

## I think I'm Trans, what next?

Wow, that's awesome, congratulations on taking the step of looking at yourself and your gender. Working out what gender identity and expression fits one best can bring challenges, joys, and great meaning to people's lives. This resource includes some specific things for Victoria, Australia, as well as some more general resources. A few things you might consider:

- *Do some research – Online, books, asking experts.*
  - We love – Trans101 (Minus 18 video online), *Gender Outlaw* (and the sequel *Gender Outlaws*), <https://www.transhub.org.au/> and <https://transgendervictoria.com>
  - You might also follow some trans rights activists, educators or performers on Youtube, Instagram, Twitter or Facebook.
- *Talk to people*
  - We'd recommend trusted friends/family, a counsellor (like me), or a trans or gender diverse peer/friend
  - Join one of the many trans and gender diverse peer groups, like The Shed, TGV, Seahorse Victoria, or Transmission
- *Take your time*
  - Sometimes it can feel like there is pressure to do a lot, or take big steps quickly. It's an exciting time!
  - We recommend taking things a bit slower, being conscientious in who you tell and how, and easing yourself into trying things to help express your gender. There's no 'correct' pace, just what works best for you, given your history and circumstances.
- *Learn the language*
  - Gender Euphoria – The joy, satisfaction, comfort or ecstasy in expressing or feeling your gender
  - Gender Dysphoria – The pain, dissatisfaction, discomfort or distress in the difference between your gender identity and gender expression, often aspects of birth-assigned gender
  - AFAB = Assigned Female at Birth      AMAB = Assigned Male at Birth
  - Transgender = Identify as *different* gender from that assigned at birth
  - Cisgender = Identify as *same* gender as that assigned at birth

### Affirming Your Gender

There are lots of ways to express your gender, and different things work for different people. The process of expressing your gender in a way you like is often called 'Transition'.

**Social Transition** – Includes appearance (e.g. hairstyle, accessories, clothes), gendered behaviours, name, pronouns (commonly he/him, she/her, they/them). It might include legal/government changes like your Medicare card or Passport, or really personal things like how you have sex.

**Physical/Medical Transition** – Includes anything involving medical professionals, like accessing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), surgery, voice alteration, etc. Around Australia, there are still laws around recognition of gender on birth certificate requiring Bottom Surgery.

## Medical Affirmation

Mainstream society puts a lot of focus on medical transition for transgender people, and for many trans folks it is an important part of the journey. For others, they choose not to involve medical transition, are unable to, or access a mixture of some actions and not others. Time, money, and government/medico-legal bureaucracy are just some of the barriers to medical affirmation. Only you can work out what's right for you and your body, and good medical professionals will aim to support your choices to be well-informed. The main medical pathways are HRT, 'Top Surgery' (mastectomy + chest reconstruction OR breast augmentation), 'Bottom Surgery' (variety of genital and gonadal surgery), or 'cosmetic surgery' (facial, hair removal, etc.). The international organisation WPATH recommends one letter from a trained clinician for HRT or Top Surgery, and two letters (two clinicians) for Bottom Surgery.

The current climate: Over the decades, transgender care has changed and developed, so here are the pathways to medical affirmation as of 2022.

1. Informed Consent Model: Equinox and some Northside Clinic GPs.
  - a. Based on Self Determination model, GP handles assessment, medication, and only refers to psychologists/psychiatrists if mental health needs extra support.
2. GP refers to Private Psychologist for Assessment: Many GPs still require a psychologist/mental health worker trained in transgender care to assess a client (do they understand the risks and benefits of the medical procedure? Is the aim of this procedure to affirm their gender, different to their gender assigned at birth?), then send a letter approving them as having informed consent for HRT.
3. Multidisciplinary team of psychologists, psychiatrists, and other support: Monash Gender Clinic.
  - a. Monash have expertise to serve clients with more needs, in order to reduce risks of poor outcomes, and effectively manage them if they happen.

Juniper at Melbourne Queer Psychologist aims to contribute within point 2 above, helping clients who'd like medical affirmation through information, support, and informed consent letter-writing.

Andy Ives, Cheng Hean Lo, Patrick Briggs, and Gideon Blecher are the main surgeons in Melbourne doing Gender Affirmation surgeries currently. There are other options interstate and internationally, depending on the surgery and financial access.

## Counselling Options

Whatever stage you're at with exploring gender, you might benefit from supportive counselling or psychotherapy. The work you do might be specifically related to gender, or gender might just be one facet that informs other issues that you're keen to change or improve.

If you're looking for medical affirmation and going through that process with Juniper, we'd recommend considering accessing counselling with a different clinician. This is because conflicts can arise when the same person who is writing a letter for you is also doing therapy with you. Ask us about options, as we may be able to provide support and referral.

### **Local Community Resources**

*If you're under 18 –*

- Join Minus18 and check out their wonderful queer events
- Enquire with Royal Childrens Hospital Gender Service
- Get your family involved with a parent/family group, such as Transcend or Parents of Gender-Diverse Children

*Under 25 –*

- Join Ygender, the key youth led trans peer group
- Join university Queer departments
- Explore online groups to share resources, learn more, connect

*Over 18 –*

- Check out Thorne Harbour Health, Transgender Victoria, ZBGC, and ACON (in Sydney)
- Pick up a copy of Archer magazine, go to a Queerstories event, or Hares and Hyena's bookshop for a variety of community activities
- FTM Shed is wonderful for transmen and masc folk, Seahorse Victoria have been running meetups for TGD folk for a long time, Transmission meets regularly, and many more groups appear all the time.