



# Supporting your LGBTQ Staff While They Work from Home



While your staff are working from home during the COVID-19 you may think that the LGBTQ community won't be vulnerable to workplace bullying and harassment, but it can raise other issues that may impact the wellness of your teams. This factsheet gives some insights into issues you may not have considered and support available. [Dealing With Stress And Anxiety](#) will be something everyone must practice.

## 1. LGBTQ Staff in Unsupportive Households

Some staff who are out and open about their gender, trans experience or sexuality at work may not be in a supportive household, or may not be out to those within their home. This burden of not being open about themselves for an extended period due to the current distancing measures could cause additional stress, as they won't have their social "safe places" to go, including being at work with allies<sup>(1)</sup>.

Regular check-ins (without specifically mentioning the gender and sexuality diverse communities in case family members are in earshot) will be crucial, as well as encouraging social connections through social media and phone calls etc. if it is safe for them to do so.

## 2. Staff Who aren't Out at Work

Some staff may not be out at work. Currently there is an expectation that people work from home and those individuals may feel compromised as the boundaries between their home and work life blur. You may need to consider flexible dial in options for staff who can't or won't use video conferencing. You can also encourage staff to use the 'blur background' option available on some web video platforms. A supportive statement from leadership letting staff know that households and families of all varieties, including those that are home for people of diverse genders and sexualities, are celebrated.

## 3. Increased Risk of Violence

At times such as this, the risk of violence within households can increase. This can be due to extra stress, excess drinking or drug use at home and "cabin-fever". Violence can come from intimate partners, carers and/or family members. This is also true of sexuality diverse couples or in an unsupportive household.

LGBTQ-specific resources can be found at [Say it out loud](#) with support services specific to the LGBTQ communities. There is also a [Bystander Checklist](#) if you see or suspect abuse, assisting you recognise, respond and recover to the incident.

## 4. Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Staff

Trans and gender diverse staff may have increased anxiety at this time due to fears that they may not be able to access the healthcare and other services needed, such as access to affirming medication, or appearance modifiers such as hairdressers, waxing and hair removal.

1: Carmen et al (2020), Covid-19; impacts for LGBTIQ communities and implications for services.

ACON's [TransHub](#) includes advice for trans people to ensure ongoing access to what they need in relation to gender affirmation. Equinox Gender Diverse Centre have also confirmed with relevant pharmaceutical companies that supply issues are not expected for gender affirming hormones. TransHub also offers advice to individuals when their gender isn't reflected accurately on their Medicare records.

Additionally, surgical interventions for trans people have been postponed or cancelled. This can have a profound impact on any trans staff who may have been awaiting surgery for many years.

## 5. Medication Shortages

As mentioned above pharmaceutical companies in Australia have confirmed adequate supplies of medication for gender affirmation. Medications used for HIV prevention and HIV treatment are not expected to have supply issues. For those in regional and rural areas, where supply may be an issue, some pharmaceutical companies are working with community chemists to supply packs to get medications directly to the community via Australia Post. If you are experiencing any supply issues please get in contact with us, or your local organisation such as Positive Life NSW. It is only recommended that you keep up to a month supply of medications. See [NSW Health advice](#) on medications.

## 6. Maintaining Relationships – Social and Sexual

While we are being asked to be physically distant from one another, it is very important that social relationships are maintained, but in a different form. LGBTQ people may be estranged from their biological family, and may or may not live with partner/s. This can lead to social isolation from peers, so online and other non-physical forms of contact are encouraged. ACON advises against [casual sex](#) at this time, and provides alternatives for [maintaining a sexual relationship](#) at a distance.

## 7. Drugs and Alcohol

Like any other community, sexuality and gender diverse people might use drugs and alcohol as a crutch during times of stress. However, without the social support to limit usage, the lack of a need to be the 'designated driver' by drinking at home, and the higher rates of usage within the LGBTQ population, use of alcohol and drugs may become difficult to manage. [Pivot Point](#), ACON's dedicated resource for information and support relating to alcohol and drug use, and offers information for those who may use COVID-19 restrictions as [an opportunity to change](#) their behaviours.

## 8. Maintaining General Health

Some LGBTQ people already report poorer health outcomes and negative experiences with the medical profession, due to discrimination and stigma. It has also been reported that visits to GPs and other health professions are dropping while people avoid them due to fear of catching COVID. It is important for all people to maintain healthy care routines during this time. The new Telehealth services available from GPs, allied health workers, nurses etc should improve access.

## 9. Staying prepared

It is recommended that all people plan in advance in case they get sick. This can be particularly pertinent for trans people who have Medicare and other identity documents that are out of date. This plan should be shared with loved ones, and even formalised into a Power of Attorney, Advanced Care Plans and Enduring Guardianship. Some assistance is available at the [NSW Trustee and Guardian](#) (and other government sites).

Of course much of this information will not be unique to LGBTQ people, but the support they feel most comfortable accessing will most often be LGBTQ specific services. A full list of supports available can be found on [ACON's COVID-19 clearing house](#) page.

**For any queries or support please contact [Claire Allen](#), National Program Manager, Pride in Health + Wellbeing (0419 583 034)**