

Policy Brief

Making Evolving Models of Care Gender-Responsive

Key messages

- Gender-responsive care refers to health care that acknowledges and takes into consideration gender as a key determinant of health which influences how women and gender diverse people experience health, illness and access to health care.
- Viewing models of care in mainstream health through an intersectional gendered lens is pivotal as they evolve in response to research, technological changes and global health threats.
- Social, environmental, structural, economic, cultural, biomedical, commercial, and digital factors that compound and can result in worse health outcomes and experiences for women and gender diverse people, their children and communities must be considered, particularly for making models of care accessible to priority populations.
- To ensure preventive health is widely accessible, the benefits and risks of evolving models of care must be considered through the application of a gender-responsive approach.
- Gendered differences in health experiences, treatment, and health outcomes must be considered in the development of clinical guidelines, policies, strategies and plans.
- Training and professional development on best practice gender-responsive care and gender-responsive approaches to health and prevention is needed.

Purpose of this brief

Australian Women's Health Alliance works to articulate the policies and actions necessary to improve health outcomes for women and gender diverse people. This brief explores evolving models of care from a gender-responsive lens to inform policy, strategy, and practice. It is applicable in all jurisdictions.

New models of care and health care delivery are emerging in response to global health shifts, including pandemics, climate change and developing technology. Achieving health equity and supporting prevention efforts requires applying an intersectional gendered lens to these evolving models of care.

Why put an intersectional gendered lens on models of care?

Understanding the diverse lived experiences of women and gender diverse people when delivering various models of care is essential to effective preventive health measures, particularly as these models take steps to improve safety and access. Gender-responsive care recognises that women and gender diverse people may experience health care differently than men and embedding gender sensitivity in health care policies, systems and practices ensures that services are safe and responsive.¹ It is also important to consider family-sensitive practice as part of gender-responsive care, given that women are the predominant caregivers of children, ageing parents and people with disability and long-term health conditions.^{2 3 4}



Intersectionality is a lens to understand how people's different identities, whether that be their gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, or disability, impact the way they are treated. Intersectionality allows us to understand how the multiple, different identities we hold as individuals intersect with one another, influencing our interactions with systems, services, and the broader community.⁵

For priority populations, an intersectional gendered lens is vital to properly implement developments within models of care.

Evolving models in current and future climates

Health service provision has evolved in response to technology and global health threats, which have forced providers and policy makers to develop novel ways to deliver care. Some of these changes in Australia, and internationally, allow women and gender diverse people to access health systems more easily and safely, including:

- Improved access and availability of telehealth and virtual care, which gives women and gender diverse people more autonomy on when and where they speak to clinicians, including flexibility for caring responsibilities that may occur in the home.
- Establishing data linkages with other services and community to support coordinated, trauma-informed care.⁶
- Tools such as phone applications, symptom checkers and tracking mechanisms that increase health literacy and empower women and gender diverse people to make decisions for their health.⁷
- Consumer support platforms that encourage, engage and empower women and gender diverse people by fostering a sense of community connection.⁸
- Applying a gender-responsive approach to artificial intelligence (AI) in health, which considers gendered biases.⁹

However, if an intersectional gendered lens is not applied at all stages, from planning through to development, and implementation, many of the changes can come with great risks to women and gender diverse people, as well as the wider community and health services. For instance, the increasing use of AI in health research and care in Australia¹⁰ must address, rather than perpetuate, gendered biases that already exist.

Evolving models in practice

In response to past, current and future pressure on health systems, nurse and midwifery led care is growing as a model of care in mainstream health.¹¹ This can be seen in screening programs, coordinated responses to violence through service delivery partnerships, abortion care, health hubs, walk in clinics, family birth centres and community-controlled care.^{12 13} These nurse-led services are a key part of prevention, taking pressure off hospitals and emergency care and addressing broader social determinants such as increased cost of living, housing instability and changes in technology.

Coordinated care, provided through health hubs, partnerships and online connections, has emerged as an intersectional response to the systemic barriers that limit women and gender diverse people's access to health care.



Social, environmental, structural, economic, cultural, biomedical, commercial, and digital factors can compound and result in worse health outcomes and experiences for women and gender diverse people.¹⁴ Partnerships between services such as legal centres, safety planning services and child and family centres, enable women and gender diverse people to access support in navigating broader social determinants that impact their health outcomes.

Trauma-informed care

Trauma-informed care is an evolving model of care that should continue to be integrated with gender-responsive approaches. Trauma-informed care includes the principles of choice, control, safety, empathy, and collaboration, many of which are central to holistic care and ensure the wellbeing of communities, which in turn leads to better health outcomes.^{15 16}

Women and gender diverse people disproportionately experience gender-based violence and other types of violence, including while accessing health care services. Integrating trauma-informed care with a gender-responsive approach ensures these people can access health care safely. This works as a form of prevention by ensuring health services don't further harm those with experiences of trauma and instead build trust in the health system. Practically, this includes strengthening the role of the health sector in the response to gender-based violence, for instance in accordance with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.^{17 18} While evidence of trauma-informed practice is emerging in health departments¹⁹ and GP practices,²⁰ it needs to be embedded across all health settings to ensure better health outcomes.

What does this mean for health equity?

Measures to address health inequities and strengthen prevention must adapt and consider how health services are being delivered, particularly in response to changing technology. While improvements in technology have increased access to certain services through telehealth, online data sharing and rapid communication, there are risks that must be considered. For example, data collection and storage. Security measures must ensure data is collected and stored safely to protect everyone, especially women and gender diverse people experiencing violence.²¹

Ongoing funding for evolving models of gender-responsive care is important to ensure changes effectively respond to the needs of women and gender diverse people. In addition, funding that supports continuity of care must be guaranteed to ensure ongoing support to communities. Peak health bodies funded to develop clinical guidelines should address the gendered differences in health experiences, treatment, and outcomes in these guidelines.

Training and professional development on best practice gender-responsive care and gender-responsive approaches to health and prevention is needed as part of knowledge translation and implementation. This training should be co-designed with health consumers to ensure lived experience is embedded in evolving care models and practice. Considering gendered factors in service design and delivery, including workplace policies and procedures, would ensure a more consistent focus on gender sensitivity and safety for women and gender diverse people across services.²²



Further research in emerging practices and efficacy of gender-responsive care is vital to examine and understand the benefits for women and gender diverse people. Understanding gendered experiences in health and policy outcomes is crucial as models of care adapt in response to emerging research, shifts in technology and global health threats.

About us

Australian Women's Health Alliance provides a national voice on women's health. We highlight how gender shapes experiences of health and health care, recognising that women's health is determined by social, cultural, environmental, and political factors.

Contact us

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work. We pay our respect to Elders past and present. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

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⁵ Australian Women's Health Alliance, [Glossary of Terms](#), Australian Women's Health Alliance, 2024

⁶ Department of Health and Aged Care, [National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030](#), Australian Government, 2021.

⁷ Department of Health and Aged Care, [National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030](#), Australian Government, 2019.

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- ¹⁴ Department of Health and Aged Care, [National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030](#).
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