



OUR AUTHENTIC SELVES

A guide to
Dignity and Choice for
Trans and Gender Diverse
people accessing
aged care services.

*This resource was developed for aged care service providers to promote the rights of older **Trans** and **Gender Diverse** (TGD) people to be their **authentic selves**.*

This resource addresses:

- The rights of older TGD people to determine who they are
- The rights of older TGD people to express their gender identity
- The responsibilities of aged care service providers to support older TGD people.

These rights and responsibilities are a critical component of Dignity and Choice, the first of the eight Quality Standards for Aged Care Services. For the purposes of this resource, Dignity and Choice are defined in the following ways:

- **CHOICE:** the rights of older TGD people to be their authentic selves
- **DIGNITY:** the result of actions supporting older TGD people to be their authentic selves.

The resource outlines 10 elements of Dignity and Choice, an eight point action plan and links to further information and resources developed for the Kinfolk project.

Kinfolk Project

This resource was developed as part of the Kinfolk project, which was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Australia to increase choice and control for older TGD people. The project responded to research demonstrating that older TGD people may not have their Choice or Dignity respected by family members, service providers or other service users.

The Kinfolk project was coordinated by Alice's Garage and the project team included: Dr Catherine Barrett, Kaye Bradshaw, Toni Paynter, Sally Conning and Kathy Mansfield. Co-leadership of the project by three older TGD people was critical to the success of the project.

***Alice's Garage, Melbourne.
Available from: alicesgarage.net/kinfolk***

Elements of Dignity and Choice

This section outlines 10 elements of Dignity and Choice for older TGD people. The elements reference the language of the Quality Standards for Aged Care and are presented as statements of understanding and commitment by service providers.

1. COMMUNICATING A MESSAGE OF WELCOME

I understand it is important that you feel welcomed and safe in our service. We will ensure that our staff are well trained and supportive, and that our online and printed information is TGD inclusive. We will also educate our assessment and reception staff to make sure they send you a message of welcome.

2. RESPECTING GENDER IDENTITY

I understand that you have the right to be your authentic self and this includes your right to choose how you express your gender identity. I will listen to your needs, respect your gender identity and provide genuine options to support you. I understand you may change your gender identity and the way you express your gender. Please let me know how I can support you.

If your gender identity or expression is restricted by families, staff, other consumers or anyone else, I will advocate for your right to be your authentic self and choose how you express your gender identity.

I will listen when you tell me your name and I will respect it. I will refer to you by the name you give me and the personal pronouns or salutations you choose. Please tell me if your name or pronouns are not respected by service providers or consumer and I will talk to them.

3. UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

I understand you may have been discriminated against by health services in the past because of your gender identity. I understand that these experiences may have reduced your trust in aged care services. We will educate all staff to help understand this power imbalance and to send a message that you are welcome.

4. WORKING WITH TGDPHOBIC FAMILIES

I understand that decisions about your gender identity and expression are yours. If your family do not respect your decisions I will work with your family to help ensure they understand that these decisions are yours.

5. UNDERSTANDING POWER IMBALANCES

I understand that you might be fearful of TGDphobic discrimination by staff and that this may limit your willingness to share all your needs. We will deliver education to help staff understand how their own values and beliefs influence the services they provide to you and that we expect them to provide culturally safe services to you.

6. PROMOTING CULTURAL SAFETY

I understand that service providers who come to your home are entering your private space and must respect your privacy and circumstances. We will provide staff education to ensure all our staff are aware of this.

I understand that you may be fearful of the responses from other consumers, residents, families and visitors in residential aged care. We will work to ensure that your right to privacy and safety in shared services and communal living is respected.

7. ASSESSMENT & PRIVACY

We will ensure that our assessment forms and questions are TGD inclusive. I want you to know that you are welcome to discuss any and all of your care needs with me. I understand that you may wish to share your private and personal information with us; but you also have the right not to. It is your choice and we will respect your choice.

Elements of Dignity and Choice continued.

I will work hard to promote your right to dignity and choice – if we don't get it right please tell us so we can make improvements.

8. UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA FACTS

I am aware of a transphobic myth that all TGD people who have dementia 'revert' to gender assigned at birth. I know the fear this myth generates. I understand that if you have dementia you may lose the capacity to assert your choices and needs and that this may mean that TGDphobic families and service providers act in ways that do not respect your right to be your authentic self. If this occurs I will advocate for you.

9. CARE FROM THE HEART

I understand that some service providers are curious about TGD people and may ask unnecessary or invasive questions. I understand this is disrespectful and may compromise your Dignity. We will educate all staff on the importance of seeing you as a person - not just a gender.

10. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

I understand how important it is that we take full responsibility for workforce training and do not expect you to educate us.

I will work hard to promote your right to dignity and choice – if we don't get it right please tell us so we can make improvements. If you have a complaint we will take it seriously and look at how we can improve our service so that the issue is resolved and does not happen again.

Suggested actions

This check list of actions may assist a service to promote Dignity and Choice for older TGD people:

- Develop a policy on TGD inclusion to guide and educate all staff.
- Conduct an audit of online and print resources to ensure TGD inclusive language and images.
- Ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities to advocate for older TGD people.
- Ensure assessment forms and processes are TGD inclusive.
- Check that complaint and feedback processes have explicit reference to feedback from older TGD people.
- Provide education to ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of the experiences and needs of older TGD people and not reliant on older TGD people for basic TGD education.
- Provide staff education that includes the following: historical experiences of older TGD people, power imbalances, cultural safety, advocacy strategies, the elements of Dignity and Choice outlined in this document, the vulnerability of TGD people with dementia to transphobic staff and family members.
- Adopt an approach to services that shifts staff from a curiosity about gender to Care From The Heart – or services that focus more broadly than gender.

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Suggested citation: Barrett, C; Mansfield, K; Bradshaw, K; Paynter, T and Conning, S. (2019). RippleGrams. A resource to support older Trans and Gender Diverse people and their families.

Alice's Garage, Melbourne.

Available from: alicesgarage.net/kinfolk

Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank the following people who participated in the Kinfolk project workshops or otherwise supported the Kinfolk project including: Henry Von Doussa, Social Researcher The Bouverie Centre; Kathleen Lambeth, Elder Mediator Relationships Australia Victoria; Kristie Hunter, Project Support Officer Relationships Australia Victoria; Heidi Buhner, Quality Support Officer Better Place Australia; Samantha Apley, Family Consultant Better Place Australia; MaryClare Machen, Drummond St Services; Leanne Renfree, Senior Project Manager Drummond St Services; Meredith Butler, Outreach, Switchboard Victoria; Sally Goldner, TransGender Victoria; Ren Grayson, Gender Diverse Health Project Lead, Thorne Harbour Health.

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