



Submission on the National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Final Development Consultation Paper

INTRODUCTION

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia (LHA) welcomes the explicit recognition of LGBTQIA+ communities as a priority target group and the invitation for continued dialogue and engagement. LGBTIQ communities are often left largely invisible despite being identified as a priority group across a range of national strategies. Specific, targeted strategies are needed for LGBTIQ communities to ensure that the identified priority issues are addressed.

Significant data and research gaps regarding LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing impede government policy responses to improve health outcomes. However, the research evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that LGBTIQ+ people and communities continue to experience health and wellbeing disparities across a range of areas compared to the general population.

Research suggests the way in which patriarchal and macho cultures value heterosexuality and reject homosexuality may increase the risk of child sexual abuse.¹ There is much research detailing the high levels of discrimination and high levels of verbal and physical homophobic and transphobic abuse experienced by LGBTQIA+ young people in Australian educational settings, particularly in secondary schools.²

Healthy human sexuality includes the range of LGBTIQ+ sexuality and gender identities. It is crucial that responses do not pathologise people in relation to their sexuality or gender identity. As the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse identified, the research suggests that there is no link between someone's diverse sexuality and the perpetration of child sexual abuse.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- *What are the best ways for Australian, state and territory governments to listen, engage and collaborate with LGBTQIA+ groups / individuals?*
- *Are there best practice mechanisms, existing consultation mechanisms or comprehensive co-design approaches that Australian, state and territory governments should use to consult and partner with LGBTQIA+ groups / individuals?*

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia (LHA) is the largest national peak organisation working to promote the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people and communities. LHA is uniquely placed with a diverse membership that spans across states and territories, and includes LGBTIQ+ self-determined

¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final report Nature and Cause (2017), available from: https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_2_nature_and_cause.pdf

² Writing Themselves In 4: National Report (2021), p. 51.), available from: <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/publications/writing-themselves-in-publications/writing-themselves-in-4>



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community organisations, LGBTIQ+ community groups and state and territory peak bodies, service providers, researchers, and individuals.

LHA advocates for the health needs of LGBTIQ+ people at the national level, to lead and coordinate approaches from state and territory partners, and to develop a suite of policy recommendations representative of the views of LGBTIQ+ communities and organisations.

We work closely with our members to keep them up to date and in some circumstances act as a reliable conduit between the jurisdictions and the Commonwealth through consultation and the sharing of information.

LHA can provide opportunities to build connections and collaborate with a broad range of organisations, stakeholders and service providers. Continuous and ongoing engagement and collaboration with self-determined community organisations which are governed and operated by and for affected communities, are often best placed to provide trusted, safe, and affirmative services in potentially sensitive areas of service provision. LHA stresses the importance of consultation with self-determined organisations to provide direction and input.

LHA recognises the importance of having co-design at the heart of the work that is completed across projects and programs. A co-design framework is being developed that specifically meets the needs for LGBTIQ+ people who work with us. The framework is important because it creates an agreed definition of co-design, outlines roles, responsibilities and guides co-design facilitators in their work. A specialist consultant in human -centered design has been consulting with LGBTIQ+ staff, LGBTIQ+ member organisations and other health sector experts to ensure that this framework includes an approach which is trauma informed and evidence based.

RELEVANT STRATEGIC PRIORITY THEMES

- *Do you belong to or represent LGBTQIA+ groups and wish to be involved in design and implementation of individual actions under the National Strategy once it is launched?*
- *If yes, please identify which priority themes appear most relevant to you, noting you will have the opportunity to confirm your involvement in individual actions once the National Strategy is launched (and your answer here will not prevent you from being invited to be involved in actions outside any priority themes you have identified).*



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Education and building child safe cultures:

Many educational environments are not safe for young LGBTIQ+ people. Transgender students in particular report experiencing elevated levels of harassment, bullying and physical or sexual violence in school, predominantly perpetrated by classmates.³

LHA supports development of nationally consistent, regular and targeted education and training within different educational settings and mainstream services in relation to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and intersex status to normalise the diversity.

Supporting and empowering victims and survivors

Self-determined community organisations are best placed to deliver safe, trusted, inclusive and culturally safe care to LGBTIQ+ people and they can provide direct service provision, harm reduction and health promotion programs. Australia has a strong network of LGBTIQ+ organisations, all of which are under resources to respond to increasing demand. Increased investment is needed to support services and service development to respond effectively.

Mainstream organisations providing support for LGBTIQ+ persons need appropriate training. To ensure services are culturally safe and appropriate for victims and survivors, LGBTIQ+ self-determined community organisations must be involved in the planning and delivery of training to mainstream services, and appropriately funded to provide the training.

Improving the evidence base

The absence of quality and robust demographic information on LGBTIQ+ people as well as lack of inclusion in the national census inhibits the ability of service providers to develop sophisticated and targeted program initiatives for LGBTIQ+ people.

Greater coordination is needed for LGBTIQ+ research with full implementation of the new Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020 Standard on sex, gender, variations in sex characteristics, and sexual orientation variables across government and non-government health and wellbeing sector datasets and all research.

³ Russell, D.H., J.R. Anderson, D.W. Riggs, J. Ullman, & D.J. Higgins (2020). 'Gender diversity and safety climate perceptions in schools and other youth-serving organisations'. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 117: 105334.