

## Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness 2020

### Pride Foundation Australia submission

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## About Pride Foundation Australia

Pride Foundation Australia (PFA) is a national philanthropic foundation specifically focused on funding lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and other (LGBTQIA+) community issues in Australia. We have a dedicated focus on advancing equity for the most disadvantaged LGBTQIA+ Australians, including advocating for systemic change. Recent LGBTQIA+ focus areas have been homelessness, disability, and asylum seekers and refugees. While we have been funding and advocating for each of these areas individually, they all intersect, in that LGBTQIA+ individuals living with a disability, and who are refugees or seeking asylum are more likely to experience housing instability and homelessness. We use a collaborative approach, in that all of our projects include advisory committees of experts in the area, both people with lived experience and people with professional experience.

Our commissioned projects in the area of homelessness since 2016 have resulted in building knowledge about the drivers of LGBTQIA+ homelessness, as well as identifying targeted inclusive practice responses for the sector. For this submission, we draw on our key output documents:

- McNair, R, Andrews, C, Parkinson, S. & Dempsey, D. 'LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria – Final Report', University of Melbourne 2017, at URL [www.lgbtihomeless.org.au](http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au)
- McNair R, Andrews C, Wark A. Developing a model of care to support trans and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness – final report, 2018, University of Melbourne, at URL [www.lgbtihomeless.org.au](http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au);
- Andrews, C. and R. McNair. LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Practice Guide for Homelessness and Housing Sectors in Australia. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2020 <http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/lgbtiq-inclusive-practice-guide/>
- Dempsey D, Parkinson S, Andrews C, McNair R. Family relationships and LGBTQ+ first homelessness in Australia: What do we know and where should we go? In Journal of Sociology Special Issue - Disempowerment, Violence and Injustice within the Relational Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two Spirited (LGBTQ2) People. In press March 2020

We will also include important housing and homelessness intersections from our other recent work:

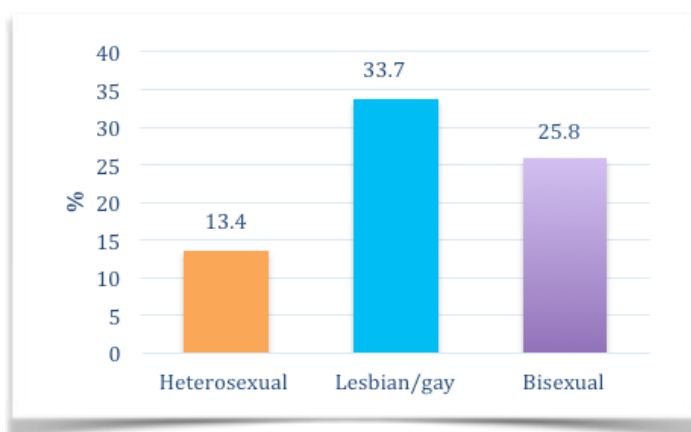
- Leonard, W. and Mann, R. (2018) The everyday experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people living with disability, No.111 GLHV@ARCSHS, La Trobe University: Melbourne. URL: [https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/publications?queries\\_subject\\_query=LGBTI+community](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/publications?queries_subject_query=LGBTI+community)

PFA also has a focus on LGBTQIA+ people who are refugees or seeking asylum. We convened an advisory group of experts in the field including consumers in 2019. We developed the following document:

- Briefing document on contemporary issues for refugees and people seeking asylum who have diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC). Presented to the LGBTI Parliamentary Friends, Canberra in December 2019,

## Responding to the Terms of Reference (TOR)

### TOR 1. The incidence of LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Australia



General Social Survey 2017 – Proportion of respondents ever experienced homelessness

We know that LGBTQ people are over-represented amongst homeless Australians. The ABS *General Social Survey* (GSS) asked about ever experiencing homelessness. It showed that bisexual respondents were much more likely to have at least 5 repeated experiences of homelessness (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017). Lesbian/gay respondents were twice as likely to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough, and bisexual people were at least 3 times more likely than heterosexual respondents. While gender diversity and intersex status were not asked in this survey, homelessness services report anecdotally observing a large increase in trans and gender diverse (TGD) clients in recent years. An Australian survey of trans and gender diverse youth, furthermore, found that 22% had experienced accommodation issues and homelessness (Strauss, Cook et al. 2017).

### TOR 2. Factors affecting the incidence of homelessness for LGBTIQ Australians

A study we conducted at the University of Melbourne with colleagues at Swinburne University of Technology (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017) identified several specific factors that were associated with higher rates of homelessness. There were structural and personal factors specific to being LGBTQ (Q=queer):

**1. Structural – violence and harassment**

These arose from homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia, and explicit discrimination.

**2. Structural – ignorance**

This included heteronormativity and/or cisgenderism, often manifested as assumptions of heterosexuality and/or misgendering.

**3. Personal vulnerability**

This included family conflict, childhood sexual assault, younger age of first homeless episode, mental health and substance issues.

These structural and personal factors were inter-connected, and vulnerability was often directly related to inequalities and trauma.

Australian and international research suggests that family conflict is a major pathway to homelessness, and that it is more likely to be a driver for becoming homeless in this population. This finding was reinforced in our analysis of the *Journeys Home* study (Dempsey et al, in press). LGB respondents were more likely than their heterosexual peers to report leaving home in the early teens; and to have experienced conflict, abuse and deprivation in their families of origin.

Other factors affecting the incidence of (and increased vulnerability when experiencing) homelessness include higher rates of childhood sexual assault, exiting foster care, mental health issues, and substance use, lower life satisfaction, poorer general health, and financial stress often due to medical expenses associated with gender affirmation.

#### TOR 4. Opportunities for early intervention and prevention of LGBTIQ homelessness

**1. Family of origin interventions**

Some work with family of origin has been conducted in North America to address LGBTQ youth homelessness, and this is understood as an important element of prevention and early intervention, particularly given the significance of family rejection as a driver (Abramovich and Shelton 2017). However, there are few such programs in Australia. Researchers also suggest that family reunification is not realistic for all LGBTIQ youth, and more inclusive definitions of family such as chosen family are needed that extend beyond biological parents<sup>1</sup>, as well as strategies that address the specific needs of diverse subpopulations (Abramovich and Shelton 2017). Education for families of origin and other counselling services are needed, furthermore, to understand LGBTIQ identities and increase support for queer and trans young people, which is also a protective factor for mental health.

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<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned Australian study found a greater reliance on friends or community groups rather than family for support (McNair et al 2017).

## **2. School based interventions**

Schools have an important role in addressing LGBTIQ homelessness by addressing discrimination, bullying, and harassment (including homophobia, biphobia and transphobia), which impact on mental health as well as homelessness (Gaetz and Redman 2016); being aware of heightened risk factors such as family rejection and violence; providing an environment that is supportive and affirming of LGBTIQ identities, and linking students to appropriately inclusive referral services and other information as required (Abramovich and Shelton 2017, Andrews and McNair 2020). We also suggest that sexual orientation and gender diversity should be a part of high school sex education, so that:

- (i) it is plainly seen that LGBTIQ people are part of the normal and healthy human diversity; and
- (ii) the next generation will know about and be more comfortable with LGBTIQ people.

## **3. Peer support**

In the GALFA (now PFA) homelessness report (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017), three main factors that helped LGBTQ participants feel strong were:

- Having agency (including presenting their identities authentically);
- Finding security (having somewhere stable to live, having work, education, and other outlets), and
- Social connection and advocating for self and others.

Our later project piloting an 'LGBTIQ safe housing network' found that positive experiences of having a peer support worker included strong advocacy for clients, more specific rapport and empathy, and raising awareness of specific needs for this population among other homelessness service providers (at [www.lgbtihomeless.org.au](http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au)). The potential benefits of having workers that LGBTQ people experiencing homelessness can identify with has also been noted in some earlier Australian studies (Maberley and Coffey 2005, Twenty10 2007, Oakley and Bletsas 2013).

As identified in the National LGTBIQ+ Guide for Homelessness and Housing Sectors in Australia, promoting peer leadership in services is important in supporting consumer participation and facilitating a more inclusive workforce; at the same time, it is important to include a variety of roles and diverse representation that recognises highly marginalised identities and intersectional experiences (Andrews and McNair 2020).

## TOR 5. Services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness,

Our original study concluded that all mainstream homelessness services, social housing and housing assistance services should be LGBTIQ inclusive, but that specialised services for this population are also important to accommodate a range of needs. Participants commented on how unsafe they felt in mainstream services and, consistent with findings overseas, some felt safer sleeping on the street.

In addition, LGBTQ people with experience of homelessness reported that they needed the legitimacy of their LGBTQ identity to be acknowledged by services and to be recognised. Many wanted affirmation and visibility. Negative experiences or fears of discrimination and of being misgendered created barriers to accessing services, especially within faith-based organisations. The highly gendered nature of the already limited accommodation options was a further challenge for people whose gender was non-binary or fluid, with implications for future help-seeking. A major shortage of services in rural/regional areas was identified, and a shortage of appropriate, safe housing options for older members of the community, notably lesbian women and trans people.

The national guide for homelessness and housing sectors highlights several areas - at both frontline service delivery and senior management levels - that need to be addressed in order to promote inclusive practice (Andrews and McNair 2020). Broadly, these include:

- Disclosure and confidentiality
- Respectful communication
- Cultural safety
- Discrimination and harassment
- Specific support, referral, and advocacy
- Organisational policies
- Procedures and facilities
- Consumer participation
- Staff training, and
- Data capture and storage.

This guide was developed in response to requests from the housing and homelessness sectors, as well as clear research and practice evidence that LGBTIQ+ people are at higher risk of homelessness and have specific needs to address. The guide provides a practical set of principles for staff at all levels to implement systems and cultural change, as well as to serve as a source of useful information for people in the LGBTIQ+ community who may be accessing these services. The document is divided into two main sections, aimed at staff who are in direct contact with LGBTIQ+ clients and tenants (or applicants), and service managers, respectively. The content maps onto the Rainbow Tick Standards (GLHV@ARCSHS). In brief, LGBTIQ inclusive practice entails, at a minimum:

- A demonstrated commitment grounded in policies that establish a Zero Tolerance approach to LGBTIQ-based discrimination
- Various elements that constitute a safe and welcoming environment

- Active engagement with (and awareness of) relevant groups and support services in the LGBTIQ community to facilitate social support and appropriate referral pathways
- Awareness of the multiple barriers (particularly stemming from societal discrimination) and complex needs that are often experienced by LGBTIQ people
- Provision of flexible delivery of care and allocation of appropriate accommodation options, spanning mainstream and specialised services and support programs. In particular, placing clients in facilities that are consistent with and respectful of their self-identified gender and preference.

A PDF of the guide, online version, and additional factsheets are available at

<http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/lgbtiq-inclusive-practice-guide/>

#### TOR 6. Support and services for people at particular risk of homelessness, including:

- a. women and children affected by family and domestic violence;
- b. children and young people;
- c. Indigenous Australians;
- d. people experiencing repeat homelessness;
- e. people exiting institutions and other care arrangements;
- f. people aged 55 or older;
- g. people living with disability; and
- h. people living with mental illness

Many of the vulnerable subgroups listed in this term of reference are over-represented amongst LGBTIQ people. In particular, LGBTIQ people at risk of homelessness are more likely to be living with a disability, living with mental illness, be older, or have experienced repeated homelessness. The intersectionality of multiple vulnerabilities and marginalised identities is well known to increase vulnerability and risk. At least one other vulnerable subgroup should be added to this list, which is LGBTIQ refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.

Homelessness services specifically for LGBTIQ people are also needed for those who feel it simply is not safe to access a mainstream homelessness service, so remain on the street (which is also particularly unsafe). This is a particular subgroup that is most vulnerable and tend to have experience sexuality or gender-based abuse and violence from multiple people in their lives including housemates or other residents of residential facilities.

#### ***LGBTIQ people living with disability***

The Pride Foundation Australia (formerly GALFA) funded literature review (Leonard and Mann 2018) found:

- LGBTI people with disability experience higher rates of crime and victimisation than LGBTI people without disability

- Risks of violence are even higher for women living with disabilities, and LGBTIQ people with intellectual disability or learning difficulties
- Trans and gender diverse people with disability experience even greater discrimination when accessing services than LGB people with disability. They are less likely to access aged care services due to fear and anticipation of discrimination
- Restrictions on freedom of sexual expression for people with disability are even more likely for LGBTI people with disability
- LGBTI people with disability may be at increased risk of family violence and violence from carers and support workers. These risks may be even higher for people with intellectual disabilities
- LGBTI people with disability experience discrimination from within both LGBTI and disability communities compounding their sense of social marginality and isolation and contributing to their increased risk of mental health problems
- LGBTI people with disability have twice the rates of anxiety and psychological distress than LGBT people without (Private Lives 2 data)
- LGBTI people with disability have difficulty connecting with LGBTI communities and with disability communities

At this stage, we do not have reliable data on whether LGBTIQ people living with disability are more likely to experience unstable housing. However, we can expect that they are more likely than other LGBTIQ people to have difficulty expressing their sexual or gender identities in their home environment. They can be more reliant on family of origin or others as carers, and may not have control over choosing their carers. So, at the very least, they are more likely to have a housing situation that is unsafe or unsatisfactory.

Carers need to be trained to understand this context for their LGBTIQ clients. NDIS planners also need specific training so that plans can be created and adapted to include LGBTIQ connections and support to find appropriate and affirming housing. Training has been developed in Victoria by Inclusion Melbourne and Melba Services. This includes work by Deakin University to adapt their Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships program for LGBTIQ people with intellectual disabilities (Marks, O'Shea et al. 2020). It is a peer-led, co-designed set of materials for people to learn skills in building their relationships, and was very highly evaluated by participants.

Further, a new project is underway. Inclusion Melbourne, Deakin University and Thorne Harbour Health have been successful in securing a grant through the Information, Linkages and Capacity building (ILC) Investment Strategy Round 2019-2022. The aim is to ensure LGBTIQ+ people with intellectual disability (LGBTIQ+ PWID) are connected to services and participate in mainstream events, activities and opportunities. This will be achieved through the co-production of information resources. As a result, a secondary objective of the project is to build the capacity of community, businesses, and a wide range of sectors so they are well equipped to support and include LGBTIQ+ PWID.

### ***LGBTIQ refugees and people seeking asylum***

The housing situation for many refugees and asylum seekers in Australia is well known to be precarious. No formal data have been gathered regarding LGBTIQ refugees and asylum



seekers, but increasing anecdotal evidence shows them to be even more vulnerable. For example, trans and gender diverse (TGD) refugees and asylum seekers have great difficulty finding emergency accommodation due to gender-based constraints. Support services report that these TGD people are often turned away from single-sex services. Also, LGBTI refugees often cannot access housing due to the prerequisite to have an income.

Queer Displacements was the first Australian conference dedicated to this group of people and was held in November 2019 at the Australian National University in Canberra. The conference included many LGBTIQ people with refugee experiences. The following vulnerabilities were raised:

- high levels of trauma, and experiences of discrimination, violence, marginalisation, fear of violence related to being LGBTIQ and their forced displacement
- mental and physical health impacts of this trauma
- loss of connection to families and communities of origin due to LGBTIQ-based stigma and discrimination
- barriers to employment
- poverty (for example - 80% of people seeking asylum are no longer eligible for basic income support due to cuts to Status Resolution Support Services)
- difficulty accessing health services, housing , education and social support

The Canberra Statement<sup>2</sup> was produced as an outcome of the Queer Displacements conference. It was written by Tina Dixson and Renee Dixson (Queer Displacement co-convenors) and Eliana Rubashkyn (co-founder Rainbow Path New Zealand) in consultation with the attendees of the conference.

- The statement details the ongoing human rights abuses and discrimination that LGBTIQ asylum seekers and refugees are experiencing not only in their countries of origin but en route to safety and in host countries.
- The statement sets out reforms needed to ensure access to safety and justice for LGBTIQ asylum seekers and refugees.

One new proposal to support refugees on arrival in Australia is the Australian Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. This is a joint project of the Refugee Council of Australia, Amnesty International Australia, Save the Children Australia, Welcome to Australia, Rural Australians for Refugees and the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce. It that aims to build upon the existing Community Support Program to:

- expand the eligibility criteria to include additional vulnerable groups,
- increase the size of the program,
- expand the eligibility of sponsors to include groups of individuals,
- reduce the cost of sponsorship, and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/cbr-statement>

- increase access to public services for sponsored refugees.<sup>3</sup>

The initiative has received philanthropic funding to employ staff and conduct feasibility work on the concept in Australia including gathering individual pledges of support. Amnesty International Australia LGBTIQ networks are also interested in this area and have developed 'My New Rainbow Neighbour' campaign in Queensland to encourage local sponsors.

The advantages of the initiative for LGBTIQ refugees include:

- allowing additional refugees to enter Australia outside of the current quota
- sharing the cost of settlement between government and concerned individual Australians
- sponsorship by small groups of LGBTIQ individuals would enable connections to be made for the refugee with their local LGBTIQ community, enhancing wellbeing and successful settlement including more stable housing.

## TOR 8. Examples of best-practice approaches in Australia and internationally for preventing and addressing homelessness

We suggest that there are two responses that should occur side-by-side:

1. ensuring that all housing and homelessness services are LGBTIQ inclusive, and
2. providing specific LGBTIQ programs and housing for the most vulnerable in this community who cannot access mainstream services due to past trauma and fears of discriminatory treatment from staff and/or residents.

There are a few Australian initiatives that are specifically focused on addressing LGBTIQ homelessness.

### ***Twenty10 – Sydney***

Twenty10 is a LGBTIQ specific youth service in NSW, now combined with the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service. This has been largely funded via philanthropic support, as well as some government funding. They provide a broad range of specialised services for LGBTI young people aged 12-25 including housing, mental health, counselling and social support. They have transitional housing for LGBTIQ young people 16-25 who are either employed or in training to assist them to move out of crisis accommodation to stable housing. This includes case management and support with living skills, finding employment or education (<https://www.twenty10.org.au/get-support/housing/>).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://apo.org.au/node/248346>

### ***WOMAT Housing – Melbourne***

LGBTI Homelessness & Family Violence Project at WOMBAT Housing is a response to recommendations from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (<https://www.wombat.org.au/whatwedo/lgbti-homelessness-family-violence-project/>). It aims to build capacity in Homelessness and Family Violence Services in Melbourne's west and north to ensure LGBTI people, in particular those who cannot remain in their homes, receive a sensitive and appropriate service system response. It provides short term accommodation. The team also provide LGBTIQ inclusive practice training for homelessness and family violence services.

### ***Safe Housing Network – peer support model – Victoria***

A pilot project was funded by VicHealth for 2 years and run by our team at the University of Melbourne (<http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/research-and-policy/reports/>). The general aims of this project were to develop a safe housing network (including referral pathways and resources) in Victoria for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or gender diverse, intersex, or queer (LGBTIQ), and who are at risk of homelessness; to pilot the network in two areas of Victoria (one inner urban location based at queerspace - Drummond Street Services - Melbourne catchment, and one regional location at Uniting Care - Greater Shepparton catchment); and to explore the impacts for participants, workers, and service providers.

From 2017–2019, the pilot was implemented and evaluated. A total of 39 people went through the intake process for the safe housing network program. Participants were provided with support to navigate the homelessness and housing sectors primarily by a peer support worker - that is, someone who is LGBTIQ-identified and has previous lived experience of navigating these sectors due to homelessness or insecure and/or unsafe housing. The average duration of assistance (or involvement in the program) per participant was 8.26 weeks.

The evaluation found that there were consistently positive experiences of the peer support model including:

- 1) advocacy for their clients and for LGBTIQ inclusion in services;
- 2) LGBTIQ-specific rapport and empathy with clients, and
- 3) awareness raising of LGBTIQ needs amongst service providers.

Challenges for the workers included a lack of clarity about the scope of their role, and inadequate resourcing and time particularly for supporting clients with complex needs. Challenges in the sector included a lack of understanding of the value of peer support and lack of LGBTIQ inclusive referral networks, particularly in the regional area.

Conclusions were that there is value in having access to peer support workers for LGBTIQ people at risk of homelessness. However, to provide a more holistic approach, the model needs increased support and supervision for the peer support workers, and experienced case

workers with good knowledge of the homelessness and housing sectors. There needs to be a greater investment of time and money, and advocacy for more LGBTIQ inclusive services in the whole sector.

### ***Perth Inner City Youth Service (PICYS) – Perth***

PICYS offers homelessness support via the Household Network program (HHN) and assistance with mental health issues via the PILLAR program. More than 50% of young people engaging with PICYS services identify themselves as LGBTI. The specific services offered by PICYS are tailored to meet that niche and underserved area of youth assistance. One example is the Basecamp agender, which provides a monthly drop in space for trans and gender diverse young people who are experiencing homelessness and disconnection from family. (<https://picys.org.au/services/basecamp-agender/>) It is run by TGD peers and qualified support workers, and aims to build wellbeing, resilience and connectedness to communities and homelessness services.

## **TOR 9. The adequacy of the collection and publication of housing, homelessness, and housing affordability related data**

The national database for homelessness services does not contain LGBTIQ+ fields. This lack of appropriate data collection on LGBTIQ people accessing homelessness services has been repeatedly identified as a challenge in effectively addressing this issue, understanding prevalence and trends (especially among highly vulnerable subgroups and intersectional experiences), and providing inclusive services that are sufficiently targeted to identify and meet specific needs (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017, Andrews and McNair 2020). Although some services have made changes to their databases, there are still many services that do not collect data, and training is needed to ensure that – when appropriate fields are available to report information – staff are comfortable and competent asking questions in a way that is sensitive, respectful, and reassuring of confidentiality.

Data collection that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex variations should be mandatory and linked with service funding agreements.

Improved data collection would be one important signifier of systemic change towards LGBTIQ inclusion. Housing and homelessness policies at State and Federal level should be inclusive. Initiatives in the USA show an approach that is integrated with major policy initiatives. In 2006, a prominent report from the National LGBTQ Task Force named homelessness among LGBTQ+ young people an epidemic (Ray 2006). Since then, policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and researchers have mobilised at national and local levels. Training programs, toolkits, and best practices (Ferguson-Colvin and Maccio 2012);

policy recommendations (Keuroghlian, Shtasel et al. 2014) have been developed. Research has aimed to build new understanding about the population and service-related needs (Abramovich and Shelton 2017). Significantly, national organisations such as True Colors United ([www.truecolorsunited.org](http://www.truecolorsunited.org)) were created to assist the youth homelessness sector in providing adequate care for LGBTQ+ young people and to centre LGBTQ+ young people in national and local efforts concerning youth homelessness, and in partnership with the National Alliance to End Homelessness the National Youth Forum on Homelessness was established.

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