



# **LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper**

**Mental Health Victoria's responses to the feedback  
survey**

**February 2021**

## 1. The vision for Victoria

*How much do you support the vision in the LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper?*

Mental Health Victoria (MHV) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Victorian Government's LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper (December 2020). The Directions Paper's vision aligns with aspects of MHV's submission, and we welcome the Victorian Government's commitment to improving the lives of LGBTIQ+ people by ensuring systems, policies and services are accessible and inclusive. We support the 4 directions outlined in the paper as they demonstrate key areas of change necessary to support the progress of equality for LGBTIQ+ people in Victoria.

While we support aspects of the Directions Paper, we are concerned about some missed opportunities regarding mental health. The confluence of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the development of the LGBTIQ+ Strategy provides a unique opportunity to improve the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people. Further attention needs to be paid to mental health and wellbeing to guarantee meaningful improvement to the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people.

In particular, the focus on inclusivity in Direction 2 (Equitable and accessible service systems) is necessary but does not go far enough in providing for genuine and meaningful equity in mental healthcare. Direction 4 (Safe, strong and sustainable communities) should also go further to capitalise on the strengths of LGBTIQ+ communities to support good mental health.

In order for the strategy to genuinely improve the lives of LGBTIQ+ people, the Directions Paper must be broadened to facilitate:

- Expansion in targeted mental health services, providing LGBTIQ+ people with the choice of accessing mainstream services or specialist/community-delivered services, as is appropriate to their needs.
- Targeted research, education, training and practice guidance to support specialist service provision.
- Further capitalising on the strengths of LGBTIQ+ communities to foster good mental health and wellbeing, including in response to prejudice and harassment.

## **2. Direction 1: Equal rights and freedoms**

Do you agree with 'Equal rights and freedoms' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

MHV supports Direction 1 as a necessary precondition for improving the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people. Among LGBTIQ+ people, stigma, discrimination and exclusion from society are key contributors to increased rates of mental health issues and suicidal behaviours. Strengthening legal protections and equal recognition of LGBTIQ+ people in society are critical to improving mental health and wellbeing. The paper should go further by explicitly acknowledging the need to modernise anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws to ensure LGBTIQ+ Victorians are protected under the law.

## **3. Direction 2: Equitable and accessible service systems**

Do you agree with 'Equitable and accessible service systems' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

MHV supports the focus on inclusivity within Direction 2 as a necessary precondition for the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people. Inclusivity is important to mental health service delivery as it facilitates recognition of the diverse needs, backgrounds and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people. However, MHV is concerned that the focus on inclusivity is too narrow and will not address the mental healthcare needs of all LGBTIQ+ people.

While we strongly support the need for mainstream services to be more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people, even inclusive mainstream services will not be appropriate for everyone. There are many LGBTIQ+ people who do not feel safe or comfortable seeking help from a mainstream service. For example faith-based services may not be suitable for people who have experienced faith-based discrimination.

Specialist LGBTIQ+ services can provide a range of LGBTIQ+ specific resources, education and assistance, staffed by specialist trained workforces. This means that they are often better equipped at understanding the nuanced mental health experiences and issues of LGBTIQ+ people such as childhood bullying, repression of their sexuality/identity, gender dysphoria and support from families of choice. Inclusivity alone is insufficient to ensure that service providers properly consider the relevance of all of these complex issues to service delivery.

There is a specific need to develop targeted responses to mental health which give LGBTIQ+ people the option for specialist or community-delivered

services where mainstream services are not appropriate. This should be supported by research, education, training and practice guidance to support workers to deliver these targeted services, which would guarantee sustainability and longevity of services for LGBTIQ+ people in Victoria, including in rural and regional areas. Dedicated ongoing funding, similar to the ongoing funding for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations, would ensure long-term confidence and security for LGBTIQ+ people, organisations and communities.

MHV therefore recommends that Direction 2 of the Paper should be broadened to acknowledge that equity in mental healthcare requires more than inclusivity in mainstream services. In order to achieve equity in mental healthcare, LGBTIQ+ people require genuine choice between an inclusive mainstream service or a service specifically targeted to their needs.

#### **4. Direction 3: Visibility to inform decision-making**

Do you agree with 'Visibility to inform decision-making' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

MHV supports Direction 3 as a necessary precondition for improving the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people. The proposal for inclusive and co-designed government data collection services will help address knowledge gaps about LGBTIQ+ mental health. By providing an accurate account of mental health issues and psychological distress in LGBTIQ+ people, we can ensure that both inclusive mainstream and targeted mental health services are capable of delivering high-quality effective mental healthcare to LGBTIQ+ people based on the best available evidence.

#### **5. Direction 4: Safe, strong and sustainable communities**

Do you agree with 'Safe, strong and sustainable communities' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

MHV supports Direction 4 as a necessary precondition for improving the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people. Building safe, strong and sustainable LGBTIQ+ communities is essential to supporting the mental health of LGBTIQ+ individuals. However, the Strategy would do well to explicitly acknowledge the role of communities in mental health promotion and prevention initiatives, and how communities can be supported and empowered to address harassment and abuse.

The lack of discussion in the Paper around the promotion of good mental health and prevention of mental health issues within communities presents an unfortunate gap which fails to capitalise on the potential of LGBTIQ+ communities to support mental health promotion and prevention efforts. Communities can play a crucial role in supporting the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people by countering stigma, building safe spaces and fostering positive mental health practices. This requires specific funding to empower LGBTIQ+ community organisations to develop and deliver promotion and prevention initiatives suitable to their communities.

Communities should also have access to supports required to address experiences of prejudice, including incidents of harassment and abuse associated with 'backlashes' to efforts to promote and progress their human rights. This includes counselling and relevant supports following incidents of harassment and abuse. While research into what drives prejudicial backlashes, and how to respond to them, is further needed to ensure effective prevention strategies are developed.

## **6. Additional feedback**

Are there further comments you would like to make about the vision and directions outlined in the Directions Paper?

MHV has no further comments on the Directions Paper.