

Mental health safety for LGBTIQ+ people

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La Trobe University's Bouverie Centre has partnered with Thorne Harbour Health to launch an online course designed to help mental health practitioners work safely and effectively with LGBTIQ+ people.

LGBTIQ+ people experience anxiety and depression at higher rates and

are at greater risk of suicide and [self-harm](#) than their heterosexual peers. More than that, many experience high rates of family relationship struggles and breakdown—which can amplify such vulnerabilities.

This has been exacerbated by COVID-19, which saw many [young people](#) having to return to their family home because of loss of work, accommodation or illness.

Backed by research, and guided by people with lived experience, the online self-learning modules have been created to support LGBTIQ+ people and their family navigate times of stress and pressure—with a view to improve [support networks](#), and the mental health and well-being of LGBTIQ+ people.

Research fellow at La Trobe University Henry von Doussa said that the aim of the online training was to really help practitioners understand the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ people and properly engage [family support](#).

"Traditionally LGBTIQ+ people are excluded from therapeutic family opportunities, or, when included, are often seen as problematic sites of family upheaval or breakdown," Mr. von Doussa said.

"Our research found that strong and inclusive relationships were key protective factors for the mental health and well-being of LGBTIQ+ people—especially around formative moments of identity development, such as disclosing sexuality and [gender identity](#) to [family members](#)."

"The self-paced online training course consists of three modules which will provide a framework for family therapists to address the unique personal and relational challenges faced by those in the community and improve the mental health and well-being of everyone involved," Mr. von Doussa said.

After completing the modules, the [mental health](#) practitioners will be able to create a safe, non-judgmental environment for families to meet, while also advocating for the LGBTIQ+ person.

The practitioners will be able to help families develop the skills and knowledge to support the LGBTIQ+ person—such as understanding important terminology, history and culture, the experience of minority stress and potential trauma, and the need for support when there is relational pressure around sexuality or gender in the family.

Director of services at Thorne Harbour Health, Carolyn Gillispie, said the development of the online program was triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Family involvement has become more urgent in the context of COVID-19 as many young people return to the [family home](#) after losing financial independence through job loss," Ms. Gillespie said.

Provided by La Trobe University

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