

Being an ally to intersex people

- Support intersex inclusion in health and human rights initiatives.
- Adopt the 2017 Darlingtong Statement by Australian and NZ intersex organisations. Find a copy at oii.org.au/darlington-statement
- Change your language and frame of reference. Intersex status is distinct from sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. These are each recognised separately in the federal Sex Discrimination Act.
- 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 and genetic de-selection are LGBTI issues as they show what can happen when non-heteronormative people are established to be “born this way”. Ally with our call to end harmful practices on infants, children and adolescents with intersex variations. Challenge body shaming and the elimination of intersex traits via IVF.
- Include intersex in education and service access policies, and in employment, diversity and inclusion, and anti-bullying policies.
- Consider whether and where your organisation needs to collect data on sex, gender and title. Recognise the diversity of intersex people. Recognise that intersex and non-intersex people alike benefit from F, M, X and multiple options. Find more information at oii.org.au/surveys
- Some intersex people are married, while others are unable to marry because of the way we understand our bodies, or the way our sex or gender is documented. People with intersex variations need to be included in campaigns for marriage equality.
- Put people with intersex variations and intersex-led organisations front and centre when talking about intersex.
- Follow and share intersex issues on social media.

Resources

Books

- *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority and Lived Experience* by Katrina Karkazis
- *Golden Boy: A Novel* by Abigail Tarttelin
- *None of the Above* by I W Gregorio

Films

- *Orchids: My Intersex Adventure* (2011)
- *Intersexion* (2012)
- *XXXY* (2000)

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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Acknowledgements listed at oii.org.au/allies



Who are intersex people?

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit stereotypical definitions of male and female. Intersex traits are natural manifestations of human bodily diversity. There are many different intersex traits. Not all intersex traits are visible in infancy. Intersex variations might become apparent prenatally, at birth, at puberty, or in adulthood. They may become apparent when trying to conceive.

How common are intersex people?

A low-range 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 having 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 that medical history. If in doubt, it is best only used by people with intersex variations.

What issues do intersex people face?

We can experience stigma, shame, discrimination, trauma and human rights violations due to our natural physical characteristics, including body shaming. Key issues include unwanted medical interventions and genetic de-selection on grounds that intersex traits are disorders, and discrimination in access to healthcare, education, other services and in employment.

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.

Why are intersex people subjected to medical interventions?

Medical interventions attempt to make the bodies of people with intersex variations conform to male or female norms. Current medical protocols are based on the ideas that medical interventions will "minimise family concern and distress" and "mitigate the risks of stigmatisation and gender-identity confusion".

Such surgical interventions intrinsically focus on appearance, and not sensation or sexual function. They are also problematic as children cannot give informed consent and parents are often unaware of the full, lifelong implications. Adolescents, and even adults, have also reported pressure by doctors or families to conform to societal norms. The UN and many other human rights institutions now recognise these as harmful practices.

Very many intersex people suffer the physical and emotional effects from such interventions, and related shame and secrecy. Some doctors still believe that disclosure of a person's intersex status would be too alarming.

At a fundamental level, homophobia, stigma and ancient superstitions underpin contemporary mistreatment of people with intersex variations.

What are DSDs?

In 2006, a group of doctors replaced the umbrella term intersex with "disorders of sex development" or DSDs. The new label reinforces the idea that intersex traits are individual medical conditions or disorders that need to be fixed.

There are some intersex people who use the term today, especially when accessing healthcare, or when first taught to use DSD by 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.

We believe that 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 variations of sex characteristics.

What gender identities do intersex people have?

Intersex is a lived experience of the body and we have many different ways of understanding our bodies, our sexes and our genders.

We 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?

Some of us are, but many of us are not. The gender identities of intersex people frequently match our assignments at birth, and sometimes they may be freely chosen. Some people who have chosen their gender may identify as transgender or gender diverse.

Many intersex people have an experience of involuntary medical treatment to impose stereotypical sex characteristics, or are at risk of this. This can make 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 people with intersex variations are LGB, queer or asexual, and many are heterosexual.

We share common goals with the LGBT movement as we all fall outside of expected sex and gender norms. Intersex is part of LGBTI because of a shared experience of stigma based on sex and gender norms, not because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

What do intersex activists seek?

We seek the rights to self-determination and bodily autonomy, the right to a life without stigma and discrimination, and the right to a life free from shame and secrecy.