

# Improving mental health in rainbow communities

August 6 2019

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Research from Victoria University of Wellington has helped create a new resource to address the high rate of mental health difficulties faced by New Zealand's rainbow communities.

"There is a great deal of evidence that rainbow people—people of

diverse sexualities, genders, and sex characteristics—experience [mental health difficulties](#) at a much higher rate than the [general population](#), mainly due to societal stigma and discrimination," says Ph.D. student Gloria Fraser from Victoria University of Wellington's School of Psychology, who is leading the research.

"Many mental health professionals also feel they don't have the knowledge or skills to best support their rainbow clients, and there is a real lack of New Zealand-based resources to help with this."

Gloria's research investigated the specific problems rainbow people face when accessing mental health services in New Zealand.

"The aim of our study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and needs of rainbow people when accessing mental health services in New Zealand and highlight potential areas of improvement," Gloria says. "We wanted to give voice to the stories of community members, which doesn't always happen in research studies."

In partnership with Gender Minorities Aotearoa, InsideOUT, and RainbowYOUTH, Gloria conducted 34 detailed interviews and surveyed over 1,500 members of the community to gather data on their experiences with [mental health care](#).

The results show that rainbow people face issues such as a lack of access due to location or waiting times—a problem faced by many people seeking mental health support—as well as a lack of safe and supportive therapy spaces and a lack of understanding and education around rainbow identities.

To address this lack of understanding, Gloria has worked with Gender Minorities Aotearoa, InsideOUT, and RainbowYOUTH to create an education resource for mental health professionals.

"This resource gives information on the right language to use, the history of rainbow rights in New Zealand, common therapy topics, and what accessing [mental health services](#) is like for rainbow people," says Gloria. "The final resource is informed by the experiences, feedback, and thoughts of almost 1,700 people from the rainbow community and the mental health sector."

Toni Duder, Communications Manager at RainbowYOUTH, says: "We believe this resource has the potential to address some of the more immediate issues identified by the rainbow community, particularly with regards to basic education around gender and sexuality and take a human-centred and non-pathologised approach to care."

Tabby Besley, Managing Director for InsideOUT, says: "Rainbow people in Aotearoa are more likely to experience bullying, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance abuse, but a lot of [mental health professionals](#) aren't competent or confident working with us. This resource is going to be a huge asset for the mental health sector on its journey to providing inclusive services to [rainbow](#) communities."

The research was funded by the Rule Foundation, the Oakley Mental Health Foundation, the Victoria University of Wellington Postgraduate Students' Association, the Rainbow New Zealand Charitable Trust, Te Rau Matatini, and Rainbow Ride New Zealand.

The resource is freely available at [www.rainbowmentalhealth.nz](http://www.rainbowmentalhealth.nz).

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

Citation: Improving mental health in rainbow communities (2019, August 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-mental-health-rainbow.html>

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