

# EVERY BODY WELCOME

## Supporting LGBTQA+ individuals with eating disorders and body image concerns

Individuals in the LGBTQA+ community experience greater incidence of eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours, more severe symptoms, and longer delays between diagnosis and treatment than their heterosexual counterparts.

Homophobia, transphobia, gender dysphoria, discrimination, bullying, trauma, abuse, and alienation from friends or family can all contribute towards emotional stress. In addition to other risk factors, these issues can contribute to body image issues and/or eating disorders.<sup>1,2</sup>



Transitioning means something different to everyone. For me, it involved medical care, but for other people a change of name or pronouns may be all they need to feel comfortable. Being able to affirm who we are, in whatever way feels right, can be an essential part of eating disorder recovery for trans people like me. I know it was essential to mine.”

Kai, he/they

## Tips to support yourself

### Connect with your community

Connecting with like-minded people can foster belonging and acceptance, which can build resilience and wellbeing.

### Diversify your feed

Follow body positive and body neutral influencers, queer influencers and people with more diverse body types. Representation and visibility are important!

### You're worthy

Society has many unrealistic and unattainable stereotypes and ideals about bodies, appearance, and gender. You're worth more than your appearance.

# How to support someone you know

## Change the conversation

Encourage people to push back against body ideals and diet talk, and instead celebrate body diversity.

## Educate yourself

Understand that eating disorders are severe and life-threatening mental illnesses, and can impact anyone, of any weight, age, gender or sexuality. No one is ever to blame for developing an eating disorder.

## It's not just about food

Disordered eating, negative body image and negative self-talk are often a way of trying to cope with deeper emotional distress.

## Don't be the problem solver

Avoid being critical, trying to come up with simple solutions (such as 'just eat') or making generalisations. You don't have to solve the issue, but you can be there to provide support & listen to their concerns.

## Be a voice of encouragement

Remind them frequently that recovery is possible and encourage them to reach out for support.

## Tips for healthcare professionals

Every individual has the right to experience safe, appropriate and effective medical and mental health treatment and care, free from discrimination <sup>ii</sup>.

This means it is essential that healthcare providers are aware of the complex intersections between body image and disordered eating, and gender and sexual identities - and that they respect their clients' unique needs without judgement.

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I spent 6 years in and out of hospital and during this time found my struggle with my gender identity to be a barrier to treatment [for an eating disorder]. I didn't see or hear of any recovery journey like mine and at no stage did a health professional identify the possibility that my gender identity was impacting my eating disorder treatment and provide me with support.”

Reece he/him

# When supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals with eating disorders and body image concerns, remember to:

## Use preferred language and pronouns

If you're not sure, ask them and ensure your medical forms, assessments and resources are inclusive and gender-neutral where possible.

## Recognise and respect

Respect the diversity of bodies, genders and sexualities in all people. Visual markers of safety, such as wearing your own pronoun badges or ACON's 'Welcome Here' sticker, can help illustrate your practice is a safe space for the community.

## Consider context and show empathy

Your client may have experienced stigma, discrimination and prejudice about their relationships, gender, sexuality, identity and appearance or body. Race, ethnicity, religion, age, socioeconomic status and trauma history also need to be considered to understand support needs.

## Adopt an empowerment focused, person-centred approach

Build resilience and recognise people's existing skills rather than focusing on harm reduction and negative behaviours.

## Listen and learn

Everyone's experience of an eating disorder will be unique, so it's imperative to listen to and learn from people with lived experience.

## Know it's not one size fits all

Body image and eating concerns will present differently and be more complex for some.

They may be impacted by gender dysphoria, trauma, and discrimination. Mainstream eating disorder recovery messages may also be invalidating.

## Commit to professional development opportunities

To support diversity in your practice, stay up to date with the latest research and clinical guidance, and ensure you are aware of appropriate services to refer people to.

For references and to learn more, visit [www.linktr.ee/everybodywelcome](http://www.linktr.ee/everybodywelcome)

# Get support

For LGBTQIA+ specific support, connect with

## Q Life

1800 184 527  
3pm-midnight (AEST/AEDT), daily

For eating disorder and body image support, connect with

## Butterfly

1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)  
chat online or email  
support@butterfly.org.au  
8am-midnight (AEST/AEDT), daily

LGBTQIA+ specific eating disorders support group

## EDV

Eating Disorders Victoria's  
'Bloom' support group

For carers, family or friends supporting someone with an eating disorder, connect with

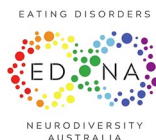
## EDFA

Eating Disorders Families Australia  
edfa.org.au  
1300 195 626

## About

# EVERY BODY WELCOME

The EveryBODY Welcome! collaboration, driven by Australia's national and state-based eating disorder organisations, aims to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote access to intersectional, person-centred, and gender-affirming care for members of the LGBTQIA+ community affected by body dissatisfaction, disordered eating or an eating disorder.



Find out more about  
EveryBODY Welcome