

Addressing gender and misgendering to reduce vaccine hesitancy

It's not about identity politics or political correctness, it's just about meeting a community's needs to ensure best access to medical services - helping us all access the COVID vaccine and increasing vaccination across the population. To help encourage people from LGBTIQ+ communities to get the vax, and help reduce one of the barriers or challenges that may cause vaccine hesitancy in these communities, we're providing this fact sheet on how we can work together on this during the vaccination roll-out.

Background

- The perceived or actual risk of being misnamed or misgendered causes many trans, gender diverse and non-binary people to be cautious or even avoidant of medical and clinical settings.
- Misnaming means using, or referring to someone, by a name someone no longer uses. Some communities also call this "dead naming."
- Misgendering means referring to someone by a gender that they do not identify with, including using pronouns they do not, or no longer, use. This is particularly distressing for transgender people, but is also unfortunately sometimes used as a bullying tactic against people of any gender.
- Both misnaming and misgendering can be highly distressing or trigger severe anxiety, depression, trauma and dysphoria.
- Using people's name and pronouns correctly ensures they feel respected, seen and welcome.
- We don't want this to prevent these communities from coming forward to access COVID19 vaccinations.

Why names and pronouns matter in this setting

- Many trans, gender diverse and non-binary people use names and pronouns that may not match the names and sex or gender marker on their official identity documentation.
- Pronouns are words like *she/her*, *he/him*, *they/them*, or other terms people may use.
- Everybody has pronouns - not just transgender people.
- Some people find using *they/them* to refer to a person odd or uncomfortable, due to the misconception that it is a plural pronoun only. You can keep in mind examples where you don't know someone's pronoun: "Oh no, someone left *their* phone behind, I wonder if *they* will come back to it." This may help you acclimatise. (As an interesting side note, there is a long history of *they* as a singular pronoun).
- There are a variety of reasons people from the trans, gender diverse and non-binary community may not have updated their official identity documents with their name or sex or gender marker yet - due to the difficult, or challenging process, due to cost, due to safety concerns, or a myriad of other important reasons.

How we can approach this to reduce vaccine hesitancy

- As clinicians, it makes sense to help patients feel as comfortable and safe as possible. This includes using people's name and pronouns correctly when talking to them during their attendance at a vaccination site, including receiving the vaccine itself. But if you do slip up or make a mistake, just ensure to apologise, reassure, correct yourself, and continue.
- To assist, we're providing a **Template Letter** that trans, gender diverse and non-binary community members can bring to their vaccine appointment, clarifying the names and pronouns that will make them most comfortable in a clinical setting. **Use the letter in conjunction with this fact sheet**, and together we'll be addressing and solving one of the barriers that drives vaccine hesitancy for this community, and reduces anxiety in attending vaccination sites.

