

Gender Clinic

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Web: www.monashhealth.org/page/gender_dysphoria

Information Pack for Potential Clients

Thank you for enquiring about our clinic. We hope the information here is of help to you. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the clinic. We are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

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1. THE GENDER CLINIC

The Gender Clinic is part of the Monash Health network in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. It also has links with the Monash University Department of Psychological Medicine. The clinic is the largest government-funded clinic of its kind in Australia, and it also receives referrals from neighbouring states. The clinic aims to provide an assessment and treatment service for the trans and gender diverse community.

The clinic accept referrals for individuals aged 17 and above. Clients can be referred for various reasons. Some people may want to just explore and achieve a better sense of their gender identity while others who identify with a gender other than their birth-assigned gender, may seek assistance in starting the process to make their body as congruent as possible with their affirmed gender. The staff at the clinic conduct specialist mental health assessments relevant to gender dysphoria and, where appropriate, assist clients with the “transition process” from one gender to another, often with the assistance of various gender affirming treatments including hormone therapy and surgery.

The clinic has several permanent part-time staff members, as well as several clinical associates. All clinical staff, including associates, meet regularly in order to evaluate the progress of clients.

Procedures within the clinic are consistent with the Standards of Care (Version 7, 2011) published by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and endorsed by the Australian and New Zealand Professional Association for Transgender Health (ANZPATH).

The clinic is located at 352 South Road in Hampton East. If arriving by car, there are a number of on-street parking options on the side streets around South Rd. Please check parking signs for restrictions, time limits and fees. If travelling with public transport, the nearest train station is Moorabbin which is on the Frankston line. Some people may also be eligible for transport assistance through schemes such as the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme. Please contact us to see if you may be eligible or if you would like to receive more information on this scheme. Please inform clinic staff as soon as possible if you have any mobility restrictions.

For clients who live in regional and remote areas, the clinic is able to conduct appointments by teleconference. Please contact us if you would like to receive further information.

2. GENDER DYSPHORIA

“Gender Dysphoria” is a term that describes the *discomfort and unhappiness* a person experiences as a result of the tension between the gender assigned to them at birth and the gender with which they identify (including non-binary gender identities). We acknowledge that not everybody experiencing diversity in gender variance necessarily experiences distress.

While it is not considered a psychiatric disorder to have a gender identity which differs from the gender assigned to you at birth, it is very important to rule out other conditions that could present with gender variance. As a result, the clinic takes great care in ensuring that a comprehensive assessment is conducted. In addition, the purpose of the assessment is to identify supports that may help prior to commencing any medical treatments leading to gender affirmation. These could include referrals to appropriate services for assistance with housing, employment and social isolation, etc. Clients who have a mental health condition such as schizophrenia, depression,

Borderline Personality Disorder or Autism Spectrum Disorder are still eligible to receive support from our clinic. Their assessment however may be extended to ensure that adequate supports are in place prior to any gender-related treatments.

Staff at the clinic seek to work with our clients to establish the best medical and social options for each individual. As the WPATH Standards of Care note:

“While many individuals need both hormone therapy and surgery to alleviate their gender dysphoria, others need only one of these treatment options and some need neither. ...

Health professionals can assist gender dysphoric individuals with affirming their gender identity, exploring different options for expression of that identity, and making decisions about medical treatment options for alleviating gender dysphoria (p9).”

3. THE CLINIC’S ASSESSMENT PROCESS

You have the choice of obtaining a specialist mental health assessment either in the public or private health system.

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

The Monash Health Gender Clinic offers this assessment through the public system, with no out-of-pocket costs, but with a longer waiting list. If you would like to take this option, please complete the General Information Form, which you will find at the end of this Information Pack, and obtain a referral to our clinic from your GP.

Please note that we will not be able to offer you an appointment until we have received both of these documents.

As a new client, you will then be offered appointments to see one of the mental health professionals at the clinic. An initial series of interviews (approximately 3-6 sessions based on your needs) is the first phase of the assessment process; it may also include, with your consent, a detailed psychological assessment and/or a family assessment. Some aspects of the assessment may be conducted by another member of the team. During the assessment your clinician will gather information about your experiences in relation to your gender at various stages of your life and any associated distress. The purpose of this is to identify your strengths and to also assess what supports are needed as you embark on strategies to reduce your distress. It is a common experience to feel quite anxious before your first appointment. This, however, is a safe space in which you can explore some very personal issues. Clinicians have no expectations that you act or dress in a certain way. We encourage you to attend your appointment in a way that makes you feel comfortable. By being honest and open, your clinician will be able to form a comprehensive understanding of your experiences and needs.

All new assessments are discussed at regular staff meetings during the year. Anyone assessed as not being appropriate for gender affirmation therapy will be offered support to find ways of living with their Gender Dysphoria/gender variance, which do not involve medical treatments. They can also be offered the option to be re-assessed in the future, following other non-medical interventions.

If clients are approved for gender affirmation therapies and wish to proceed, they can be referred to other clinicians for:

- hormonal treatment to masculinise the body (partially irreversible) or feminise the body (which is largely reversible);
- and, if appropriate and when additional criteria are met, surgical procedures (which are largely irreversible).

The clinic will be able to assist in making a referral to the Endocrinology service at Monash Medical Centre or to a private endocrinologist or experienced GP. The Gender Clinic does not offer surgical treatment at this stage. However we are able to make referrals to appropriate private surgeons, who will be able to advise you of their fees when you make your appointment with them. The Gender Clinic is able to provide some financial support to a limited number of clients each year to assist with surgical costs. Please speak to your clinician for further information. The clinic is also able to provide referrals and information regarding speech therapy, which is conducted through La Trobe University's Voice Clinic.

PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS

There are both psychiatrists and clinical psychologists working in the private sector who are able to complete specialist gender-related mental health assessments (please see attached list). If you are already seeing a mental health clinician, for example, psychologist, counsellor or psychiatrist, we suggest choosing to see a private mental health professional who specialises in gender dysphoria for your assessment.

Clinicians working in the private system usually have significantly shorter waiting lists than the Gender Clinic. There are, however, costs to see a private clinician, even after a Medicare rebate has been claimed. These extra costs can range from \$20 to \$120 per session. For up-to-date information regarding waiting times and consultation fees, please contact the clinicians directly. Contact details are provided in the attached list of private clinicians. You will also need to contact them directly to organize an appointment.

Please be advised that clients who have undergone a mental health assessment by a private clinician and are then referred back to the clinic for other services e.g., hormone therapy, will still be subject to the usual waiting time to see a mental health clinician. Given that they have already had a mental assessment by a private clinician, it is likely that their assessment by one of our clinicians will be much briefer.

4. THE STANDARDS OF CARE

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health publishes clinical guidelines (the "Standards of Care"), which are followed by clinic staff. This is to ensure that the highest standard of care is provided to all the clients who attend the clinic.

The Standards of Care, which are readily available from the internet or upon request from the clinic, cover mental health evaluation and diagnosis, psychotherapy where indicated, real life experience, hormone therapy and surgery. Although the guidelines can sometimes appear restrictive, the clinic

prefers to adopt a cautious approach in order to reduce the likelihood of regretting treatment. However, the clinic applies the guidelines in a way that recognizes a person's unique anatomical, social or psychological situation, which may suggest that a flexible approach will achieve a better outcome for the person but still in a safe manner.

5. THE REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

The Real Life Experience is a period of time (usually 12 months) prior to genital surgery where people live in a role congruent to their gender identity. This period of time allows the person to develop stability in their affirmed gender, and to build confidence in their ability to live in the affirmed gender role. It is also intended to raise awareness of the personal and social consequences of transition; this is very important because changing one's gender expression has been known to contribute to employment discrimination, relationship or friendship difficulties, and the restriction or loss of contact with children.

Many people find that the Real Life Experience allows time for improvement in mental health, and during the Real Life Experience, a mental health professional will help you explore the impact of your transition on family, relationships, finances and legal issues. These review sessions may also involve considering how you are functioning as a member of society according to your ability to be employed, or function as a student or volunteer. This process is consistent with the Standards of Care.

6. MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT & INTERVENTION

A comprehensive mental health assessment is a very important part of the clinic's work with clients. In addition, ongoing monitoring or psychotherapy normally occurs concurrently with the Real Life Experience and involves forming a trusting relationship with a mental health clinician in order to explore their gender identity.

As everyone is unique, there is no predetermined or recommended number of sessions. Meeting regularly with a mental health clinician is an important means of receiving support, finding the best set of medical and social options for the individual, working through difficulties where they arise and addressing expectations of the possibilities of transgender treatments and gender transition. This process usually covers a broad range of issues in order to consider all the circumstances that will help an individual who is transitioning achieve stability and satisfaction in their lives.

The Gender Clinic is committed to education, and has strong relationships with various education institutions. For this reason, clients may be asked to assist in educating future clinicians by allowing students to observe or participate in the assessment process. If you are not comfortable with this, please inform your clinician.

7. SPEECH THERAPY

It is important to recognise that a person's birth-assigned gender is often reflected in their voice and the way they communicate. Therefore, it is possible that you may request voice modification to reflect your affirmed gender. People who wish to modify their voice or communication style in preparation for gender transition can ask for a referral to the La Trobe University's Voice Clinic.

Clients will usually see a speech therapy student who is in their final year of training and is being supervised by a qualified speech therapist.

Speech therapy can be arranged at any time during your transition process - it may range from one or two sessions for voice analysis and advice to regular weekly sessions for focused voice modification. Because the therapy targets a person's individual needs, it is not possible to say how many sessions are required to maximise voice potential. Clients may also request to see a private speech therapist. Please discuss how to obtain a referral to a private speech therapist with your clinician.

8. HORMONAL TREATMENT

Hormone treatment plays an important role in the physical and psychological transition process for many clients who attend the clinic. Hormones are prescribed by a medical specialist (an endocrinologist) or experienced General Practitioner who must be satisfied that the person is medically stable and that there are no physical contra-indications to hormonal therapy.

Please be advised that hormones are not prescribed by mental health clinicians at the clinic. However, if appropriate, we will assist in referring you to the Endocrinology clinic at Monash Medical Centre or an experienced clinician in private practice once your mental health assessment has been completed. Obtaining hormones without a prescription is strongly discouraged by the clinic.

Birth-assigned males treated with feminising hormones can expect treatment to result in breast growth, some redistribution of fat, decreased body hair, slowing or stopping of male pattern balding, decreased testicular size, reduced fertility and less frequent, less firm erections, with possible loss of libido.

Birth-assigned females treated with masculinising hormones can expect a permanent deepening of the voice, permanent clitoral enlargement, mild breast shrinkage, reduced fertility, increased upper body strength, weight gain, facial and body hair growth, increased libido, decreased fat on the hips and possibly male pattern baldness.

There can be medical, psychological and social side effects for all people receiving hormonal treatment and it is important to familiarise yourself with these prior to commencing hormones. The criteria to commence hormone therapy as specified in the Standards of Care must be satisfied prior to referral to the hormone prescriber.

9. SURGICAL INTERVENTION

For some people, surgery is an important step in the transition process, and involves generally irreversible surgical procedures aimed at providing anatomical congruence consistent with their affirmed gender.

Surgery is available in Australia, but some people may choose to pursue surgery overseas; the Gender Clinic does not have any official links or affiliations with any overseas surgeons. It is important to understand that reputable overseas surgeons follow the same Standards of Care as our clinic. Therefore, they often ask for some correspondence from the clinic confirming that all

the criteria have been met to undergo gender affirmation surgery.

Surgery for birth-assigned males can include removal of the testicles and penis, and the creation of a vagina. Some individuals may also wish to pursue breast enlargement, rhinoplasty, laryngoplasty (shaving of the “Adam’s apple”), vocal cord surgery, and/or facial feminisation surgery.

Surgery for birth-assigned females can include removal of the breasts, and removal of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. Surgery to create a penis (phalloplasty) or metoidioplasty (clitoral release) is associated with a number of complications that have led to the discontinuation of these procedures in Victoria. However, these procedures are still performed elsewhere.

The surgeon will provide detailed information to the client prior to the operation, including the nature of the surgical procedure, risks and possible complications and the costs involved. At present the only surgical procedure that is available through Monash Health is removal of the uterus and/or ovaries (hysterectomy and/or oophorectomy). Other procedures are performed by private surgeons, and your clinician will be able to assist in making referrals as appropriate.

10. HEALTH INSURANCE

For clients who wish to proceed to surgery, it is imperative that private health insurance – with the highest level of hospital cover – is obtained, in order to cover some of the cost of these procedures. However, even with the highest level of private health insurance cover, there is still a significant gap payment. Please note that all health insurance companies have waiting periods.

Recent changes to some health funds now require that clients have psychiatric cover to ensure payment for gender-related surgeries. If you wish to pursue treatment outside of Australia, please be advised that you will not be eligible for any government or insurance rebates, and you will have to pay the full cost (travel, medical fees, accommodation) yourself.

11. TAKING THE FIRST STEP & OBTAINING A REFERRAL

In order to make an appointment, we need to receive the following:

1. A medical doctor’s referral (preferably your GP)
2. A completed one-page General Information Form (Attached).

A month before your first appointment, please provide the following:

1. A report or psychiatric assessment from any previous or current mental health clinician (if applicable)
2. A brief (1-2 pages) autobiographical statement explaining how gender dysphoria or gender variance has developed in your life, including information regarding schooling, friends, family and occupation.

This can give us an understanding of your background before we meet with you and provides an opportunity for you to consider your thoughts and feelings in your own written words.

You can email, post or fax your referral and paperwork to:

The Clinical Director

Gender Clinic - Monash Health

352 South Road, Hampton East VIC 3188

Tel: (03) 9556 5216 (09.00-17.00 Weekdays)

Fax: (03) 9556 5256

Email: genderclinic@monashhealth.org

FINALLY...

It is important to remember that the assessment and management of gender variance is complex and different for all individuals, and that body-changing interventions are not appropriate for all clients, or preferred by them. Diagnosis, treatment and side effects differ from one person to the next, therefore, this information is an outline only and should **NOT** be understood as a substitute for specific advice from an appropriate health professional.

It is also important to note that the reality of gender variance can also have a profound effect on the well-being of those who share lives with people experiencing these conditions, including parents, partners, children, friends and colleagues. It is important that careful consideration be given to their needs and usually it is recommended to seek professional advice before discussing these issues. We hope this information answers some of your immediate questions. Please feel free to contact us if you require further information.

Gender Clinic



GENERAL INFORMATION FORM

E:genderclinic@monashhealth.org

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED IS TREATED AS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

NAME ON MEDICARE CARD: _____

PREFERRED NAME: _____ PREFERRED PRONOUN: _____

NAME FOR CORRESPONDENCE: _____

RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

HEALTHCARE CARD: YES / NO NUMBER: _____

Please keep us updated of any changes to the above information

BIRTH DATE: ____/____/____ SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH: _____

MEDICARE NUMBER :----- Ref No ---- Expiry Date: ____/____

TELEPHONE (Home): _____ (Mobile): _____

CONTACT PERSON / NEXT OF KIN: _____ PH: _____

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE: YES / NO

HEALTH INSURANCE FUND: _____ MEMBER NO.: _____

REFERRAL DATE OF REFERRAL: ____/____/____

REFERRING DOCTOR: Dr. _____ TELEPHONE: _____

If we need to contact you by phone:	Please circle
If someone else answers the phone, can we identify the clinic's name and ask for you to call us back?	YES NO
We must only speak with you, the patient	YES NO
We can leave a message on your home answering machine	YES NO
We can leave a message on your mobile phone voicemail	YES NO

By signing here, you acknowledge that you have received this information pack and consent to information being shared amongst the clinicians associated with the clinic.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

OFFICE USE ONLY

ALLOCATED CLINICIAN: _____