APRIL 2022

Fact Sheet: Trans Health & Wellbeing

POPULATION & MENTAL HEALTH

Trans women, trans men and non-binary people live, work and play sport in every town in Australia. Although community understanding and attitudes have improved, trans people, particularly trans women, are sometimes still seen as a threat, while trans men and non-binary people are invisible. Research tells us that while sport can be a hostile and unwelcoming place for trans people, inclusive policies do make a significant and positive difference to sports club cultures and to those who participate within them [i ii vii ix].

Women and girls who are trans and want to play sport with their peers is about real people in our communities who have the right to live authentically. Most people, particularly cis women, do not agree with excluding trans women from women's sport, indeed the biggest threats to women's sport in Australia are chronic underfunding, pay disparities and a lack of resources. [xii xiii]

Trans inclusion is important in sport, not only because trans people shoulder some of the heaviest burdens of prejudice-driven poor mental health, but because sport should be for everyone. Consider the following:

- Only one in five trans respondents rated their health as very good or excellent. [viii]
- Quality of life improves dramatically for trans people who are affirmed and respected for who they are. [viii]
- 86.2% of trans women, 90.6% of trans men and 89.9% of non-binary people have experienced suicide ideation in their lifetime. [viii]
- One in 10 reported having attempted suicide in the past 12 months. [viii]
- Across their lifetime 45.6% of trans women, 52.9% of trans men and 40.2% of non-binary people will attempt to die by suicide compared to 3.2% of the general population. [viii]
- 77.5% of trans respondents were treated unfairly because of their gender identity in the past 12 months. [viii]
- Most people, particularly women who play sport are not concerned about the inclusion of women and girls who are trans. [ix]
- Most people, particularly women, do not support a blanket-ban to exclude women and girls who are trans. [ix]
- Men are most likely to support the exclusion of trans women in women's sport. [ix]

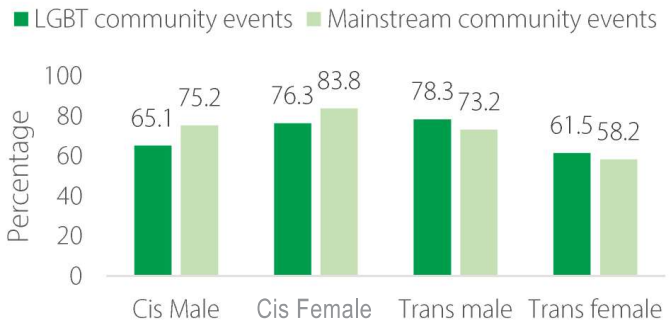
High quality empirical evidence and data (such as from a Census) about the size of the Australian trans population are limited. However, a systemic review of studies published internationally from 2009-2019 found estimates ranged from 0.5 to 4.8% among adults. These data suggest there could be more than one million adults in Australia whose gender is different to that presumed for them at birth. [iv] A tiny proportion play community sport and there are no elite trans athletes currently competing in Australia.

Women's sport, and increasing the participation of all women in sport, is essential, important and should be protected. The inclusion of trans women in women's sport doesn't challenge this and there is no evidence that suggests the participation of cis women declines when a trans woman is part of the team.

Trans women have been competing openly in the Olympics since 2004 and women's sport continues to grow and thrive. Trans women make up a very small portion of the Australian population, with a tiny fraction ever having participated in elite sport. Participation improves when sports are more inclusive.

Many sports organisations in Australia already have governance in place that address the inclusion of trans people. These policies provide clear and practical guidance to clubs so that all people have an opportunity to participate, including at an elite level.

Trans women have the lowest participation rates in LGBTQ or mainstream community events compared to the rest of the LGBTQ community [vi]



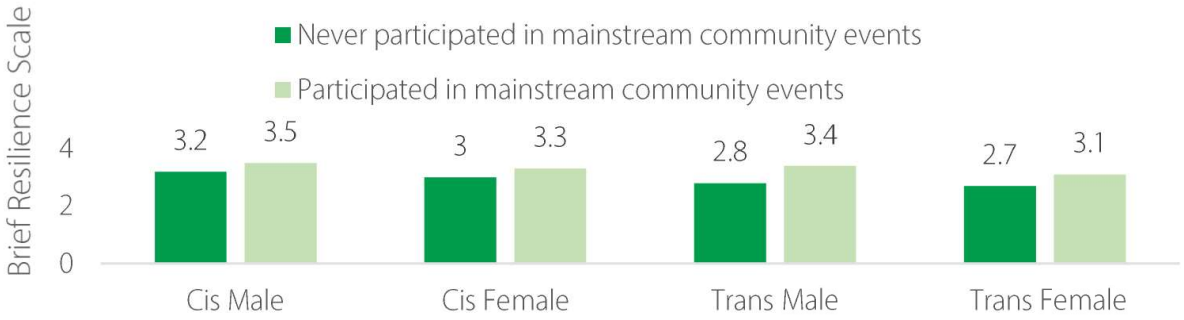
WHY TRANS INCLUSION IN SPORT IS IMPORTANT

THE GOOD

We know that participating in sport makes a profound difference to those who play and compete.

- LGBTQ youth say sport for them brings a sense of belonging; improves mental and physical health; sporting opportunities; peer support and friendships. [iv]
- Using a young person's chosen name at work, at school, with friends, and at home:
  - Reduces depression symptoms by 71%
  - Reduces through of suicide by 34%, and
  - Reduces suicide attempts by 65% [v]
- Participation in mainstream and LGBTQ-specific community events was associated with increased resilience for all sexuality and gender identity groups. [vi]
- Increased visibility and social inclusion are vital to improving the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ people. This involves ensuring trans people are valued and active participants in all areas of social life including work, education, sport and recreation, politics, art and culture. [vi xii]

Participation in mainstream community events increases resilience [vi]



THE OPPORTUNITIES

- Participating in sports and physical activities strengthens and connects local communities. In a COVID-world, our local communities have never been more important. [viii]
- Trans people in particular found sport and exercise activities discriminatory as they were often excluded from participating as themselves – that is, as their affirmed gender. [vi]
- Clubs and sporting environments that reinforce gender binaries, or don't allow for mixed competitions and gender neutral facilities, were frightening for trans young people. [vi]
- Young people do not perceive sport as a safe and welcoming environment, and many have been subjected to transphobia. [vi]

There is no consistent research that suggests trans women, trans men or non-binary people have any athletic advantage at any stage of gender affirmation. Even so, laws in Australia (the Sex Discrimination Act) already allow sport organisations to exclude trans athletes on a case-by-case basis on matters of strength, stamina and physique.

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