



Psychotherapy & Counselling
Federation of Australia

Position Statement on therapeutic support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people and their families

PACFA recognises that “all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, 2012) and embraces diversity of expression of human gender, sexuality and relationship structures.

PACFA recognises that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people and their families are subject to significant pressures and discrimination based on prejudice towards their sexual and/or gender identity.

A national study of the LGBTIQ+ community found direct negative mental health impacts from discrimination, with almost 40% of respondents seeking therapy in the previous 12 months for anxiety, depression, family and relationship concerns (Leonard et al, 2012). The report recommended that underlying causes of discrimination be addressed.

Therapies practised with the intention of reducing or eliminating same-sex attractions, sexual behaviour and gender diversity, are harmful and contrary to ethical research-informed therapeutic practice. PACFA stands with other local and global professional associations that oppose conversion or reparative therapies.

Consequently with respect to therapy for LGBTIQ+ people and their families, PACFA affirms that:

- Same-sex attraction (homosexuality) is not a mental disorder (APA, 2013); neither are gender-diverse or transgender identifications. Gender dysphoria pertains to the degree of distress caused by stigma, not to the transgender identity itself (APA, 2013);
- Counsellors and psychotherapists recognise the harmful effects of conversion and reparative therapies, that aim to reduce or eliminate same-sex attraction or gender-diverse identities or expressions, and abide by the PACFA Code of Ethics 2017 which requires them to do no harm to clients;
- Counsellors and psychotherapists respect the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and their families to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy;
- Counsellors and psychotherapists are aware of their personal values, beliefs and assumptions in relation to diverse clients; and respect diversity by not discriminating against clients based on their gender and/or sexual identity, either directly or indirectly (PACFA, 2017);

- Counsellors and psychotherapists take responsibility for their ongoing education, training, consultation and supervision to ensure their competence to practise with LGBTIQ+ people and their families;
- Counsellors and psychotherapists refer onward clients for whom they are not competent to provide a professional service, and ensure that referrals are in the clients' best interests and are made with informed consent (PACFA, 2017);
- Counsellors and psychotherapists commit to eliminating the stigma and discrimination that has been historically directed toward LGBTIQ+ clients and their families; and
- Counsellors and psychotherapists support the dissemination of accurate information to clients about their sexual and gender identities, and apply appropriate therapeutic interventions to meet client needs.

PACFA opposes outright the use of conversion and reparative therapies, or other interventions that proactively aim to change a person's sexual or gender identity. These are in contradiction to the PACFA Code of Ethics. Careful attention should be paid to avoid subtle influence, manipulation or coercion in this regard.

Therapeutic responsiveness with LGBTIQ+ clients who present with concerns about their sexual or gender identity, or members of their families, can be oriented around a contextualised approach to the client's presentation, challenging negative stereotypes, and supporting self-acceptance.

Further resources

PACFA is developing resources on therapeutic support of LGBTIQ+ clients and their families, including information about interventions and professional development opportunities.

References

- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Leonard, W., Pitts, M., Mitchell, A., Lyons, A., Smith, A., Patel, S., Couch, M. & Barrett, A. (2012). *Private Lives 2: The second national survey of the health and wellbeing of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Australians*. Monograph Series Number 86. Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.
- PACFA (2017). *Code of Ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.pacfa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PACFA-Code-of-Ethics-2017.pdf>
- United Nations (2012). *Born free and equal: Sexual orientation and gender identity in international human rights law*. The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/BornFreeAndEqualLowRes.pdf>