

14 August 2020

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Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality
Department of Premier and Cabinet
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Dear Commissioner,

Mental Health Victoria (MHV) welcomes this opportunity to provide input into the Victorian Government's discussion paper for *Victoria's LGBTIQ Strategy* (the Strategy).

MHV is the peak body for the mental health sector in Victoria. Our members include consumer and carer groups, community health and mental health services, hospitals, medical associations and colleges, police and emergency services associations, unions, local governments, and other bodies across the health and related sectors.

Now is a critical time for LGBTIQ+ mental health and wellbeing. Victoria's mental health system is struggling from decades of underinvestment and a lack of long-term planning. However, from 2021 major reforms are expected following the final reports from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Mental Health.

Other relevant reforms include the establishment of Mental Health Reform Victoria to implement the Royal Commission's interim recommendations, the commencement of a national trial of federally funded Adult Mental Health Centres, and various state and federal investments aimed at addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These reforms and initiatives present an historic opportunity to improve the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people, and ensuring that the Strategy coheres with them is critical to improving the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people in Victoria.

MHV has made a number of submissions around the much needed reform of mental health services in Victoria, all with recommendations aimed at developing an appropriately funded, well-designed and effective mental health system. This submission builds on these recommendations by providing specific consideration around the mental health needs of LGBTIQ+ people.

To that end, MHV recommends that Victoria's *LGBTIQ Strategy* includes a specific priority on mental health and wellbeing. This key priority should include specific action areas focussing on:

- access to safe and high-quality services
- developing a specialist lived experience workforce
- more inclusive and reliable data
- mental health promotion and prevention.

Response to the consultation paper

MHV commends the Victorian Government for its thoughtful and inclusive approach to the Strategy. We particularly welcome the whole-of-government scope and the focus on community engagement, both of which are integral to improving mental health outcomes.

We further commend the paper's comprehensive account of mental ill-health and psychological distress among LGBTIQ+ people, including the identification of prevalence rates, risk and resilience factors, and the importance of peer-led programs and more inclusive and reliable data.

Access to safe and high-quality services

LGBTIQ+ people experience disproportionately high rates of mental ill-health and distress, and therefore require timely access to safe, high-quality mental health services which are attuned to their individual care needs and life experiences. This requires significant scaling up of existing services as well as broader system improvements.

There are currently a range of services providing mental healthcare for LGBTIQ+ people, including through community-led models, as well as carer services which perform a vital function in the mental health sector.

MHV refers to the [joint submission to the Royal Commission](#) made by Rainbow Health Victoria, Thorne Harbour Health and Switchboard Victoria which contains detailed recommendations to improve the mental health system. We further note the particular need to focus on:

- wrap-around, recovery-oriented and family-inclusive services
- peer and therapeutic community models
- safe bed-based care in both subacute and acute settings
- the specific needs of subpopulation groups including trans and gender diverse people, people with lived experience of suicide, and people with high-intensity and/or complex support needs.

Existing LGBTIQ+ mental health services, including those provided by Thorne Harbour Health, Drummond Street Queerspace and Switchboard, should be scaled up. Any new service models should have lived experience and mental health expertise embedded into their structures.

Mainstream services should be supported to provide safe care for LGBTIQ+ people, including through continued uptake of Rainbow Tick accreditation, targeted improvements in mental health training and education, and consideration of LGBTIQ+ needs to inform future capital planning.

Embedding cultural safety through recognised service improvement models is critical to providing safe environments for LGBTIQ+ people seeking support. In particular, Rainbow Tick accreditation has been a critical driver in improving cultural safety across multiple service sectors, with Victorian services leading the way. MHV therefore welcomed news of the development of a revised *Rainbow Tick guide to LGBTIQ inclusive practice* to better support services on their journeys to accreditation while also providing a shared set of cultural safety principles for organisations not seeking accreditation. Further funding supports to assist services with accreditation costs would also be welcome.

There is also a particular need in mental health for services to go beyond cultural safety in providing targeted and non-pathologising care. This requires specific improvements in training and education on LGBTIQ+ mental healthcare, including through higher education, workplace training, and practice guidance and resources.

Specific consideration of safe referral pathways is also required to address the complex intersections between mental health and other areas of wellbeing. The federally-funded Adult Mental Health Centres trial and other reforms arising from the Royal Commission and Productivity Commission inquiries present important opportunities to provide improved service navigation supports. It will be important to ensure these reforms are implemented with an understanding of cultural safety issues for LGBTIQ+ people.

Developing a specialist lived experience workforce

Specialist LGBTIQ+ lived experience workers, including consumers and carers, have significant potential but too few employment opportunities. Development of the broader lived experience workforce is a key objective of Victoria's *Mental Health Workforce Strategy* which also includes a principle on cultural safety. Specific consideration of the LGBTIQ+ workforce should be undertaken as part of this work, including the consideration of qualifications, training opportunities, supervision arrangements and career pathways.

Although funding for peer programs is currently limited, there are a number of good models to expand and draw upon, including the Victorian Government-funded Healthy Equal Youth (HEY) project, PHN-funded service navigation models, and community-led programs. Any new models should be developed with consideration of intersectionality and organisational readiness requirements, and with worker supports, including training and professional development opportunities, embedded.

More inclusive and reliable data

The provision of high-quality mental health services to LGBTIQ+ people requires better data on LGBTIQ+ mental health. This necessitates more inclusive, co-designed data collection processes for state and federal government activities, including the national Census, and service activities, including outcomes monitoring and complaints procedures.

Targeted research is also required to address gaps in our knowledge about LGBTIQ+ mental health, particularly for intersex people, people with complex needs and people with intersectional experiences. Specific areas of research required include risk and resilience factors, peer support models, clinical interventions, relational care and family-based supports.

Mental health promotion and prevention

Mental health promotion and prevention is critical to address the structural drivers of mental ill-health. By addressing these drivers, outcomes can be improved across a range of areas including mental health, physical health, employment and housing.

Mental health promotion and prevention initiatives in Victoria require a coordinated and comprehensive strategy and a significant boost in associated funding in order to be more effective. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System provides an opportunity for Victoria to establish a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission with clear responsibility to develop and monitor strategies for the promotion of mental wellbeing and prevention of mental ill-health. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission would be

responsible for ensuring that the factors specific to LGBTIQ+ people (and other groups with particular needs) are considered.

Community organisations can play a vital role in supporting mental health promotion and prevention by encouraging help-seeking behaviours through the promotion of safe services and countering of mental health stigma, as well as by promoting good mental health practices, facilitating connections with community, and improving understandings of intersectionality.

Mental health promotion and prevention actions may also include strengthening legislative protections for LGBTIQ+ people, considering the well-documented impact of discrimination and vilification on mental health.

Conclusion

A confluence of reform processes, including Victoria's *LGBTIQ Strategy* and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take a strategic, foundational whole-of-government approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people.

At this historic time, we can capitalise on the incredible work of LGBTIQ+ people, organisations and communities, and their allies. We have established services with extensive experience, effective peer models and a strong LGBTIQ+ segment of the workforce, not to mention a comprehensive cultural safety accreditation framework, centralised Ministerial responsibility for mental health and equality, and increasing goodwill from service providers and the Victorian community. Now is the time to capitalise on these strengths.

We therefore recommend that Victoria's *LGBTIQ Strategy*:

1. be developed in coherence with the ongoing work of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, including the newly established Mental Health Reform Victoria and, if established, Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission
2. include mental health and wellbeing as a priority with specific action areas on:
 - a. access to specialist and culturally safe mental health and carer services, including through:
 - bed-based facilities
 - accreditation cost offsets
 - education, training and practice resources
 - capital planning considerations
 - safe referral pathways
 - b. the development of a specialist lived experience workforce, including:
 - consideration of the LGBTIQ+ peer workforce in Victoria's *Mental Health Workforce Strategy*
 - expanding on effective peer-led programs
 - c. more inclusive and reliable data, including through:

- targeted research on LGBTIQ+ mental health
 - inclusive, co-designed government data collection processes
- b. mental health promotion and prevention, including through:
- targeted, evidence-based initiatives
 - community capacity-building supports
 - strengthened legislative protections.

MHV again thanks the Victorian Government for the opportunity to contribute to this vital piece of work, and welcomes any further opportunity to provide more detailed advice.

For further information on this submission, please contact Larissa Taylor, Director of Policy, on (03) 9519 7000 or l.taylor@mhvic.org.au.

Sincerely,



Larissa Taylor
Director of Policy
Mental Health Victoria