



AIR FORCE DIVERSITY HANDBOOK:
**TRANSITIONING
GENDER IN AIR FORCE**

AIR FORCE



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FOREWORD

High calibre people are essential to Air Force's ability to deliver air power. Air Force can be challenging, rewarding, and above all, a unique and different career. A member who is not feeling comfortable within themselves, or suffering gender dysphoria, may add an additional dimension to these challenges and opportunities for some members.

This guide has been designed to assist members, supervisors and Commanders to create more inclusive workplaces and culture for transitioning members. It is just one of the many initiatives being developed for LGBTI members in Air Force. This guide has been developed by Air Force Workforce Diversity staff, in close consultation with members who have transitioned gender in Air Force. All of the quotes in this guide are from currently serving Air Force members about their experiences.

Our ability to deliver capability in the future will depend on our ability to attract, recruit and retain the very best personnel from every part of the Australian community. I am committed to ensuring that Air Force continues to develop innovative strategies to confirm our place as an employer of choice for all Australians, because our future success as an Air Force depends on it.



Air Marshal Geoff Brown, AO
Chief of Air Force

BACKGROUND

This handbook has been compiled with the assistance of members who have transitioned gender in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). It is designed to assist members who are transgender and who wish to begin living in the gender role which is not the sex they were born, raised and or in which they commenced their Air Force career.

The handbook is not intended to replace or substitute extant Defence or Air Force policy, nor is it to outline the medical process and procedures related to transitioning gender. This handbook has been developed to assist our transgender members in affirming their gender in the Air Force workplace while also helping the mates, co-workers, managers and Commanders of transgender members to foster improved understanding and awareness of issues faced by members within their team. The aim of the handbook is to provide additional information to members who are transgender through a friendly, empathetic and relaxed approach based on shared experiences, lessons, advice and tips.

Transitioning gender is a very significant and challenging journey which will impact almost every part of a person's life. In particular, transitioning gender in any work environment is a difficult process and managing gender transition within an Air Force career throws in a mixture of Service demands and expectations. The Air Force can be challenging, rewarding, and above all, a unique and different career. Hopefully, with some advice from this handbook, you can get the most out of your time in the Air Force, while also feeling that you don't need to compromise your personal life.

This handbook will outline some of the challenges and issues faced by transgender members, followed by some advice and tips from members. It will also outline some policy issues with particular reference to the impact on transgender members. This handbook does not have all the solutions - your individual circumstances are unique. This handbook does however offer some insights that may relate to your situation, or aspects of your situation. You may feel you are alone when in fact there are other members who have been where you are. The guidance in this document relies on anecdotes and understanding from personnel who have also experienced some of the challenges associated with being a transgender member in the ADF.

INTRODUCTION

A person's gender is one of the first things we seek to identify when we see or meet other people. Most of the time people are happy living the life and cultural expectations of their birth gender (sex) but sometimes people's gender identity does not match their sex at birth. Air Force understands that being transgender is not a choice but a bone fide condition which is to be recognised and treated accordingly.

To be transgender is to be different and the challenges you face are more than likely to be around the general ignorance of Gender Incongruence (also known as Gender Identity Disorder). Air Force understands that being transgender is not related to a person's sexual orientation (sexual attraction) and that transgender people may, like everyone else, be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. By providing some guidance about how other members transitioned gender we hope that you can consider how this can translate to working through your unique situation with your work colleagues (superiors, subordinates and peers) in your unique situation.

Transitioning gender is a very significant journey which will impact almost every part of a person's life. This guide has been developed to assist our transgender members in affirming their gender in the Air Force workplace.

POLICY

In 2011, Defence released a guide *Understanding Transitioning Gender in the Workplace* to help members and Commanders support and manage the transitioning gender process. This Air Force Handbook provides a more personal, informal perspective of the issues, challenges and strategies you may face during your transitioning process as well as how transitioning gender may impact your Air Force career with regard to Leave, Individual Readiness, etc. This handbook should be read in conjunction with Defence's *Understanding Transitioning Gender in the Workplace* guide.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Sex (birth gender or assigned gender): Sex is genetically assigned at birth as male or female, usually based on the appearance of the external genitalia. However a number of genetic or hormonal Intersex conditions exist where a person is not exclusively male or female.

Gender identity: A person's intrinsic sense of being male (a boy or a man), female (a girl or woman), neither or both.

Gender expression: How a person expresses their gender through behaviour or clothing usually through conforming to culturally accepted gender roles.

Gender Dysphoria: Distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth.

Gender Incongruence (Gender Identity Disorder): Formal diagnosis specified in the 4th edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV-TR)¹. Gender Incongruence is characterized by strong and persistent cross-gender identification and a persistent discomfort with one's sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex, causing clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Transgender (or Transsexual): Adjective to describe a diverse group of individuals who transcend culturally-defined gender roles and who may seek to change their primary and/or secondary sex characteristics through feminisation or masculinisation of the body through hormones or other medical procedures.

Transitioning gender (gender affirmation): Process of changing from the gender role associated with their sex assigned at birth to a different gender role, also known as affirming gender identity. This is likely to include learning to live socially in another gender role and sometimes including feminisation or masculinisation of the body through hormones or other medical procedures.

Sex reassignment surgery (gender affirmation surgery): Surgery to change primary and/or secondary sex characteristics to affirm a person's gender identity. Sex reassignment surgery can be an important part of medically necessary treatment to alleviate the condition of Gender Dysphoria.

¹ American Psychiatric Association (2000). Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition, Text Revision (DSM IV-TR), (Note: DSM V is in the final revision prior to publication).

THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER PERSONNEL

Being transgender does not and should not have any effect on a person's ability to perform their job and Air Force realises the value that high calibre personnel bring to the organisation.

The Air Force values of Respect, Excellence, Agility, Dedication, Integrity and Teamwork align with a flexible approach which supports transgender Air Force members during a period of gender transition. Supporting transitioning members provides many benefits to Air Force and makes good business sense through:

- Increased retention of personnel – translating to reduced cost of turnover and recruitment costs.
- Greater effectiveness and productivity – members who transition in a supportive workplace are likely to have more productive workplace efforts.
- Promotion of innovation and team collaboration – recognition, appreciation and utilisation of each person's unique insights and perspectives.
- Mitigating the risk of unintentional discrimination and inappropriate behaviour.

Air Force recognises that every person has the right to have their gender identity recognised and respected. Therefore all Air Force people who need to transition gender will be provided with the necessary support and management to do so.

FINDING THE BALANCE

There are Standards of Care² for the treatment of Transgendered people, although a number of variations mean that no two transitions are exactly alike. Whilst not all of these are included in every transition, most involve the following stages:

- **Gender realisation** – you decide you need to transition gender and seek medical diagnoses, advice and assistance.
- **Hormonal realignment** – you usually commence pharmacological treatment (hormones) to gradually change your body to that of your affirmed gender.
- **Social realignment** – you begin living, working and expressing yourself in your affirmed gender. Administrative recognition of your affirmed gender should occur at this time.
- **Gender affirmation surgery** – you may continue your transition and undergo surgery to acquire the physical anatomy and characteristics of your affirmed gender.

Individuals are likely to differ in how public they want their gender transition to be. Some prefer that very few people know they are transgender and hope that after transition they can quietly blend in as members of their new gender. Others are committed to educating the public about Gender Incongruence, are eager to answer questions, and continue to talk openly about being transgender long after transition.

“... it is not about sexual orientation or lifestyle, but the prism through which I see myself.”

Work situations can vary too: the composition of the workplace; the type of work being done; the amount of interaction the member has with peers, superiors, subordinates and clients; the physical layout of the workplace; the public or private nature of the business; and the surrounding culture all have a bearing on how the transition should be handled. For all these reasons, there is no single formula for managing transitions in the workplace. Instead this handbook aims to offer sound guidance based on the most successful strategies in a large number of transitions, but it must be tailored to meet the needs of specific situations.

² World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), 2012. Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Non-Conforming People.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR MEMBERS TRANSITIONING GENDER

Revealing your gender identity at work is often one of the last steps to take before living and working in your preferred gender role. By the time you inform the Air Force that you plan to change gender, you have no doubt been dealing with this issue for many years. You have probably already told your family and some friends, and you may be dealing with the consequences of this admission such as estrangement, child custody and exclusion from social networks.

"I feel like I have thrown a grenade into a room and I am now having to watch as the casualties are being treated. I feel helpless on the sidelines as my family slowly transforms itself to the new normal."

"We leave a big wake behind us as we transition. We are accused of being selfish and not thinking of the consequences of our decision on those around us."

The Standards of Care for transgender people (WPATH, 2012) recommend at least a year of living full time in your preferred gender identity before gender affirmation surgery is performed, known as the Real Life Experience. You will therefore need to begin working in your new gender role before you are likely to undertake gender affirming surgery. This mid-transition period may be awkward for you and those around you, and should therefore be planned and managed sensitively.

Communication

Chain of command. After you have been given a diagnosis you will need to inform your Chain of Command (CoC), usually via presentation of a Medical Certificate (or Form PM101- Medical Fitness Advice). This is likely to be very daunting, and for most managers and commanders it may be the first time they have needed to consider Gender Incongruence, particularly in the work environment. So it is vital that you are open, honest, upfront and also understanding with your colleagues and Commanders to ensure the communication channels are open both ways. This will enable you to convey your needs as well as address any questions or concerns your manager may have.

Communication between you and your manager is important as your needs will change as you go through the transition process. You will also need to establish an open relationship with your Administration Officer (or other administrative staff) so they can assist you in making the administrative transition as smooth as possible.

You may need to consider whether you want to transition whilst staying in your current unit or upon arrival at a new unit. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. The latter has the advantage of leaving your old life in your old posting location and arriving in your new unit ready to start your new life. However the disadvantage is that you will have to re-establish your transition support networks in the new location. Other factors to consider are the size of your mustering/category and how well you are known.

"Before I informed my chain of command, I did a lot of stage management. All of the elements involved in the diagnosis were complete and I had decided to move on to transition. I prepared a brief, which I used as a script when I informed my CoC and I read off that. I requested an appointment with my one and two up bosses, the Padre who was privy to the information and the person I had requested to be my mentor."

A Transitioning gender support plan/road map is provided at annex A to assist transitioning members and their managers in arranging leave, and other issues.

Annex B and C are examples of ways you may wish to inform your Commander or manager.

Colleagues. Communication with colleagues is equally important as they may also not be familiar or comfortable with the notion of gender transition. It is important to remember that while you have usually had many months, probably years, to understand your need to transition, this may be the first time your work colleagues have been exposed to Gender Incongruence and they may have difficulty in reconciling your different identities; between being a colleague/superior/subordinate and the notion of you undertaking such a personal journey. Effective communication relies on an accurate assessment of each situation and the people involved. This will help implement the best strategy to make it a comfortable work environment for all those involved.

There are many ways to respectfully disclose your gender identity to your work colleagues. How you wish to have it announced is something you will need to discuss with your Commander or manager and it is important that you state what information you are happy to have discussed and what you are not. Ways others have chosen include the following:

- Have Management call a section or unit meeting and make an announcement on your behalf. Have specialist health professionals and/or chaplains to answer questions.
- Have a letter you have drafted read out to your unit/section. Copies of examples are attached at annex C or D.
- Distribute a letter or notification via email.
- Make the announcement in person at a unit meeting.

“The chain of command was very supportive and allowed me to control how my co-workers were informed. I chose to have a letter read out by my boss and then let my co-workers express themselves and have any questions answered. I then went on leave prior to returning to work in my affirmed gender.”

Of course, your disclosure may not be enough information for some personnel in your work area. You may wish to also discuss with your CoC about how you would like your workmates to get good information, to discuss and digest this information. A minimum should be identifying and providing some information rather than letting individuals wade through copious information on the internet. Consider setting up an environment where people are allowed to ask you, your mentor, or another specialist, questions to which they will receive open, honest and factually correct information.

Disclosure

Below are some tips to help you prepare for disclosing your personal situation with friends, family, colleagues and bosses from other LGBTI members.

Preparation

- Drop a few hints to ‘test the water’. Sometimes hints are all that’s needed to get the ball rolling.
- If there is an unspoken understanding between you and your friends, it might be that they’re waiting for you to give them the opportunity to talk to you openly about the subject.
- Friends, family or colleagues may already know more about you than you credit them with.
- Discuss the issue with people one at a time and somewhere private; it’s easier to reason with an individual than with the group.
- Don’t plan on anything else for the rest of the day.

Questions

- Be ready to talk to your friends for hours on the subject. They'll probably be very curious and want to know what it's about and what it means for your friendship. Make sure you're well informed to make sure you do all this successfully.
- Be ready to be peppered with questions you might rather not answer - be honest and be frank, but don't feel obliged to give any more detail than you feel comfortable or would not be acceptable under cultural norms of discussion.
- Let them know where they can find out more if they are too emotional or afraid to ask you straight away.
- Be prepared for follow-up questions by phone and in person – it is an on-going process.

Reaction

- Make sure you are emotionally prepared for all reactions, good and bad. Some people can be extremely shocked at first, so be patient. Very negative reactions are unlikely, but if they occur, don't let this diminish your resolve.
- People who are ignorant of the facts, or emotionally distressed, may begin by saying things that are hurtful without quite realising what they are saying. Remember that they may also be experiencing turmoil too. You have also dropped a big revelation that they most likely weren't prepared for and are asking them to adjust and accept it immediately – it might have taken you years to come to terms with your gender identity!
- Be ready for people to need time and space to think about things before any discussion takes place. With that in mind – when telling family, don't leave telling people until the last day of your visit home - do it half way through.
- Make sure people are in no doubt before you leave that it is your life to live, you only have one, and the bottom line is that you are going to continue your transition until it is complete, no matter what their reaction is.
- Unfortunately, you need to consider that you may lose a friend or family members during this process. In some people the revulsion to gender identity issues is so deeply-rooted they simply cannot overcome it.

Finding a mentor

"The mentor in my case is a friend who will give me frank & honest advice."

To assist you in your transition, you may like to take up the option of a mentor or case manager to help you during the transition period. The role of the mentor can be whatever you negotiate it to be. Obviously both you and the mentor have to be comfortable with the arrangement, but it can include the following:

- Helping to provide advice on military issues related to the correct wearing of your affirmed gender's uniform, and related grooming issues.
- Being a supportive sounding board.
- Provision of frank and honest advice.
- Being a unit point of contact, or conduit, for questions from the workplace related to gender transition.

Most people choose a mentor of their affirmed gender and it's most appropriate to choose someone from your peer group or one rank level up (i.e. if you are a CPL then find another CPL or a SGT). Your selection of mentor is likely to work better if your relationship can develop into a supportive friendship. If you cannot suggest your own potential mentors to your Commander/manager, consider seeking advice from the padres or DEFGLIS.

Period of adjustment – Leave considerations

After you have announced your plan to transition you may initially wish to keep a low profile and take a short period of leave to adjust your appearance/grooming. Doing so may reduce any confusion for others with your potential gender ambiguity during transition, but this can also be a time for your work colleagues to get used to the idea of you turning up to work as the opposite gender.

Adjusting your appearance and grooming can take some time, for example if you are transitioning from Male to Female you may want to grow your hair. Your gender transition is likely to be more obvious or even successful if your workplace's dress of the day is Service Dress because there are male/female differences in styles; however you may find this task more challenging if you usually wear DPCUs in your workplace. To overcome some of this workplace awkwardness, particularly during the early stages of social and hormonal realignment, it may be appropriate to negotiate a combination of Short Leave (PACMAN, vol 1. Chap 5. Part 9, Div 1) and some Temporary Home Located Work or other Flexible Work Arrangement (DI(G)PERS 49-4).

For the most part of your transition, you will not need to access Sick Leave (DI(G)PERS 16-21 - *Sick and Convalescence Leave – Defence Members*), however you are likely to need Sick Leave to recover from some medical or surgical treatment. Accordingly, when Sick Leave is recommended for greater than four continuous calendar weeks you will be required to have a Medical Employment Classification Review (MECR) and a rehabilitation assessment.

ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSITION

Change of name and gender

It is likely that you will wish to choose a name which is more gender-appropriate as well as amending your gender on various official documents. For some of these documents you may wish to commence notification/amendment immediately after gender realisation, but many can be done before you transition in the workplace. For most document changes, a medical certificate confirming your gender is required.

Changing your name to be more gender appropriate is done through your State of residence Birth, Deaths & Marriages office and does not require any surgery. The requirements to change your gender on your birth certificate will depend on the State it was issued by, but usually requires medical supporting documents.

Here is a list of private documentation which others have found useful, but this list is not exhaustive:

1. Driver's License.
2. Bank accounts.
3. Tax File Number details.
4. Superannuation.
5. Insurance policies.
6. Other licenses or endorsements, e.g. Forklift, Shooters License.
7. Educational records, e.g. Degrees, diplomas.
8. Citizenship papers (if applicable).
9. Civilian passport.
10. Other government agencies, e.g. Centrelink, Medicare.
11. Birth Certificate (Note: all Australian States/Territories recognise the affirmed sex of an individual after surgery, unless the person is married. There are different requirements if you were born overseas).

You will need Administrative assistance to change your name/gender on these official Defence documents:

1. Defence ID cards.
2. PMKeyS –Change of name (Form AD150).
3. Account names of service applications (e.g. PMKeyS, CMS, ROMAN, etc.).
4. Change of Circumstances Notification (Form SVA003).
5. Defence DRN/DSN email accounts. Note: items 2 and 3 above must be completed before this can be actioned. Complete a DRN Access Request to update your Outlook account and change your account name (Form AD261).
6. MedKeyS / Medical documentation.
7. Personnel file.
8. The President/Chairman of your Mess Committee (if applicable).

9. ADF drivers license.

10. Official passport (Note: Australia now has the option of X for sex on a passport).

11. PMKeyS – Change of gender (Note: a reissued Birth Certificate will be required to have the affirmed gender reflected).

It is likely to take many months to successfully capture all the changes, with some possibly not enacted for a couple of years. We all have histories and this takes time to change!

Note: It is also beyond the scope of this guide to discuss the many legal issues and aspects of transitioning gender and how they might relate to family law (e.g. your entitlement to remain legally married). However, you may wish to refer to the Defence policy on Interdependent Partnerships (DI(G)PERS 53-31) regarding de-facto entitlements.

Uniform and name tags

Upon presenting the Medical Certification (or Form PM101) to the Clothing Store you will be entitled to wear the uniform appropriate to your affirmed gender including the issue of new name tags.

The Air Force Clothing Policy (AAP 3032.001(AM1)) provides for free exchange of personal clothing due to a medically supervised weight loss program where a member's body shape has undergone a noticeable change. Similarly, gender transition is a medically supervised change in body shape and an entitlement to a free re-issue of uniform seems therefore reasonable. According to AAP3032.001, you can apply for a free re-issue by submitting a Minute, endorsed by your ADF Medical Officer, to the OIC Air Force Clothing Entitlements (OIC AFCE – RAAF Williams) through your Area Health Network. The MO must declare you have been on a medically supervised program which has changed your body shape such that you should be considered for an entitlement to a free exchange of personal clothing at public expense. On receipt of the Minute, AFCE will seek final approval from DCOORD-AF and advise all concerned of the outcome.

If you have ribbon bars with 4 (or more) medal ribbons, you will to have these adjusted as the Air Force Manual of Dress (AAP 5195.003(AM1)) requires that the row of ribbons consists of not more than four ribbons for a male member and three ribbons for a female member. If you have already been issued with your ribbon bars, you will need to apply to have the amendment to your ribbon bar as a free re-issue along with your application for free exchange of uniform above.

IMPACT TRANSITIONING MAY HAVE ON YOUR AIR FORCE CAREER

Transitioning gender may have an impact on several different aspects of your career including Individual Readiness (IR), physical fitness, weapons testing, Medical Employment Classification (MEC), health and safety, flexible employment and career development.

Posting considerations

Completing transition within a normal posting cycle of 3-4 years is possible, and may or may not be desirable depending on your circumstances. There are many issues which should be considered with regards to postings.

- Specialist Gender Clinics are not available in all posting locations. Posting to a place with a reputable program may need to be considered.
- Moving locations means potentially moving away from a stable environment, including medical specialists and social support. However making a fresh start may be easier for some transitioning members and/or their work colleagues.
- There are positives and negatives about choosing to transition in your current unit or to start afresh at a new unit. The pathways you have taken to transition will also impact on your decision about where you commence the Real Life Experience of your affirmed gender.

Individual readiness (IR)

Transitioning gender may affect your IR, for example, if you have been medically downgraded or there have been delays in undertaking an annual PFT and weapons testing requirements or if you have chosen to make yourself unavailable to deploy.

Air Force IR policy (DI(AF)OPS 4-8) states a Commander is to be informed by Form PM 101 when, as a result of any condition or planned medical treatment, a member will be, or has become, non-deployable for any period likely to exceed 28 days. Commanders may grant an IR waiver for up to a period of 12 months under certain circumstances. Refer to DI(AF) OPS 4-8 for further information.

Air Force IR policy also specifies that members considered for deployment need to be mature, stable, self-sufficient, self-disciplined and capable of working closely with others, including the requirement to share accommodation. In some cases, Commanders may consider the effect of your gender transition on that of your work colleagues and may deem your ability to share accommodation may be somewhat compromised by the awkwardness felt by others. This is a challenging situation for everyone and most of the time these situations can be addressed sensitively and appropriately through communication and education.

Medical Employment Classification

As Gender Incongruence is recognized as a bone fide medical condition, management of your transition will invariably be a combination of administrative and medical tasks, with a requirement to follow the ADF policy on the Medical Employment Classification (MEC) system (DI(G)PERS 15-15). Consideration in the MEC and MECR process needs to be discussed with your treating MO and other specialists and will be dependent upon your personal medical, psychological and pharmaceutical requirements.

As with most member's who transition gender, you are likely to be classified as MEC 3 – Rehabilitation - for at least some of your gender affirmation journey, which means you are being defined as temporarily unfit for operational deployment. For some parts of your transition you may be able to negotiate a MEC 2 – Employable and Deployable with restrictions – because depending on your circumstances, a MECR Board may not consider being transgender and/or taking hormonal medication a medical barrier to deployability. However, as indicated earlier in this document, should you require sick leave for greater than four continuous weeks, you will be required to have a MECR and a rehabilitation assessment.

Physical Fitness Testing

The PFT is a fundamental requirement of service in the Air Force. To account for physiological differences between males and females, the PFT is a sub-maximal, general fitness test with standards relative to the birth gender and age of those taking the test. On commencing the social/hormonal realignment phase of your transition, you may then be required to meet the PFT of your affirmed gender if you are deemed medically fit to do so. Which test you are required to take, and when, will be determined by your treating MO and can be provided to your PTI on a PM101.

Air Force fitness testing policy (DI(AF)PERS 53-13) indicates that members with a medical condition that affects their ability to undertake individual components of the PFT are to be assessed by a MO and given remedial training prior to undertaking the test. However, medical restrictions to performing components of the PFT are only to apply when the member has been allocated a MEC which specifies employment restrictions in accordance with DI(G)PERS 16-15.

THE IMPACT AN AIR FORCE CAREER HAS ON TRANSITIONING GENDER

Being you

It is important to feel that you are able to just be yourself – a somewhat unique and changing situation for you whilst going through gender transition. Just because you are transitioning gender doesn't mean the workplace has any further rights to your private or personal situations or that they can disregard equity and diversity principles. An inclusive workplace means accepting everyone for who they are, irrespective of their age, sex, gender identity, sexual preference, religion, marital status and cultural background. You should not feel the need to put on a façade at work; adopting a 'fake' persona will only lead to unhappiness and a lack of willingness to remain in the Air Force. All members who demonstrate and personify the Air Force values should feel empowered to be themselves.

Staying in touch

Members posted within close range of their hometown are more likely to have ready access to a great support network in existing supportive family and friends, but not always. Whether close to or far away from your support network, keeping in contact with friends and family is important, whether by phone, Facebook, Skype or writing by mail. Good day, bad day, or anything in between – supportive family members will most likely want to hear from you. It is important to maintain close connections with family and friends whom you trust. Support networks are an essential part of dealing with the stresses and challenges you will face during your career.

Building networks in new locations

While all members of the Air Force need to establish new networks and support in each location when they are posted, this can be more difficult for transgender members. One advantage you have as an Air Force member, is that you have access to a ready-made network of people who can provide advice, support and mentoring (see a list of contacts at the end of this guide).

DEFGLIS provides a ready-made support network for you and through DEFGLIS you will be able to connect with other LGBTI members at your new base/locality. Other ways to find and build new support networks are:

- Get involved with your local LGBTI community – your local community is always looking for volunteers to support one another. If you don't know anyone else, put your Air Force connections to good use, and meet new people while you are strengthening your local community. The DEFGLIS website also maintains a list of LGBTI community resources in every state.
- Pride in Diversity hold regular networking events in each state. DEFGLIS advertises these events and as employees of Defence, we are automatically invited because Defence is a member. These events provide a great way to connect with LGBTI networks in business.
- Pick up your local LGBTI newspaper or read it online. The Star Observer, Gay News Network and SameSame are national LGBTI news services that have a lot of information about what is happening in the community. You'll most likely find a community event that interests you.

TOP TIPS FOR MEMBERS TRANSITIONING IN THE AIR FORCE

The following tips have been provided by members who have transitioned gender in the Air Force.

- **Honesty.** *“If you wish to be respected you must also give that same respect to your co workers up and down the chain. How you treat others and inform others will be directly related to the way you are treated. It is incredibly hard to open up and trust people with a personal secret you have probably carried for your entire adult life, however from my experiences if you keep an open door philosophy and answer honest questions with polite and clear non emotional detail, most will accept and understand.”*
- **Be professional.** *“Professional; the hormones you may undertake to change will have a varied and perhaps profound effect on not only your physical body, but more importantly your emotional stability. Try not to allow this to cloud or effect your judgement, it will be hard for some to see this happening, trust in your friends when they point out little slips and errors in your emotional well-being, they have your interests at heart!”*
- **Empower those around you.** *“Knowledge equals power which equals understanding; empowering those around you to understand will help them feel less threatened and confused, which can assist in being treated with respect and understanding rather than confusion and possibly even contempt and hostility.”*
- **Be confident.** *“Know your self; make as much effort as possible to be part of the team and not hide or be hidden away to avoid embarrassment. Stepping out in to the work arena will be hard, but the sooner you face this challenge the sooner your well being can return.”*
- **Trust.** *“Trusting others when you’re vulnerable is hard for most serving people. We are proud, strong and generally rather too stubborn to allow others to take charge of us when we feel we can manage ourselves. The problem is you may not understand all that is happening around you, particularly with your co workers. So listen and trust in your commanders based on their good sound knowledge.”*
- **Planning.** *“Map out your transition as best you can, try and forecast as much as possible and pass this on to the relevant commanders. Learn and understand not only what’s happening now in your world, but look and think about where you will be and what you may need.”*

GUIDANCE FOR COMMANDERS AND MANAGERS OF MEMBERS TRANSITIONING GENDER

Managing or commanding an Air Force member who is transgender should, in theory, be no different to any other Air Force member. However, as can be seen from the previous parts of this guide, there are certain areas in which a little understanding and care can have a great impact for these members.

The Commander's impact

A Commander or a Manager has a powerful role in setting the tone and defining the degree of inclusion within your team. Your leadership and attitude towards transgender members will have a strong impact on whether transgendered members feel they can be themselves in the workplace, and how others treat them. Transgender members who have to hide their Gender Dysphoria are not performing at their best, because they spend a significant amount of their available capacity hiding this aspect of themselves. Spending time ensuring a moderate workplace that encourages everyone to be themselves allows the Air Force to capitalise on the strengths of all individuals and reduces the likelihood that you will need to deal with unacceptable behaviour within your unit.

Managing or commanding a transgender member may seem a daunting experience for a supervisor or commander, influenced by either personally held beliefs, a lack of understanding or awareness of the issues, or in some cases, minimal understanding or experience with transgender people. However, it is important to treat transgender members the same as any other Air Force member under your command. There is support available to commanders and supervisors - please see the support available section of this guide.

Harassment and Bullying

Transphobic attitudes and harassment is one of the most pervasive, frightening, and potentially damaging threats members can face. If a member is being bullied, called names, threatened, or physically harmed at their workplace because of their Gender Dyphoria, it is a command responsibility to act to stop the harassment and rectify the situation. If the Chain of Command (CoC) does not do anything to protect the member, they can be held liable.

The impact harassment can have on members should not be underestimated; it has the potential to effect the member both personally and professionally. One Airman reflects on overhearing two colleagues making derogatory remarks about his sexuality:

'This was the point that I felt I had lost the fight for Equality within my Squadron. I started contemplating leaving the RAAF. I started participating in self destructive activities (such as binge drinking) and my self-esteem was broken. Although I had to stay at the SQN, I lost my spark and my drive to be at work or participate in SQN activities. I never wanted to be around anyone and I became recluse'.

Allowing inappropriate jokes, attitudes or comments which marginalise transgender persons is equally damaging to an inclusive workplace culture, especially considering that its very difficult to know whether there is a transgender person within the unit or not. If a transgender person has made a decision to not disclose their gender dysphoria, it's very unlikely they will come forward to report unacceptable behaviour.

The member's colleagues, supervisors, chain of command or anyone in their workplace does NOT have the right to "out" someone without the affected member's permission. This can have tragic and dire consequences. Threatening to disclose personal information violates a member's right to privacy.

TIPS FOR COMMANDERS FROM MEMBERS WHO HAVE TRANSITIONED GENDER

- Protect the member's privacy. Information management is very important.
- Become very familiar with Understanding Transitioning Gender in the Workplace.
- Seek guidance and advice from the Padre, Psychology section and Medical services. Attend medical case management meetings to ensure you are well informed on the issues surrounding your member.
- Seek guidance and advice from other Commanders & Managers who have experience with gender issues. AFWD or DEFGLIS may be able to put you in contact with other Commanders/managers who have been through a similar management process.
- If the member has not articulated a transition plan encourage the member to develop a transition plan to include a notification plan.
- Listen to the member's wishes with respect to disclosure to the workplace and the broader community.
- Provide the member with a Mentor who the member is comfortable with.
- Be sure you understand your member's wishes with regards to their transition
- Be open with your transitioning member. Feel free to ask them questions.
- Ensure that other members in the unit know that intolerance, bullying or any other ill-behaviour towards the member transitioning will not be tolerated.

Support available and further information

- Mentoring and support available from CPL Amy Hamblin, the first Air Force member to successful transition, amy.hamblin@defence.gov.au
- Defence Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Transgender and Intersex Information Service (DEFGLIS) www.defglis.com.au
- Pride in Diversity www.prideindiversity.com.au
- The Gender Centre www.gendercentre.org.au
- Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org/documents/HRC-Workplace-Gender-Transition-Guidelines.pdf
- Diversity Council Australia www.dca.org.au
- Gender identity www.med.monash.edu.au/gendermed/identity
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) www.wpath.org
- Gender Education and Advocacy www.gender.org
- The National LGBTI Health Alliance www.lgbt.health.org.au
- Human Rights Campaign, Workplace Gender Transition Guidelines www.hrc.org/documents/HRC
- Human Rights Campaign, Transgender Visibility www.hrc.org/documents/transgender_visibility_guide

- Centre for Gender Sanity, Managing Transsexual Transition in the workplace www.gendersanity.com/shrm.html
- Transsexual Road Map, Family Issues www.tsroadmap.com/family/index.html
- Wipe Out Transphobia, Myth buster www.wipeouttransphobia.com/myth-buster/
- Personal website of an ADF person's transition <http://justlikeyou.com.au/>
- Passports www.passports.gov.au/web/sexgenderapplicants.aspx

Anti-Discrimination Legislation

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Commonwealth)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth)
- Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1996 (NT)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (TAS)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (VIC)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)

Births Deaths & Marriages

State/Territory

New South Wales (NSW)

Victoria (VIC)

Queensland (QLD)

South Australia (SA)

Western Australia (WA)

Tasmania (TAS)

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Northern Territory (NT)

Contact Details

www.bdm.nsw.gov.au/

www.bdm.vic.gov.au/

www.justice.qld.gov.au/bdm/

www.ocba.sa.gov.au/bdm/

www.bdm.dotag.wa.gov.au/

www.justice.tas.gov.au/bdm/

www.ors.act.gov.au/community/births_deaths_and_marriages

www.nt.gov.au/justice/bdm/index.shtml

Licensing Authorities

State/Territory

New South Wales (NSW)

Victoria (VIC)

Queensland (QLD)

South Australia (SA)

Western Australia (WA)

Tasmania (TAS)

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Northern Territory (NT)

Contact Details

www.rta.nsw.gov.au

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

www.tmr.qld.gov.au/

www.sa.gov.au/subject/Transport,%20travel%20and%20motoring

www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/566.asp

www.transport.tas.gov.au/

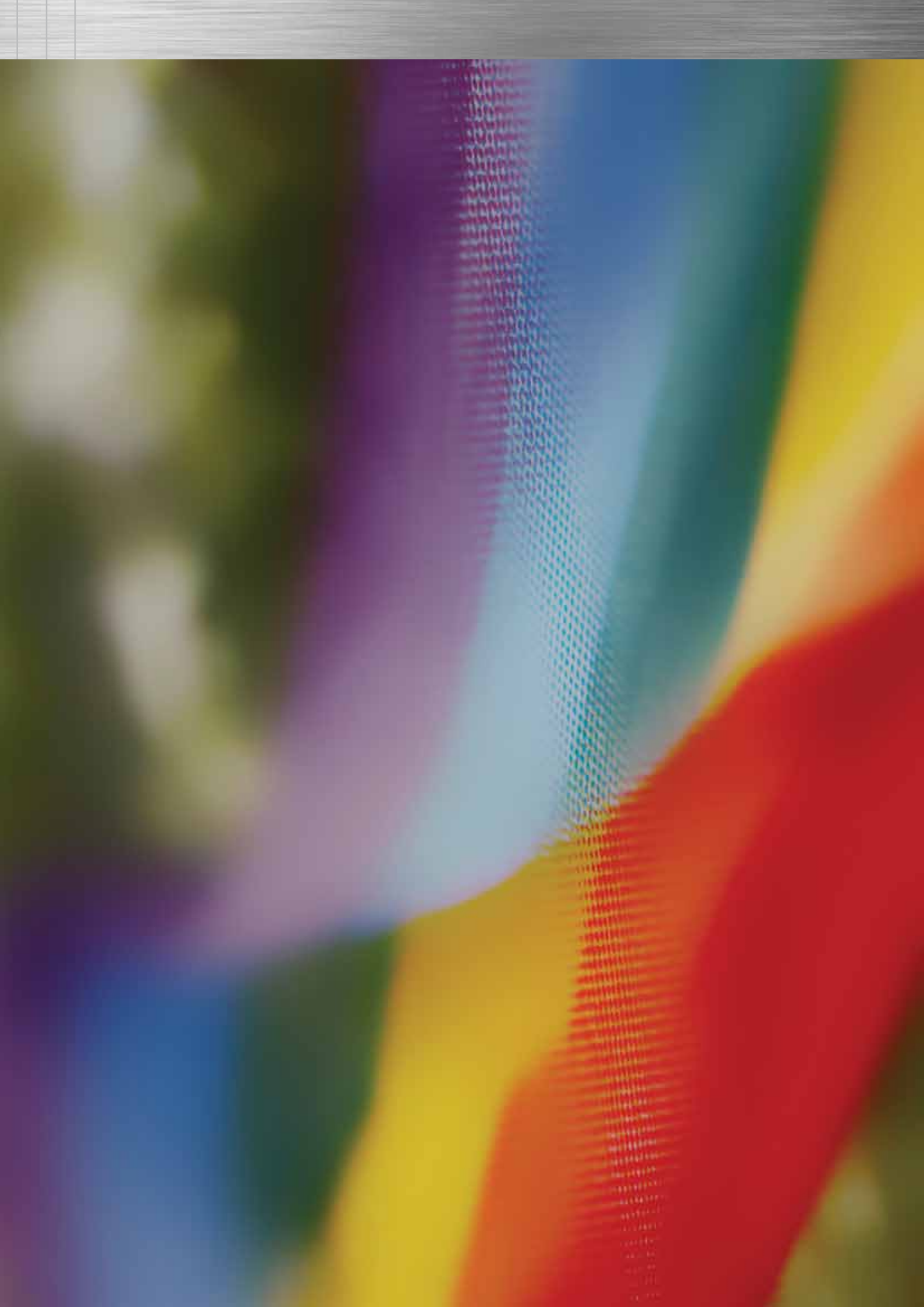
www.rego.act.gov.au/

www.transport.nt.gov.au/mvr/about-us

REFERENCES

- Australian Air Publication 3032.001(AM1) *Air Force Clothing Policy* (4th ed.).
- Australian Air Publication 5195.003(AM1) *Manual of Dress*.
- Australian Defence Force Pay and Conditions Manual (PACMAN), vol 1. Chap 5. Part 9, Div 1 – *Short Leave*
- Department of Defence (2011). *Understanding transitioning gender in the workplace*
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 16-15 – *Australian Defence Force Medical Employment Classification System*
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 16-21 – *Sick and Convalescence Leave – Defence Members*
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 36-2 – *Australian Defence Force Policy on Individual Readiness*
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 49-4 - *Flexible Work Arrangements for members of the Australian Defence Force*
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 50-1 –*Equity and Diversity in the Australian Defence Force*.
- Defence Instruction (General) Personnel 53-1 – *Recognition of Interdependent Partnerships*.
- Defence Instruction (Air Force) Personnel 53-13 – *Physical Fitness in the Royal Australian Air Force*
- Defence Instruction (Air Force) Operations 4-8 – *Individual Readiness*
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). (2012). *Standards of Care: for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming people*. (7th ed.). Retrieved from www.wpath.org/publications_standards.cfm
- American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, (4th ed., text revision).(DSM IV-TR).





GENDER TRANSITION SUPPORT PLAN

Introduction

This plan provides Commanders/Managers, Supervisors and transgender members with some extra guidance on the implementation of a gender transition arrangement.

Meeting

Commanders/managers and the transitioning member will need to develop a transition plan or roadmap for mutual clarity and guidance. There is no standard template to be used but the plan should include consideration of the duration of transition, the pathways being taken for the member to transition, and posting considerations.

Timelines

Complete gender transition can take years, however much of the early journey will happen between the member and their health care providers, usually hidden from the unit management and personnel.

- **Diagnosis (up to 12 months):** For a member to seek medical advice and receive an accurate diagnosis can take several months. This phase includes the process of obtaining a specialist referral, waiting times for specialist medical appointments, a number of appointments to enable assessment by the specialist, then eventually a specialist diagnosis.
- **Commence Treatment:** After specialist diagnosis, hormonal realignment therapy is usually commenced. Again the member will need a different specialist referral (and associated wait times) to obtain a prescription for and to commence hormonal treatment. Treatment may be commenced prior to disclosure or commencing Real Life Experience.
- **Disclosure:** After diagnosis, the member will need to decide on who and when to tell family friends and work colleagues. This Support Plan should be commenced as soon as the member chooses to disclose their condition and intent to transition gender to the Unit management. Seeking out an appropriate mentor and other support structures is very important at this point. Members will most likely have identified a new name for themselves and will want to commence changing their name and aligning their gender identity with official documents.
- **Commence Real Life Experience (at least 12 months):** Member begins living full time in their affirmed gender to stabilise their life and ensure this change is definitely right for them. This will occur for at least 12 months before gender reassignment surgery is considered. At the beginning, members may want to consider a period of leave or ways to maintain a low profile whilst developing a more gender-appropriate appearance. Where possible, the timing of this stage can be linked with posting cycles (especially if transitioning into a new unit) and/or stand down periods.
- **Surgery (up to 6 months):** Members requiring surgery will need to obtain the necessary approvals prior to seeking a surgeon and being scheduled for the applicable surgery. Additionally, there will be a recovery and rehabilitation period.

There are many variables to this timeline but full transition is unlikely to occur in less than 2-3 years. There are many drivers which will affect this timeline including the member's:

- desire to keep things on track and be an advocate for themselves.
- social/family situation.
- response to medical and hormonal treatment.
- psychological health.
- Unit management, personnel and tasks.
- Personnel Manager and Employment Group sponsor.

Posting considerations

Completing transition within a normal posting cycle of 3-4 years is possible, and may or may not be desirable depending on the member's circumstances. There are many issues which should be considered with regards to postings.

- Specialist Gender Clinics are not available in all posting locations. Posting to a place with a reputable program may need to be considered.
- Moving locations means potentially moving away from a stable environment, including medical specialists and social support. However making a fresh start may be easier for some transitioning members and/or their work colleagues.
- There are positives and negatives about choosing to transition in your current unit or to start afresh at a new unit. The pathways you have taken to transition will also impact on your decision about where you commence the Real Life Experience of your affirmed gender.
- It can be challenging to commence hormonal treatment and changing official documentation whilst still living in your birth gender role.

Other considerations

Many other considerations, such as use of ablutions, have been addressed in the *Understanding Transitioning Gender in the Workplace* guide, particularly the flowchart at annex B of the guide.

ANNEX B

STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE

MEMBERS STATEMENT PROVIDED TO [INSERT CO - UNIT]

ROADMAP FOR TRANSITION SUBMISSION BY [INSERT NAME RANK PMKEYS]

Reference:

- A. Department of Defence Guideline: Understanding Transitioning Gender in the Work Place.
- B. Air Force Diversity Guide to Transitioning Gender in the Air Force.
- 1. [Insert Introduction]
- 2. I have been addressing my own health and well-being issues since [insert appropriate date] when I sought help for issues I have with my gender identity. IAW refs A and B this is the earliest opportunity to inform you.

Back ground

- 3. [Insert Time line of the journey thus far which you want to disclose, including related family issues].
- 4. In [insert date] I was struggling with my gender identity issues and sought medical and psychological help.
- 5. I was referred to the Gender Identity Clinic and...
- 6. After X appointments with the Psychiatrist I was diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder and was approved for hormone treatment.

Current situation

- 7. I have been given medical approval to start social realignment from the male/female* role to the female/male* role. Attached at annex A is a copy of the letter from Dr XX acknowledging my need to commence gender transition, so I can commence changing the gender identity on my identification.
- 8. [Insert the information you want to disclose, including family situation for which you may need management support or assistance].

Transition

- 9. [Insert when you would like to start the transitioning gender at work].
- 10. [Insert future medical plans as you wish to disclose, including plans for hormonal and/or gender realignment surgery if applicable].
- 11. [Insert request for leave or suggestion for Flexible Work Arrangements].
- 12. [Insert suggested allocation of a same-sex mentor and/or case manager].
- 13. [Insert your suggestion about any transition arrangements for use of ablutions at work, and or any living-in arrangements which may need to be reviewed.
- 14. [Insert suggestions on how you would like to inform the workplace, e.g. draft a statement, have a team meeting, and what information (if any) management can disclose on your behalf].

Conclusion

15. I understand that this issue will come as a shock to most people. As I have stated before; I know the importance of taking care of myself. I need to do this to take care of myself. I will keep my Chain of Command fully informed as I progress through my transition. I will continue to maximise my contributions to the work of [insert unit name].

Signature Block

Date

STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE

An example of written communication between the transitioning person and management

Dear _____ ,

I have some very personal but important information I would like to share with you. This is not an easy letter to write and it has taken me many years to prepare for this moment.

For many years now I have felt a disconnect between my mind and the body I was born with. I have now been diagnosed with a medical condition called Gender Dysphoria, which means that my mind and body are not affirmed from a gender point of view. In other words, whilst my physical sex is male, my psychological gender perception is actually female. There has been some research done which suggests that this condition is most likely caused by imbalances in the mother or foetus before birth. It is therefore a condition I have had all of my life. I have had to accommodate this condition with increasing difficulty.

As a result of this condition I have spent many years suffering confusion, doubt and guilt resulting in increasing levels of depression and years of broken sleep. It is only now after considerable introspection and professional help, that I have come to grips with the issues and the alternatives that I face. I really only had three options:

1. continue trying to cope with the condition and live with increasing levels of depression and probably see my life disintegrate around me;
2. succumb to the depression that I have been suffering and attempt to end it all; or
3. end years of denial and address the mind/body mismatch by rebuilding my life and living as the woman I know I am.

The last few years have been an emotional roller coaster as I have battled with these alternatives. As a result of the professional help I have received I have accepted that I can not continue to live as a woman trapped in a man's body. Suicide is also not a route I want to take. I have been able to reach a decision which means that I now have a future to look forward to as a woman.

I have spent a big part of my life trying to deny the real me. I have done a lot of reading and research in recent years and I was relieved to find that I was not the only person to face these issues. The incidence of Gender Dysphoria is not high. As it is not a common condition, the awareness of it within Society is very limited and news about it is often met with ridicule rather than attempts to understand it.

Making the decision to transition from male to female has not been easy. In fact, it has been agonising, especially when considering the impact on my wife and our children as well as my parents and other loved ones. The last few years have been extremely difficult. I had an overwhelming need to understand the issues and work out what I needed to do to be true to myself. The confusion, the doubt, the fear of the unknown and concern over the impact and pain on my family really made me try to make option 1 work. It did not. I now know that I must live and work as a woman. I now need to find a way for me to successfully make the transition and restart my life as a woman.

I want to continue working with this Department. I want to continue using my skills, experience and knowledge to add value and make a difference. I realise this will provide many challenges for me, you as my Manager, my work colleagues, and for the Department.

My plans are to change my name to [new name] in December and to commence living as a woman at that time. As you know I have arranged to take four weeks annual leave over Christmas. I would like to inform my work colleagues of my transition plans prior to my holiday and then return in the New Year as [new name].

It will take some time for me to make a full transition. It will take time to 'unlearn' all my male habits and ways and to learn new ways. I have found it increasingly difficult living with such a big secret and not talking about the real me and being open and honest with you and others about my true self. I have not meant to mislead you or any of my colleagues. I hope you can understand that it has been a very emotional time for me and my family and I have needed to get myself sorted out and prepared before telling you and the rest of the organisation about this.

I would like to meet with you to discuss some thoughts and plans on how a smooth transition might be achieved so that this process is as stress-free as possible for all concerned. I have the contact details for a psychologist who has had experience in assisting people and businesses through the transition phase and I would like to involve her as I take this huge, frightening but vital step. I believe her involvement may also make the transition easier for my work colleagues too as she will be able to assist them with understanding what is happening.

I would appreciate your keeping my news confidential at this stage as I want to avoid any uncontrolled rollout of the news around the workplace. This will help avoid disruption and embarrassment for my colleagues and for me.

I realise that this whole process will not be easy, but I would really appreciate your support and advice on how it might be achieved. I am always available to answer any questions you may have now or in the future.

With respect,

[Your name]

STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE

Example of written communication between a transitioning person and their workplace colleagues

Dear _____ ,

I have some very personal but important information I would like to share with you. This is not an easy letter to write and it has taken me many years to prepare for this moment. I suspect that you will be rather surprised and even dumbfounded at the contents of my letter.

I have been diagnosed with a medical condition called Gender Dysphoria, which means that my mind and body are not aligned from a gender point of view. In other words, whilst my physical sex is male, my psychological gender perception is actually female. There has been some research done which suggests that this condition is most likely caused by imbalances in the mother or foetus before birth. It is therefore a condition I have had all of my life. I have had to accommodate this condition with increasing difficulty.

As a result of this condition I have spent many years suffering confusion, doubt and guilt resulting in increasing levels of depression and years of broken sleep. It is only now after considerable introspection and professional help, that I have come to grips with the issues and the alternatives that I face. I really only have three options:

1. continue trying to cope with the condition and live with increasing levels of depression and probably see my life disintegrate around me;
2. succumb to the depression that I have been suffering and attempt to end it all; or
3. end years of denial and address the mind/body mismatch by rebuilding my life and living as a woman.

The last few years have been an emotional roller coaster as I have battled with these alternatives. As a result of the professional help I have received I have accepted that I can not continue to live as a woman trapped in a man's body. Suicide is also not a route I want to take. I have chosen option 3. This means that I now have a future to look forward to as a woman.

I have spent a big part of my life trying to deny the real me. For many years I believed that I was the only person with such feelings and therefore I believed they could not be right so I hid them. I have done a lot of reading and research in recent years and I was relieved to find that I was not the only person to face these issues.

Making the decision to transition has not been easy. In fact, it has been agonising, especially when considering the impact on my wife and children, and my parents and other loved ones. The last few years have been extremely difficult. I had an overwhelming need to understand the issues and work out what I needed to do to be true to myself. The confusion, the doubt, the fear of the unknown and concern over the impact and pain on my family really made me try to make option 1 work. It did not.

I know that I must live and work as the woman I really am. I now need to find a way for me to successfully make the transition and restart my life as a woman.

It will take some time for me to make a full transition. It will take time to 'unlearn' all my male habits and ways and to learn new ways. I have found it increasingly difficult living with such confusing feelings and not being able to be the real me. I have not meant to mislead you. I hope you can understand that it has been a very emotional time for me and my family, and I have needed to get myself sorted out and prepared before telling you about this.

The incidence of Gender Dysphoria is not high. As it is not a common condition, the awareness of it within Society is very limited and news about it is often met with ridicule rather than attempts to understand it. Some of you may have had previous experience with transitioning people and can therefore relate to my need to transition. If you have not, I can understand that you might be confused and find this letter quite unbelievable. I have lived with this condition all of my life and have consulted many professionals who specialise in gender issues. I would welcome any questions that you might have. I would much prefer to help you and others to understand my condition and its implications than to have any misconceptions exist. I would ask that you respect my right to privacy and understand that there might be some questions that I feel are not open for discussion.

My plans are to change my name to [new name] in mid-December and to commence living as a woman at that time. As you know I have arranged to take four weeks annual leave from mid-December until mid-January. When I return in the New Year please refer to me as [new name] and use 'she' and 'her' as appropriate.

This is a very daunting time for me as I don't know how you and others will react to my news and my transition. I will try to make it as easy as I possibly can for everyone. I hope you will see that whilst the external appearance will change, not everything will be different. I will be the same person with the same values, skills, experience and knowledge as before. I want to continue the same friendship and close working relationship we have had in the past. I would ask that you extend to me the same level of respect and assistance that you have previously, as your support in assisting me through this very difficult period of change for us all would be really appreciated.

I have been heartened by the support I have had from the senior management. My transition raises new and interesting challenges and their support has helped ease some of my anxieties. They have reinforced the Department's Equity and Diversity policy and Values.

The meeting you have been invited to this week will give you the opportunity to meet the psychologist I have been working with in recent years. She has considerable experience in assisting those with Gender Dysphoria and will provide some more background on the subject. She will also be able to answer any questions you might like to raise. I will not be attending the meeting.

In closing, please help with my transition by referring to me as [new name] on my return to work next year, accept my decision and treat me with the respect that you have previously, and please feel free to ask any reasonable questions to help avoid any misconceptions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

With respect,

[your name]



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