

National LGBTI Health Alliance

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other
sexuality, sex and gender diverse people and communities
PO Box 51 Newtown NSW 2042
(02) 8568 1120/1119, 0458 039 685



The Hon. Jenny Mikakos
Minister for Health
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Email: minister.health@health.vic.gov.au

5 August 2020

Dear Minister

Covid-19 Support and Resourcing for LGBTI Communities and Organisations

I write to you in my capacity as the Acting CEO of the National LGBTI Health Alliance (the Alliance) to seek **additional targeted support and resourcing for LGBTI communities and organisations affected by the Stage 4 restrictions** imposed in Victoria to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Alliance is the national peak health organisation in Australia for organisations and individuals that provide health-related programs, services and research focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI) and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people and communities. We recognise that people's genders, bodies, relationships and sexualities affect their health and wellbeing in every domain of their life.

During the severe COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria, many LGBTI members of our community are particularly vulnerable due to isolation, loss of support networks, mental health and intimate partner and family violence.

We are concerned that the restrictions will have significant health impacts for many LGBTI people, exacerbating existing health inequalities in mental health and suicidal behaviours, drug and alcohol use etc. Younger LGBTI people forced to remain at home with their family of origin may experience violence and abuse as a result of their sexuality gender identity and/or intersex status. Many older LGBTI people are also disconnected from their families of choice and other support networks and may experience heightened feelings of isolation and loneliness during this time. They fear that their age makes them particularly vulnerable. Older LGBTI people experience elevated rates of chronic health conditions and are therefore at higher risk of serious illness if they acquire COVID-19.

The National LGBTI Health Alliance's recent research report, *Me, Us and the World: The Impact of COVID-19 on Older LGBTI Australians* (<https://bit.ly/33pgYjK>) highlights that coronavirus-related mainstream and government support services and health promotion materials are not seen as accessible and inclusive for many older LGBTI people.

Proactive and flexible services are needed that provide quick responses, particularly in areas of mental health, homelessness, health, family rejection and financial stress.

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Community based and peer-led initiatives are fundamental for culturally safe care to LGBTI people, coupled with targeted mainstream services that have experience working with LGBTI people. Australian and international research shows that LGBTI people underutilise health services and delay seeking support due to actual or anticipated discrimination or stigma from service providers, impacting their overall health and wellbeing.

During the crisis, services also face serious constraints due to increased need and reduced capacity. Face-to-face delivery is complex or suspended entirely to meet government restrictions and social distancing requirements. Volunteer programs are on hold due to the increased complexity of client needs and to protect volunteer health.

On behalf of the Alliance's members, I ask that your Government **urgently allocate additional funding to support the delivery of vital support and outreach for LGBTI service providers.** I particularly seek your support for additional training and staffing needs to maintain and increase access to the LGBTI Community Visitor Scheme for older LGBTI people receiving residential aged care or Home Care Packages and QLife services.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or the Alliance's Policy and Research Manager James Zanotto james.zanotto@lgbtihealth.org.au should you wish to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Z. Tintor".

Zed Tintor

Acting Chief Executive Officer
National LGBTI Health Alliance