



# Intersex Inclusion in your Workplace



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## WHAT IS INTERSEX?

‘Intersex’ is an umbrella term used to describe a wide variety of bodily variations of sex characteristics (such as genitals, reproductive organs, hormonal and/or chromosomal patterns). Intersex people are individuals who were born with variations of sex characteristics that are atypical to, or do not align with, socially and medically defined male and female sex characteristics. Intersex Human Rights of Australia (IHRA) uses the following statement to define intersex: “Intersex people are born with physical sex characteristics that don’t fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies.”

There are at least 40 known intersex traits and due to the diversity of the population, the lived experiences of intersex people often differ greatly. Intersex people do, however, have a shared experience of difference or atypicality that provokes stigma and discrimination.

Intersex is not a disability or impairment. Some people with intersex variations experience disability or chronic illness that can be attributed to their variation, and indeed while those people with the most prevalent intersex variations are likely to experience disability during their lifetime, most people will not. Australia’s intersex-led organisations recognise the applicability of the social model of disability to the situations of many intersex people.

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known intersex traits and due to the diversity of the population, the lived experiences of intersex people often differ greatly.

Whilst some intersex people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and/or transgender, many intersex people are cisgender and/or heterosexual. It is important to understand that 'intersex' does not refer to a type of sexuality or gender identity. Therefore, it is important that you do not use terms such as 'queer', 'sexually diverse', 'diverse sexualities' or 'gender diverse' to describe or include intersex people. Instead, when talking about intersex people as a demographic group, you should use terms such as 'intersex people', 'people with intersex variations', or make reference to the diversity of bodies, sexualities and genders.

IHRA can provide intersex inclusion training delivered by people with lived experience.



**“With me it’s a bit more complicated because I’ve got the kidney stuff. Other intersex people don’t have those issues. Some people do work casually, some people do work full-time. But yeah, it really depends on the individual, being intersex is a really individual experience for many. For some they may have dealt with it better than others.”**

## **THE DARLINGTON STATEMENT:**

The Darlington Statement is a joint consensus statement which was established in March 2017. It was developed by key intersex organisations and individual intersex advocates across Australia and New Zealand. The Darlington Statement advocates for full recognition of the human rights of intersex people. It addresses the key issues faced by intersex people, such as discrimination, stigmatisation, and human rights violations, and calls for endosex (non-intersex) people to educate themselves on what intersex is and become aware of intersex issues.



In the context of employment, the Darlington Statement (2017, p. 8) advises educational institutions and employers to take the following actions to become more inclusive of intersex people by:

- Becoming educated about intersex people and issues to challenge misconceptions about intersex people and reduce the stigmatisation of intersex.
- Recognising that the stigmatisation and pathologisation of intersex people hinders their self-acceptance, access to community, and their ability to seek help and access healthcare services.
- Acknowledging the effects of stigma, trauma, and unconsented medical and/or surgical interventions has on intersex people and their access to education and employment.
- Developing affirmative policies and practices to support employees with intersex variations.
- Recognising that some employees with intersex variations would benefit from workplace adjustments and accommodations, flexible working arrangements, provisions for medical leave.

If your organisation would like to show solidarity with intersex people, you can **affirm the Darlington Statement**.



**“It’s one of those things where we’re forced to take hormone treatments because of what’s happened to us at a young age. So, we have a love/hate relationship with the medical teams. We hate them because of what they did, but we love them because they give us our hormone treatments – which we wouldn’t have if they didn’t intervene in the first place. So, there needs to be understanding that intersex is multifaceted. It’s not related to gender but there’s different medical related stuff that surrounds it, even though intersex is not a medical condition in of itself.”**





**Employers should recognise that 'intersex' is about biological variations and is not synonymous with 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual', 'queer', 'transgender', or 'non-binary'.**

## **EMPLOYER CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERSEX INCLUSION:**

Intersex people need a work environment that is genuinely inclusive of them and understands their health and wellbeing needs. Employers should recognise that 'intersex' is about biological variations and is not synonymous with 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual', 'queer', 'transgender', or 'non-binary'. Your organisation may be inclusive of sexuality and gender diverse people; however, if your organisation has not taken direct initiatives to include intersex people, they may be excluded from your workplace.



**“There needs to be more understanding that there is diversity and that some of the employees may be intersex and the employers don't even know it. Also, a willingness to make allowances for people who have extra stuff happening. So, whether they're willing to allow some extra time off if a person needs to see a doctor to maintain their health. Because without health, you've got nothing. And if an employer wants to say 'no' to that, then that's irresponsible. That's basically saying, “no, I don't care about your health. I want you here.” I think employers forget that they're employing human beings and not robots.”**

When contemplating intersex inclusion within your organisation, you should consider the following:

- Uphold the Darlington Statement by following its recommendations for becoming more inclusive of intersex people.
- Undergo awareness and inclusion training about intersex that is delivered by intersex organisations or people, rather than LGBT+ organisations.
- Consult with intersex people when creating diversity policies and LGBTI+ services.
- Include 'intersex status' or 'sex characteristics' in your human resources processes and documents to raise the visibility of intersex people in your workplace.
- Encourage intersex people to apply to work with your organisation.
- Consider the access requirements of intersex people in hiring and employment processes including flexible work arrangements and leave for intersex people that provide coverage for any medical needs, and reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process as required.
- Raise awareness of intersex people and intersex issues in your workplace
- Use language that is inclusive of intersex people such as 'bodily diverse', 'intersex people', and 'people with intersex variations'.
- Display intersex flags and informative materials about intersex if your organisation provides services for LGBTI+ people.
- Consider the implications of suggesting that services not designed for intersex people are there to meet their needs. Avoid using the 'I' in the LGBTI+ acronym where it does not genuinely apply and use terminology which accurately matches the populations your services support.
- Avoid using terms such as 'queer', 'sexuality diverse', and 'gender diverse' when talking about intersex people.
- Consider opportunities to record de-identified statistical data on the presence of intersex staff in your organisation, if intersex people feel comfortable disclosing their intersex status or that workplace adjustments are required either during recruitment or on the job. This data could inform recruitment processes and manager training/upskilling sessions.
- Remain mindful that for many intersex people, health and medical organisations have been sites of human rights violations – so if you work in a health or medical organisation, intersex staff or clients may be more likely to feel unsafe.



**“It’s just about having the courage to say this program is for this part of the community. We are an LGBTIQ health service, or we want to be an employer of choice to that community, we’ve done a lot of work for the LGBT community, we’ve done virtually nothing for the ‘I’ community. It’s not something we’re comfortable with, but we are consciously working hard about addressing that problem so that we can genuinely say that we are a service that supports the full community under the umbrella. We are doing that by consulting directly with the intersex community, not other LGBTQ consultancy individuals, cohorts, and groups, and assuming that what they say also applies to intersex people. This is the thing that they (LGBTI+ organisations) need the courage to say.”**

Questions for your organisation to reflect upon:

1. What is your understanding of intersex?

2. What are some issues and challenges that you think are shared between the intersex community, LGBT+ communities and the disability community?

3. What are some issues and challenges that you think are different between the intersex community, LGBT+ communities and the disability community?

4. Do you think your organisation's current policies, procedures, and services are inclusive of intersex people? Why or why not?

5. How can your organisation become more inclusive of intersex people?



**“At the end of my last Intersex Awareness Day address last year, I said we have to be taken out of the ‘too hard’ basket and put into the ‘work hard’ basket.”**



**“You look at what the life experience of a male who’s not intersex, but a male who has a sudden drop in testosterone and becomes androgen deficient in his mid 30s’ instead of gradually over 20 years. They’ll become moody, will lose libido, they’ll become lethargic. So, these are things that we live with on a daily basis. So, that impacts us in the workplace... And you got to talk to the person. You got to sit down with them and say, as far as you’re aware, are there any reasonable adjustments that we could put in place that would support you in the work environment? And here’s a whole list of reasonable adjustments that we’ve been able to make for other people and maybe some of those that you weren’t even aware of could assist you as well.”**



## FURTHER READING:

- For more information about who intersex people are, see Intersex Human Rights Australia's Intersex for Allies resource.
- For more information about how to be an ally to intersex people, see the National LGBTI Health Alliance's Guide to Being an Intersex Ally.
- For more information about the intersection between intersex and disability, see Intersex Human Rights Australia's Intersex Intersectionalities with Disability resource.
- For more information about the social and medical model of disability see People with Disability Australia's Social Model of Disability resource.
- For more information about how to support intersex people in the workplace, see the following resource by Pride in Diversity and Intersex Human Rights Australia's Employers' Guide to Intersex Inclusion.
- For more information about the Darlington Statement, go to the Darlington Statement's website.

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