

How to be a good ally?

- Consider what you do to support intersex inclusion in health and human rights initiatives.
- Change your language and frame of reference. Intersex status is distinct from both sexual orientation and gender identity. These are each recognised in the federal Sex Discrimination Act.
- Put intersex people and intersex-led organisations front and centre when talking about intersex.
- Many medical studies of people with intersex variations explicitly identify gender identity issues and non-heterosexual behaviours as reasons for medical treatment. Non-consensual genital surgery is an LGBTI issue as it shows what can happen when non-heteronormative people are established to be “born this way”. Ally with the call to end normalising interventions on intersex children.
- Adopt federal Guidelines on gender recognition, and offer everyone F, M and X options if you have to record gender in your workplace. Go further and support multiple options. Consider whether your workplace needs to record information on sex, gender and title. Can you offer an option to opt out?
- People with intersex variations should be included in campaigns for marriage equality, but intersex people are not included in same-sex marriage. Marriages in Australia have been annulled on the basis that one party was neither fully male nor fully female.
- Include intersex in education, service access, and in employment and anti-bullying policies designed to prevent harassment and discrimination.
- Follow and share intersex issues on social networks.

Resources

Books

- *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority and Lived Experience* by Katrina Karkazis
- *Golden Boy: A Novel* by Abigail Tarttelin

Films

- *Intersexion* (2012)
- *Orchids: My Intersex Adventure* (2011)

Speakers, articles, videos, information

- Organisation Intersex International Australia
oii.org.au/allies
- Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group
aissga.org.au

INTERSEX for ALLIES



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What is intersex?

Intersex is a term that relates to a range of congenital physical traits or variations that lie between stereotypical ideals of male and female. Intersex people are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. Many forms of intersex exist; it is a spectrum or umbrella term, rather than a single category. Some common intersex variations are diagnosed prenatally. Intersex differences may be apparent at birth. Some intersex traits become apparent at puberty, or when trying to conceive, or through random chance.

How common are intersex people?

The lowest popular statistic is around 1 in 2,000 people (.05% of births) but a more likely figure may be closer to 1.7%. This makes intersex differences about as common as red hair.

Are intersex and hermaphrodite the same?

Biologically, no. Hermaphrodites (such as snails) possess fully functioning sets of both "male" and "female" sex organs. This is impossible in mammals. Linguistically, the word originates in the Greek myth of Hermaphroditus who was both male and female, having elements of both sexes.

Some intersex diagnoses have been termed "pseudo-hermaphrodites" or "true-hermaphrodites". While some intersex people use the term, others find it stigmatising due to this medical history. If in doubt, it is best only used by intersex people.

Do intersex people have health issues?

Intersex people, like all people, have health issues. In a few diagnoses, immediate medical attention is needed from birth, but being intersex is not a health issue in and of itself. Natural intersex bodies are most often healthy. Intersex people frequently need hormone replacement therapy. This may be due to medical intervention.

Why are intersex people subjected to medical intervention?

Medical intervention attempts to make the bodies of people with intersex variations conform to ideals of male or female. Current medical protocols are based on the ideas that infant genital surgery will "minimise family concern and distress" and "mitigate the risks of stigmatisation and gender-identity confusion". Surgical interventions intrinsically focus on appearance, and not sensation or sexual function.

Childhood cosmetic genital surgeries are also problematic as children cannot consent to them. Adolescents, and even adults, have also reported pressure by doctors or families to conform to societal norms. Some doctors still believe that disclosure of a person's intersex status would be too alarming.

Very many intersex people suffer the physical and emotional effects of surgery, and related shame and secrecy. At a fundamental level, homophobia, intolerance and ancient superstitions underpin contemporary mistreatment of people with intersex differences.

What is DSD? Is this the same as intersex?

In 2006, a group of doctors replaced the umbrella term intersex with "Disorders of Sex Development" or DSD. The collective term DSD reinforces the idea that intersex traits are individual medical conditions or disorders that need to be fixed.

Today, some intersex people use the label – especially those who were taught DSD by their parents or doctors. People with intersex variations are free to use any label, but the term intersex has become even more accepted and widespread today.

Stigmatising language leads to poor mental health, marginalisation, and exclusion from human rights and social institutions. The term intersex promotes equality and human rights for people born with atypical sex characteristics.

What gender identities do intersex people have?

Intersex is a lived experience of the body and intersex people have a broad range of gender identities, just like non-intersex people. The identities of people with intersex variations may sometimes not match our appearance. Having a non-binary gender identity does not automatically make someone intersex.

Are intersex people transgender or gender diverse?

A minority of intersex people change gender, and some may self-identify as transgender or gender diverse. Most intersex people identify in the sex they were raised, but some will not fully identify with their assigned sex. This is part of the intersex experience, but it doesn't make us trans or gender diverse. Intersex bodies have diverse physical sex characteristics; many intersex people have an experience of involuntary medical treatment to impose stereotypical sex characteristics, or are at risk of this. This makes descriptions of intersex people as "cis" or "cisgender" problematic.

Are intersex people gay, lesbian, or queer?

It depends on the individual, how they define their gender and identity, how they present, and who they form relationships with. Every intersex person is different. Some intersex individuals are LGB or queer, and some are heterosexual.

However, LGBTI activism has fought for the rights of people who fall outside of expected binary sex and gender norms. Intersex is part of LGBTI because of intersex status and a shared experience of homophobia, not because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

What are intersex activists' goals?

To raise awareness, and achieve an equal place in society. We seek the right to bodily autonomy, the right to a life without stigma and discrimination, and the right to a life without shame and secrecy.