

Safe and Affirmed: Evaluating Capacity to Support LGBTIQA+ Young People in Mental Health Services in New South Wales

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Background:

This study aimed to evaluate the Safe and Affirmed Program, a mental health professional development program offered by Twenty10, a NSW-based not-for-profit organisation serving LGBTQIA+ young people.

Methods:

A pre- and post-evaluation survey was conducted with mental health professionals across participating NSW government and private health services. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online three to six months post-training. The evaluation focused on the average change in seven-point Likert scores from pre- to post-training surveys using paired t-tests. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic and professional characteristics. The study was designed to detect score changes with high statistical power ($p<0.05$). Interview transcripts were coded in NVivo14 and analysed using inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

Results:

334 completed the pre-evaluation, 271 the post-evaluation, and 15 a follow-up interview. Most participants practised in regional or rural locations ($n=171$, 65.8%), compared to metropolitan (30%, $n=78$) or remote (3.5%, $n=9$) locations. There was

significant improvement in participants' confidence in their knowledge and skills to provide gender affirming approaches for young people (respective mean difference 1.35, 95%CI 1.22-1.48; 1.34, 95%CI 1.22-1.46, both $p<0.01$), and in providing culturally safe mental health care for sexuality diverse young people (1.19, 95%CI 1.07-1.31, $p<0.01$). Participants indicated an increased understanding of the co-occurrence of gender diversity with diagnoses such as eating disorders and neurodivergence (1.17, 95%CI 1.03-1.31, $p<0.01$). Awareness of the NSW Specialist Trans and Gender Diverse Health Service for young people increased from 47.2% (n=105/222) pre-training to 96.7% (n=177/183) post-training. Interviews revealed barriers to culturally safe care, including limited family support for trans youth, scarce resources in regional areas, and inadequate workplace support for inclusive practices.

Conclusion:

The findings highlight the program's effectiveness in improving participants' ability to provide culturally safe care for LGBTIQA+ youth. Sustained investment in targeted professional development is essential to strengthen the mental health workforce's knowledge and capacity.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no disclosures.