



THE TRANS AGEING AND CARE (TrAC) PROJECT

Dignified and inclusive health and social care for older trans people in Wales

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY PRACTICE AND SERVICE MORE TRANS INCLUSIVE?

Guidelines for Social Workers

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH:

Not much is known about trans people's health and social care needs in later life. The little research that there is on the needs of trans adults has often focussed on access to healthcare and gender affirming treatments, but with little attention on trans ageing. The Trans Ageing and Care Project was a two-year mixed-methods study of trans individuals' health and social care needs, expectations and concerns in later life. The main objective was to better understand what the health and social care needs are of trans adults 50+ years, and to explore whether current health and social care services and professionals are meeting those needs in Wales.

Our aims were: 1) To identify the health and social care needs of trans people aged 50+ and their hopes, expectations and concerns about service provision in older age; 2) To examine attitudes and perceptions of health and social care professionals working with older people towards older trans people; and, 3) To produce digital stories and guidelines for health and social care practitioners on supporting older trans people in later life.

WHAT DID WE DO?

We spoke to 22 trans individuals in 2-part interviews about their experiences of health and social care services. We conducted an online questionnaire with 165 respondents employed in Welsh health and social care services (including GPs, medical staff, nurses, social workers, managers and administrators) to ascertain their views and attitudes on this topic.

In addition, we facilitated three workshops across Wales to bring together trans community members and health and social care professionals (including social workers) to identify areas for change for making services more trans-inclusive. Based on our findings, we've put together the following guidelines to make your practice and your service really trans-inclusive, person-centred and anti-discriminatory.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW AS A SOCIAL WORKER?

It's important to adopt a life-course perspective when working with older trans individuals to be able to recognise key turning points in their journey to transitioning to an affirming gender. An individual's understanding of their gender identity and how they express this may change across their lifetime and may continue to change in later life. It's also important to recognise that not every older trans individual is seeking to transition in gender or access gender affirming treatments. An increasing number of older trans adults are identifying as non-binary or genderqueer and not identifying with a fixed gender identity (man/ woman, feminine/masculine). Some individuals may identify as cross-dressers and not be invested in gender transitioning. Equally, do not assume that all individuals who have received gender affirming treatment may identify as trans. Some people will have transitioned at earlier points in their life and may not wish to discuss or share this.

A psychosocial approach to an assessment of an older individual's care and support needs will bring a deeper understanding of the key psychological and social factors that have impacted on a person's wellbeing, their relationships to others and understanding of their identity. Social factors include recognition of the stressors an individual may experience from living in a cisnormative society where gender is narrowly defined according to two sexes in a fixed binary. This can result in many individuals enduring a lifetime of experiencing misgendering – that is, being addressed by the former gender -, being outed as trans by others or encountering transphobic attitudes, abuse and discrimination in work, at home or in their local community. Psychological factors include the ways an individual

has learnt to cope with these stressors over time, who they look to for emotional and practical support within their social network, and how they define and describe their gender identity in the past and currently.

When trans people seek to transition in later life, they may encounter ageist attitudes from health and social care professionals. Do not assume that trans individuals are too old to access gender affirming treatments – age alone should not be a barrier. Some trans individuals have waited a long time (sometimes, their whole life) to start this journey and deserve equal treatment and support as younger clients.

Transitioning in later life may hold different meanings for different people, depending on their experiences and the resources available to them, for example financial. For some trans individuals this can represent a new lease of life and bring new opportunities to live their life as who they are. For others, barriers encountered in accessing gender affirming treatments may result in a continued sense of frustration and delay. This can sometimes foster a perception that they are running out of time to enjoy their life as who they are. Accessing gender affirming treatments and gender identity clinics can be expensive, even when funded through the NHS, and some older individuals may struggle financially, particularly if relying on a state pension.

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Older trans individuals may have lived with a lifetime of being misgendered by others or encountering transphobic or discriminatory responses, including from social care and healthcare professionals. Equally, some individuals may have lived long periods of their life in 'stealth' and not have discussed their trans identity with others. These difficult experiences can accumulate over time and diminish an individual's confidence in others. Consequently, some trans individuals may not trust helping professionals or be reticent to discuss personal information and life-experiences. Therefore it may take time to build rapport and trust with new clients who identify as trans and for new clients to feel confident in social workers.

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Trans peer groups and network online and in local geographical communities may be highly valued by a lot of trans individuals. Across their lifetime, older trans individuals can look to trans peers for support on a whole range of levels. This may include practical support with navigating healthcare systems and moving forward in receiving gender affirming treatments, knowing how to access available services, advice

dress and presentation, where to find information about gender transitioning, or more emotional support with speaking to spouses, partners and loved ones about their gender identity and transition journey. Social workers need to identify and support trans peer groups as an important source of support for trans clients.

Equally, social workers need to understand that it may take time for individuals to build up confidence to access groups and speak to other trans individuals. This may not be a quick process.

Later life can bring with it a number of anxieties for trans individuals about how they will be treated by social care practitioners if they require care services or need to move into long-term care in the future. Some trans individuals may have worries about living with dementia and losing control over day-to-day decision-making and their personal choices, such as what clothes to wear and how to dress. Others may be worried about aspects of personal care being neglected by care staff, such as the importance of regular shaving or the taking of prescribed hormones. Some individuals will anticipate discriminatory treatment if care staff see surgical scars on their bodies while providing personal, intimate care. The views and attitudes of other residents or staff in long-term care environments may also be a major concern. Trans older individuals can be highly vulnerable in these care settings and isolated from others.

WHAT CAN I DO AS AN INDIVIDUAL?

1. When you meet a client who identifies as trans, it is useful to ask them how they would define themselves and then ask what this means to them personally. This is an excellent starting point to develop a good rapport.

2. Accessing continuous professional development is essential. Stay up to date on current groups and services available for trans and gender diverse individuals in your local area. Be informed about gender identity pathways available that are of interest to the trans individual you are working with. Remember that not all individuals are seeking to transition or to access gender affirming treatments.

3. Check your sources – be aware of media bias on reporting of trans issues. Local trans groups, networks and services may be a more valuable and reliable source of information.

4. Take professional responsibility for staying up to date on trans inclusive information and services – it is not the responsibility of trans individuals to educate health and social care professionals or find out information on services and treatments available. Stay informed about gender affirming treatments and services available through the NHS.

5. Speak out when you hear comments from other colleagues and professionals that misgender trans individuals (i.e. do not use a person's correct name or gender pronoun), that dismiss their views and experiences, or that suggest

trans patients and clients are not deserving of NHS or local authority support – these negative comments are discriminatory, unethical and not in keeping with the Equality Act 2010.

6. Trans inclusive care means keeping the individual client at the heart of good care – listening to and respecting their views and wishes. It's okay to ask questions if an individual client knows they are being supported and listened to.

7. Respect a trans individual's privacy and do not share personal information without their consent – individual clients should have control over how and when they share personal information about themselves.

8. Do not assume that being trans is relevant to every health or social care problem. Trans identities and histories may not always be relevant or related to the person's presenting needs and concerns.

9. Think beyond diagnoses of gender dysphoria – this mental health diagnosis is not relevant to all trans individuals and for some individuals it can carry a stigma or a negative connotation.

10. Check out what support and guidance individuals may need with supporting significant others such as spouses, partners or family members. Sometimes trans individuals may not need social support themselves but would value some guidance on how to support other important people in their lives.

WHAT CAN WE DO AS A SERVICE?

1. Organise trans inclusive training and professional development sessions for team members in your service. Speak to local trans groups and networks about involving trans individuals in the delivery of training, because these are the real experts. Be prepared to offer full remuneration for community members' time and involvement in training. This should not be assumed to be free or voluntary.

2. Take the time to assess how inclusive your service is to trans individuals. This starts with friendly and welcoming attitudes from front-of-house and duty staff, provision of information on local trans support and services in reception and waiting areas, and the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms and signage for all staff and clients. Consider asking team members to wear name badges indicating their preferred gender pronoun.

3. Take a zero-tolerance stance on expressions of transphobia or misgendering by staff and people accessing your service. Make this clear to all (staff and clients) in agency policies on equal treatment and diversity.

4. Maintain up-to-date client records that accurately reflect the correct names, titles and gender pronouns of individual clients. If unsure check with the individual concerned in a respectful and private manner.

5. Keep delays to a minimum when making referrals for trans individuals or seeking out relevant information. Some people have experienced a lifetime of delay; waiting and further delays can impact negatively on a person's mental wellbeing.

HOW CAN I BE A BETTER ALLY?

1. Reach out to trans local groups and networks in your area or health board – invite consultation on how your service can be more trans-inclusive and aware. Offer remuneration for any consultancy provided. Show support by offering resources, e.g. making a meeting space available or assisting with advertising the group online.
2. Support trans community events and celebrations, such as Trans Pride, Pride Cymru or Swansea Sparkle. Have a presence at these events and promote your service to trans individuals in your local community.
3. Read some of the information below and share with others in your team. Watch our digital stories online and discuss these as a team during a meeting or away day. Digital stories can be accessed here: <http://trans-ageing.swan.ac.uk/>

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AUTHORS:

Dr Paul Willis (School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol) and Dr Christine Dobbs & Dr Michele Raithby (College of Human and Health Sciences, Swansea University).

 paul.willis@bristol.ac.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING:

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