


# Sexuality, sex and gender identity

## Why it's important

*Gender* is not the same as *sex* or *sexuality*. *Sex* refers to the way our society currently categorises people according to biology. Common terms include female, male, intersex and transgender. *Gender* relates to roles, expectations and behaviours that our society identifies as being masculine or feminine. *Gender identity* is the way in which people personally express their gender and can be predominantly masculine, feminine or anywhere between or outside of these two positions (i.e. 'gender queer'). *Gender identity* need not necessarily 'match' one's biological 'category' (male/female).

Gender, gender identity, sex and sexuality interact strongly and are linked with health outcomes. For example:

- Women generally live longer than men but are more likely to suffer from long-term disability and chronic diseases
- Risk taking behaviour is the 'norm' among males and contributes to higher mortality rates before mid-life. Men are more prone to accidents and more likely to be involved in violent incidents
- Women tend to have less access to, and control over resources, their bodies and their lives than do men
- Historically women have been subject to discrimination and gender role stereotyping leading to social exclusion and poor mental health
- Men are more likely to commit suicide than women
- Transgender, intersex and gender queer persons often experience significant emotional distress and mental health concerns due to gender identities that do not conform to dominant social expectations
- Women are far more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence and sexual assault
- Women continue to carry most responsibility for raising children, caring for disabled or frail family members, and housework. If employed, they usually earn less than men. These factors can contribute to poor health
- Men are more likely to be the principle earner in the family and this role may take them away from spending time with their families and/or children, often resulting in stress and unrealistic expectations
- Men and women have different patterns of disease and may experience different symptoms for the same medical conditions. Research and treatments have also traditionally been modelled on male biology, however men's and women's responses to treatment can also vary.



*"Women do 70% of the world's work:  
yet receive 10% of the world's income  
and own just 1% of the means of  
production. Are you ok with that?"*

*Quote from 'Are you ok with that?' campaign, 2011*

## Why are sexuality, sex and gender identity issues for the health of Tasmanians?

### Life expectancy for males is lower than females

Women live longer than men. The 2012 life expectancy of Tasmanian females was 82.6 years while for males it was 78.7. These figures are lower than the Australian average of 83.1 years for females and 79.7 years for males. Life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians was 73.7 years for females and 69.1 years for males.<sup>1</sup>

### Causes and rates of death and disease differ

There are biological differences between men and women that lead to distinctive health outcomes. The 5 leading causes of death for females are: Coronary Heart Disease, Cerebrovascular Diseases, Dementia and Alzheimer Disease, Lung Cancer and Breast Cancer; causes of death for males are: Coronary Heart Disease, Lung Cancer, Cerebrovascular Diseases, Prostate Cancer and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.<sup>1</sup>

### Men and women behave differently

Males are more likely to smoke, consume alcohol at risky levels, and be overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup> While lung cancer incidence and mortality among males has declined steadily since the 1980s (due to the declining rate in daily tobacco smoking), for females, lung cancer incidence and mortality continue to rise.<sup>1</sup>

### Males are more likely to commit suicide

Tasmania's suicide rate (the second highest in the country) involves a considerably higher number of males at a rate of 23 compared to the rate of 7 per 100,000 for females.<sup>3</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people have significantly poorer mental health and higher rates of suicide than other Australians.<sup>4</sup>

### Gender discrimination occurs in Tasmania

In 2014-15 the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner reported that gender discrimination was among the top five most common discrimination complaints. Complaints also related to pregnancy, sexual orientation, family responsibilities and breastfeeding.<sup>5</sup>

### Women are more likely to be victims of violence

Data shows that around 11% of Tasmanian women experience violence. Women with a disability are more likely to experience violence.<sup>6</sup>

### Some of us access health services less frequently

Men seek help and use health services less frequently than do women.<sup>7</sup> LGBTI community members are also less likely to access health services, often because they lack confidence that the system will respect their needs and/or their identity.<sup>8</sup>

### Men are more likely to go to prison

In June 2014, males comprised 93% of the total prisoner population in Tasmania.<sup>9</sup> Incarceration has a significant impact on health and wellbeing.

### We should do better

Overall, in 2015 Australia ranked 36th in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, which assesses 134 countries on how well they divide resources and opportunities among male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources. Iceland ranked first.<sup>10</sup>

## References & Resources

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10. World Economic Forum 2015, *Global Gender Gap Report*: [weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2015/](http://weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2015/).

## Communities

- Speak out about gender inequality (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups or write to the media). Read more here: [humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality](https://humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality).
- Create safe communities for all members of the community.
- Support women's choices to stay at home and raise children, or to return to work.
- Support men to spend more time with their children and take on other caring roles.
- Develop an understanding of how women can be supported to leave domestic violence situations and the role that communities can play in providing support.
- Celebrate community diversity through education and promotion programs that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Establish men's programs and support groups for new parents that cater for their differing needs.
- Establish new programs that support men in times of crisis and help them to develop better communication skills.
- Support community education initiatives that raise awareness of gender equity issues.
- Care and support for people living with disability and their families.

## Individuals

- Inform yourself about gender discrimination - challenge your thoughts and behaviours in relation to gender inequality. Read more here: [humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality](https://humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality).
- Start a conversation with someone new and 'different' - maybe they aren't that different after all.
- Investigate volunteer opportunities - e.g. free telephone crisis support services that deal with suicide prevention or mental health.
- Model healthy relationship behaviour to children and young people.
- Encourage and empower both young women and young men to continue their education and fulfil their dreams.
- Educate yourself about the lives of transgender and intersex persons and the barriers that they face in our community.
- Support young boys and girls whose behaviours do not necessarily conform to dominant gender stereotypes to 'be themselves'.
- Provide immediate and unconditional support to any person who 'comes out' to you - this is usually a huge decision and they are likely to have chosen you because they trust you.
- Initiate discussions with children and young people in your life about the value of difference in people.
- Challenge gender stereotypes of how women and men (girls and boys) are supposed to look and behave.



## Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Develop workplace policies that help ensure gender discrimination and harassment does not occur. Ensure all staff are aware of such policies and that they are enforced.
- Tailor health services to reach out to men - e.g. provide outreach services and use creative strategies to engage with young men.
- Ensure services are welcoming and inviting for all members of the community.
- Implement health promotion programs on sexual health and sexuality, including healthy sexual relationships (straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual).
- Tailor health promotion programs specifically to the needs of different groups - men, women, intersex and transgender persons, as well as young people and older Tasmanians.
- Provide information about domestic violence and sexual assault support services in appropriate places.
- Provide positive images and information that welcome men into health and community services.
- Support women to take up positions on boards, committees, and other positions of leadership and influence.
- Provide flexible working conditions to enable employees to balance family and work responsibilities.
- Speak out against discriminatory practices and behaviours in the workplace.
- Invite a speaker from the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner's office to speak to all staff, including management.
- Work with school communities to create welcoming school environments that reflect diversity in their policies and procedures, encourage discussion of relationships and sexuality, and provide support regarding gender identity.

## Politicians & Governments

- Appropriately fund and support organisations that take a gendered approach to health and wellbeing, and those that work with the most 'at-risk groups' in our community e.g. LGBTI, young men, women with disabilities, sex workers, men who do not access help and services when they need them most, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with fewer resources and low literacy (including those who are socially isolated) and Aboriginal communities.
- Fund, implement and evaluate ongoing actions to address family violence, including the Tasmanian Government's *Safe Homes, Safe Families* initiative. This must include a strong focus on prevention and action on the social determinants of health: *Safe Homes, Safe Families Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan 2015-2020*: [dpac.tas.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/266073/Safe\\_Homes\\_Safe\\_Families\\_-\\_Action\\_plan.pdf](http://dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/266073/Safe_Homes_Safe_Families_-_Action_plan.pdf).
- Invest in the health of Tasmanian men by funding an organisation to focus on men's health and wellbeing, and provide leadership regarding the prevention of poor health outcomes among men (such as suicide and physical violence).
- Seek alternative approaches towards working with men under the criminal justice system.
- Implement strategic policy and actions to move Australia up the Global Gender Gap Index.
- Demonstrate leadership to help build a culture across the community that says NO to discrimination.
- Work through the education system to secure a healthy and happy future for Tasmanian school students by implementing a state-wide health promoting schools framework that fosters healthy bodies as well as healthy minds.
- Work with Aboriginal communities to reduce the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples—both males and females.
- Implement and evaluate the *Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy (2016-2020)*: [dhhs.tas.gov.au/mentalhealth/suicide\\_risk\\_and\\_prevention](http://dhhs.tas.gov.au/mentalhealth/suicide_risk_and_prevention).