



National LGBT Health Alliance

Sector: Health advocacy, research and programs in relation to sexuality, sex and gender diversity

Location: National (Australia), office in Sydney

Who we are

We are a coalition of organisations and individuals from across Australia that provide health-related programs, services and research targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people (LGBT).

What we do

We work to improve the health and wellbeing of LGBT people by advocating for greater recognition of LGBT health needs as well as the provision of targeted program delivery and research. We work with national legislators and policy-makers, researchers, non-government organisations in the health and human rights sectors, the corporate sector, and individuals.

We aim to:

- develop a national agenda for LGBT health and wellbeing
- advocate with one voice on LGBT health needs at a national level
- build political commitment to the support of LGBT health
- improve access to national funding for LGBT health projects
- share information and resources to build capacity in the LGBT health sector
- assist in identifying social determinants that have health implications for LGBT communities

Why we do it

There is evidence of significant differences in the health and wellbeing of Australians according to their sexual orientation and gender identities. LGBT people tend to have disproportionately negative health outcomes. Research suggests that this is related to social determinants, such as experience of discrimination, which is also related to reduced access to appropriate health care.

How we do it

We work collaboratively to improve LGBT health in different ways, including:

- developing evidence-based policy papers and position statements through national working groups and networks
- using these to advocate for improvements to Federal public health policy and greater resources for LGBT health
- helping members of the Alliance to share resources and implement programs and activities in their communities that will improve the health and wellbeing of LGBT people

Examples of our work:

- We provided submissions on a range of national policy initiatives, including the Preventative Health Taskforce, the National Men's and Women's Health Policies, reviews of residential aged care
- We are delivering a national education campaign on the same-sex relationships law reform
- We are organising *Health in Difference 2010*, the 7th National LGBT Health Conference

Our Current Focus

We work across a broad range of health areas, including

- ageing and issues facing older LGBT Australians
- issues facing LGBT youth
- the mental health of LGBT Australians
- drug, alcohol and tobacco use in LGBT communities
- violence and homophobia
- recognising LGBT relationships and removing discrimination
- the link between health and human rights
- researching LGBT health

Where we have come from

- Originating out of community-based LGBT organisations, the Alliance is one of the first organisations of its kind in the world. We launched at Australia's Parliament House in August 2007.
- Our founding members have played a key role in LGBT health in their respective states and territories, and across Australia, particularly leading the community aspect of Australia's successful response to HIV/AIDS. Each of these organisations holds high brand recognition and strong goodwill within the communities in which they work.
- Founding members of the Alliance:
 - Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV)
 - Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC)
 - AIDS Action Council of the ACT (AACACT)
 - Western Australia AIDS Council (WAAC)
 - AIDS Council of South Australia (ACSA)
 - Victorian AIDS Council (VAC)
 - Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council (NTAHC)
 - Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis & Related Diseases (TasCAHRD)
 - AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON)
 - Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO)
- In 2008 we began to put in place legal, organisational and personnel structures to establish an independent, national membership-based organisation.
- In July 2009 the Alliance incorporated as a not-for-profit public company, governed by a constitution and a Board of Directors and we opened membership to other non-government organisations working within LGBT health and broader LGBT issues, not-for-profit and corporate supporters, and individuals.

For more information, please contact:

Gabi Rosenstreich, Executive Director
National LGBT Health Alliance
PO Box 350, Darlinghurst, NSW 1300, Australia
Phone: +61 2 9206 2054 Mobile: 0437 876 824 Fax: +61 2 9206 2069
Email: info@lgbthealth.org.au
www.lgbthealth.org.au



Membership of the National LGBT Health Alliance

69 Members as of 23 February 2010, comprising

- 46 Organisations
- 23 Individuals



National Organisations:

- Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) Peak body representing Australia's community-based response to HIV/AIDS. Work includes education, policy, advocacy and international projects. Target groups include gay men, HIV+ women, sex workers, intravenous drug users and Indigenous Australians
- Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council (AGMC) Peak body representing the interests of GLBTIQ individuals and groups from a multicultural background. Provide networking and combined advocacy, hold conferences and other events, develop resources.
- Australian Lesbian Medical Association (ALMA) National organisation for lesbian medical doctors and students. Provide support and advocacy, advance the visibility of lesbian doctors and lesbian health, and create a network through communications and conferences
- GLBTI with Cancer Network Public advocacy on issues for gay and lesbian people with cancer
- Inspire Foundation Promote the mental health of young people through two national, technology based programs (www.reachout.com and www.actnow.com). Same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people are a priority target group in the 2008-2012 strategic plan
- Organisation Intersex International (OII) Australia Support and advocate for intersex people

State/Territory Based Organisations

ACT

- A Gender Agenda Advocate for the improved wellbeing of gender diverse individuals and communities. Activities include community/professional education and facilitating direct support to individuals
- AIDS Action Council of the ACT Provide a range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a particular focus on holistic HIV prevention.

New South Wales

- ACON Health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, with a central focus on HIV/AIDS. Programs include peer support for same-sex attracted young people, Lesbian Health Project, ATSI program, interagency ageing working group, Same-Sex Domestic Violence Project, Pride in Diversity Corporate Equality Program
- Freedom2(B) Provide support to GLBTIQ people of Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic Christian backgrounds
- Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby NSW Advocacy, policy and education in areas of gay and lesbian legislative inequality
- Twenty10 Youth Service Support young people of diverse genders and sexualities experiencing or at risk of homelessness through case management, drop-in, counselling, accommodation, social support, community capacity building and education. Empower young people to live healthy, productive and meaningful lives

Northern Territory

- Darwin Community Legal Service Provide free legal and advocacy services to disadvantaged and marginalised people, based on a commitment to equal rights and social justice
- Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council (NTAHC) Provide a range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a particular focus on preventing transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C and sexually transmitted infections and minimising the physical and social impact of HIV/AIDS and Hep C. Programs include Indigenous health

Queensland

- Changeling Aspects Advocacy and support for transgender people
- Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) Provides sexual and reproductive health clinical services, education and professional training programs throughout Queensland.
- Indigilez Women's Leadership and Support Group Provide encouragement, support and referral pertaining to Indigenous same-sex attracted women's health and wellbeing. Develop women's leadership, providing programs and projects to further encourage women to create and maintain a positive healthy lifestyle – spirit, soul and body.
- Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC) Promote the health and wellbeing of LGBT Queenslanders. Provide education, advocacy and support. Programs include the Women's Health and Wellbeing Action Group, LGBT Ageing Action Group, Two-Spirits Indigenous Health Program
- TransSunshineCoast Transgender support group

South Australia

- AIDS Council of South Australia (ACSA) Provide a range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing of gay and other homosexually active men, people who inject drugs, sex workers and people living with HIV/AIDS, in order to contribute to the overall wellbeing of the community
- Gay and Lesbian Community Services of SA A fully volunteer run and operated telephone support and referral service providing advocacy and support to the LGBT community and the wider community of South Australia
- Sexual Health information networking and education SA (SHine SA) SHine works in partnership with government, health, education and community agencies, and communities, to improve the sexual health and wellbeing of South Australians
- Southern Women's Health Part of Southern Primary Health, Southern Women's Health is committed to improving women's health, equality and wellbeing. Has had a Lesbian Health Program since 1995

Tasmania

- Tasmanian Council for Sexual and Gender Diverse People Network of member organisations working with regional and state government to develop management plans with strategies to enable LGBT people to live and participate fully in their communities with dignity .
- Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis & Related Diseases Provide a range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a particular focus on prevention, advocacy and support for those affected by HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and related diseases. Services include housing, needle exchange, drug information
- Working it Out Tasmania Sexuality and gender support, education, community development and advocacy service aiming to create environments that encourage LGBT people to develop to their fullest potential

Victoria

- {also} Foundation Engage in a wide range of activities in the areas of advocacy, education and promotion to support a diverse, strong, safe and inclusive LGBT community that contributes to and is respected by broader communities. Auspices a number of advocacy and support groups.
- Antiviolence Project of Victoria Peak organisation in Victoria addressing violence within and against LGBT communities
- Country Awareness Network Victoria Provide community support, education, information, advice, referrals and advocacy regarding sexual health to rural and regional communities, including programs for same-sex attracted youth (Bendigo- Equality, Participation, Inclusion & Celebration), and adults (Friends Alike in Bendigo)
- Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria Health and wellbeing resource unit. Develop training and health promotion resources and work to improve the health access of LGBT communities
- Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (Victoria) Provide free anonymous telephone counselling, information and referral service for LGBT communities in Victoria and Tasmania
- Matrix Guild of Victoria Work to improve the care, housing and lifestyle options for older lesbians in Victoria. Activities include a pilot project of home-based services to provide assistance and support for older and/or disabled lesbian to access a range of lesbian-friendly services, advocacy and community-based research projects
- Rainbow Families Council Volunteer organisation working for equality for LGBTI-parented families by providing support, information and representation. Lobby for equal access to fertility treatment for single women and lesbians
- Rainbow Network Victoria Network for people working with same-sex attracted or transgender young people both within and outside of schools. Activities include information sharing, advocacy (in particular in regards to public policy, funding and anti-discrimination work) and training for those working with young people
- TransGender Victoria Advocacy organisation working towards justice and equity for transgender people
- Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) Health promotion organisation whose primacy focus is the health and well-being of HIV positive individuals and communities, the HIV vulnerable or at-risk communities, and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities. Provide a range of programs, including counselling, legal advice, advocacy, peer support and emergency financial support.
- Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Advocate to achieve equality, human rights and social justice of LGBT people in Victoria
- WayOut Rural Victorian Youth and Sexual Diversity Network, Cobaw Community Health Rural community-based health and welfare service, which develops and delivers a range of initiatives for same-sex attracted young people, conduct training for schools, workers, organisations and young people to provide support and raise awareness

Western Australia

- Chameleon Society of Western Australia Provide support to transgendered people
- Gay and Lesbian Community Services WA Provide telephone counselling and other support services to the LGBT community as well as education and training on LGBT issues to mainstream service providers
- GLBTI Retirement Association Advocate for retirement living and health and welfare issues of particular concern to older members of the LGBTI community. Current activities include a research project on residential aged care
- Same Sex Domestic Abuse Group Advocate on behalf of the diverse sexuality and gender communities who are experiencing domestic abuse. Educates service providers about issues that relate to diverse sexualities and/or gender family and domestic abuse and provide support and information to those experiencing abuse
- The Freedom Centre Support young people of diverse genders and sexualities with social support, community capacity building and education. Developing online platforms to reach young people in rural and remote areas
- UnitingCare West - True Colours Regional Youth Service Community service agency that provides programs in the areas of health and disability, community and family, plus independent living and accommodation with a mission to support, serve and empower people most in need. The True colours program aims to reduce emotional and social isolation of geographically isolated young people with diverse sexuality and/or gender through group and individual support, increasing community understanding and providing professional development
- Western Australian AIDS Council (WAAC) Provide a wide range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a particular focus on holistic HIV prevention and the treatment and care of people living with HIV/AIDS
- Youthlink, Health Dept of WA Mental Health Service for marginalised and at-risk youth

Individual members of the National LGBT Health Alliance are community leaders in the areas of research, clinical health care and the not-for-profit sector

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Suicide in Australia Hearing 3 March 2010

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people (LGBT) have the highest rates of suicidality of any group in Australia

- 3.5-14x higher rates of suicide attempts by same sex attracted Australians cf. heterosexual peers¹
- 6x more same sex attracted young people attempt suicide
20-42% same sex attracted young people cf. 7-13% heterosexual young people²
- The average age of a first attempt is 16 years – often before ‘coming out’¹⁰
- 15.7% of gay, lesbian & bisexual people³ and 20% of transgender⁴ individuals: current suicidal ideation
- No reliable Australian data on suicide attempts or deaths for transgender people, though studies from comparable nations report 16-47% have previously attempted suicide⁴
- Evidence suggests suicidality is also likely to be higher among intersex people, however there is limited published data

"Imagine living within a body opposing your mental gender, - it's tough. This is what I go through every day of my life"
(transwoman, 17 years, in Simply Trans 2007)

Disparities in patterns of suicide between different groups are likely to be reflected among LGBT populations

- Young people, Indigenous Australians, migrants, and those residing in rural and remote areas are considered to be at significantly higher risk
- Increasing concern that older LGBT Australians may also have disproportionate rates of suicide and self-harm, many having endured persecution, including legal condemnation and ostracism and fearing dependency on mainstream aged care services

"When making the decision to come out we often feel a sense of isolation and disconnection of country we identify with and the land location we identify our kinship, often resulting in drug and alcohol dependency to suppress feelings connected to the whole 'Coming Out' process. ... There is a mental challenge to balance culture, connection to land and sexuality acceptance within our kinships" (Aboriginal lesbian, personal communication)

LGBT people experience a higher prevalence of risk factors related to suicide than the general population

- High rates of mental health problems - large scale health and wellbeing studies of LGBT people in Australia report: 36.2% of transgender people and 24.4% of gay, lesbian and bisexual people currently meet the criteria for experiencing a major depressive episode, compared with 6.8% of the general population⁵
- More harmful and frequent levels of alcohol and other drug misuse^{3,6}
- Social isolation (including family and peer rejection), discrimination, harassment, and violence – 80% experience public insult, 20% explicit threats and 13% physical assault⁶.
Among young people, 74% of this abuse occurs at school⁸
- Limited (if any) access to culturally competent care⁹

"Shock, anger, concern plus 'Maybe we should send you to a psychiatrist' from my father. 'I would rather you were dead than be one of those' from my mother"
(lesbian, on coming out to her parents, in Stewart 1993)

Estimating suicide mortality or suicidal behaviours for these populations remains highly problematic

- Sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status, unlike other demographical characteristics, are not necessarily publicly known, or readily identifiable through existing data collection methods (such as coronial records)

Existing initiatives are not effective for this high-risk group

- Lack of acknowledgement of social determinants of health, eg social isolation, discrimination
- Lack of capacity in targeted services, eg no dedicated funding for LGBT community-based services
- Exclusion from generic initiatives/services, including lack of acknowledgement in current NSPS or LIFE Frameworks and lack of visibility within public awareness programs

"Knowing what was facing me religion-wise and with my family I was pretty suicidal between the ages of about 16 and 19 ... Not so much because of people's homophobia but because of feeling totally trapped between a religion/family that didn't accept homosexuality and being who I was"
("Peggy", aged 20, in Hillier et al. 2008)

Key priorities for action

➤ Increase visibility

- In policy frameworks – such as LiFE - National Suicide Prevention Strategy, Mental Health Strategy
- In programs, services and resources – as a requirement: accessible, inclusive generic + targeted around sexuality, sex and gender diversity
- In research and reporting – including coronial data collection and investigation of protective factors

➤ Focus on health promotion and prevention as well as intervention & postvention

- Move from crisis intervention to a comprehensive approach that builds protective factors and addresses the social determinants of suicide and mental ill-health

➤ Partnership

- “Not about us without us” – effective mechanisms to utilise the expertise of the LGBT community in development, delivery and evaluation
- Build the capacity of both LGBT community services (in mental health promotion and suicide prevention) and mainstream services (to deliver culturally relevant and accessible services)
- Improved service coordination – a ‘no wrong door’ approach
- Cross-sectoral initiatives that address the underlying determinants of suicide and mental-ill health

"I believe access to mental health services is incredibly poor if non-existent. My only free psych care was after a suicide attempt I'm one who has hidden, we tend to break down and come out in our 40s. Coming out then is very dramatic and sudden and [we have] lives that we're in the process of tearing down, and you need help... I really needed help initially to survive and function and then I guess I needed help to come to terms with and learn to accept myself for who I was"
(Transwoman, in Human Rights Commission 2008)

All suicide prevention and mental health promotion initiatives funded under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy should demonstrate that they are inclusive of and, where appropriate, specific to LGBTI people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Ultimately, for progress to occur, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia must be addressed at the interpersonal, sociocultural, and institutional level.

This requires a comprehensive approach, ranging from community education campaigns, through to policy and legislative measures to end discrimination in all areas and settings.

References

1. Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 2000, *LIFE – A framework for prevention of suicide and self-harm in Australia: Learnings about suicide*, CDHAC, Canberra.
2. Dyson, S., Mitchell, A., Smith, A., Dowsett, G., Pitts, M., & Hillier, L. (2003). Don't ask, don't tell. Report of the same-sex attracted youth suicide data collection project. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society.
3. Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A., & Patel, S. (2006). Private Lives: A report on the wellbeing of GLBTI Australians. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.
4. Sources: Di Ceglie, D 2000, 'Gender Identity Disorder in Young People', *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, vol. 6, pp. 458-466. Holman, CW, Goldberg, J 2006, 'Ethical, Legal and Psychosocial Issues in Care of transgender Adolescents', in *Counseling and Mental Health Care of Transgender Adults and Loved Ones*, Vancouver Coastal Health Unit, Transcend Transgender Support and Education Society, and the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition, Vancouver; and Krieger, N 2003, 'Genders, sexes, and health: what are the connections-and why does it matter?', *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 32, pp. 652-657.
5. Couch, M., Pitts, M., Mulcare, H., Croy, S., Mitchell, A., & Patel, S. (2007). *Tranznation – a report on the health and wellbeing of transgender people in Australia and New Zealand*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS).
6. Howard, J., & Arcuri, A. (2006). Drug use among same-sex attracted young people. In P. Aggleton, A. Ball, & P. Mane. *Sex, Drugs and Young People: international perspectives*. London: Routledge.
7. McNair, R., & Thomacos, N. (2005). Not yet equal. Report of the VGLRL same sex relationships survey 2005. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.
8. Hillier, L., Turner, A., & Mitchell, A. (2005). *Writing themselves in again: 6 years on - the 2nd national report on the sexuality, health & well-being of same-sex attracted young people*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society.
9. Leonard, W. (2002). *What's the Difference? Health Issues of Major Concern to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (GLBTI) Victorians: Research Paper*. Melbourne, Australia: Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Health, Victorian Government Department of Human Services.
10. Nicholas, J. & Howard, J. (1998) "Better Dead Than Gay? Depression, Suicide Ideation and Attempt Among a Sample of Gay and Straight-Identified Males Aged 18-24" *Youth Studies Australia* 17, 4: 28-33