman and concluded:

“THE FACT THAT PEOPLE’S OPPORTUNITY IN LIFE IS IN MANY WAYS DETERMINED BY THEIR BIRTHS AND THEIR ANCESTORS, WHEN WE CANNOT EVEN COME UP WITH A RELIABLE TEST TO DIFFERENTIATE THE SEXES IS BLATANTLY UNFAIR. THIS MAY NEVER PRESENT A PROBLEM TO YOU IF YOUR MEMBERSHIP OF THE MALE OR FEMALE GENDER IS CLEARLY IN DISPUTE. BUT IF YOU PASS ONE PERSON’S (OR INSTITUTION’S, OR NATION’S) TEST FOR BEING FEMALE, BUT NOT ANOTHER’S, WHAT THEN?”

Julie Peters addressed the 1999 NOWSA conference, speaking passionately about how society’s rigid gender binaries affected transgender people from a young age. She explained the pressures for transgender people to blend into society and the mental distress felt by transgender women who could not do so.

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“THE TRANSGENDERED ARE ATTRACTED TO FEMINISM BECAUSE THEY EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION AS WOMEN; AND CAN OFFER AN UNUSUAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRACTICAL OPERATION OF GENDER, AND FEMINISM IS ABOUT TRYING TO STEP BEYOND THE LIMITATIONS OF GENDER AND THEY SUPPORT THIS AT A DEEP LEVEL.”

Peters also became active in the Australian Democrats, and she was the first openly transgender person to run for the Commonwealth Parliament when she stood for the seat of Batman in the 1996 election.

She received significant local, national and international press, much of which was respectful because she was able to present her own story and focus on her political platform. Subsequently, she was elected vice president of the Victorian branch of the Australian Democrats.

In the 1998 federal election Peters ran as Democratic candidate for Melbourne Ports and was the campaign manager for all twenty-five Victorian candidates running in the House of Representatives and four Senate candidates.

Although Peters did not win these elections, she did increase the Democratic primary vote (in 1998 she obtained 0.02% of the primary vote, compared to 0.01% for the candidate in 1996). She also was the first openly transgender person to run for the Victorian parliament, contesting the Legislative Council province of Monash in both the 1996 and 1999 elections.

Peters’ and Langley’s low-key activism also challenged Melbourne’s gay and lesbian community to be more inclusive of transgender people. Peters wrote in the Melbourne Star Observer:

“I FEEL THE GAY AND LESBIAN DISCRIMINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT TO US BECAUSE IT MEANS WE ARE LEFT OUT OF OUR OWN FAMILIES’ LIVES, AND MANY GAYS AND LESBIANS, WHO HAVE NEVER MET A TRANSEXUAL, HAVE STRONG IDEAS ABOUT WHAT WE ARE LIKE AND WHAT MOTIVATES US. AND MANY OF THESE FALSE IDEAS, WHICH HAVE BECOME COMMON BELIEFS LESSEN OUR CHANCES OF HAVING HUMAN RIGHTS. WE ARE LEFT OUT OF SOME OF THE BIGGER FILM FESTIVALS AND THE LIKE BUT THE ‘TRANNY CRINGE’ HAS LEFT US OUT OF THE LEGAL GAINS OF THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY. TRANSEXUALS NEED TO COME OUT OF THEIR CLOSETS AND LOBBY IF THEY ARE TO ACHIEVE THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS DUE TO ALL.”

Peters and Langley very much followed their own advice and took every opportunity they could to advocate for transgender rights and inclusion. The first major opportunity arose in 1996 when the Australian Senate set up an Inquiry into Sexuality Discrimination. The Inquiry grew out of Democrats Senator Sid Spindler’s efforts to introduce a Sexuality Discrimination Bill.

Notwithstanding the Inquiry title, all of the terms of reference included the phrase “on the grounds of sexuality or transgender identity.” This was the first Commonwealth inquiry explicitly to examine problems of discrimination confronting transgender people.

Peters and Langley prepared a joint submission which was one of nine transgender submissions from across the country. The only other submission from Victoria was a confidential one from later-activist Kayleen White. Both submissions discussed employment discrimination, mixing personal examples with anecdotal data gathered from other transgender Victorians. Peters presented fifteen instances of harassment she faced at work during and after her transition.

These included taunts, her breasts being grabbed, misgendering, being called by her previous name, sexual propositions and inappropriate items being left on her desk. Langley gave two examples of when she lost jobs as a consultant and receptionist, as well as a case of denied promotion despite acing an exam and twice being employee of the month. Kayleen White’s submission noted:

“I HAVE MET, BY MY BEST ESTIMATE, ABOUT 40 TRANSEXUALS. OF THESE, ONLY THREE HAVE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN THEIR EMPLOYMENT WHEN THEY TRANSITIONED. THE OTHERS GENERALLY END UP TRYING TO CHANGE CAREER, AND A FEW END UP ON SOME SORT OF MEDICAL PENSION OR JOBSEARCH.”

Peters and Langley also testified before the Senate Inquiry alongside the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic director, Dr Trudy Kennedy. They emphasised that being transgendered was not something that people did for personal gain or entered into lightly.

Peters also spoke of the importance of maintaining a broad definition of transgender in any anti-discrimination act: “I believe that the definition is good because it means that somebody who is even in the slightest way transgendered, or seen or believed to be transgendered, even if that person is unaware of it, it would be illegal to discriminate against them in those grounds.”

The final Inquiry into Sexuality Discrimination was tabled in the Senate in December 1997. It recommended the passage of the Sexuality Discrimination Bill to accord LGBT people (intersex was not on the agenda or terms of reference) protections in employment, public services and relationship recognition (though not marriage equality).

It also recommended the establishment of a states-Commonwealth joint working group to develop consistent approaches to identity documents. The wide-ranging report received support from the Australian Democrats and Greens, The Liberal-National Coalition and Labor Party would not endorse it, and the government did not enact any of the recommendations. At the Commonwealth level, any transgender reform was stalled for the foreseeable future.
NEW TRANSGENDER SUPPORT GROUPS: 1990s

With the disbandment of the Victorian Transsexual Association around 1985, Seahorse and the Elaine Barrie Project were again the only support groups for transgender Victorians. Elaine Barrie Project advertised itself as being for anyone questioning their gender identity, including trans men, or allies such as health or legal practitioners. Even so, trans men and women who attended in the early 1990s found Elaine Barrie herself to be friendly, but the group still be to primarily for dressers.

Some transgender women recall the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic networking them with each other in the mid-1980s as an informal support group, and one person even recalls a support group run in the late 1980s by St Kilda City Council. Some literature from the mid-1990s mentions a group called Crossfire Contacts Ballarat, described as “A self help group establishing itself to connect people experiencing transgender issues.”

In 1991 Jasper Laybutt founded Australia’s first men’s group in Sydney, named Boys Will Be Boys. From February 1992 Dale Crane became the Melbourne contact for the group, and from early 1993 he was facilitating a Melbourne branch of about three members.

Boys Will Be Boys nationally grew to about twenty-five members by 1994, but the group stopped meeting in 1995 and later transformed to the online community FTM Australia. Dale also featured in a short documentary produced in 1994 titled Men Like Me. Dale Crane would continue to be an advocate for visibility and rights for trans men well into the 2000s, including as a founding member in 2013 of FTM Shed. Diagnosed with cancer in 2016, Dale also advocated for research and inclusive practices for trans and gender diverse people in the medical and hospital setting. Dale passed away in December 2020.

The next major, sustained group to support transgender Victorians wound up having other ripple effects and spin-off organisations which endure to this day. The idea came from Jonathan Paré, who along with Dale was one of Victoria’s first openly trans male activists. In the early 1990s Paré was studying an Associate Diploma of Community Development, which he upgraded to a Bachelor degree at Victoria University. For two of his assessments, Paré conducted participant observation research with trans men and women about the experiences of being transgender. Out of these two reports came a key recommendation: the need for a peer-facilitated support group for trans men and women.

Building on his research, Paré and friend Sharon Saunders drove to Sydney to meet with peer educators at the Gender Centre. Diagnosed as “A self help group establishing itself to connect people experiencing transgender issues.”

In May 1995 Paré and Sharon Saunders convened the first meeting of Transgender Liberation and Care (TLC) at the Darbin Community Health Centre in Northcote. The invitation to the first meeting said:

“TLC IS A NONPROFIT ORGANISATION FORMED TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES FACING TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE. WE BELIEVE THAT A SELF HELP GROUP FUNCTION MOST EFFECTIVELY WHEN MEMBERS TAKE AN ACTIVE PART. YOUR PARTICIPATION IS IMPERATIVE FOR THE GROUP’S LONG TERM SURVIVAL. OUR OBJECTIVES ARE TO PROVIDE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT WHERE ISSUES RELEVANT TO TRANSSEXUALISM CAN BE DISCUSSED. WE HOPE TO BUILD A DATABASE OF EMPATHETIC MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS, COUNSELLORS AND ANY OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS YOU BELIEVE ARE APPROPRIATE. HOPEFULLY THIS WILL ASSIST TRANSGENDERISTS TO LIVE A PRODUCTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.”

About forty-five people showed up to the very first meeting of TLC. The organisation set up a management committee and a subcommittee to focus on community education.

TLC became a one-stop shop for all things transgender: it was a support group; delivered education to workplaces about support for transgender staff; facilitated meetings with recently out transgender people as well as their partners and families; provided education for transgender people on a range of topics; and served as an information point for referrals and advocacy for transgender people.

TLC published its first newsletter in September 1995 with a long list of topics of importance to TLC and its members. Among the highlights were: body image; safe use of hormones; accommodation difficulties; connecting with trans-inclusive health providers; social gatherings to break down isolation; and community education workshops.

The monthly meetings usually had at least twenty participants, and they generally had a guest speaker. TLC aimed to support both trans men and women, but the majority of regular participants were trans women. While there were points of common concern, there were also different issues confronting trans men and women, so Paré was not surprised that many trans men drifted in and out of the organisation.

Parallel to TLC, Anna Langley in 1995 created a document dubbed “The Good tranny Guide.” It compiled a list of support groups, friendly health practitioners, counsellors, stores, cafes, speech pathologists and beauticians from across Australia and even New Zealand. The 1998 edition included a foreword that discussed the legal and social inequalities confronting transgender people in Australia and New Zealand. It stated:

“All of these groups were open in their membership, but their members did not necessarily reflect all transgender Victorians. One important group of transgender people who generally did not join these organisations were sex workers. It is not that the group’s facilitators discriminated, but rather that sex workers who attended a few meetings felt that the leaders and participants did not understand their lives.

Transgender sex workers instead tended to socialise together and with members of Melbourne’s gay and lesbian community, especially in St Kilda and the south side of the city. Some also joined the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria, which later evolved into RHED: Resourcing health & Education, RhED and Vixen Collective continue to support TBG people within their wider advocacy for sex workers’ rights.”

A TLC brochure from 2002 stated:

“WE ARE NOT ABOUT TELLING PEOPLE HOW THEY SHOULD DEAL WITH THE DILEMMAS THEY ARE FACING, NOR THE PACE AT WHICH THEY SHOULD DEAL WITH THEM. NOR DO WE REQUIRE ANY PROOF OF ‘COMMITMENT’. WE ALL TRAVEL ALONG THIS ROAD AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS AND FACE DIFFERENT OBSTACLES. TLC AIDS TO SUPPORT ALL PEOPLE FACING THIS JOURNEY AND TO HELP THEM FIND THE STRENGTH AND KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES.”

The archival trail of newsletters from TLC ends around 2002. Yet, its legacy endures through spin-off groups (discussed below).

All of these groups were open in their membership, but their members did not necessarily reflect all transgender Victorians. One important group of transgender people who generally did not join these organisations were sex workers. It is not that the group’s facilitators discriminated, but rather that sex workers who attended a few meetings felt that the leaders and participants did not understand their lives.

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HISTORICAL FIGURES OF NOTE

DALE CRANE (HE/HIM)
VICTORIAN TRANS MALE ACTIVIST & FTM SHED COFOUNDER

JASPER LAYBUTT
HE/HIM
BOYS WILL BE BOYS FOUNDER

JONATHAN PARÉ
HE/HIM
VICTORIAN TRANS MALE ACTIVIST AND FOUNDER OF TRANSGENDER LIBERATION AND CARE

ORGANISATIONS

BOYS WILL BE BOYS
AUSTRALIA’S FIRST ORGANISATION FOR TRANS MEN

TRANSGENDER LIBERATION AND CARE
TRANS ADVOCACY, EDUCATION AND SUPPORT GROUP

RESOURCING HEALTH & EDUCATION (RHED)
SEX WORKER ACTIVIST GROUP

VIXEN COLLECTIVE
SEX WORKER ACTIVIST GROUP
In May 1997, the lesbian and gay rights organisation ALSO Foundation convened a public meeting with ten speakers from Melbourne’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formation of a Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (VGLRL). Modelling on what had been in place in New South Wales since 1988, Julie Peters was the only transgender speaker, and her speech noted the importance of the lobby including transgender people. At the end of the meeting, Julie Peters was one of two transgender people among the eighteen nominees for the VGLRL Steering Committee.

Through the course of 1997 the VGLRL Steering Committee debated the structure and aims for the organisation. Early on it became clear the group would focus on gay and lesbian issues, as the other transgender representative resigned from the steering committee. Peters continued and still hoped that it would become a Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Rights Lobby, but this did not come to fruition. When the VGLRL launched in October 1997, its media release stated: “The majority of members of the steering committee came to the position that the specific issue is one of sexuality, not gender. The Lobby’s focus should be discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. The steering committee recognised the need to work closely with the transgender Community and the need for a Transgender Lobby Group. To achieve these aims the steering committee recommends a closer working relationship and the establishment of a Transgender project to work towards a Transgender Lobby.”

Julie Peters subsequently issued a statement: “I’m very disappointed that the majority of people on the lobby steering committee did not believe it was politically wise to include the category “transgender”. I suspect the real reason was that they would be embarrassed taking a “transgendered” person along to meet a Liberal Minister. I’m also disappointed coalition politics isn’t more riddled with the sorts of divisions over pre-operative versus post-operative than other parts of the world. This is not to say that those rivalries and disagreements did not exist: rather, within representative advocacy organisations, there was a conscious effort at targeting discrimination which affected all gender non-conforming people.

VTRL formed in October 1998 as a subcommittee within TLC, and it included among its members people from Seahorse and Chameleon (the rebranded Elaine Barrie Project), as well as intersex people. Its founding document listed seven overarching objectives:

1. Legal recognition for all transgender Victorians
2. Protection from discrimination and harassment for transgender people, as well as those who identified as dressers or were only sometimes expressing a gender other than the sex assigned at birth
3. Inclusion of transgender people under the Equal Opportunity Act
4. Amendments to birth certificates for post-operative transgender people
5. Recognition of post-operative transgender people for the purposes of the Commonwealth Marriage Act
6. Federal anti-discrimination legislation to protect transgender people
7. To work alongside the VGLRL on matters of common concern or interest

The co-convenors of the VTRL, Kayleen White and Sally Goldner, prioritised lobbying for amendments to Victorian anti-discrimination laws. They considered that to be the vital first step towards expanding opportunities and respect for transgender Victorians, with many of the other objectives to flow after.

Very quickly, the VTRL leadership found that the arrangement as a subgroup within TLC was not working. TLC prioritised support for transgender Victorians and its leadership was hesitant to make waves that could jeopardise its apolitical nature. VTRL leaders were frustrated that when they wanted to make a comment to the media, they would need approval from TLC leadership. While well-intentioned, this delay meant that often they missed the news cycle.

The disagreement over media statements proved untenable, and in February 1999 the VTRL members resigned en masse, disbanding the group and pledging to re-form as an independent transgender rights organisation. While TLC expressed its disappointment with their protests, within months they buried the hatchet.

As the former-VTRL leadership was seeking a new way forward, they received support from the co-convenors of the VGLRL – the very group that initially did not include transgender people in its terms of reference. During the first half of 1999, the VGLRL conducted a community survey entitled “Enough is Enough”, asking about experiences of discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, provision of goods and services and policing. After some internal debates within the VGLRL, the working group coordinating “Enough is Enough” agreed to include transgender people in the survey. Although the response rate from transgender Victorians was small (only eighteen), their inclusion provided important data about the discrimination they faced. VGLRL co-convenors Kanton Miller and Janet Jukes also forged important relationships with transgender activists and would actively work alongside new transgender organisations. Indeed, transgender campaigners Kayleen White and Pipa Reeves became VGLRL members and would later represent the organisation Transgender Victoria on the VGLRL Elections Working Group.

In April and May 1999, the members of the former VTRL held a series of public meetings to discuss the formation of a new transgender rights group. That came to fruition at a public meeting chaired by Janet Jukes on 24 May 1999, when Transgender Victoria (TVG) was founded. Sally Goldner and Kayleen White became TVG’s co-convenors, and one of TVG’s first pamphlets listed its aims as to support reforms:

• to let us participate as active and responsible members of society
• to support the Commonwealth Marriage Act
• to promote understanding
• to work to decrease and prevent unfair discrimination, and, achieve acceptance and equal rights
• to support achieving equal opportunity in employment
• to support transgender wellbeing
• to achieve workable legal status and a reasonable right to privacy

TVG also identified four key areas of legislative and social reform: amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, birth certificates, marriage rights, and better management and medical treatment for transgender prisoners. TVG was still in its formative stage when proposed anti-discrimination laws quickly thrust the organisation into the spotlight in 2000.
At an event during Midsomma Festival in early 1998, Sally Goldner attended an ALP forum that featured the then-opposition leader John Brumby MLA. Goldner asked whether Brumby would commit a Labor government to anti-discrimination laws to protect transgender people. Brumby answered in the affirmative. When the election results were announced in September 1999, the ALP continued to base the case of anti-discrimination protections. Their biggest success was at a Meet the Candidates forum in South Yarra, where the ALP's Greens and Democratic Constitution candidates all affirmed their support for amending the Equal Opportunity Act to include transgender people. The Liberal sitting member for Prahran, Leonie Burke MLA, promised to facilitate a meeting between Premier Jeff Kennett, the incoming attorney-general and TGV as soon as possible in the event of a Coalition victory.14

The ALP won the 1999 election as a minority government with Steve Bracks the new premier. The government's main champion for LGBTIQ+ rights was Roberta Perkins MLA. Early on Hul's proposed a bill to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to add ‘gender identity’ as a protected category, along with another suite of amendments to replace the protected category of ‘lawful sexual activity’ with the less offensive terminology ‘sexual orientation’.

In March 2000, at the prompting of VGLL co-convenor Kenton Miller and former co-convenor Janet Jukes, Hul's office contacted TGV and advised that they were preparing to introduce the legislation. In April 2000 Hulls presented his bill to the Victorian Parliament, drawing on information prepared by TGV. TGK knew they would need to educate politicians, the media and employers about a whole raft of issues relating to transgender identity and disadvantage. Co-convenor Kayleen White designed a series of short biographies of four TGV members to humanise the experience of transgender Victoriaans. Hulls' amendments faced a shaky path through parliament, not so much because of the opposition, but because of the independence of the MLCs who supported the ALP's minority government. While two of them were willing to support the legislation, Russell Savage MLA was insistent on amendments to the bill which drew on false stereotypes about trans women. In particular, Savage wanted the definition of transgender narrowed only to those who had gender affirmation surgery. He expressed discontent with the possibility of dressers filing anti-discrimination claims if they could not dress at work, and drew on the myth of women dressing as men to gain access to toilets. Savage also wanted exemptions for schools and religious organisations.

Savage threatened to withdraw support for the Bracks Government, forcing Hul's to delay the legislation and reconsider Savage's amendments. Eventually a team of ALP negotiators convinced Savage to drop all his amendments except one: transgender people must be ‘bona fide’ in their gender identity. White TGV and other activists saw this insertion as somewhat demeaning, they accepted it because at least it was innocuous. Essentially, any transgender person in need of protection from discrimination was ‘bona fide’ in their identity.

Meanwhile, TGV formally launched on 26 April 2000 – almost two weeks before Hulls introduced the bill to parliament. Kayleen White's spokesperson noted that TGV's ‘interactive and informative’ website convinced them to support the legislation. Their biggest success was at a Meet the Candidates forum in South Yarra, where the ALP's Greens and Democratic Constitution candidates all affirmed their support for amending the Equal Opportunity Act to include transgender people. The Liberal sitting member for Prahran, Leonie Burke MLA, promised to facilitate a meeting between Premier Jeff Kennett, the incoming attorney-general and TGV as soon as possible in the event of a Coalition victory.15

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Savage threatened to withdraw support for the Bracks Government, forcing Hul's to delay the legislation and reconsider Savage's amendments. Eventually a team of ALP negotiators convinced Savage to drop all his amendments except one: transgender people must be ‘bona fide’ in their gender identity. White TGV and other activists saw this insertion as somewhat demeaning, they accepted it because at least it was innocuous. Essentially, any transgender person in need of protection from discrimination was ‘bona fide’ in their identity.

Meanwhile, TGV formally launched on 26 April 2000 – almost two weeks before Hulls introduced the bill to parliament. Kayleen White's spokesperson noted that TGV's ‘interactive and informative’ website convinced them to support the legislation. Their biggest success was at a Meet the Candidates forum in South Yarra, where the ALP's Greens and Democratic Constitution candidates all affirmed their support for amending the Equal Opportunity Act to include transgender people. The Liberal sitting member for Prahran, Leonie Burke MLA, promised to facilitate a meeting between Premier Jeff Kennett, the incoming attorney-general and TGV as soon as possible in the event of a Coalition victory.15

The ALP won the 1999 election as a minority government with Steve Bracks the new premier. The government's main champion for LGBTIQ+ rights was Roberta Perkins MLA. Early on Hul's proposed a bill to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to add ‘gender identity’ as a protected category, along with another suite of amendments to replace the protected category of ‘lawful sexual activity’ with the less offensive terminology ‘sexual orientation’.

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Perhaps embodying this spirit of cooperation was a conference held in 2000-01 that fostered alliances among transgender and intersex groups to support each other and the diversity within the TGD community. The period around 2000-01 was a time when Victoria's transgender population had diversified from being almost exclusively white in the early 1990s, to more inclusive in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds. Transgender women of colour from Asian, Pacific Islander and Latino backgrounds were a part of this growing diversity. The cohort of transgender sex workers also diversified from being almost exclusively white in the early 1990s, to more inclusive in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds. The hill was a time when there was a growing awareness of the need for greater inclusiveness among the transgender population.

The Victorian government was also taking steps to support the growing transgender and intersex population. In 2000, the Victorian state government established the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria, which included a Gender Identity Reference Group. The group was tasked with developing guidelines for employers around gender identity and gender reassignment. The group also produced a nine-page set of Guidelines for employers on Gender Identity, which were published the next year. The guidelines included information on how to support transgender employees, including recommendations on how to accommodate transgender employees in the workplace. The guidelines were an important tool for change and were used by many employers in Victoria to support transgender employees.

One of the early actions of the Bracks Government was to establish a transgender anti-discrimination bill. The bill was introduced in 2000 and passed in 2002, which made it easier for transgender people to seek legal protection against discrimination. The bill covered a range of discrimination, including workplace discrimination, housing discrimination, and public sector discrimination. The bill was an important step in protecting the rights of transgender people in Victoria, but it was only one of many reforms implemented by the Bracks Government to support the growing transgender and intersex population.

At the same time that the Victorian parliament was debating the transgender anti-discrimination bill, there was also a significant shift in the way that the media portrayed transgender people. In the early 1990s, the media often portrayed transgender people as being on the periphery of society, and as people who were struggling to be accepted. In the 2000s, however, the media began to portray transgender people in a more positive light, and as people who were contributing to society.

State Liberal politician Leanne Borke has offered to be a link between the transgender community and the Victorian Government to organise discussions over transgender law reform. Leanne Borke is the Liberal Opposition's spokesperson for Social Services and Gender Identity. Her comment is: “I will continue to talk to all members of the transgender community and will organise discussions with the new Attorney General on issues of concern,” she said.

Leanne Borke’s offer came after earlier comments at the media that the Victorian Government had not yet issued the new Attorney General on issues of concern. Leanne Borke said: “We’ve had enough discussion on this issue, but the need for the Victorian Liberal Government to show leadership in transgender community law reform is evident.”

Leanne Borke went on to say that the Victorian Liberal Government needed to show leadership on transgender community law reform. She said that the government needed to address issues such as workplace discrimination, housing discrimination, and public sector discrimination. She also said that the government needed to address issues such as employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and public sector discrimination.

Leanne Borke’s offer comes as the Victorian Liberal Government is about to introduce a new anti-discrimination bill that will cover a range of discrimination, including workplace discrimination, housing discrimination, and public sector discrimination. The bill is expected to be introduced in the Victorian parliament in the near future, and is likely to be supported by the Victorian Liberal Government.

The Victorian Liberal Government is also looking to support the growing transgender and intersex community in other ways. The government has announced that it will establish a new task force to look at ways to support the transgender and intersex community. The task force will be led by a team of experts, including transgender community members, and will look at ways to support the transgender and intersex community in the future.
“TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE INCLUDING TRANSEXUALS, INTERSEX PEOPLE AND CROSS DRESSERS, HAVE A DIVERSE RANGE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS. TRANSEXUALS, FOR EXAMPLE REQUIRE A RANGE OF HIGHLY SPECIALISED HEALTH SERVICES, INCLUDING SURGICAL PROCEDURES, HORMONE THERAPIES AND CO-OUTLING SUPPORT. THEIR NEEDS VARY ACCORDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL’S STAGE OF TRANSITION, WHETHER HE OR SHE IS PRE OR POST OPERATIVE AND INVOLVES NEGOTIATING LIFELONG TREATMENT REGIMENS. THEY ALSO VARY BETWEEN MALE-TO-FEMALE TRANSEXUALS AND FEMALE-TO-MALE TRANSEXUALS. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE GLBT HEALTH PLAN MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE WAYS IN WHICH SEXUAL OR BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE INTERVENES TO SHAPE THE PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS OF LESBIANS, GAY MEN AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS.”

The MACGLH produced its first two major discussion papers in March 2002.32 While the reports did include transgender issues, around the five focus areas, many transgender people were unhappy that the papers’ focus on mental, physical and sexual health were really about what Transgender Victoria called ‘secondary health issues’. In a long response to the discussion paper, TGV outlined key areas of transgender primary health overlooked in the MACGLH reports: counselling for people before, during and after transition; all aspects of the medical transition from hormones through to surgery; appropriate funding of the Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic and other gender centres; equitable and respectful treatment at hospital emergency wards. Transgender people continued to sit on the MACGLH, and by the 2010s it was being much more conscious of not just including, but building on the work of transgender health issues as distinct from LG&B concerns.

The other significant advisory group established by the Bracks Government was the Attorney-General’s Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues. The first focus of the transgender reforms was on birth certificates.

After 2000 Victoria was the only state or territory which did not have a process by which transgender people could amend their birth certificates or obtain a certificate of recognition in their affirmed gender. This placed transgender people at risk, for instance, if they were required to present a birth certificate for employment or other identification purposes.

While transgender people universally saw the importance of having an option to amend the gender on their birth certificates, or to obtain some sort of certificate of recognition (taken to what South Australia and Western Australia had in place), there were divisions within the transgender community over who should be allowed to change their birth certificates.

This historical moment c. 2002-04 was one of the few times that divisions within the transgender community threatened to derail reform.

Those divisions played out in community organisations such as TGV, with a breakdown of groups who had gender affirmation surgery forming a new association called Australian WOMAN Network. The Australian WOMAN Network argued that being transgender was a form of intersex variation and strongly believed that there should be no distinction made between cisgender women and trans women who had gender affirmation surgery. The Australian WOMAN Network mostly existed as a small, online group and did not expand substantially beyond its founding membership.

When it came to the birth certificate issue, some transgender people believed that anyone whose affirmed gender was different from their birth certificate should be allowed to change it, regardless of surgery. Others believed that surgery should be a prerequisite.

These debates played out within the community and stalled any progress with the government. Indeed, at one stage the Attorney-General Rob Hulls approved a proposal to permit transgender people to change their birth certificate even if they had not undergone surgery, so long as they had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, were on hormones, and could obtain statutory declarations from two doctors that they had been living in their affirmed gender for at least eighteen months.

According to The Age, resistance from other transgender community members, as well as gay and lesbian activists, led the Attorney-General to abandon this proposal.34

Finally, in 2004 Hulls introduced amendments to facilitate the change of birth certificates but only for those transgender people who underwent ‘sex affirmation surgery’, defined as ‘A SURGICAL PROCEDURE INVOLVING THE ALTERATION OF A PERSON’S REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS CARRIED OUT FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING THE PERSON TO BE CONSIDERED TO BE A MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX.’

This definition meant that trans men would have to undergo a hysterectomy, even though this was neither medically necessary nor desirable by many trans men. The document required statutory declarations from two medical practitioners verifying they had undergone gender affirmation surgery, or (where applicable) a certificate of gender recognition from interstate. The legislation also required the person to be unmarried, meaning those transgender people who were married were required to divorce before they could change their birth certificates. Like the 2000 amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, the legislation obtained broad support from across the parliament. Jenny Mikakos from the ALP explained the significance of the bill in the Legislative Council:

“AMONG THE MANY CHALLENGES THAT PEOPLE WITH TRANSEXUALISM FACE IS AN INABILITY TO HAVE THEIR BIRTH CERTIFICATE AMENDED TO SHOW THEIR AFFIRMED SEX, WHICH THOSE IN ALL OTHER JURISDICTIONS AROUND AUSTRALIA ARE ABLE TO DO. A BIRTH CERTIFICATE IS TO MOST OF US A FORM OF PAPERWORK SOMEWHERE AND IS PULLED OUT FROM TIME TO TIME WHEN WE APPLY FOR A PASSPORT, A JOB OR A BANK ACCOUNT. FOR TRANSEXUAL PEOPLES, HOWEVER, THIS DOCUMENT CAN BE A CAUSE OF EMBARRASSMENT AND POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION.”

Interestingly, Liberal MLC Andrea Coote supported the bill but argued that it did not go far enough to support intersex Victorians. She said:

“The intersex people believe the bill does not give them a choice. When they are born without the sexual chromosomes to make them either female or male and are assigned a gender at birth, they do not get a choice because the doctors at the time decide to give them that non-therapeutic irreversible treatment. They are not able to make an informed consent because they are small babies, therefore they believe this matter should have been dealt with better in the bill.”

ALP member Robert Smith, MLC also argued that he would like to see the bill go further by allowing those transgender people who could not afford surgery to change their birth certificates.35 Yet, he believed, like the transgender advocates who pushed the legislation, that this reform was an important step forward and could be built on in the future. That future would take some time, though: the framework for birth certificates introduced in 2004 remained in place until 2019.

The bill was indeed an important step and brought Victoria in line with the other states and territories. Yet, the law disadvantaged those transgender people who did not want or could not afford surgery. There were also transgender people with medical conditions that prevented them from being surgical candidates, and there was the problem that very few Australian surgeons even performed gender affirmation surgeries.

The law had disproportionate adverse effects for trans men. For trans men the best surgery to affirm gender, or assist with being read by others as male, was chest surgery or the reconstruction of the chest to appear more male by removing the breast tissue. The surgery for trans women needed the uterus to be removed, so that for many trans women the best surgery to affirm gender was to be secondary reproductive organs and did not include it as gender affirmation surgery.

A full hysterectomy was required, even though this did nothing to assist the person to appear more male. Some activists have called this hysterectomy requirement to change their birth certificate a form of forced sterilisation.
MEDIA AND TRANSGENDER VICTORIANS

Through the 1990s and into the early 2000s, media coverage of transgender issues broadly fell into three categories. The first were stories that covered political issues of the day, such as the debates over the anti-discrimination legislation. Generally speaking, this coverage across the mainstream press tended to be negative, notwithstanding some letters to the editor or opinion pieces that expressed colourful, transphobic views.

The second type of stories, when there were not any major legal or political issues, sensationalised transgender people to shock, mock or deride. Sociologist Dave King analysed British newspapers’ coverage of transgender people from 1950-83 and found that these were more common in the 1960s. These were more common in the 1980s. There were no questions about their gender. They were simply referred to as transgender people and were portrayed as a threat to society. The only thing stopping transgender people from joining the force was the prejudice of others. These stories were often about transgender police officers or transgender nurse advertisements.

The third type of story was the more respectful transgender human-interest story. These were more common in The Age or local newspapers, and they were needed to have an original hook. In June 2000, The Age ran a story about Will, a openly transgender candidate. The headline the following day, “Revolt on Swap Cop,” reported that a survey of readers – including police officers – revealed mass opposition to permitting transgender people to join the force.

Victoria Police, the state government, premier and Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria all stood by the anti-discrimination protections (though the then-opposition leader expressed his disapproval over permitting transgender people to join the force). The following year, The Herald Sun continued to refer to the transgender police officer as the “sex-swap cop” when reporting her graduation from the police academy.

The most comprehensive coverage of transgender issues was in the LGBTIQ+ press. There had always been inclusion of transgender voices in the mainstream press, and from the 1990s the most comprehensive Victorian publications were the weekly or fortnightly Melbourne Star Observer (1985-2000), MCV (2000-2018) and MCV (2000-2018). There were also a plethora of national magazines, smaller newsletters and a few transgender specific publications such as the Star Observer, the Sydney Gender Centre’s monthly magazine Palace.

These publications all printed opinion pieces from activists and, in addition to reporting on the legislative debates, covered some of the tensions between the transgender and gay and lesbian communities.

In 2003, for instance, one conflict between transgender women and radical lesbians went to the Victorian Civil Affairs Tribunal (VCAT). The organisers of the 2004 National Lesbian Festival and Conference (Lesfest), to be held in Daylesford, successfully applied to VCAT for an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Act to restrict the event to female participants only. They argued that this was a matter of security for cisgender lesbians, many of whom had been abused by men. The Lesbian organisers purported not to be against transgender women, arguing they could celebrate their transgender identities in other forums.

Not surprisingly, the transgender community erupted in opposition, affirming women’s identities as women. While there was some coverage in the mainstream press, this story became front-page news in the LGBTIQ+ press and there was deeper engagement with the perspectives of both the lesbian organisers and trans people.

Most letters published in the LGBTIQ+ press supported the trans women, with one arguing

“WHEN ANOPPRESSEDGROUPBECOMESANOPPRESSEDGROUP,SOMETHING IS FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG IN A SO-CALLED DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY”

and another asserting

“THAT WE AS A COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO MAKE TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX WOMEN FEEL UNWELCOME (OR IN THIS CASE, ACTIVELY EXCLUDE THEM) IS TO OUR GREAT SHAME.”

Shannon Dowd wrote an opinion piece in the magazine Lesbian in which she argued: “I see no reason why anyone, especially someone of the trans community, would want to be some sort of a threat to other women. LGTIs should be represented as a separate identity, one that is not defined by gender binary.”

Within a fortnight, VCAT reversed its decision because the Lesbian organisers had not informed the tribunal about a complaint from The Woman Network’s Karen Gurney. Gurney was reported as saying: “The strong support we received for our full acceptance as the women we are was particularly appreciated by people with transsexualism.” By the 2010s women who challenged trans women’s identities were prohibited from attending TG networks in any of the organisations of LGTIs. Because of the concerns, the Sydney difference in the Sydney Community Centre (SCC) was called Victoria Women’s Guild. Broadly speaking, though, TEPIP attitudes have not become part of the mainstream of Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ community.

There seems to be a notable lack of coverage, but there are several reasons why. The first is that, as was noted earlier, there is no trans community in Victoria. The second is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The third is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fourth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fifth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The sixth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The seventh is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The eighth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The ninth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The tenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The eleventh is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twelfth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fourteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fifteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The sixteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The seventeenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The eighteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The nineteenth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twentieth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-first is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-second is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-third is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-fourth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-fifth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-sixth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-seventh is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-eighth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The twenty-ninth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirtieth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-first is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-second is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-third is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-fourth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-fifth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-sixth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-seventh is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-eighth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The thirty-ninth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fortieth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-first is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-second is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-third is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-fourth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-fifth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-sixth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-seventh is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-eighth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The forty-ninth is that there is no trans community in Victoria. The fiftieth is that there is no trans community in Victoria.
By the 2000s, trans people were speaking and advocating for themselves through multiple associations. Transgender Victoria continued to advocate for legal rights for transgender people and would become more influential in the 2010s. Seahorse continued to operate as a group primarily supporting dresses, but it came to identify more explicitly under the transgender umbrella. Seahorse has continued the monthly meetings and also organises more informal gatherings at trans-friendly cafes and venues, such as DT’s in Richmond. Seahorse still hosts its annual ball, and they held very special thirty-fifth and fortieth anniversary balls in 2005 and 2015 and published a forty-fifth anniversary retrospective in 2020. Chameleons continued to advertise in the LGBTIQ+ press as a support organisation for all transgender people until 2011, though their regular meetings ceased sometime in the 2000s. Other transgender organisations or networks have come and gone over the years, and they have changed in their modus operandi. One was the Trans Melbourne Gender Project, which began in 2004 as an online forum and listserve to share announcements and information. In 2006 the Trans Melbourne Gender Project produced a twenty-one page information booklet titled “Q Gender Questioning,” targeting young people between ages sixteen and twenty-five who were questioning their gender identities. In May 2013 Andrew Eklund, Dale Crane (formerly from Boys Will Be Boys) and three others founded FTM Shed (now known as The Shed) as a peer support group for trans masculine identified people. This was the first Melbourne-based group for trans men since Boys Will Be Boys. The Shed aimed to build a supportive space for people through the sharing of their lived experience with each other. Over fifty people attended the first meeting, which had been held monthly.

The Shed runs a private Facebook group of over 900 members, a biannual program, annual camps throughout Victoria and a website offering STPs (stand to pee) and packing devices to assist trans masculine and gender diverse people to express their gender as best supports them.

Other more recent groups have been primarily on social media, such as Trans Pride – Melbourne or the national group Sitergrils & Brotherboys. Australia, supporting trans and gender diverse Indigenous Australians. The emergence of trans-organised groups challenged the authority that doctors had for so long wielded. No longer were psychiatrists able to frame the discussions around who was transgender. Instead, debates were evolving into how to support and empower transgender people, and this included thinking through new models of health care which centred the trans patients in an informed consent model. The move towards informed consent faced a serious setback when the trans patients in an informed consent model. Instead, debates were evolving into how to support and empower transgender people, and this included thinking through new models of health care which centred the trans patients in an informed consent model.

The Monash Gender Dysphoria Clinic was temporarily shut down and Trudy Kennedy was forced to resign, pending further investigation. Transgender regular meetings ceased sometime in the 2000s.

The year 2009 also saw the founding of the Australian and New Zealand Professional Association for Transgender Health (renamed the Australian Professional Association for Transgender Health or AusPATH in April 2018). AusPATH advocates for and educates health and allied health practitioners who work with transgender patients. The organisation also advocates for access to health care and education. The Shed aimed to build a supportive space for people through the sharing of their lived experience with each other. Over fifty people attended the first meeting, which had been held monthly.

The Monash Gender Clinic (renamed in 2016) and AusPATH have been mandated by trans-centric approaches to health care, but they still have been primarily run by cisgender allies (although more recently there have been more TGD people elected to AusPATH leadership positions). There were sporadic attempts at founding a trans-run health centre in Melbourne. In 2007 a working group ran a public meeting and online survey to discuss the possibility of founding a gender centre in Melbourne. Loosely modelled on Sydney’s Gender Centre, the Zoe Belle Gender Centre (later renamed the Zoe Belle Gender Collective) would be a trans-run organisation to provide health and wellbeing support to TGD Victorians. The organisation was named after transgender activist Zoe Belle, who was one of the major proponents of the centre who passed away in early 2008.

The Zoe Belle Gender Collective had the support of the ALSO Foundation, and before the 2010 election received in-principle support from the ALP (Greens and Australian Sex Party (now Fiona Patten’s Reason Party)). The ALP lost government that year, and the Zoe Belle Gender Collective has continued to operate primarily as an online suite of resources. Now working under the auspices of community health provider Cobham and with Youth Affairs Council Victoria’s Healthy Equal Youth (HEY) grants, the Zoe Belle Gender Collective offers diversity and inclusion training workshops and specific programs targeting TGD young people.

Through this whole period the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Health and Wellbeing continued to convene. In February 2013 the Minister for Health and Ageing and Minister for Mental Health established a Transgender and Intersex Health and Wellbeing Working Group. As its first task, the working group undertook a research study to scope health issues confronting transgender Victorians, focusing on the barriers to healthcare access, the policy environment around transgender health and the available services. The group published the “Transgender and gender diverse health and wellbeing Background paper” in 2014. This document laid the groundwork for developing and implementing new initiatives in Victoria for transgender healthcare and increased funding to support existing services.

In 2016, the then-Victorian AIGC Council (now Thorne Harbour Health) founded Australia’s first peer-led TGD health service: Equinox. The clinic came after lots of hard work from the VAC’s Trans and Gender Diverse Advisory Group and the VAC’s project lead for trans health, Jeremy Wiggins. Equinox provides GP services as well as support for sexual health and mental health. Its online resources provide information for GPs about working with TGD patients and prescribers.

Indeed, now more GPs are educating themselves about TGD health and have become more comfortable prescribing hormones. There are online training modules written by doctors like Ruth McNair, and several Victorian health networks subscribe to HealthPathways, which includes a section on trans health as a step-by-step resource for GPs. In June 2019, the Victorian Government announced plans to fund two more similar TGD health clinics: one in Ballarat and one in Preston. TGD Victorians including Wiggins are again being involved in the design and implementation of how these new clinics will operate.
The other major initiative to support TGD children and young people has attracted far more public attention: the Safe Schools Coalition. This was a program designed by Roz Ward (from the Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University) with two aims: to combat bullying, and to affirm young people’s diverse sexualities and genders. The program began in Victoria in 2010 and from 2013 went national with Trobe University) with two aims: to combat bullying, and to affirm young people’s diverse sexualities and genders. The program began in Victoria in 2010 and from 2013 went national with.
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Notwithstanding the increased transgender visibility and shifts in societal attitudes, TGD people continue to experience disproportionately high levels of violence and poorer mental health outcomes. TGD people have always faced threats of violence, whether that be intimate partner violence or hate crimes. Historically, many cases of physical assault—whether in the home or by strangers on the street—went unreported because transgender people feared police just as much as perpetrators.

As mentioned earlier, the 2000 VGLRL report “Enough is Enough,” examining discrimination confronting LGBT Victorians, found that 56 per cent of transgender respondents reported discrimination in their dealings with police.84 Perhaps Victoria’s most high-profile transgender victim of a hate crime was Adele Bailey, a sex worker who had gone missing in 1978 and whose remains were found in 1995. The coroner recorded an open finding over Bailey’s death in 1999, but there have always been allegations of police involvement in her murder and cover-up.85 Relations between the transgender community and police improved since the founding of the GLLO program (gay and lesbian liaison officers – later renamed lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex liaison officers) in 2000.

Research focusing on transgender people in Australia was thin on the ground even in the 1990s. Roberta Perkins’ 1994 study on Transgender Lifestyles and Relations between the transgender community and police improved examining discrimination confronting LGBT Victorians, found that 72 per cent of respondents had experienced some form of sexual harassment, verbal abuse, or other forms of violence.85

The 2006 Private Lives national survey found that 61.8 per cent of trans men and 36.4 per cent of trans women had been physically assaulted at least once in their lifetime, and 33 per cent had been sexually assaulted.84

The 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence explored cases of physical violence—whether at home or by strangers on the street—went unreported because transgender people feared police just as much as perpetrators.

The poor mental health outcomes are not because of innate illness or disorder about being transgender; rather, they are a consequence of societal attitudes and discrimination which have demeaned, demonised and disadvantaged TGD people.

One recent example is numerous transgender oral histories discuss as affecting their mental health was the 2017 marriage equality postal survey. National debates over marriage equality had begun raging in Australia since at least 2004, and by the 2010s a majority of public support was in favour of legalising marriage equality.

The Commonwealth Coalition Government policy called for a public vote on marriage equality, which they implemented over the period August-October 2017 in the form of a postal survey.85

Much of the ‘no’ campaign did not focus on the issue of marriage between same-sex couples, but instead targeted other, tangential topics: Safe Schools, gender fluidity, so-called religious freedom and the supposedly negative outcomes of marriage equality for children (while of course overlooking same-sex couples raising children, and those children who identified as LGBTQ+). Counselling services such as QLife, Drummond Street Services and Switchboard Victoria reported spikes in the number of calls and the detrimental effects that the marriage equality survey and debate was having on LGBTQ+ people.

Oral histories suggest that the ‘no’ campaign’s messaging was designed to distract, so generally did not engage with the specious arguments. ‘Yes’ campaigners instead focused the conversation on marriage and the positive message about equal love. Many people in the TGD community felt erased with so much of the ‘yes’ campaign being focused on ‘same-sex marriage’, rather than as marriage being between two people.

The ‘yes’ side won with 61.6 per cent of the vote nationally and 64.3 per cent in Victoria. The marriage equality legislation passed through the Commonwealth parliament on 7 December 2017. In the aftermath of the survey, though, some TGD and other LGBTQ+ activists have criticised the ‘yes’ campaign for not doing enough to combat the transphobic messaging of the ‘no’ campaign.

Marriage equality advocates wanted to channel much of the grassroots energy and campaign networks into a new national organisation for LGBTQ+ rights. In December 2018 the Equality Campaign, one of the chief drivers of the ‘yes’ campaign, relaunched as Equality Australia. Based in Melbourne, this organisation has already been working to support LGBTQ+ rights and reforms across the Commonwealth and state governments.

• transgender people aged eighteen and over were nearly eighteen times more likely to have thoughts of suicide.
• 57.2% of TGD people over age eighteen have had at least one 57.2% of TGD people over age eighteen have had at least one
• Transgender people were almost eleven times more likely than the general population to attempt suicide. The poor mental health outcomes are not because of innate illness or disorder about being transgender; rather, they are a consequence of societal attitudes and discrimination which have demeaned, demonised and disadvantaged TGD people.

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The poor mental health outcomes are not because of innate illness or disorder about being transgender; rather, they are a consequence of societal attitudes and discrimination which have demeaned, demonised and disadvantaged TGD people.
TGD visibility reached a significant tipping point in the mid-2010s, and since then there have been a plethora of programs, organisations, social media groups, activists and cultural events. Melbourne’s Midsumma program is awash in exhibitions, performances and social events highlighting the contributions of the TGD community. TGD performers and events run across the entire year, including the annual Midsumma Festival and gender diverse film festival since 2014. Events marking International Transgender Day of Visibility (1 March) and Transgender Day of Remembrance (20 November) have grown in prominence.

Melbourne’s LGBTIQ+ radio station 94.9 began hosting the program Transmission Time in February 1999, and the show celebrated its 400th episode in January 2012. Over the years, other TGD programs on 94.9 have included Trans P.O.V (Transgender Point of View) and the recent history podcast Transgender Warriors. Longstanding transgender activist Sally Goldner has also hosted Out of the Box community radio station VCR since 2005. Channel 31 program Bent TV regularly runs episodes discussing TGD issues, featuring community leaders, activists and artists. In 2014, Bent TV hosted a thirteen-episode series called “Trans-miss-ion”, exploring the lives of TGD people in Victoria. All of these programs are available to stream online or to download as podcasts.

The 2010s have also been a time of legislative reform and political change. The Australian Defence Force lifted its ban on transgender service in 2010, and in 2011 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade changed passport guidelines to allow citizens to nominate their gender without surgery, or use the marker ‘X’. The Commonwealth government amended the Sex Discrimination Act in 2013 to provide federal anti-discrimination protections on the grounds of sexuality, gender identity and intersex variations. Two former transgender activists from McGregor, Brenda Appleton and Sally Goldner, received Order of Australia (AO) awards as part of the 2019 Australia Day Honours.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHR) has consistently played a role to educate workplaces and the wider community about their obligations under the Equal Opportunity Act. In 2014 VEOHR published “Guideline: Transgender people at work” Compliance with the Equal Opportunity Act in employment.” Designed in conjunction with TOV, the guide and supplementary materials assist employers with supporting transgender employees. The supplementary materials include an application plan for transgender employees and a template for workplaces to design policies to support transgender people. In 2017 VEOHR published “Guideline: Trans and gender diverse individuals in sport”, with supplementary materials outlining common scenarios, policy templates and a shorter information guide called “The Basics.”

TGD inclusion is very much a part of the Andrews Government’s (November 2014-) agenda. The government appointed self-described “gender walker” Ro Allen as the state’s inaugural Gender and Sexuality Commissioner in July 2015. Allen and staff have worked across a range of government departments and with community stakeholders, private enterprises, statutory bodies and non-government organisations to advocate for and support the needs of TGD (and all LGBTIQ+) people.

Transgender Victoria CEO Brenda Appleton was appointed co-chair of the new Victorian LGBTIQ+ Taskforce in September 2015. Appleton was the first trans person to chair/co-chair a Government Taskforce in Australia. The Taskforce has representatives from across the rainbow alphabet and takes a holistic approach to advise the government on legislation, policies and programs affecting all LGBTIQ+ Victoriaans. The two working groups informing the Taskforce, focusing on health and human services and justice, also include TGD representatives.

The main legislative reform pushed in the last two terms of government was around birth certificates. In 2014 the Andrews Labor Government introduced legislation that would remove the requirements for TGD people to have surgery and to be unmarried to change their birth certificates. The legislation also would have introduced the option of a non-specified or non-binary gender and would allow the person to use their own wording to describe their gender identity. The bill passed the Legislative Assembly, but the opposition and part of the cross bench blocked its passage in the Legislative Council. The Legislative Council passed an updated bill in 2018, following the Commonwealth legislation of marriage equality, which removed the requirement that married people must obtain a divorce before they could change their birth certificates.

The November 2018 election returned the Andrews Government with an increased majority in the Legislative Assembly and a very different cross-bench in the Legislative Council. In June 2019 the government again tabled a bill to remove the requirement for TGD people to have surgery to change their birth certificates, and to introduce the option of non-binary gender marks.

The bill passed through the parliament in August 2019 with the support of the Greens and most independents (the Liberal-National Coalition again opposed the bill along with three Legislative Council minor party members). This reform brought Victoria in line with birth certificate legislation already passed in the ACT (2014), South Australia (2016), Northern Territory (2018) and Tasmania (2019). Within the first two weeks of the law going into effect on 1 May 2020, Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria received fifty applications to change record of sex. To put that in perspective in all of 2019 they received forty applications and in 2015 they received only twenty-four.

In February 2019 the Andrews Government also announced plans to introduce legislation to ban so-called conversion therapy, which numerous studies have found to be harmful to LGBTIQ+ people. In October 2019 the government began a consultation process to consider what sorts of practices should be banned and how the new legislation should be drafted and implemented. In November 2020 the government published its consultation paper. A bill to ban so-called conversion therapy passed the Legislative Assembly in December 2020 and the Legislative Council in February 2021, making Victoria the third Australian jurisdiction (after Queensland and the ACT) to ban conversion therapy practices.

In the TGD health space, the Andrews Government has also responded to community concerns and the growing demand for services. Both community members and allied health professionals associated with the publicly funded Monash Gender Clinic and Royal Children’s Hospital Gender Service have long lobbied for more funds. By 2015 the waitlists for an initial consultation at the Royal Children’s Hospital Gender Service were over a year. In June 2015 the Victorian Government announced a funding boost of $6 million over four years, and in April 2016 the government delivered a similar funding increase of $8.7 million over four years to the Monash Gender Clinic.

In 2018 the Victorian government committed $3.4 million dollars over four years “to expand the Victorian health system’s capacity to support trans and gender diverse people and ensure they get the healthcare they need.” Two of the three projects funded by this initiative are being run by a consortium led by Your Community Health. The first two are new multidisciplinary gender clinics, one in Preston and the second in Ballarat. The second initiative is a state-wide training program for health professionals focused on inclusive and responsive healthcare. This will assist clinicians across Victoria to provide better services for trans and gender diverse Victorians. The clinics have TGD peer navigators and the training includes TGD peer educators.

The third component is a million dollar partnership between the government and TOV to co-design a peer support program for TGD Victorians. The program is supported by an Expert Project Steering Committee, chaired by the Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities, Ro Allen. In March 2019 there was an initial,
The increase in transgender visibility internationally was mirrored with increased visibility in regional Victoria. In June 2015 Geelong hosted a two-day forum bringing together over 100 TGD young people, as well as a separate summit for GPs, psychologists and other trans health providers. The Geelong Advertiser also ran a feature about FTM Shed founder Andrew Eskend, while a 2018 episode of the ABC program Back Roads showcased trans woman Di Reeves in Violet Town.

Regional centres are increasingly hosting their own pride festivals and consciously including TGD people and events on their programs. More regional and rural organisations have also introduced LGBTIQ+ inclusion training modules, with the aged care sector a prominent site of training.

The 2010s also witnessed an intersectional turn within TGD advocacy and organisations. It is not that transgender activists or support groups actively excluded Indigenous or other marginalised groups. Yet, organisations were not making a conscious effort to consider the distinct challenges that might confront TGD people from Indigenous and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Oral histories recollect that the membership of transgender support and advocacy organisations before the 2000s was predominantly from Anglo-European backgrounds.

The First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum held on Magnetic Island, Queensland in 1999 (which did not have any Victorian representatives) made twenty-five recommendations. The majority focused on ways to promote access, awareness and outreach for sistergirls within government programs, education resources, LGBTIQ+ organisations and any Indigenous-run or other-service providers. Even so, it would not be until well into the 2010s – as there was increased visibility of sistergirls/brotherboys nationally – that Victorian transgender organisations were more proactively incorporating Indigenous perspectives in their decision-making and advocacy.

ORGANISATIONS

**TILDE**
TRANS FILM FESTIVAL

**SISTERGIRLS & BROTHERBOYS AUSTRALIA**
ONLINE SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUP FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE

**KEY ISSUES**

INTERSECTIONAL INCLUSION ACTIVISM
GREATER INCLUSION OF DIVERSE TRANS PEOPLE ACROSS CULTURAL AND INTERSECTING MINORITY BACKGROUNDS

**HISTORICAL FIGURES OF NOTE**

**BRENDA APPLETON**
SHE/HER
TRANSGENDER ADVOCATE

**RO ALLEN**
COMMISSIONER FOR LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITIES
**TIMELINE 1700s - 1970s**

**VIC AUS GLOBAL**

**1788** First Fleet commences European colonisation of the continent

**1879** Edward De Lacy Evans discovered to have been born Ellen Tremayne. Evans features in numerous newspaper reports and is forced to live the rest of their life as Tremayne

**1888** Gordon Lawrence arrested for being dressed as a woman at Melbourne’s Centennial International Exhibition at the Melbourne Exhibition Building.

**1889** Melbourne founded

**1891** Australian Colonies Federate

**1835** First mention of ‘transvestism’ in Australian newspapers.

**1888** Onwards men caught dressed as women charged either for ‘offensive behaviour’ or ‘vagrancy’. Women caught dressed as men charged as well, although not as frequently

**1901** Victoria founded

**1910** German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld publishes *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress*, for the first time identifying a category of ‘transvestism’ in Western discourse

**1912** First gender affirmation surgery performed on Danish woman Lili Elbe in Germany. She died from complications following surgery

**1912** First Fleet commences European colonisation of the continent

**1930-31** First gender affirmation surgeries performed on Danish woman Lili Elbe in Germany. She died from complications following surgery

**1936** Zdeněk Koubek from Czechoslovakia has female-to-male gender affirmation surgery

**1938** Former American GI Christine Jorgensen undergoes gender affirmation surgery in Denmark and becomes a global celebrity

**1953** Dr Harry Benjamin publishes *Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes*, outlining a medical model of transsexuality

**1960** Virginia Prince begins publishing magazine *Transvestia* in the USA

**1966** Compton’s Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco marks a turning point in transgender people fighting for rights.

**1966** Beaumont Society founded in UK as a social group for dressers

**1969** First gender affirmation surgery believed to have been performed in Victoria

**1969** Daughters of Bilitis (Melbourne) and Homosexual Law Reform Association (Canberra) founded as Australia’s first gay and lesbian rights groups

**1970** Stonewall Riots in New York City, begun by trans women of colour Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, mark the beginning of the modern LGBT rights movement

**1971** Seahorse founded in Sydney.

**1971** Present Corbett v Corbett case in UK sets common law precedent – later applied in Australia – that people can change their gender but not their biological sex

**1971** Present Corbett v Corbett case in UK sets common law precedent – later applied in Australia – that people can change their gender but not their biological sex
### TIMELINE 1970s - 1990s

#### VIC AUS GLOBAL

**1975**
- Gender clinic founded at Melbourne’s Queen Victoria Hospital. This would become the present-day Monash Gender Clinic.

**1976**
- Petition by Study Group for Legitimisation of Sex Reassignment calling for trans birth certificate reforms tabled in Victorian Parliament.

**1978**
- Report from Family Law Council notes the challenges of states implementing reforms to birth certificate laws in order for recognition of transgender people's affirmed genders.

**1979**
- Australian Transsexual Coalition founded by transgender women agitating for legal reforms around anti-discrimination and recognition of affirmed genders. They also ran the Victorian Transsexual Association Self-help group.

**1979**
- Elaine Barrie Project founded as a breakaway group from Seahorse.

**1975-77**
- Seahorse Victoria founded.

**1978**
- First Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

**1979**
- Victorian Transsexual Coalition founded by transgender person to agitate for legal reforms around anti-discrimination and recognition of affirmed genders. They also ran the Victorian Transsexual Association Self-help group.

**1980**
- Homosexual law reform passed, decriminalising consenting adult male sex. This also has the unintended consequence of ending prosecution of trans women for dressing.

**1981**
- First cases of AIDS diagnosed in the USA.

**1982**
- Roberta Perkins leads Australian Transsexual Association in Sydney and stages a public protest at a shopping centre.

**1983**
- ABC broadcasts documentary “Call of the Frock”, following transgender patients at the Melbourne Queen Victoria Hospital.

**1984**
- Reforms to passport regulations allow people who have undergone gender affirmation surgery to have passports issued in their affirmed gender.

**1985**
- Proposed legislation to recognise transgender people's affirmed gender floated but never introduced into parliament.

**1986**
- Lou Sullivan founds FIT International in the USA.

**1988**
- South Australia passes Sex Reassignment Act, allowing those who have undergone gender affirmation surgery to apply for a 'certificate of recognition' as a new identity document. This is the first state to introduce a mechanism to recognise transgender people's affirmed genders.

**1989**
- Toye de Wilde runs as an independent in Queensland state byelection. She is the first known openly transgender person to run for parliament in Australia.

**1990**

**1991**
- Boys Will Be Boys founded in Sydney as Australia's first trans men's group.

**1992**
- Melbourne branch of Boys Will Be Boys set up by Dale Crane.

**1993**
- ABC broadcast’s documentary “Whose Time has Come: A Movement Whose Time has Come”.

**1994**

**1995**
- Equal Opportunity Act amended to add 'lawful sexual activity' as a protected category, thus outlawing discrimination against LGBT people.

**1996**
- Julie Peters runs for seat of Batman in federal election for Australian Democrats and for Legislative Council province of Monash in the Victorian state election; she is the first openly transgender person to run for the federal and Victorian parliaments.

**1997**
- Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby founded. Despite input from transgender people, the steering committee decides not to include them in the remit.

**1998**
- Victorian Transgender Rights Lobby formed as a subcommittee of Transgender Liberation and Care until, finding the arrangement unworkable, the group disbands in early 1999.

**1999**
- Julie Peters holds foundational meeting of Victorian Transgender Rights Lobby.
Glossary
Adapted from the TGV Language Guide

Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD)
An umbrella term used to describe anyone whose gender identity or expression is different from that which was assigned at birth or is expected of them by society. This includes those who identify as: trans; transgender; transfeminine; transfeminine; trans and gender diverse; non-binary; cross-dressers; Sistergirls, Brotherboys, and other culturally-specific identities; as well as a variety of other gender labels. TGD people may or may not access services to medically transition – this is different for everyone, and there is no requirement for medical transition in order to be transgender and/or gender diverse.

Transgender
Transgender people have gender identities and expressions that differ from their assigned sex at birth (for example, someone who was assigned male at birth and is transgender may be female, genderqueer, non-binary, agender, or any other gender that is not male). Transgender is often used as an umbrella term, either on its own or as part of the larger term ‘trans and gender diverse’, but may also be used as a gender in and of itself.

Transsexual
Like transgender people, transsexual people have gender identities and expressions that differ from their assigned sex at birth. Transsexual is an older term originally coined by the medical profession, and commonly refers to someone who has accessed services to medically transition through the use of hormones and surgery. Transsexual people may more often identify with a binary gender of male or female. This is a term that some people now find offensive, but for others, it is an important identity label.

AMAB
Assigned Male At Birth.

AFAB
Assigned Female At Birth.

Trans Woman
A trans woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth. Some trans women prefer to simply be referred to as women, whereas others feel being trans is an important part of their gender label. Some trans women use terminology such as MTF/M2F (male-to-female/male-2-female), but for others these terms place too much emphasis on birth assigned sex and are considered offensive.

Transfeminine
A transfeminine person is someone who was assigned male at birth, but does not identify as male. Being transfeminine usually also means identifying with femininity in some way, but for some people may simply indicate a move away from their birth assigned gender. Someone who is transfeminine may be a trans woman, non-binary, genderqueer, agender, a Sistergirl, or many other gender labels.

Trans Man
A trans man is a man who was assigned female at birth. Some trans men prefer to simply be referred to as men, whereas others feel being trans is an important part of their gender label. Some trans men use terminology such as FTM/F2M (female-to-male/female-2-male), but for others these terms place too much emphasis on birth assigned sex and are considered offensive.

Transmasculine
A transmasculine person is someone who was assigned female at birth, but does not identify as female. Being transmasculine usually also means identifying with masculinity in some way, but for some people may simply indicate a move away from their birth assigned gender. Someone who is transmasculine may be a trans man, non-binary, genderqueer, agender, a Brotherboy, or many other gender labels.

Genderqueer
A gender that falls outside of male and female categories. Genderqueer people may describe themselves as masculine, feminine, androgynous, non-binary, bi-gender, multi-gender/pan-gender, agender, transgender, another gender label, or simply as genderqueer.

Non-Binary
Non-binary refers to any gender that falls outside of the categories of male and female. It is usually a descriptive term added to gender labels such as transgender/trans and genderqueer, but some people simply use non-binary to describe their genders. Some non-binary people may partially identify with a binary gender, and self-describe as a “non-binary woman” or “non-binary man”.

Androgyne/Androgyinous
Someone who is androgyne, or an androgyne, is neither male nor female but instead has a gender that often combines traits traditionally labelled as masculine and feminine. Androgynes may identify as “in-between” male and female, or as a separate gender altogether.

Agender
An agender person is someone who has no gender. Agender people may also be transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, or another gender label.

Bi-Gender/Multi-Gender
Bi-gender and multi-gender people are people who have multiple genders (bi-gender people have two genders, multi-gender many/more than two different genders). Bi-gender and multi-gender people may experience different genders from day to day, and may use different names, pronouns, gender labels, and ways of presenting (clothes, jewellery, etc) to express this.

Genderfluid
Genderfluid people are people who shift between different genders, or expressions of gender. Some genderfluid people may also be bi-gender or multi-gender, but others may not have two or more established genders which they move between, and instead may experience many different genders that change in a more fluid fashion.

Cross-Dresser/Dresser
A cross-dresser is someone who dresses in clothes typically assigned to the “opposite” gender, but does not necessarily live full-time as that gender. Instead, cross-dressing is often a part-time way of exploring gender. For some people, cross-dressing is a beginning step to transitioning, but for others it is an important way to honour feelings about their gender without requiring transition. Some trans people find the term cross-dresser offensive and prefer just dresser.

Sistergirl
Sistergirls are Aboriginal transgender women (assigned male at birth) who have a distinct cultural identity and often take on female roles within the community, including looking after children and family. Many Sistergirls live a traditional lifestyle and have strong cultural backgrounds. Their cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs are pivotal to their lives and identities.

Brotherboy
Brotherboys are Indigenous transgender people with a male spirit, whose bodies were considered female at birth. Brotherboys choose to live their lives as male, regardless of which stage/path medically they choose. Brotherboys have a strong sense of their cultural identity.

Cisgender
A cisgender person is someone who identifies with the gender that was assigned to them at birth. For example, a cisgender (or cis) woman is someone who was assigned female at birth and currently identifies as female.

Pronouns
Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone when not using their name. Common pronouns are she/her/ hers, they/them/their, and he/him/his. There are many other pronouns that people use, and it’s important to ask before assuming. Some people may use different pronouns depending on their gender that day, or the environment they’re in, or who they’re with. It’s important to follow people’s lead.
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