



VincentCare
Engage. Enable. Empower.



VincentCare
Community Housing



LGBTIQ+

Inclusive Language Guide

'Blak' is a term coined in the early 1990s by Torres Strait Islander artist Destiny Deacon and is used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to reclaim their identity from colonialist language.

In dropping the 'c' from the word 'Black', which has been used in a derogatory manner, this term represents urban, contemporary and politically conscious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.



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Acknowledgement of Country and queer Aboriginal history



VincentCare Victoria and VincentCare Community Housing acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands we live, work and meet on and we recognise their continuing connections to those lands, the waterways, territories and resources.

We acknowledge the richness, diversity and sophistication of the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay our respects to Elders past and present and to the memories of their ancestors.

The creators of this guide acknowledge the ongoing leadership and advocacy of Blak queer people, and recognise their enduring connections to culture, community and Country. We also recognise that this labour is frequently unrecognised, despite its significant impact.

LGBTIQA+

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Introduction

Language holds power.

The words we choose can shape how safe, respected and welcome people feel. It can be used to affirm, include and celebrate people for who they are.

Unfortunately, it can also be used to exclude, stereotype or erase people's identities.

To use language meaningfully and safely, we must recognise that language is not fixed. It changes over time as communities grow, reclaim words and create new ways to describe identity, connection and experience.

Staying open to feedback and being willing to adapt is an important part of showing respect and maintaining cultural safety.

Cultural safety means building an environment where people feel their identities are seen, valued and protected, and where they do not need to hide parts of themselves to feel safe. It also means taking responsibility for the words we use and the impact they have on others.

At VincentCare, each of us plays a role in how we create cultural safety – including our use of safe and inclusive language. Using inclusive language is one way VincentCare demonstrates our values of respect, compassion, courage, empathy, integrity, commitment and advocacy.

Our Inclusive Language Guide sets out VincentCare's commitment to using language that helps create cultural safety for LGBTIQ+ people.

1. Why inclusive language matters

Inclusive language helps remove barriers that many LGBTIQ+ people still face. It means using words that reflect people's identities and experiences, rather than outdated or harmful stereotypes.

It means avoiding assumptions about who people are, how they live or what their families look like. Inclusive language is an immediate signal to people that they are seen, heard and celebrated.



2. Why inclusive language is essential to the implementation of the VincentCare Recovery Model (VRM)

The VincentCare Recovery Model (VRM) is VincentCare's internally developed practice framework, which outlines how we provide support to clients. At the heart of the VRM are six foundational principles that guide both the delivery of its various components and the cultivation of a culture that supports recovery.

These principles are:

- intersectionality
- person-led practice
- integrated practice
- strengths-based practice
- trauma-informed practice
- social justice

Inclusive language is essential to the effective implementation of the VRM because it directly reflects and reinforces each of these principles.

The words we use shape how people experience our services, how safe and respected they feel, and how effectively we build trust and connection.

By using language that is respectful, person-centred, and affirming of diverse identities and experiences, we create an environment that promotes dignity, belonging, and recovery.

3. Understanding the

LGBTIQA+

acronym and sexual orientation

LGBTIQA+ is an inclusive acronym that represents a broad spectrum of identities related to sexuality, gender, and bodily diversity. Each letter reflects the diversity of lived experiences within communities and highlights that identity can be complex, fluid, and deeply personal.



What LGBTIQA+ stands for

L – Lesbian

A person who identifies as a woman and is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other people who identify as women.

G – Gay

A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. While often used to describe men attracted to men, some people of other genders may also use this term.

B – Bisexual

A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender. This identity does not rely on a binary understanding of gender and can encompass attraction to people across a broad gender spectrum.

T – Transgender or Trans

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may identify in many ways, including as men, women, non-binary, gender fluid, or with culturally specific terms such as sistergirl and brotherboy.

I – Intersex

A person who is born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex is a natural variation in human bodies and does not indicate a person's gender identity or sexual orientation.

Q – Queer or Questioning

"Queer" is used by some as a reclaimed term to describe identities that challenge mainstream norms around gender and sexuality. However, it is important to note that the word has a history of being used in a derogatory way and may still be hurtful or offensive to some people. It may also represent a political stance of resistance to heteronormativity. "Questioning" reflects a period in which someone may be exploring or unsure about their gender or sexual orientation.

A – Asexual, Aromantic or Agender

Asexual: A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others.

Aromantic: A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others.

Agender: A person who does not identify with any gender.

+ – Plus

Represents other identities that may not be included in the acronym but are part of the broader LGBTIQA+ community, such as pansexual, demisexual, non-binary, genderqueer, and more.

4. What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation refers to a person's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to others. It is not defined by behaviour or experience, but by how a person understands and describes their own identity. Some people may identify with a specific sexual orientation regardless of whether they have been in relationships. Others may identify as sexually fluid, meaning their orientation may shift over time.

Sexual orientations include but are not limited to:

Heterosexual

A person who is attracted to individuals of a different gender.

Lesbian

A woman who is attracted to other women.

Gay

A person attracted to people of the same gender.

Bisexual

A person attracted to more than one gender.

Pansexual

A person whose attraction is not limited by gender and who may be attracted to people across the gender spectrum.

Asexual

A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction.

Queer

An umbrella term used by some people who do not identify exclusively as heterosexual. This term is often used to reflect a more fluid or inclusive understanding of sexuality.

It is important to understand that sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity.

For example, a transgender person may identify as heterosexual, gay, bisexual or another orientation, just like a cisgender person.

Cisgender refers to people whose internal sense of gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.



5. Identity is personal

There is no single way to experience or describe gender and sexuality.

Some people may use identity-first language (e.g. “a gay man”), while others prefer person-first language (e.g. “a person who is gay”).

The most respectful approach is to use the terms people use for themselves.

6. Pronouns and misgendering

Pronouns are words like she, he or they that are used in place of a person's name. While they are a basic part of communication, pronouns can hold significant meaning, especially for trans and gender diverse people. Using the correct pronouns is a simple and respectful way to affirm a person's identity. It reflects inclusive practice and supports an environment where people are acknowledged and treated with dignity.

Pronouns are personal and may not always be visible or shared openly. The use and sharing of pronouns are nuanced. What feels appropriate for one person may not feel the same for another. This can be influenced by past experiences, cultural background, or safety concerns. A respectful way to support inclusion is to offer your own pronouns during introductions, in email signatures or in meetings. This helps build a culture of acceptance and reduces the need for others to explain themselves.

If someone has not shared their pronouns, avoid assuming based on appearance or how others refer to them. Instead, use their name or neutral language such as they or them. For example, "Jordan is attending the session" is respectful and inclusive until their pronouns are known.

Misgendering occurs when someone is referred to using incorrect pronouns or gendered language. This can cause distress and may impact a person's experience of inclusion and respect. While mistakes can happen, it is how we respond that matters. If you use the wrong pronouns, simply correct yourself and continue.

If someone else misgenders a colleague or client, a helpful way to support inclusion is to gently clarify, such as "Just to let you know, Lee uses they and them pronouns," then move on without making the correction the focus.

Having an early conversation about how someone would like misgendering to be addressed is a key part of a person led and respectful approach. Some people may prefer a quiet correction, while others may not want any attention drawn to it. Asking and following the person's preference supports inclusive communication and aligns with integrated practice by recognising each person's voice, context and needs.



7. Cultural safety

Cultural safety for LGBTIQ+ people means creating environments where people are respected and valued for who they are. It involves recognising and addressing power imbalances and approaching support in a way that responds to each person's identity, experiences and needs. Cultural safety takes a whole-of-person approach, understanding that people's wellbeing is shaped by social, historical and structural factors.

For LGBTIQ+ people who are also Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, living with disability, seeking asylum, have refugee experience or come from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, cultural safety must reflect this complexity. This includes respecting culturally specific identities such as sistergirl, brotherboy and fa'afafine, among others. It means engaging with people in ways that are respectful and inclusive, without requiring them to explain or reduce any part of themselves.

Using LGBTIQ+ inclusive language is one important way to support cultural safety. The language we use shapes how people experience a space and whether they feel recognised and understood. Inclusive language builds trust and connection. It shows a commitment to listening, learning and creating environments where people know they are welcomed and respected.

8. Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs we make about people without knowing their background, identity or experiences. These assumptions often reflect dominant norms and ideas about how people should look, live or relate to others. For LGBTIQ+ people, assumptions can be particularly damaging because they often erase or misrepresent who someone is, leading to feelings of exclusion, discomfort or invisibility.

Common assumptions include believing someone is in a heterosexual relationship, assuming their family structure or relationship status, or using language that reflects only one view of identity. Assumptions become even more harmful when LGBTIQ+ identities intersect with other lived experiences. This may include being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, living with disability, seeking asylum, having refugee experience or coming from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse community.

People with these experiences are already navigating systems that may not reflect or respect who they are. When assumptions are made about any part of their identity, the impact is compounded and can lead to deeper exclusion or silence.

Instead of assuming, we can approach people with curiosity and openness. Curiosity means being willing to learn without needing to have all the answers. It invites us to listen, to ask thoughtful questions when appropriate and to reflect on how our own views may shape how we see others. Curiosity is a practice that helps us stay present and respectful and allows people to share who they are in their own way and in their own time.

9. our working definition of inclusive language

Working definition

Inclusive language means using words and phrases that respect how people describe their identities, bodies, relationships and experiences.

It shows people that they are welcome, safe and seen.

Connection to our values

Commitment:

Inclusive language reflects our commitment to building environments where everyone feels respected, valued and affirmed.

Courage:

It takes courage to challenge assumptions, embrace change and speak up when language excludes or harm.

Advocacy:

Inclusive language is a tool for advocacy, sending a clear message that we support equity, visibility and safety for all people.

How this supports recovery

When people feel safe to show up as their whole selves, they are more likely to trust services, share what they need and stay connected.

Inclusive language can help reduce shame, build trust and support people's wellbeing.





10. Inclusive language as everyday advocacy

Working definition

Advocacy: means using our words and actions to stand up for people's rights, safety and dignity. Using inclusive language is an act of everyday advocacy.

It shows we do not accept language or ideas that harm LGBTIQ+ people or any other marginalised group.

Connection to our values

Respect: Everyday inclusive language shows respect by acknowledging people as they are and honouring the language they use to describe themselves, their bodies, identities and relationships.

Empathy: Speaking and listening with inclusive language requires empathy.

It invites us to consider how others may feel, to be thoughtful in our words and to stay open to perspectives and experiences different from our own.

How this supports recovery

When people know they are supported and spoken about with respect, they feel less alone.

They can trust that they will not be shamed or judged for who they are. This builds stronger connections and helps people feel safer to reach out for support when they need it.

11. Our VincentCare Recovery Model (VRM) foundation principles in action

Strengths-based practice

Working definition

Using language that recognises and highlights the resilience, knowledge and pride of LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

This means focusing on people's skills and lived experiences as **strengths**, not deficits.

Connection to our values

Respect:

Affirms each person's identity and honours their lived experience as valuable.

Empathy:

Sees people as whole and capable, not defined by challenges alone.

Courage:

Acknowledges the bravery it takes to live authentically and share your story.

How this supports recovery

Using strengths-based language helps people feel proud of who they are and what they bring. It builds hope and confidence and encourages connection.

This supports self-worth and creates a strong foundation for healing, growth and recovery.

Trauma informed

Working definition

Using language that recognises many LGBTIQ+ people have experienced trauma, discrimination or exclusion at different points in their lives.

Trauma-informed language means being mindful of how words can affect people's sense of safety and trust. It involves speaking with care, asking rather than assuming, and respecting each person's boundaries and story. It gives people choice and control over what they share and how they are described, helping them feel understood and supported.

Connection to our values

Compassion:

We choose words that show care for people's histories and honour their stories without forcing them to relive painful experiences.

Courage:

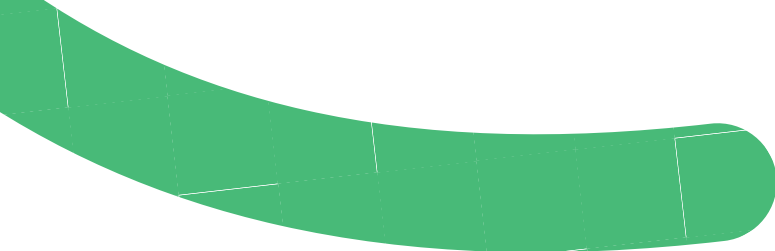
We are willing to have honest, respectful conversations about difficult topics and to challenge language or ideas that may cause harm.

How this supports recovery

Trauma informed language helps create a sense of safety and trust, which is essential for recovery. When people feel their stories will be handled with care, they may be more comfortable sharing what matters to them.

For example, asking, "*Is there anything about your background or past experiences that you would like me to know so I can better support you?*" shows genuine respect for each person's history without being intrusive.

This approach reduces the risk of causing distress and reminds people they will be listened to and supported without judgement.



Integrated practice

Working definition

Integrated practice for LGBTIQ+ people means bringing together different services in a way that fully recognises and respects their diverse identities, experiences and needs.

It goes beyond what is easiest to provide and advocates for pathways that connect people with the right support, even when it takes courage to challenge systems or fill gaps.

This approach respects each person as whole, ensuring they do not have to hide or explain parts of themselves to feel safe and understood.

Connection to our values

Advocacy:

We speak up to ensure LGBTIQ+ people receive the right support, even when systems need to change or services need to work together in new ways.

Courage:

We are willing to challenge barriers and have honest conversations to make sure people's identities and needs are not overlooked.

Respect:

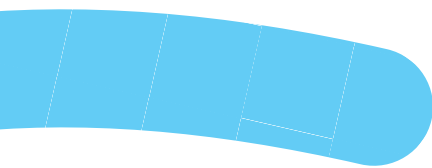
We communicate in ways that honour each person's identity and experience, sharing information thoughtfully to protect trust and dignity.

How this supports recovery

Integrated practice helps LGBTIQ+ people feel recognised and supported as whole people rather than being defined by just one part of their identity.

Clear and respectful communication within and between services means people do not have to keep repeating their story, which can be tiring and uncomfortable.

This builds trust, makes support easier to access and helps people feel truly connected to support that fits their needs.



Intersectionality

Working definition

Intersectionality means recognising that LGBTIQ+ people may hold many identities at the same time.

A person may be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, living with disability or neurodivergence, or have refugee or asylum seeker experiences.

Each of these parts of someone's identity can shape what language feels safe and respectful. Using person first or identity first language where appropriate shows care for how people describe themselves and ensure that no part of a person's identity is ignored or devalued.

Connection to our values

Respect:

We honour all parts of a person's identity and use words that reflect what people tell us about themselves.

Integrity:

We speak truthfully and accurately about people's experiences, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes.

Empathy:

We listen deeply to how people want to be described and stay open to learning from their stories and perspectives.

How this supports recovery

When all parts of a person's identity are recognised and respected, people are less likely to feel they must hide or downplay who they are.

This helps build trust and makes it easier for people to share what they need. It also reduces the risk of people feeling judged or misunderstood because of assumptions.

Taking an intersectional approach means people feel seen as whole and complex, not just one label. This can strengthen connection, support a sense of belonging and help people feel safe enough to ask for help, stay engaged and work towards their goals.

Person led

Working definition

Person-led means ensuring that people have genuine control over the decisions that affect their lives.

It recognises that each person is the expert in their own identity, needs and goals. This approach is especially important for LGBTIQ+ people and others whose identities or experiences may have been misunderstood or dismissed.

Connection to our values

Commitment:

A person-led approach reflects our commitment to genuine engagement and responsiveness. It means showing up with consistency, listening actively and doing the work to create systems that honour people's voices

Respect:

It demonstrates respect by recognising people's right to self-determination and by valuing the diverse ways people understand themselves and their experiences

How this supports recovery

A person-led approach supports recovery by building trust and increasing agency.

When people feel seen, heard and in control, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with supports.

It strengthens identity, connection and confidence, creating the conditions needed for recovery to be self-defined, sustainable and empowering.

Social justice

Working definition

Social justice means actively working to remove barriers that create disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion.

For LGBTIQ+ people, this means addressing the systemic inequalities that impact safety, access to services, recognition and wellbeing.

Social justice in practice involves challenging unfair structures, making space for marginalised voices and advocating for equity in all areas of life.

Connection to our values

Respect:

A social justice approach reflects our ongoing commitment to equity and inclusion.

It means doing the work every day to challenge discrimination and create safer systems for LGBTIQ+ people

Integrity:

Acting with integrity means aligning our values with our actions. Social justice requires us to be honest about power and privilege and to act in ways that uphold fairness, truth and accountability

How this supports recovery

When services actively work to create spaces that affirm identity, celebrate diversity and uphold the right to self-determination.

This approach reduces the isolation and distress that often arise from exclusion, invisibility and discrimination. It builds pathways to connection, trust and agency, where people can engage on their own terms.





12. Final note



Using Inclusive language is a powerful practice that reflects VincentCare's values and shapes how we engage with others. It plays a key role in building environments that are responsive, accountable and aware of the diverse communities we work alongside.

This guide supports ongoing learning and encourages careful, considered communication. Language is always evolving, and our willingness to reflect, adapt and improve is part of our commitment to inclusive and person led practice.

By using this guide and sharing it with others, you are putting VincentCare's values into action and helping shape a culture of true respect and belonging. Modelling inclusive language in our everyday communication also sets a clear standard for others, strengthening a workplace culture where everyone is mindful of the impact words can have.

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