

# Gender Affirmation & Transition

Practical guidelines for transitioning employees, their  
people leaders and colleagues

# Contents

1. **Glossary of Terms** (page 3)
2. **What is transitioning?** (page 6)
3. **Information for Transitioning Employees** (page 8)
4. **Your role as a leader** (page 11)
5. **Key information for all MfE employees** (page 13)
6. **Support and resources** (page 14)
7. **Appendix: Transitioning Plan**

These transitioning guidelines have been prepared by the Ministry for the Environment People & Capability directorate in collaboration with the MfE Rainbow Network and influenced by the excellent work undertaken by the New Zealand Intelligence Community in preparation of a similar document.

The guide includes a glossary of terms, provides helpful information as well as practical advice for managers, staff who are in transition (or considering it) and work colleagues supporting team members through the process.

They aim to create awareness and to be supportive of all staff at Manatū Mō Te Taiao.

# 1. Glossary of terms

## Ally

A person who supports a group but is not a member of that group, eg, “Trans ally”.

## Asexual (ace)

A person who feels low or no sexual interest in others of any gender.

## Bisexual (bi)

A person who is emotionally and physically attracted to more than one gender.

## Cisgender (cis)

A person whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

## Deadname

The name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning. Deadnaming may be accidental, or an intentional attempt to deny, mock or invalidate a person's gender identity. Unless required for legal reasons, do not ask for or use a transgender persons 'deadname'.

## Fa’afafine

A Samoan term for a person whose sex assigned at birth was male but takes on a range of behaviours considered feminine and is accepted as a third gender.

## Gender

A person’s internal sense of their own gender as it relates to the social norms of masculinity and femininity.

## Genderfluid/Gender Non-conforming

A person whose gender changes frequently.

## Gender dysphoria

A term used to describe uncomfortable or distressing feelings that some people experience because the sex they were assigned at birth does not match their gender.

## Gender Expression

The physical expression of one’s gender through clothing, hairstyle, voice, make up, body shape, etc.

Transgender people may seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender (who they are), however this is not always the case (e.g. non-binary individuals may resemble either binary gender or neither). All gender expression is valid.

## Gender Identity

Another way to refer to gender. Some people see the addition of ‘identity’ as a way of delegitimising trans people’s genders.

## Heteronormative

This refers to the deeply held institutional belief that relationships between heterosexual masculine cis men and heterosexual feminine cis women are the norm, while all other relationships are viewed as abnormal in contrast. It refers to systems and society being structured around this assumption. This can show up in our actions in ways as simple as assuming someone’s ‘partner’ is a certain gender.

# Glossary of terms (cont.)

## Homophobia

An irrational fear or prejudice against people who are attracted to the same sex/gender.

## Homosexual

A term created in 1868 to describe people sexually attracted to the same sex. It was revolutionary in its time because of its scientific and non-judgemental nature, but today is widely viewed as old-fashioned and clinical.

## Intersex

Intersex people are individuals born with any of several variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies”.

## LGBTQTIA+

Includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Takatāpui, Intersex, Asexual and others. The + sign refers to other identities that are part of the community but not included in the first few letters, such as pansexual.

## Misgender

The act of referring to someone using an incorrectly gendered word, e.g. referring to someone as a woman when they are a man. This is considered a faux pas and may hurt the person in question.

## Non-Binary (nb, enby)

A person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies as neither, both, or a combination of male and female.

## Pansexual (pan)

A person whose attraction is not limited by gender.

## Pronouns

Words used to refer to someone (e.g. she, they, he). These are not necessarily related to someone’s gender or gender expression. Since they can’t be assumed from appearance, we encourage our people to proactively inform others of their pronouns.

## Queer

Once an insult, this word has been reclaimed and is used by many to cover the entire range of human and sexual diversity in the same way Rainbow is. Due to its past usage as an insult it can make people uncomfortable, particularly when used by people who are not in the LGBTI+ community.

## Rainbow

An umbrella term that covers all forms of sexual and gender minorities. Is easier to say than “LGBTQTIA+”, and does not have the offensive history of “Queer” that can make some people uncomfortable. This is typically used to refer to a community, not an individual.

## Sex

This term is used to refer to someone’s biological characteristics through the lens of “masculine” and “feminine”. Some people disagree with using masculinity and femininity to describe bodies.

# Glossary of terms (cont.)

## Sex Assigned at Birth

A medical distinction based on a person's physical characteristics at birth. Usually recorded as male, intersex (see description on previous page), or female.

## Sexuality

This term describes one's attraction to other humans. Not limited to homosexuality and heterosexuality.

## Takatāpui

A Māori term that encompasses not only aspects of sexuality but also cultural identity. Originally meaning "an intimate companion of the same sex" it has grown in use and meaning. Takatapui incorporates both a sense of indigenous identity and communicates sexual orientation, and has also become an umbrella term to build solidarity among sexuality and gender minorities within Māori communities. It is used as both a personal and community identifier.

## Transitioning

The personal process or processes a trans or gender diverse person may undertake to allow them to live as their affirmed gender identity and so that society recognises this. The transitioning process varies from person to person. Individuals may transition on the basis of gender identity (how you understand your own sense of self), gender expression (how you express your identity) and biological sex (chromosomes, hormones and genitals). For example, a person who is transitioning may dress as their affirmed gender. They may alter their physical appearance or take hormones. Other people may choose to undergo different surgical procedures over time.

## Transgender (trans)


This term describes a wide variety of people whose genders are different from the sex they were assigned at birth. It is the opposite of cisgender. Some transgender people opt for one or more forms of medical intervention (e.g. hormone replacement therapy, surgery) but many do not. If someone describes themselves as a trans man, they are a transgender person who is currently a man.

## Transphobia

An irrational fear or prejudice against trans people or those who break social gender rules

## Transsexual

This term is less common today than transgender. It is typically used for a person who has had, or is in the process of changing their body to conform with their gender.



For more terms and definitions visit [Glossary of LGBTIQ+ Language | OutLine Aotearoa](#)

## 2. What is transitioning?

### Understanding Transition

Transitioning is a change from one gender to another, in as many or as few ways as the transitioning individual is comfortable with. It is important to be clear from the outset that sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and sexual orientation are three distinctly different matters and should not be confused. Sex assigned at birth is a medical distinction based on a person's physical characteristics at birth. Gender identity is about our internal sense of being female, and/or male, and/or gender diverse. It is different from sexual orientation, which is who we are attracted to and/or choose as a sexual or romantic partner.

Transitioning people may be heterosexual/straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual – just like all other people. Each of us defines our own gender identity; which means that gender identity and its expression vary greatly. The term 'transition' refers to external changes an individual undergoes, often (but not always) to be more congruent with their gender identity. Those changes could mean physical ones, such as use of hormone treatment to change the individual's body shape, appearance and behaviour. Or they could mean social changes, such as dressing and living in their new gender role. There may be legal changes, such as a name change by deed poll. Or it could be a combination of these changes.

There are many different aspects of transition that a trans person may undertake, and this varies from person to person. Below are some non-exhaustive examples of the different aspects of transition:

#### Expressive transition

A change in the outward expression of their gender, e.g. change in clothing, hair, accessories, etc. This may occur at the same time as social transition.

#### Legal transition

A legal change of a person's gender and/or name.

#### Medical transition (Non-surgical)

There is no single model of treatment but this may involve counselling and psychotherapy, hormones and antiandrogens, facial hair removal, and/or speech therapy. Some steps require a medical diagnosis of "gender dysphoria". Hormone treatment is taken to change the person's body shape and is normally required for the rest of the person's life.

#### Medical transition (Surgical)

Some trans people undergo surgery to acquire their desired physical characteristics. Surgical treatment may include genital surgery, breast augmentation or removal, facial feminisation surgery, reduction of the external appearance of larynx and modification of the vocal chords. Surgical procedures may be carried out over a number of years, and may require post-operative monitoring and ongoing counselling.

#### Social transition

This describes the process of living and working in one's affirmed gender role. It is a requirement of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) International Standards of Care that a person must live and work in their new gender for a period of one year minimum prior to some types of surgical intervention.

## Manager must-knows:

### Understanding Transition

Not all transitioning people choose to go through all these steps. Some may wish to, but may not be able to for a range of reasons; including financial, medical and surgical availability. The steps may overlap or run concurrently, and each situation is specific to that person.

Note that medical transition is a lengthy process, and can take years after the initial diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Careful and sensitive management of the staff member's workload and wellbeing is needed.

Private surgery in New Zealand is expensive and the public health system only funds a handful of operations every year. Some people in New Zealand seeking more feminine physical characteristics via surgery may travel to Thailand, while New Zealanders seeking more masculine physical characteristics will often have to go further afield to the USA or England to access the specialist surgical expertise required. If you are supporting a team member who decides to pursue this option, getting the support to recover post-operation is important and recovery could take a significant period of time.

It is almost impossible to identify gender dysphoria from the outside. People may conceal gender-related issues due to both external discrimination and their own internal fears and perceptions.

Our staff who consider themselves transgender or want to transition are likely to have been through a turbulent and emotional period of coming to terms with their gender identity. Sensitive management of the person is essential. Any individual who declares themselves to be transgender should be offered the appropriate level of care and support regardless of whether or not they pursue medical transition.

Once you become aware of a staff member who is considering transition, you should research the relevant information and seek out assistance to enable you to appropriately manage this sensitive situation. Further avenues for information on transitioning and other issues are at the end of this guide.



### 3. Information for Transitioning Employees

If you are an employee in the process of or considering transitioning

If you have decided to transition, The Ministry for the Environment acknowledges the courage and self-awareness required to undertake this process and are committed to supporting you with sensitivity and respect.

You are encouraged to maintain an open and honest dialogue with your manager. This doesn't mean you need to share personal details or information you're not comfortable sharing, but that you keep each other informed on matters that you each need to be aware of, you identify what support you need, and help them understand how best they can support you in your individual circumstances.

Members of the People & Capability team and Leads of the MfE Rainbow Network are also available for additional support, or as a first port-of-call if you do not feel comfortable to discuss this with your people leader.

# Developing a Workplace Transition Plan

Your manager, with the support of your P&C Advisor or Business Partner and any external support services, will work with you to establish an appropriate Workplace Transition Plan. Below is a list of suggested topics you might consider addressing in your plan.

## Communication

In most cases the organisation may need to communicate internally and with external stakeholders and customers you work with, for instance to inform those stakeholders about a change to your name and / or pronouns.

**The employee who is transitioning must be consulted around any communications and give their express permission for each step in this process. The practices set out below is to be used as a guide only, and can be adjusted in line with what feels right for the transitioning employee's individual circumstances.**

Common practice is for the Manager of a team, or if the employee is comfortable/wants this to be more widely known, the head of the organisation, to send out a clear and simple message explaining Person A is transitioning gender, and to confirm their name, pronouns and titles to be used moving forwards.

This message should also stress that the organisation supports them and sees them as a valued employee, expects all employees to be treated with respect and will not tolerate any discrimination or harassment. This Policy, and the Bullying, Racism, Harassment and Discrimination policy should be referenced.

A message in a similar format can be used to communicate with customers and other external stakeholders, as identified as appropriate by the transitioning employee in consultation with their manager.

**These steps are only taken with the permission and input of the person who is transitioning and always at their pace.** The employee may decide they wish to have ongoing communication (e.g. at different stages of their transition), or they may not.

## Timeframes

You may want to consider the timeframes related to some key events:

- When you will assume your affirmed gender at work (e.g., be known by a new name, referred to by affirmed pronouns etc). This is something that does not require any legal change of name.
- Start to use facilities such as bathrooms and changing rooms which match your gender. Note the use of facilities matching gender identity can be very important for transgender and transitioning people, and MfE supports employees to use bathroom facilities which match their gender identity.
- Time off work for medical treatments relating to their transition, if necessary, or to attend to any other matters associated with their transition. Refer to 'Leave' (below) for more guidance on time off work.

# Developing a Workplace Transition Plan (cont.)

## Updating employee records

- Your gender and name can be corrected at any time (and without evidence) by amending your Personal Details in the Employee Kiosk. Gender options are Female, Male, Gender Diverse, or Prefer Not to Say.
- Although you can change or update your name in Employee Kiosk at any time and without the requirement to provide evidence, in some situations where we are required to connect with external bodies, MfE records need to match your legal name. An example of this is where we are required to apply for an ACC payment due to a work-related accident. [This page contains support and guidance on how to change your legal name.](#) You will then need to contact Payroll with evidence of your legal name change, such as a copy of photo identification issued under your new name.
- You or your manager can ask IT to update your email address and distribution lists you may be a member of, and other places where your name appears. Changing your preferred name in the Employee Kiosk will change your name on Teams and the Ministry organisational chart on Te Taiao. .

- You or your manager can ask the Business Support Co-ordinators to organise a new ID card if it doesn't show the correct name or photo.

## Presentation/Expression

Trans and gender diverse people, including those who identify as non-binary, are encouraged to present themselves however they feel comfortable, in keeping with appropriate dress standards for our business/dealing with stakeholders and customers.

## Leave

MfE will provide appropriate leave and flexibility to take time off work for medical appointments, surgery, hormonal treatment, or for any other reasons associated with transitioning. Requests for leave will consider the individual's circumstances and be agreed upon through consultation between the employee, their Manager and People & Capability. An estimate of how much leave (if any) will be required, and all parties should agree to how this leave will be covered (may include sick leave, holiday leave, leave without pay etc). This will be aligned with any other medical/sick leave policy.

## 4. Your role as a leader

### If you are a manager and a member of your team is transitioning:

Anyone who is transitioning can raise this with their manager or with the People and Capability team, secure in knowing their information will be treated respectfully and confidentially.

If one of your employees (or another team member) has informed you they are transitioning (or intend to transition), your responsibility as a Manager is to support their transition at work. You should, with the permission of the transitioning employee, contact your P&C Advisor or Business Partner who can assist you in the planning process to help support a positive experience for the individual. This includes working with the transitioning employee to develop a Workplace Transition Plan, if the employee wants one.

Inform the employee they can be accompanied by a support person at any or all conversations. You are also able to bring a support person if needed for the conversation.

Please take the appropriate steps to educate yourself about gender transitioning and what it means to be transgender, such as referring to the external resources listed at the end of this policy, contacting People & Capability or the MfE Rainbow People Network. Understand it is not the transitioning employee's role or responsibility to educate you on gender diversity, transitioning, or this policy and process.

## Manager must-knows:

### The importance of leadership

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) Inquiry into Discrimination Experienced by Transgender People (2008) confirmed that transgender people face significant discrimination in daily life, including in the workplace. As a people leader, you are uniquely placed to support your team member through this important life event, and help to set the tone for the rest of the organisation through your support.

### Manager responsibilities:

- Ensure team members understand what constitutes a breach of this Policy.
- Lead by example, demonstrating behaviour that is inclusive and considerate of all employees.
- Use titles, names and pronouns as expressed by transgender or non-binary colleagues.
- Be open and approachable so their people feel comfortable to share their gender, whether they are planning to transition, or, at their discretion, if they already have transitioned.
- Proactively address any instances of unacceptable behaviour they observe
- Attend, and encourage others to attend education sessions provided by MfE.
- Understand the process a reported complaint should go through.
- Accommodate cultural aspects that may need to be considered throughout the process.

## Your role as a leader (cont.)

If the employee wishes to develop a Workplace Transition Plan, ensure you seek to understand whether and how the employee would like to communicate their transition process. Acknowledge that this aspect is critical to success in supporting the employee appropriately and needs to be informed by the employee's preferences and circumstances.

You should not ask the employee to provide you with a medical certificate, or any other similar documentation about their transitioning, except where a medical certificate is required under the sick leave policy (where a medical certificate is required, this does not need to include any details of the nature of the medical treatment).

The most important thing you can do is treat the employee with respect, empathy, and have an open and honest conversation so you can understand their needs and concerns. Stand up for them - if you see other people say insensitive or hurtful things about a transitioning colleague – regardless of whether they're present to hear it – you should raise those behaviours directly with the person or people involved (refer to MfE's Bullying, Racism, Harassment and Discrimination policy).

Most importantly, allow your employee opportunities to talk about their individual experience and wishes regularly, if they wish. Gender transitioning is a personal experience which varies widely. MfE intends to provide tailored support centred around the wishes of the transitioning individual, and led by them. It's important not to make assumptions about how they wish to handle things, including what changes they want to make at work; who they want to tell and when; and what support they would find useful. Let them take the lead and ask them what would help.

If you feel you need some support to navigate the situation, please contact your P&C Advisor or Business Partner. You can also access MfE's Employee Assistance Program if you wish to seek further support or should you wish to discuss anything relating to the situation confidentially.

If, as a people leader, you feel unable to support the employee in the manner outlined above for any reason, please discuss with your P&C Advisor or Business Partner, who will work with you and the employee on a plan for supporting their transition.

## 5. Key information for all MfE employees

### Bathrooms

Trans and gender diverse people have a right under law to use bathroom facilities (including toilets, showers and changing areas) that are appropriate to their affirmed gender. If you experience any issues in the course of doing so, please let your Manager or P&C know.

### Health and wellbeing

You have access to our Employee Assistance Programme which is available for all staff to use confidentially.

### Administration

Talk to the HR Business Partner team, and/or the Payroll Services team regarding any questions about forms of address and change of name, records, or privacy of your personal information.

### Confidentiality

- MfE is committed to ensuring confidentiality when a concern or complaint is raised.
- Everyone involved in a complaint has an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the process, the content and facts of the complaint, the fact a complaint has been raised, and the identities of those involved.

### Bullying and harassment

MfE does not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of gender identity. We are committed to creating and maintaining a workplace free from bullying, discrimination, and harassment. Our Bullying, Harassment & Discrimination Policy outlines different forms of undesirable behaviour to allow this to be identified, reported and prevented. The policy also explains the informal and formal options for resolution and the support available to everyone.

**NOTE:** You are **not** required to approach the other person directly about your concern, or to tell the other person that you are finding their behaviour or conduct concerning.

Breaches of this Policy will be managed by the process outlined in our [Bullying, Racism, Harassment and Discrimination policy](#). Please refer to this policy for support and guidance on how to report breaches of this Policy.

### Performance and Career

Your status as a trans or gender diverse person or your decision to transition should not impact on your performance or career with MfE. If you have any concerns about how transitioning might impact on your performance or career, discuss with your Manager and involve the P&C team as needed

## 6. Support and resources

If you are transitioning or considering transitioning and would like to speak to someone about this, or are a manager supporting a transitioning team member, below are some contact points for support:

### Internal

- A support person or ally at work (someone with whom you have a strong relationship who will be open and supportive)
- Your Manager, or another Manager with whom you have a relationship
- Your P&C Advisor or Business Partner
- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)
- [MfE Rainbow People Network](#)

### External

- [Gender Minorities Aotearoa](#)
- [OutLine Aotearoa](#)
- [Employment New Zealand](#) - Guidelines on supporting transitioning & transgender employees
- [Human Rights Act 1993](#)
- [Rainbow Youth](#)
- [Human Rights Commission](#)

## All staff must-knows:

### All employees (including managers) are required to support trans and transitioning colleagues by:

- Aligning all behaviours to the Gender Affirmation and Transition Policy.
- Using titles, names and pronouns as expressed by transgender or non-binary colleagues.
- Avoiding undertaking any behaviour that intentionally endangers or causes distress to others, and acting on feedback to address any behaviour that unintentionally causes harm or distress to others.
- Accommodating cultural aspects that may need to be considered throughout the transition process.
- Reporting incidents of bullying, harassment and discrimination against themselves under MfE's Bullying & Harassment Policy, and where possible keeping records of experiences including specific behaviours and incidents.
- Where possible, speaking up about instances of bullying, harassment, discrimination or inappropriate behaviour that they witness.
- Maintaining confidentiality of any complaint proceedings they are party to.



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