

# MidCentral District Health Board

## Positive Inclusion

When MidCentral District Health Board employee Matt visited the emergency department at Palmerston North Hospital five years ago seeking medical care, he was asked some confusing questions. Was he “homosexual” and did Matt and his partner like their relationship? It left him feeling scrutinised and upset.

More recently he had another visit and his experience was very different. “They treated me just like anyone else. I felt ‘normal’ and it was great!” Matt says this time around, he found staff to be positively inclusive, engaging with his husband respectfully and appropriately.

The turnaround is music to the ears of MidCentral District Health Board (MDHB) which has been working hard to make sure Matt’s experience five years ago is a thing of the past.

The DHB employs more than 2,700 people, including doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and administrators, and provides a wide range of health and disability services.

The basis for the change is the MDHB Rainbow Forum, established in December 2016, aimed at making MDHB the most Rainbow-inclusive DHB in New Zealand.

Through the forum MidCentral District Health Board has increased the competence of staff working with patients and whānau, creating a safe and inclusive workplace for staff who identify as part of the Rainbow community. It has also brought together LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) people and allies to form a network to drive inclusivity initiatives and link with community groups. The forum is sponsored by Keyur Anjaria, the General Manager of People & Culture.

The forum’s initiatives have been included in the DHB’s Organisational Development Plan. One of the most successful has been a training programme on gender and sexual diversity which is delivered to staff several times a year, most recently to a group of trainee doctors.

Almost all participants (96 per cent) of the gender and sexual diversity training reported that participating increased their awareness of heteronormativity and discrimination of sexual and gender minorities.

**Video Link:**<https://vimeo.com/286802549>

"I learned new terminology, such as intersex, understanding of how discrimination occurs, what I can do to tackle or challenge discrimination and be more inclusive," said one participant.

"There is so much knowledge that I wasn't aware of before and now I have scratched the surface I can learn more on my own. There is a lot of subtle discrimination in the workforce that would be hard to ignore if every person had this education," said another.

Feedback has shown the workshops did much more than pay lip-service.

One participant shared her observation afterward. "After hearing the issue raised by Bridget about transgender female to male people falling off the breast screening and cervical screening programmes once their gender is changed on medical records, I spoke to the Central Cancer Network. The team had never had this problem brought to their attention before. As a result of the conversation, the issue is now going to be raised at the next National Cancer Network Meeting."

International calendar events such as IDAHOBIT (International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia) have also been recognised, with MDHB running a series of workshops and presentations.

On "Rainbow sticker day" more than 2,000 stickers were distributed for staff and contractors on MDHB sites to wear. Gender neutral bathrooms and gender diverse employment applications have been introduced.

The results of the changes have been noticed and appreciated by staff. Backing up Matt's recent improved experience at the Palmerston North emergency department, a MDHB employee who attended a medical appointment with her trans brother also confirmed positive change has occurred. "The nurse they spoke with immediately told them she would include his preference for using male pronouns on all of his paperwork so others involved in his care could use he or him correctly," she says.

As employees, others have experienced positive changes. When Lise, a Speech Language Therapist who recently joined the organisation, saw that 'gender diverse' was an option on her employment application she said she was very excited. "I thought, 'This is the place for me!'"

MDHB is the first workplace Rochelle, a member of the Human Resources team, has been comfortable being 'out' as bisexual. "In previous jobs, I always felt I was hiding something because I was worried people might treat me differently. I am so happy I don't have to do that anymore."

Aspirational goals for the MDHB Rainbow Forum include being the first DHB to receive the Rainbow Tick and to participate in a pride parade. It also wants to develop and deploy a safe space programme to create a network of knowledgeable and supportive allies across all staff groups.

"Although we have made great strides and have made a positive impact in the lives of our Rainbow staff members, there is still a lot of work to be done, and we plan to do it," concludes MidCentral District Health Board HR Consultant Rochelle Shadbolt.

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