



1.16 Queer Affirmative Agency Plan

This Queer Affirmative Action Plan has been developed to ensure that every aspect of the agency mirrors Queer Affirmative Practice. The QAAP covers four key recommendation areas which the agency will implement over the past two years. These recommendation areas included:

1. **Visibility Campaign**
2. **Agency Governance and Mission and Operational Policies and Procedures**
3. **Workforce Development**
4. **Programs and Services**



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Visibility Campaign

1.1. Agency Brochures and Promotional Information

- Informs potential clients and referral sources of the options available for QUEER person's seeking counselling
- Informs the public of the agency's human rights policies and mission statements, which explicitly includes a 'zero tolerance' policy against discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards QUEER identified person's
- Advertises QUEER specific programming/services, which lets individuals know that they are welcomed and safe within agency space, and amongst staff
- Advertises programs that may be of particular interest to QUEER community members – examples HIV/AIDS counselling, trauma and body work, coming out, internalized/homophobia/heterosexism, peer support groups, etc

1.2. Posters, Stickers, and Literature

- Displayed in waiting and receptions areas, and in counsellors work space, offering information about community resources without clients having to first disclose their sexual/gender identity, and promotes non-QUEER counsellors as allies
- Convey the agency's expectation that QUEER community members are part of their service population, thus offering a sense of belonging, positive connection, support, safety, and comfortability for the client when in a new, and unknown, environment.

- Offers potential QUEER clients awareness that the agency is proactively involved in making sure that agency space is visibly Queer affirming
- Subscriptions to monthly issues of local QUEER magazines and newspapers (LOTL, BNEWS, MCV, Queer festival guides (film, Pride, Carnival), will be made easily accessible, and part of general waiting room reading material.
- The agency's library will support the inclusivity of reading, research, resources, and video material relevant to Queer her/histories, Queer political movement work, and oppressive socio-political issues impacting members of the Queer community
- Staff non compliance to participating in, and/or supporting, the creation of Queer affirmative space, will be taken up through an open, solution focused staff meeting specifically aimed at discussing the agency's anti-discrimination policy, and all consequences applicable to any one staff member who carries out non adherence to all areas of policies and procedures where Queer affirmative action is both stated and active

1.3. Community Outreach and Building Community Alliance

- Agency will take an active role in connecting with, and building strong community alliance/s with QUEER specific services within both, urban and rural, settings
- Connect with organizations such as PFLAG, Queer community centres, Department of Human Services, local AIDS committees, women's based agencies, Queer youth groups, Queer academics/researchers, etc. to be up to date and well informed of what is happening locally, state and nation-wide, with regard to Queer specific training, education, resources, and research.
- Build community service relationships to discuss current service gaps where QUEER community based needs are most critical to health and well-being, but going unmet and silenced within mainstream social services
- Make connections within QUEER communities to help create opportunities to break down stereotypes, and to provide and/or receive accurate community based 'culturally specific' information which will contribute significantly to building service capacity amongst status quo providers within mainstream agencies
- Form a strong community link to provide extended networks of knowledge and support, and convey to the QUEER community the commitment to serving and meeting the needs of QUEER person's, whilst further heightening the agency's public profile as an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming service

2. Agency Governance and Mission and Operational Policies and Procedures

Governance Policies

2.1. Statements of Mandate

- The agency will support, as policy, a 'Vision Statement' developed by an established QUEER Advisory Committee
- The agency will explicitly identify QUEER individuals as a client group in statements about mandate to reflect the agency's commitment to creating an initial climate of visibility, as an essential step towards the development of Queer specific services
- The agency will support the provision of competent and equitable care of and services to QUEER persons as a reflection of its commitment to affirmative practice, working towards proficient service delivery to QUEER client group, and integrating it as a core value into recruitment and evaluation of policies and procedures

2.2. Board Composition

- Board of Directors will involve the QUEER community in their decision –making processes as an essential step towards community accountability
- Will recruit Board members from unrepresented groups within their QUEER client population, including current or former service consumers
- Advisory Committee will be inclusive of both QUEER community representatives and consumers as instrumental contributors to identifying systems barriers to access, whilst taking on a pivotal role within program development
- Decisions made by the Board of Directors, involving QUEER programming, will be based on information of needs voiced by QUEER service users, community representatives, and allied community agencies, through Board or committee membership.
- Evidence based research, narrative work, community voice, and health statistics will be utilized to inform the Board of Directors of how best to make proactive QUEER inclusive policy decisions that will guarantee unique service needs delivery

2.3. Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment

- For the provision of equitable services to QUEER to be upheld and active, the agency will be inclusive of sexual and gender identity in all statements of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment relating to clients, staff, board, students, and volunteers
- Board of Directors will raise agency –wide awareness of QUEER specific policies in order to ensure that they are effectively executed.
- Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment policies will be supported by procedures addressing and dealing with homophobic, heterosexist, and genderphobic incidents at all levels of the organization

Operating Policies and Procedures

2.4. Personnel

- Agency Board will support inclusive hiring policies, and welcome QUEER identified staff members as primary providers of accessible services to QUEER clients. Job postings can be stated as such: “QUEER individuals are encouraged to apply”
- Employment positions will be posted in QUEER specific and/or positive newspapers, magazines, and in community based services/organizations to ensure that qualified QUEER applicants are informed
- The agency will ensure that QUEER staff feel comfortable being “out” at work by making sure that employees are aware that discriminatory comments and/or behaviour will not be accepted, tolerated, or permitted, as a proactive step towards creating safety for QUEER staff and clients
- The agency acknowledges that by ensuring safety for QUEER staff to be “out”, positive role modelling messages to QUEER clients are better conveyed, thus creating space for sexual and/or gender exploration, and healthy growth of confidence and self esteem towards individual and/or group “Pride” development
- To demonstrate the agency’s commitment to equitable employment practices, it will support and advocate for inclusive rights, on all levels of local, state, and national government, of coverage for same sex partners within employees benefit packages

2.5. Training

- Comprehensive training for staff and managers in sexual and gender diversity and related issues will be considered a significant factor in improving services for QUEER clients and developing affirmative practice
- Boards will ensure that policies of inclusion are successfully translated into action by making QUEER specific training a funding priority

2.6. Confidentiality

- Agency policies will describe the limits of confidentiality, which can assure QUEER clients that information regarding sexual and/or gender identity/related issues will not be shared with their families and/or others outside services without her/his permission and direction
- Clients will be informed that information relevant to service provision will be shared among staff within the agency

3. Workforce Development

3.1. Agency-wide Training

- Provide opportunities for professional development of knowledge and skill at all levels within the agency to meet the needs of QUEER individuals accessing services
- All staff members, including managers, supervisors, counsellors, group facilitators, receptionists, volunteers, and students will be trained in both areas of historical oppressions and discriminatory socio-political issues impacting the wholistic health of QUEER individuals, families, and community

- Advocate through the Australian Association of Social Workers and/or through the School of Social Work at local Universities that the service needs of QUEER clients be included within the curriculum of competency-based training for social service providers/workers.
- Develop the capacity to deliver QUEER specific training in-house as well as making available to staff, students, and volunteers, QUEER community-based professional development opportunities, including conferences and interagency networking
- QUEER issues will be integrated into generalized training related to youth and family issues, and areas for which QUEER individuals are known to be at risk.
- Managers and supervisors will take responsibility for ensuring the development of QUEER specific programs, and monitor their quality through her/his own gained knowledge of accurate information regarding sexual and gender identity/diversity, and all issues impacting QUEER health
- QUEER specific training will not be offered through a “blitz” approach, where everything that mainstream service providers want to know about one particular group, is discussed in one-day educational/training sessions, as it is a risk for ‘tokenistic’ representation, resulting negatively to counselling work between a heterosexual service provider, and a QUEER client.
- Queer counselling development and training will be delivered through consistent increments, in a way that’s meaningful to the participants, and least harmful to QUEER clients
- Allow time before the scheduled training for consultation, assessment of training needs, and planning

3.2. Consultation and Planning

- Provide early opportunities for input from all staff participants to offer important information about what kinds of workshops and training sessions that have been most helpful to them in the past
- Staff will have an opportunity to voice individual questions and/or concerns related to QUEER skills and education training which can be discussed and processed as part of future workshop development
- Soliciting participant input at the planning stage will be utilized as an effective way to increase group commitment to the learning process
- Initial internal consultation when presented in a way that acknowledges past experiences with mandatory training, while still placing clients’ needs first, will be utilized to diffuse resistance and encourage active participation
- Through external consultation the agency, in collaboration with congruent professional development goals, will combine resources and offer training together

3.3. Sensitivity of Material

- Delivery of training in sexual and gender identity and/or related issues will be utilized to assist the agency in providing more accessible and appropriate services to all clients

- QUEER specific training is not to be a forum for moral or ethical argument or for personal counselling
- Acknowledgement of the sensitivity of sexual and gender identity topics will be utilized to create space for participants to raise concerns and express learning needs
- Clarification of expectations and establishing group agreements and/or ground rules prior to commencing a training session will be utilized to help decrease the possibility of arising group conflict and/or problems
- Initial internal consultation will include a group decision-making process specific to training 'location', as 'off-site' training can sometimes offer more comfortability to status quo providers, significant to the 'uncomfortability' when openly engaged in discussions of QUEER identity/oppression related issues
- Training sessions will be carried out in an integrated format, offering learning material at a pace that works for all staff without overloading newcomers with new counselling knowledge and awareness, as QUEER training is most effectively delivered at a slow pace, incrementally over a long period of time, using an integrated, non-medical, sociopolitically focused, feminist, Queer affirming based approach
- Training format will include small group discussions, working in pairs, whole group activities, videos, role plays, and reflective/social location work
- 'Best Practice' when working with QUEER individuals (children, youth, adults), family's, and/or community will be an area of focus for training and skills development amongst mainstream social service providers.

3.4. QUEER Best Practice Training

Group work training/exercises will aim to develop a critical, and Queer affirmative, knowledge base in mainstream/status quo counsellors to;

- Understand from a socio-political perspective, how homophobia and heterosexism affects the lives of Queer children, youth, adults, and Queer communities
- Develop an integrated working/counselling approach that affirms, empowers, validates, and explores QUEER client's homophobic experiences, and entrapped feelings of sadness, isolation, self harm, fear, and nervousness, from a non-medical, wholistic, Queer positive, anti-oppression approach
- Explore and discuss Queer specific research, aimed at raising awareness of the negative effects that oppression has on wholistic health of QUEER identified persons
- Understand QUEER funded and focused research that reflects the homophobic/heterosexist experiences of Queer persons with/within mainstream social services, using presentation of evidence and group discussion to brainstorm agency and/or program development ideas and/or solutions of how best to offer safe and inclusive service delivery
- Understand, and learn use of, anti-oppression language within QUEER affirmative practice, inclusive of adherence to **'zero'**

tolerance’ to ‘pathologising’ identity and/or exploring negative health impacts of homophobia/heterosexism on QUEER persons, through use of oppressive medicalised language and diagnostic/stigmatizing labels

- Share ideas of how best to create QUEER safe and affirming agency, and individual practice space
- Offer ideas of how best to be involved in QUEER affirmative agency and program development as an “ally”
- Taking steps towards cultural fairness
- How best to meet needs of QUEER children, youth, adults, families, inclusive of addressing and exploring different needs based on race, ethnicity, ability, spirituality, gender, and sex, with confidence and competency
- Identify and address socio-political challenges facing transgender and transsexual youth – what do mainstream service providers know?
- Gain awareness and understanding of gender identity, gender fluidity, and gender expression
- Gain critical awareness of ‘self’ sexual location based on privilege, human rights, legal recognition, social acceptance, social ‘norm’, heterosexist assumption, resource access, exclusive vs inclusive policy, practice and programming
- Take action from within agency through activism and advocacy as a Queer ally
- Proactively support pride development via QUEER client empowerment, development of self agency, self determination, life ownership, reclaiming power through Queer political involvement and community connection, healthy confidence, self esteem, and Queer identity development and growth through positive and affirming role modelling, peer support, and mentoring

3.5. Trainers and Educators

- Experienced QUEER identified persons’ will be hired to facilitate the training sessions
- The agency will support skilled QUEER facilitators as the ‘experts’ and providers of awareness raising and excellent information regarding sexual and gender identity, and all issues related to oppression and impacts on QUEER health
- In the case that there are two facilitators present, the agency will support that at least one facilitator is QUEER identified as an essential part to its commitment to affirmative practice, and ensuring that the content of the training reflects the experiences of QUEER persons’

4. Programs and Services

4.1. Intake and Assessment

- The agency will support QUEER staff, community agencies, advisory committee, and board members to collaboratively develop, and internally conduct, QUEER specific intake and assessment form/s,

reflecting the agency's commitment to affirmative practice and advocacy through supporting community based 'rights' of safe and empowering space, and access within mainstream services for QUEER persons

- The agency will support the implementation of QUEER specific intake forms as a recognition and acknowledgement that unique needs are best assessed through identity specific assessment tools
- The agency acknowledges that a QUEER specific assessment tool will help guide status quo service providers, collaboratively with the client, in developing specifically tailored health, safety, resource, and/or treatment plans
- The agency acknowledges that a QUEER specific intake and/or assessment process will allow mainstream service providers make appropriate, QUEER positive, referrals
- The agency acknowledges that a QUEER intake and/or assessment will gather information and statistics reflective of culturally specific needs, which will/can contribute significantly to; awareness raising of QUEER needs within the counselling/social service field; training and education specific to QUEER counselling; agency's role as advocate for policy and law reform on all levels of organization and government
- Implementation of inclusive assessment procedures will convey a positive message that clients do not have to be, act, or appear heterosexual in order to receive services
- QUEER intake and assessment training will be delivered by QUEER staff, consumers/clients, and/or community alliance members, to all staff, including supervisors, managers, counsellors, receptionists, students, and volunteers, aimed at educating mainstream service providers in sexual and gender identity issues, socio-political oppression/s of Queer peoples, and understanding of identity, location, and context of critical question asking, as part of capacity building through awareness, sensitivity, confidence, and competence development
- The agency will support QUEER specific assessment tools as a critical component to 'best practice', aimed at offering intake workers guidance to engage and assist QUEER clients through a positive, safe, and validating information gathering process
- Mainstream intake workers will be trained to deliver information about agency QUEER services with both competence and confidence, conveying to the client that diversity of sexual and gender identity/ies is recognized and respected
- Intake will take place in a confidential and private space
- All intake and assessment forms will be examined for heterosexual and gendered bias within its questioning/framing structure
- Neutral and/or culturally affirming language will be utilized in all areas of the intake and assessment processes

4.2. Individual/Couples Counselling

- Affirmative Action policy in relation to recruiting Queer Counsellors

- Comprehensive QUEER specific counselling and skills development training is mandatory for any one staff member working with QUEER client's and/or communities
- The agency will support QUEER affirmative practice within the area of clinical supervision by designating an experienced QUEER staff member, or external consultant, to oversee all QUEER specific clinical enquires and/or issues
- The agency will support training opportunities that aims to develop counsellors confidence and awareness to identify and address indicators that clients may be experiencing confusion or discomfort with their sexual and/or gender identity/ies
- The agency will support training that aims to identify, and offer space to process, counsellors self identified lack of experience, and possible uncomfotability, working specifically with issues of sexuality, sexual and gender identity/ies within an QUEER context, when themes of coming out, oppression, homophobia/heterosexism, internalized homophobia, body issues/concerns, aging, HIV/AIDS concerns, etc are areas of engagement and exploration in relation to feelings of sadness, isolation, rejection, fear, nervousness, difficulties with trust, drug and alcohol use, self harm, etc.
- Counsellors will be best prepared through QUEER training to practice with confidence and competence to challenge and correct erroneous and damaging beliefs about QUEER peoples, when expressed by any one person, under any clinical and/or agency circumstances
- Counsellors will be best educated through QUEER training to practice with awareness to responsibly replace negative myths and stereotypes, with accurate information aimed to confront anti-QUEER discrimination, whether it is directed at others or the self.
- Counsellors will integrate allied QUEER affirming practice into her/his approach as an essential component to the development of healthy self-esteem, sense of pride, and personal empowerment for QUEER clients
- Counsellors will possess knowledge, and visibly promote, QUEER specific and/or positive community resources, and will offer external referral if/when an issue arises that both the client and counsellor feel would be better addressed and supported by an QUEER community resource

4.3. Mixed Groups

- Counsellors/facilitators have a responsibility to identify and address problems that many QUEER clients encounter in mixed groups, where some or most of the members are heterosexual
- Counsellors/facilitators are responsible for client's safety, and mandated to take action against any one group member who expresses verbal harassment and/or any other form of anti-QUEER discrimination against another group member
- Counsellors/facilitators must understand and acknowledge potential dangers of heterosexism and homophobia within a mixed group process, which often creates anxiety and story censorship amongst QUEER group participants, and are therefore committed to advocating

for the development of agency supported QUEER specific group work processes

- Counsellors/facilitators will respect a client's decision to participate in a mixed group, but is/are still responsible for risk assessment and safety planning with QUEER group members who experience homophobia, gender-phobia, and heterosexism within a mixed group setting
- Counsellors/facilitators will make individual counselling, or 'check in', time available for QUEER client's to discuss issues that she/he cannot safely raise within the group and/or address issues of experienced oppression within the group
- Counsellors/facilitators will practice and positively promote neutral and inclusive language in the delivery of verbal and/or written information, assignments, resources, group topics, and group discussion
- Counsellors/facilitators will not pressure a client to 'come out' to group members if the client is not comfortable, but is responsible for creating safety and comfortability (i.e 'coming out' role playing) for the client if/when she/he self determines 'coming out' in group, or to co-workers, family members, friends

4.4. Separate Groups

- The agency will support the human rights need for affirmative practice within specialized group development where by all members and facilitators are QUEER identified, as an acknowledgment that QUEER health can benefit tremendously from a climate where shared common understanding and experiences are normalized
- The agency respects and understands that QUEER specific groups offers client's the opportunity to talk openly with peers, and can provide invaluable insight into beliefs and behaviours previously invisible to them
- The agency recognizes the diversity of issues impacting individuals, couples, and families from the QUEER community, and will therefore support QUEER needs based groups relevant to age, gender, sex, race/ethnicity, HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol, trauma, building family, and parenting.

4.5. Family System Approach

- The agency identifies a family as a system that consists of two or more people, whether living together or apart, related by blood, marriage, adoption or commitment to care for one another
- The agency is committed to QUEER affirmative practice within couples and family work in all areas of hiring practices, assessment, education, skills training, research, community development, assessment, supervision, program evaluation, and counselling approaches/modality
- The agency is committed to gaining knowledge and developing skills specific to working with diverse QUEER family systems, and does not practice family and/or relationship counselling from traditional heterosexual family system based counselling theory, approaches/models

- The agency is strongly committed to assisting QUEER families and individuals through counselling, community development, advocacy and public education programs
- The agency is committed to strengthening QUEER families and individuals in just and supportive communities
- The agency aims to be a leader in strengthening QUEER families and communities, to be innovative, dynamic and fully involve people from diverse populations