

Overseas-born trans and gender diverse people's experiences with Australian sexual health services: A qualitative study

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Background:

Overseas-born trans and gender diverse people is an often-overlooked population in Australia's HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention strategy. They faced intersecting unique challenges, including fear of racism and transphobia from health professionals, confusion over navigating the Australian healthcare system, and concerns over cost to access health clinics. These could result in delaying access to HIV and other STI prevention strategies, including testing and treatment. This study aimed to investigate their experiences with sexual health services in Australia.

Methods:

An in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview was conducted between July 2024 and November 2024. We used a reflexive descriptive qualitative analysis to interpret the data.

Results:

11 participants were involved in the study, with the majority (n=8) were between 30 – 39 years old. Participants were born in Southeast Asia, South Asia, South America, and Western Europe. All participants reported mixed experiences with sexual health services. Some positive experiences include being addressed by their pronouns and practitioners referring to their genitalia using words that they were comfortable with (e.g., 'front hole', 'bonus hole'). Some negative experiences include practitioners making assumptions about their gender, sexuality, and the gender/s of their sexual partners, referring to their body using medical terms, and not providing adequate sexual health information specific to their gender identity. Nearly all participants recommended a standardised gender-affirming care training for all sexual health professionals to ensure safety and accessibility.

Conclusion:

We recommend a strong commitment from regulatory bodies, such as the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, to coordinate and deliver a compulsory training for all health professionals on gender-affirming sexual health care that are inclusive of the specific needs of overseas-born trans and gender diverse people.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.