

Tip Sheet: Transcending Disinformation

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of disinformation campaigns and attacks on the rights of trans, gender diverse and non-binary individuals. These attacks have taken the form of:

- Disinformation being spread with false facts and unreliable evidence about trans, gender diverse and non-binary people, including their families about their care needs, treatment options, the validity of their identities, their value to society and their right to exist.
- Misinformation and misreporting of stories about trans, gender diverse and non-binary people with the purpose of creating fear and distrust in society towards them.
- Political lobbying and introduction of bills or laws at different levels of government that seek to restrict access to care and violate the rights and dignity of trans, gender diverse and non-binary people.
- Infiltration of hate speech and disinformation into public and private narratives and debates.
- Social and professional pressure and vilification towards parents, carers, schools, health care providers, local governments, libraries, and other public service providers.
- Multi-level threats to the human rights, privacy, dignity, freedom and equality of trans, gender diverse and non-binary people, their families, supporters and allies.
- Violence, harassment and public vilification.

This tip sheet is intended to provide context, evidence-based information, tips and links to resources for anyone affected by the spread of disinformation and hate towards trans, gender diverse and non-binary individuals.

Enabling Context

In our current Australian context, challenges impeding the safeguarding of the rights and freedoms of trans, gender diverse, and non-binary (TGDNB) individuals encompass several key factors:

- A mere 1 in 10 people have a close acquaintance who identifies as TGDNB. Yet, it is established that individuals are more inclined to advocate for the rights of TGDNB persons when they have a personal connection with someone who is trans.
- Disinformation tends to gain traction among individuals lacking knowledge about or personal connections with TGDNB individuals.
- Allies, while crucial, may not always understand their pivotal role in fostering awareness and understanding among others.
- Inadequate legal protections against vilification, hatred, discrimination, and violence contribute to the vulnerability of TGDNB individuals.

Enhancing public awareness of the disinformation we experience and its underlying motives can bolster society's confidence and proficiency in recognising and rejecting efforts to mislead and exert influence.

Misinformation can be new, surprising, or emotive. This can make us more likely to share it and it can often spread faster than the facts.

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Disinformation vs Misinformation

Disinformation and misinformation both refer to the spread of inaccurate or misleading information, but they differ in their intent and source.

Disinformation: information intentionally produced to mislead by fabricating facts, misrepresenting data, drawing unsupported conclusions, omitting important context or details, or referencing unreliable or misleading sources. It's purposely created to mislead. Often generated and disseminated by individuals, groups or entities with a specific agenda.

Misinformation: Incorrect, false or misleading information that is spread regardless of intent to mislead. Typically originates from misunderstanding, misinterpretation or support for a specific agenda. It can also be the result of the fast and widespread dissemination of information, especially in the digital age. Its spread contributes to harmful effects such as false beliefs, rumours or inaccurate data.

Both disinformation and misinformation contribute to the erosion of trust in information sources and have significant impacts on our society.

Common Threads of Disinformation

Disinformation can take various forms and be disseminated through different channels.

Some of the common threads of disinformation targeting trans, gender diverse and non-binary people are:

- Disinformation is increasingly posing or being platformed as legitimate journalism.
- Fake studies and research that have been fact checked and debunked keep being used as valid research.
- Anti-trans disinformation is co-opting the women's movement to attack trans rights and undermine women's rights.

- Social media channels are used because companies often refuse to use their power to restrict the spread of disinformation and misinformation or the use of vilifying language on their platforms. This contributes to a rapid spread of disinformation.
- Media organisations failing in their responsibility to adhere to principled journalism and journalistic integrity and contributing to the spread of disinformation by giving platforms to conspiracy theorists and anti-trans lobbyists.
- Public figures are allowed to spread disinformation with impunity and contribute to exacerbate societal divisions.
- Anti trans medical and health professionals who breach patient confidentiality in the public sphere and through public media by misrepresenting patient experiences or clinical presentations to intentionally spread fear and doubt. This is an unethical and harmful action that abuses the rights of the trans health consumers and is often not an accurate representation of real events.
- Disinformation fuels anti-trans legislation and is being used to spread conspiracy theories.
- Disinformation is being used strategically to target different audiences, especially parents and carers with a gender non-conforming young person, legal and medical professionals, etc.

Australia defines disinformation as the intentional creation and dissemination of wholly or partly false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead audiences and/or obscure the truth for the purposes of causing strategic, political, economic, social, or personal harm or financial/commercial gain.

– Australian Government

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Strategies to Identify Disinformation

While it might feel like an overwhelming task, we are all responsible for playing our part in identifying and stopping the spread of disinformation. The following are a few strategies to help identify disinformation that targets trans, gender diverse and non-binary people:

There are a number of **pseudo-scientific organisations** that publish medical disinformation that feeds into efforts to ban trans rights, especially in the US and more recently being used in Australia. These organisations have been created for the purpose of developing and spreading medical disinformation. It is important to understand that they have the following in common:

- They are not recognised scientific organisations;
- They oppose gender affirming care;
- They oppose bans on conversion practices;
- They do not have working relationships with the trans community;
- They provide advice that is at odds with internationally recognised standards of care.

The **terminology** used in disinformation serves the purpose of portraying being trans, gender diverse or non-binary as a mental health condition. They are likely to use terms such as '*gender dysphoria*' rather than talk about '*trans people*'. Common terms used include: *gender-dysphoric, trans-identified, gender-confused, gender-questioning, gender distress, transgenderism* or *transgender*, or *gender ideology*.

Any cited studies and information will come from **so-called experts with no connections to the trans community** or expertise delivering services or care to trans, gender diverse and non-binary people or work with community based trans organisations.

Look out for **fear inducing, anti-trans tropes** such as '*social contagion*' or '*Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria*', describing gender-affirming care as '*too affirming*', being trans, gender diverse or non-binary as a mental health issue, looking for '*root causes of trans identity*', advocating for not trusting or believing young people, including claiming that they have developed an unhealthy fixation on their gender, or using weaponised stories of detransition.

Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria is widely recognised as a **conspiracy theory** and has been proven to not exist. Early research produced around this has been widely discredited, including by the journals that originally published it. However, it continues to be used especially to raise fears of contagion and '*mass detransition*' and to support efforts to restrict access to gender affirming care.

Narratives and stories that suggest parents will not be consulted in treatment decisions or are being pressured or forced to '*transition their child*' by gender clinics are commonly used to target families. They will often claim that parents are being intentionally excluded from conversations and interventions regarding their child's gender identity.

Look out for **new therapies being promoted** that are a re-wording to create confusion among parents but remain anti-trans. For example, Gender Exploratory Therapy or a Neutral Therapeutic Approach as an alternative to conversion therapies.



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What can you do?

Combating misinformation is a multifaceted challenge that requires a combination of individual, societal, and technological efforts. Here are some tips to help you:

- Encourage critical thinking skills and teach people how to evaluate the reliability of information sources (look out for clickbait headlines, sensationalist stories and emotional manipulation tactics).
- Verify information before sharing it, especially on social media.
- Report mainstream media that platforms disinformation:
- For print media, complain to the press outlet and to the Press Council on the same day. They can lead to corrections, and help document how decisions are made.
- For broadcast media, complain to the outlet, wait for a response or 60 days (whatever comes first) and follow up with a complaint to ACMA if necessary.
- Encourage people to seek information from a variety of reliable sources and use evidence-based information to educate those around you to stop the spread of disinformation. See the section on Further Reading below for articles you can use.
- If you are in a position to call out disinformation, do it.
- Help boost positive stories and evidence-based information and comments. There are lots out there that don't get near as much attention as disinformation.
- Seek advice if contacted by a media organisation wanting to report about you or your experience. Reach out to Transcend Australia for support about this.
- Advocate for and support legislation that addresses malicious spreading of false information.
- Let decision-makers such as your local MP know when harmful legislation or policies are introduced.

It is also important to take care of your mental health and the mental health of those around you. Seek professional help if needed and possible, and ensure you go to professionals that have a proven experience of working in trans-friendly mental health support and who abide by recognised standards of care.

Recognising the common threads and context of disinformation that targets trans, gender diverse and non-binary people is crucial for developing strategies to combat disinformation, to demand accountability and protect human rights. Addressing disinformation is an ongoing process that requires collaboration across individuals, communities, educators, governments, media organisations and technology companies.

This tip sheet is derived from a webinar presented by Transcend Australia, titled "Transcending Disinformation: Challenging Myths and Empowering Change." Our sincere appreciation goes to the webinar expert, Jackie Turner, founder of the Trans Justice Project, for her invaluable participation in the webinar and her impactful work in this critical area.

Crisis numbers

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact the following services:

In case of emergency, please call **000**

LifeLine | **13 11 14**

QLife (LGBTIQ counselling line, 3pm to midnight everyday) | **1800 184 527**

Suicide call back service | **1300 659 467**

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Further Reading

National Library of Australia

[What is fake news, misinformation, and disinformation?](#)

Fair - Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting

[Judge's Ruling Debunks Anti-Trans Claims Often Seen in Corporate Media](#)

Yale School of Medicine

[Biased Science in Texas & Alabama](#)

Political Research Associates

[Combating Anti-Transgender Disinformation](#)

Health Liberation Now!

[A New Era: Key Actors Behind Anti-Trans Conversion Therapy](#)

Jackie Turner

[How to Identify Dangerous Anti-Trans Disinformation](#)

Dr Ken Pang

[Negative Media Coverage as a Barrier to Accessing Care for Transgender Children and Adolescents](#)

HRC Foundation

[Myths and Facts: Battling Disinformation About Transgender Rights](#)

Jackie Turner

[Anti-trans disinformation is rife in Australia - and it's being spread by a small group of organisations](#)

Jackie Turner

[Five Things the Albanese Government Can Do To Protect The Trans Community](#)

Julia Serrano

[All the Evidence Against Transgender Social Contagion](#)

Erin Reed

["Gender Exploratory Therapy": A New Anti-trans Conversion Therapy With a Misleading Name](#)

Florence Ashley

[Interrogating Gender-Exploratory Therapy](#)

ACMA

[Online Misinformation](#)

Ethics & Public Policy Centre (EPPC)

[The Transgender Misinformation Machine](#)