

# The National LGBTI Health Alliance

## Analysis: National Suicide Prevention Adviser's Interim Advice Report and Final Report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Mental Health System



### Introduction

The National LGBTI Health Alliance (the Alliance) is the largest national peak organisation working to promote the health and wellbeing of LGBTI people and communities. The Alliance is uniquely placed with a diverse membership that spans across states and territories, which includes LGBTI community-controlled health organisations, LGBTI community groups and state and territory peak bodies, service providers, researchers, and individuals.

The Alliance is strategically positioned to provide a national focus to improving the health and wellbeing of LGBTI people through policy, advocacy, representation, research evidence, and capacity building across all of the health portfolios that are of significance to our communities.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a written response to the Productivity Commission's Final Report on mental health and Ms Morgan's Interim Advice to the Prime Minister.

### Background

The Alliance engaged in the Productivity Commission's broad consultation process, providing an initial submission in April 2019 and subsequently a second submission in response to its draft report in January 2020. Further to this, representatives from the Alliance gave evidence in a public hearing in Sydney to discuss the draft report's initial findings and present recommendations to ensure the needs of LGBTI populations were incorporated in the Final Report.

In July 2019, the Prime Minister announced that the Australian Government is working towards zero suicides and appointed Ms Christine Morgan as the first National Suicide Prevention Adviser reporting directly to the Prime Minister. The Alliance has followed the progress of the work of the National Suicide Prevention Adviser with keen interest and has participated in a range of consultations and supported the work of the National Suicide Prevention Taskforce. We are now responding to the Initial Advice and early findings from Ms Morgan before the release of the Final Advice in December 2020.

This Alliance's calls to action are informed by recommendations provided in our submissions to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into mental health. It is our perspective that these recommendations are sound with regards to the issues of mental health and suicide prevention and provide a useful framework to analyse both the Productivity Commission's Final Report and Ms Morgan's Interim Advice.

It is important to note that we will be releasing our updated National LGBTI Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy by the end of the year. Following its release, the analysis of both these reports will be more thorough.

The table below provides a snapshot of where our calls to action have been adopted and where there is still work to be done.

**Addressed** = specific recommendations related to LGBTI people included

**Partially addressed** = broad recommendations included, but not specific to LGBTI people

**Not addressed** = no mention of the issue

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| Theme  | National LGBTI Health Alliance’s calls to action  | Productivity Commission Final Report     | Christine Morgan’s Interim report        |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Causal factors</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LGBTI people from across all populations, backgrounds and circumstances experience an increase in social inclusion and a reduction in stigma and discrimination.</li> </ul>  | Partially addressed                      | Not addressed                            |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consideration of the negative impact of prolonged national debates and legislative processes on the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people.</li> </ul>  | Not addressed                            | Not addressed                            |
| <b>Access barriers</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LGBTI people experience equitable access to mental health and suicide prevention services and receive support that is appropriate to their experience and responsive to their needs.</li> </ul>  | Not addressed                            | Partially addressed                      |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exemptions for religious-based organisations that deliver Commonwealth funded mental health and suicide prevention programs under <i>Sex Discrimination Act</i> to be removed.</li> </ul>  | Not addressed                            | Not addressed                            |
| <b>Person-centred and trauma-informed care</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt affirmative and responsive trauma-informed, person-centred care initiatives across the mental health sector.</li> </ul>  | Partially addressed - not LGBTI-specific | Partially addressed – not LGBTI-specific |
| <b>Intersectionality and inclusion</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt an intersectional approach to LGBTI mental health and suicide prevention.</li> </ul>   | Not addressed                            | Not addressed                            |
| <b>Integrated, comprehensive support services and programs</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ ‘no wrong door’ approach principles across the mental health care system to ensure LGBTI people have equitable access to the supports they need and remain in the mental health system.</li> </ul>  | Partially addressed – not LGBTI-specific | Partially addressed – not LGBTI-specific |
| <b>Data collection</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Australian Bureau of Statistics to appropriately collect data on the sexual orientation, gender identity and variations in sex characteristics of the Australian population in the national Census.</li> <li>A consistent data set that captures sexuality, gender, intersex status and</li> </ul> | Not addressed                            | Addressed                                |

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|  |   |               |                     |
|--|---|---------------|---------------------|
|  | relationships included across health and social wellbeing services and suicide registers.   | Not addressed | Addressed           |
| <b>Early intervention, promotion, and prevention</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in LGBTI-inclusivity to be mandated for all wellbeing leaders in schools.</li> <li>• Invest in education campaigns that promote the inclusion of LGBTI people in society more broadly.</li> <li>• Invest in community capacity building initiatives to be developed and implemented with LGBTI people and communities, to increase their capacity to identify and respond to mental health needs of people in their communities.</li> <li>• Invest in evidence-based promotion, prevention and early intervention initiatives and primary mental health care supporting the prevention, early detection and treatment of mental health problems experienced by LGBTI people and communities.</li> </ul> | Not addressed | Not addressed       |
|  |   | Not addressed | Not addressed       |
|  |   | Not addressed | Not addressed       |
| <b>Workforce development</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural safety and inclusive practice for LGBTI people applied across the entire mental health service system.</li> <li>• National coordination and implementation of education, training, and professional development on LGBTI populations within the mental health and suicide prevention workforce.</li> </ul>  | Not addressed | Not addressed       |
|  |   | Not addressed | Not addressed       |
| <b>LGBTI community-controlled services</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased investment in community controlled LGBTI mental health and wraparound support services to enhance capacity, meet demand and expand geographical reach.</li> </ul>  | Not addressed | Partially addressed |
| <b>National coordination and investment</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal government commit to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a National LGBTI Health and Inclusion Strategy that focuses on mental health and suicide prevention.</li> </ul>   | Not addressed | Partially addressed |

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### The Alliance's position

#### *Productivity Commission Final Report*

We welcome the Final Report's recognition that LGBTI people are more likely than the general population to face stigma and discrimination, and that we are highlighted as a population group at higher risk of poor mental health and suicidal behaviours. It is also reassuring to see the Commission recognising the need to improve access to appropriate services, and to have a well-trained workforce to provide high quality and culturally safe services for all Australians. We also commend the Productivity Commission for rightly acknowledging the importance of addressing the social determinants of mental health and taking a broad view to include housing, employment, justice, income support and social inclusion. Despite a thorough discussion on the issues our communities face, the Alliance is concerned that the Final Report fails to recommend specific solutions that focus on dismantling the structural drivers that contribute to the high prevalence of mental health disorders and suicidality among LGBTI populations.

**We believe urgent action is required to address the impact of Minority Stress - the chronic stressors that LGBTI people are uniquely exposed to as a result of sexuality, gender and bodily diversity being socially stigmatised. This includes experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, harassment and physical violence.**

The Alliance reasserts its call for a strategic and coordinated approach, which considers meaningful change at the legislative, community and social level is needed to address the mental health disparities that exist between LGBTI populations and the general community. This will require an effort across multiple sectors beyond health, including education, employment, social services, housing and justice. A paradigm shift that decentres heteronormativity and embraces sexuality, gender and bodily diversity, coupled with the collection of quality and robust data and evidence will help increase social inclusion and reduce stigma and discrimination in the lives of LGBTI people. These measures will result in a more supporting and accepting societal environment that will act as a protective factor for the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people, and lead to an increase in Australia's economic and workforce participation and enhance productivity and economic growth.

#### *National Suicide Prevention Adviser's Interim Report*

The Alliance welcomes the inclusion of specific Priority Actions related to LGBTIQ+ populations with regards to being identified as a priority population within national suicide prevention strategies and plans, ensuring a focus on co-design with LGBTIQ+ communities and community controlled service responses, and improved population data for LGBTIQ+ people and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ status in research and evaluation.

We call on the National Suicide Prevention Adviser in her final advice to the Prime Minister, to strengthen the issues that been partially addressed in the Interim Report, and begin to explore the issues that have not been addressed.