



TRANSFORM

Your Voice Matters

AN AUSTRALIAN LONGITUDINAL GENDER HEALTH STUDY



TRANSGENDER MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE RISK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Preliminary findings from the 'Resilience and support in the trans community during the COVID-19 pandemic' survey

The Trans Medical Research Group based at the University of Melbourne, in partnership with Austin Health, Thorne Harbour Health and ACON have recently launched TRANSform: An Australian Longitudinal Gender Health Study. The goal of TRANSform is to improve the health and wellbeing of the Australian transgender community.

As part of TRANSform, the 'Resilience and support in the trans community during the COVID-19 pandemic' was released 1 May 2020. This survey is designed to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of transgender Australians and understand resilience factors and strategies to best support transgender Australians during this time.

The survey opened 1 May and will close 30 June 2020. The survey is open to all trans including gender diverse and non-binary (TGDNB) people living in Australia over the age of 16. As of 19 May 2020, 778 people had completed the survey. Respondents come from all Australian states and territories.

TRANSform is a trans-led research project. Investigators include TGDNB researchers Sav Zwickl, Alex Wong, Kalen Eshin, Daria Chetcuti and Teddy Cook, together with Dr Ada Cheung and Dr Lachlan Angus, endocrinologists who have worked extensively in trans healthcare.

This study has been approved by the Austin Health Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number HREC/57155/Austin-2019), ACON Research Ethics Review Committee (Reference Number 2020/03) & Thorne Harbour Health Community Research Endorsement Panel (Reference Number THH/CREP 20-006).

Enrol in TRANSform: www.bit.ly/transformau - More info: www.transmedicalresearch.org
Find us on Facebook and Instagram: Trans Medical Research



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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS: Resilience and support in the trans community during COVID-19

LIVING SITUATION, EMPLOYMENT & FINANCIAL STRAIN

16% are currently living with someone who makes them feel unsafe or afraid

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

13% have lost their job and 30% are working reduced hours

42% are experiencing financial strain related to paying their rent/mortgage

60% are experiencing financial strain related to buying food/groceries

"I've still been keeping it a secret from everyone, and feel too anxious to come out, given I have nowhere to go".

"The person I live with is abusive and he also does not take the pandemic as serious as he should be... What I have done to try and combat this is limit my interaction with him as much as possible even if it means I am staying in my room and/or the spare bedroom and not in the lounge room".

"Both of my parents are transphobic and only call me by my deadname and it is definitely affecting my mental health as I am out almost everywhere else".

"I haven't been eating as much because I can't afford grocery delivery (and am high-risk, so can't go to the shops in the way I used to be able to)".

"The stress of not being able to pay rent and getting evicted was horrible".



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MENTAL HEALTH

In the past two weeks:

54% have thought that they would be better off dead or of hurting themselves

74% have felt bad about themselves or that they are a failure

84% have felt down, depressed, or hopeless

"I haven't been able to see family or connect to my country or culture properly... I've really struggled to comprehend and plan for the future. Without any certainty, it's been hard to feel motivated and feel hopeful which has made my depression far worse".

"I have had increased rate of suicidal ideation... and have thought about checking into the ER because I didn't feel safe, but also felt that healthcare workers were already at risk and overworked so I didn't".

"At this point, either suicide or the psych ward are going to be the final road stop on this journey if restrictions aren't eased".

"I was already struggling with depression and anxiety before the pandemic hit. Losing the daily structure of my work routine, the loss of outlets for exercise, and the reduced opportunities for socialisation have all exacerbated the depression... the losing of my job and the lockdowns resulted in me spending a month in a psychiatric hospital as my suicidal ideation and planning went to extreme levels".

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GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

Of those who had scheduled gender-affirming surgery, 17% have had their surgery cancelled and 55% have had their surgery postponed

Of those who had gender-affirming surgery in the 3 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half report that their after-care had been affected

"Due to the current pandemic I am unable to continue my laser hair removal and electrolysis sessions. I have had to go back to shaving and watching the hair creep back in, which is causing my dysphoria to spike".

"My GP who usually gives me my testosterone shots is an hour away by public transport, which I'd like to avoid due to the pandemic. I contacted my 2 closest GP clinics to ask if nurses there could give me my shot, both said no. One asked me what injection and actually laughed at me when I said testosterone/HRT and told me that it wasn't essential".

"The doctor prescribing and administering my HRT is interstate. Travel to see them in person is currently impossible".

"My top surgery was cancelled just a few weeks before it was supposed to happen. I had been looking forward to it for months, and suddenly not knowing when or if it would happen caused a big spike in my depression. I found it really hard to look after myself for weeks afterward as I couldn't find anything to look forward to".



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ONLINE COMMUNITY

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

22% have sought support from an online TGDNB-specific group or forum

24% have sought support from an online LGBTIQA+ group or forum

"There have been some fantastic online events - discussions, meetups, creative performances from community members and allies".

"The pandemic and restrictions led to me seeking out support groups as I was not a member of any previously".

"They need services to be accessible to people of colour, disabled people and poor people (with understanding that you can be all of those). Disability accessibility is especially important - not just physical disability access (also very important) but access for people who are Deaf/HoH, Blind, neurodiverse, intellectual disability, mentally ill etc".

"Community provider groups have had more online functions. As a trans person in a regional area this has been a benefit of Covid".

"A lot of the orgs/groups I am in have done a fantastic job keeping the groups informed about how the shutdowns are/were likely to impact the community, so I am very happy".



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SUPPORT SERVICES

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

31% have sought support from a mental health professional (e.g. counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist)

21% have sought support from a LGBTIQA+ specific organisation (e.g. QLife)

17% have sought support from a mainstream organisation (e.g. Headspace, Beyond Blue)

11% have sought support from a General Practitioner

"I have been reaching out to the local Peer navigator to have discussions surrounding my transition/becoming. It was the best phone call I made! He was a wonderful ear and help for me".

"I am no longer able to see psychologists in person which makes getting psychological care difficult".

"My mental health has deteriorated a lot since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I've been in crisis several times and phoned my gender clinic for help".

"Some specialists and services in trans health have indefinitely paused activity because of the virus, without referring patients elsewhere or giving them guidance".

"I feel like there needs to be more talk about practical responses and resources that are currently available!"