

APANZ COUNCIL'S NOVEMBER 2024 FINALISED SOGICE STATEMENT

APANZ Council's finalised response to the 2023 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) report

Introduction

Council reminds the membership that Council previously advised the membership in April 2024 that it “agrees with the value of providing an updated statement regarding SOGICE. As the report notes, APANZ, in 2004, issued a “policy statement on therapy to change a person’s sexual orientation (“reparative therapy” or “reorientation therapy”) (SOCE 2004)”. This 2004 statement appears on page 38 of the 2023 SOGICE report (Note: The 2023 SOGICE Report can be accessed via the following link: <https://nzap.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Final-Report-for-NZAP-Council-on-SOGICE-Oct23.pdf>).

This [2004] policy statement articulates APANZ’s current policy position in relation to sexual orientation change efforts within psychotherapy, though the 2023 SOGICE report notes that this statement “fell into obscurity” and is not well known amongst the membership. Given changes in clinical, psychotherapeutic, and sociocultural perspectives in relation to gender, that have become more visible in the past 20 years, Council agrees with the need to update this policy statement. This perspective is in keeping with Council’s preliminary position statement above, that any psychotherapeutic efforts that have as their aim the intention to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender presentation, expression, or identity, are unethical and illegal (for a fuller overview of the history of the process leading up to the provision of this final 2024 policy statement, see the draft statement originally provided to the membership in June of 2024, available via the following link: <https://apanz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DRAFT-JUNE-APANZ-Council-2024-SOGICE-response.pdf>).

The following are APANZ Council’s finalised responses to the SOGICE 2023 report’s recommendations

1. SOGICE report 2023 Recommendation one: updating of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts APANZ policy statement.

Council confirms that the following is the finalised updated APANZ policy statement.

APANZ November 2024 policy statement regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and presentation change efforts.

- A. We, the Association of Psychotherapists Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Rōpū Whakaora Hinengaro, reaffirm our position that aims to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity are unacceptable within psychotherapeutic practice. In doing this we align with other professional mental health and statutory bodies who have issued similar statements. Sexual orientation and gender

identity change efforts are harmful and lack credible scientific evidence. They are illegal in Aotearoa New Zealand and contrary to our Code of Ethics.

- B. We regard diversity in sexual orientations and genders to be an inherent part of the spectrum of human sexualities. We affirm that no sexual orientation or gender identity, expression, or experience is any more valid, 'natural' or 'normal' than any other. Any psychotherapeutic attempts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or suppress their experience or expression of their sexuality or gender, is a form of conversion therapy and is unethical.
- C. Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts are based on perspectives that there are some sexual orientations, and gender identities and expressions which are "more normal" than others. We do not accept these perspectives and consider such assumptions to be harmful to psychotherapeutic work as they impede the necessity for psychotherapists to be receptive to the client's subjective experience.
- D. Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts continue the process of colonisation and the subjugation of indigenous Māori sexualities and are at odds with our Association's commitment to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We acknowledge Takatāpui as a unique indigenous identity, encompassing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, that does not necessarily equate with other LGBTQAI+ identities.
- E. Given that we are all sexual and gendered beings, psychotherapists, like all human beings, are susceptible to being consciously and unconsciously influenced by normative assumptions regarding sexuality and gender. As we do with all other clinical work, we therefore consider it foundational to psychotherapeutic work that clinicians continue in an ongoing way to utilise supervision, peer support, training, and where appropriate, their own therapy, to continue to reflect upon their own consciously and unconsciously held perspectives in relation to sexuality and gender, and the manner in which these interact with clinical work.
- F. We believe that the above principles enhance the creation of a psychotherapeutic environment within which psychotherapists are able to thoughtfully receive all aspects of clients' subjective experience, including those related to gender and sexuality, and to work with clients, to enhance self-understanding, in a deeply reflective manner, in relation to clients' experience of themselves, including, where clinically appropriate, their sexuality and gender experience, presentation and identity. We support psychotherapists to create such an environment in support of a respectful commitment to open ended enquiry and unhurried exploration within their work.

2. Recommendation two: Linking the above APANZ policy statement on SOGICE to our Code of Ethics.

The APANZ code of ethics currently includes the following provisions:

1.2 Practise non-discrimination. Psychotherapists shall be sensitive to diversity and shall not discriminate on the grounds of colour, creed, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, social class, religion or political belief.

1.3 Be responsive to cultural diversity and seek training and guidance to ensure competent and culturally safe practice.

...

3.2 Be legally responsible. Psychotherapists shall practise within the law.

3.3 Promote non-discrimination. Psychotherapists shall seek to promote non-discrimination in the wider community.

We consider the updated 2024 policy statement above is consistent with the above provisions of the APANZ code of ethics. Given that the previous sexual orientation change efforts policy statement 2004 fell into obscurity, we will place a further sentence at the end of clause 1.2 stating “Psychotherapists shall abstain from undertaking sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts”, and we will also provide a footnote at the end of item 1.2, above, with a link to the 2024 policy statement, and a sentence in the footnote stating that “For APANZ’s full policy statement regarding sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts, APANZ members are referred to the 2024 policy statement via this link: [Provide link]”. We will also add into clause 1.2 of the code of ethics “gender identity, and gender expression,” into the list of things Psychotherapists “shall not discriminate on”.

3. Recommendation three: Establish a clear process for engaging with members of Rainbow Communities about issues related to those communities.

We are very appreciative of those who have taken the initiative of forming the “Rainbow Rōpū” of APANZ and Waka Oranga, an initiative which arose out of the zoom hui held by Council as part of the consultation process in relation to the 2023 SOGICE report. APANZ Council recognises that at times this relationship has been challenging and very painful for members of the rainbow rōpū. We wish to emphasise that we as a council are strongly committed to building a resilient, respectful, and effective working relationship with this rōpū.

In this regard, Council will initiate further dialogue with the rōpū with the aim of collaborating with the rōpū to design a robust and effective process for consultation with the rōpū about matters that directly affect Rainbow communities.

In addition, Council, is also very open to and wishes to also build relationship with and hear from any APANZ members who are members of T/LGBTQAI+ communities and have not joined the APANZ Rainbow Rōpū, but nevertheless wish to communicate with us, at any time.

4. Apology (part of recommendation one)

As well as examples detailed in the 2023 SOGICE report, during the recent consultation period with members, we heard numerous examples from members of our Association, of experiences of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts conducted within psychotherapeutic relationships. In addition, the significant majority of submissions Council received from members regarding an apology were in support of an apology. APANZ Council therefore agrees with the recommendation to offer an apology for the harm caused by members of our Association and therapists generally who, influenced by prejudicial normative perspectives regarding sexuality and gender, engaged in sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts. Following further discussion with the rainbow rōpū, and with T/LGBTQAI+ members regarding this apology, Council is committed, to engaging in a process of careful dialogue and consultation with the rainbow rōpū, and with all T/LGBTQAI+ members of our Association, regarding this apology, including its form and the format within which it will be offered, before offering this apology, in service of our aim that this apology be thoughtful, genuine, and meaningful. This apology will be offered on or before the 15 of June 2025.

5. Recommendation four: Strengthen APANZ 's relationship with trans and gender diverse communities.

This recommendation emphasised the value of educational opportunities for members in relation to issues of psychotherapy, sexuality and gender. APANZ Council is committed to strongly supporting the development of a respectful culture of learning, within our association, in relation to sexuality, gender and psychotherapy. We look forward to working with all members of our Association, to support the development of educational opportunities for members of our Association to continue to learn and develop our understandings and clinical abilities in relation to working with matters of sexuality and gender within psychotherapeutic contexts. We see this is an urgent need, given developments in clinical theory and practice in this area in contemporary times, and the challenging and sometimes very distressing engagements in relation to this area, over the past two years, within our association. Council will liaise and consult with the membership, and specifically with the rainbow rōpū, to enable and assist such opportunities to be developed and offered over the next two years.

Conclusion

APANZ Council is very appreciative of all who have contributed to the many processes, responses, and consultations that have led to the development of this finalised response to the SOGICE report. We thank you for your honesty, thoughtfulness, engagement, and participation. We look forward to continuing to work with our membership, in relation to the above initiatives.

John O'Connor, APANZ President

Gabriela Mercado, APANZ Past President

On behalf of APANZ Council.

November 2024