

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional Affairs
Inquiry on the Exposure Draft of the *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012*.
By Anneke Deutsch, Housing and Aged Care Spokesperson, Matrix Guild of Victoria
21 December 2012

Dear Secretary,

Thanks for the opportunity to have input on this important matter. I am a committee member of the Matrix Guild of Victoria. The Matrix Guild Victoria Inc. was founded in 1992 by a group of lesbian feminists for the benefit of older lesbians. We promote appropriate care, support and provide advocacy for older lesbians. We challenge ageism and oppose discrimination. We educate aged care providers about how to provide inclusive, affirming care for lesbians. We provide some accommodation in Victoria for older lesbians who are financially disadvantaged.

Matrix has published two studies (*My People (2007) & Permission to Speak (2009)*) which show that older lesbians are discriminated against in aged care services. The studies also show that positive attitudes from service providers go a long way to creating a welcoming environment. Our booklet, *We Live Here Too: A Guide to Inclusive Practice in Aged Care*, (2011) is designed to assist aged care staff to understand our needs and the inherent heterosexism of most institutions. Lesbians face the double disadvantage of homophobia and sexism.

Most aged care in Australia is provided by faith-based organisations. Many lesbians fear using aged care services because they expect (and often receive) homophobic treatment. I visit and support an older lesbian who lives in an Islamic aged care facility. She is not Islamic and had been an "out" lesbian for about 30 years. After her 25 year long relationship ended, she was very upset and disturbed. She went to live with her daughter, but after a few months, she attempted suicide. Her stomach was pumped and then the acute hospital needed to discharge her. Her daughter didn't want her to come back to her place. The Islamic facility had a bed available, so this is where she went to live. She has not disclosed her sexuality to the staff there, because she expects poorer care, or possibly being asked to leave.

Any organisation that receives taxpayer funding should not receive any exemptions from anti-discrimination laws that the rest of us are required to abide by.

I would like to support this anti discrimination bill, so that lesbians utilising aged care services can confidently be open about who they love.

There are those of us who work for religious organisations and we should be able to do so without having to hide our sexuality.

I would be happy to speak further about the points I have made.

Regards,
Anneke Deutsch