

## IMPLEMENTING TRANS-AFFIRMATIVE CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Increase Awareness and Competency:

- Gauge the readiness of your community:
  - a. What foundational groundwork has been laid to promote change?
  - b. What processes are in place at the departmental, institutional and community level?
  - c. How can you build on these initiatives and network with other professionals?
- Conduct a needs assessment of the gaps in care:
  - a. Ask the transgender community about their experiences and needs.
  - b. Create strategies on how integrated health needs can be met.
  - c. Network with providers, institutions, and professional organizations that are already working on transgender health in order to gain knowledge and support (e.g., regional providers, The Center of Excellence in Transgender Health, <http://www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/>; WPATH, [www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)).
- Create a taskforce of interested stakeholders that is multi-disciplinary:
  - a. Include providers and LGBTQ community centers/activists.
- Educate yourself and others about transgender issues:
  - a. It is important to have some knowledge about the diversity of transgender experiences and common developmental milestones (Beemyn, 2011) for diverse identities (e.g., gender queer, gender fluid, female to male, and male to female, as well as any other self-definitions that your clients embrace).
  - b. Explore past treatment of transgender individuals.
  - c. Look for strengths you can build on as well as the pattern of challenges in your community.
- Create a case consultation group that integrates providers from different disciplines.
- Access resources and review guidelines:

- a. Excellent resources exist on barriers to care (Grant et al., 2010), steps for building inclusivity (Beemyn, 2005; GLMA, 2012; Joint Commission, 2011), provision of psychotherapy (ALGBTIC, 2009; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Lev, 2004), and provision of transition-related services (WPATH, 2011).
- Establish providers who offer hormone therapy for treatment of gender dysphoria when requested:
  - a. Inform individuals of risks and expected bodily changes and obtain consent for treatment.
  - b. If providers lack experience with hormone therapy, identify providers who are willing to learn.
- Assist trans-identified individuals in building social support:
  - a. Transgender individuals often lack social support (Bridge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013; Nemoto, Bodeker, & Iwamoto, 2011; Lev, 2004), especially early in their identity development.
  - b. Finding other transgender individuals and supportive communities plays an important role in fostering resilience (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Pinto, Melendez, & Spector, 2008; Singh & Mckleroy 2010) and creating the conditions for increased self-acceptance and continued identity development.
  - c. Online communities and research into transgender lives can be a good way to begin. Transgender support groups, when available, can be invaluable (Rachlin, 2002).

## 2. **Create an Environment of Trans-Inclusivity:**

- Provide a gender-neutral bathroom.
- Develop a gender-neutral protocol for waiting areas and check-in procedures.
- Use individual's chosen language:
  - a. If an individual client or community member avoids use of a pronoun or uses a specific pronoun, follow their lead regardless of how you interpret their gender.
  - b. Similarly, ask for a preferred name, and if relevant, preferred pronoun, a simple, yet very important step that can help establish rapport and create a sense of safety.

- Review signs and paperwork for trans-inclusive language and symbols (e.g., avoid pink and blue as gender markers), and include paperwork and signage options such as transgender rather than only male and female.
- Increase visibility of LGBTQ and especially transgender-affirming literature and brochures in waiting areas, exam rooms, and meeting rooms.
- Focus on gender issues only when the individual indicates these are important and relevant to presenting concerns:
  - a. Avoid asking questions that are too specific and can be experienced as intrusive or dehumanizing (e.g., “Have you had surgery?”).
  - b. If you need to know about body parts (e.g., for sexual health), ask specifically about body parts.
- Foster a safe environment by utilizing non-gendered prompts (e.g., tell me about your past relationships) and by non-judgmental reactions to any hint of non-conforming gender identity:
  - a. Avoid gender normative statements (e.g., “men are...”), or statements that assume male and female are the only two options.
- Undergo free online LGBT inclusivity training from The Human Rights Campaign, which sponsors a Health Care Equality Index. They provide criteria for reviewing your environment/protocols and inclusion on their index for institutions that meet criteria.
- Celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small! Creating an environmental shift requires patience, resilience, and support. Steps that appear minor may pay huge dividends for your clients and your community.