

Advocating for LGBTI Australians: Establishing a national LGBTI peak: *Green Policy Initiative*

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The Australian Greens call for the establishment of a federally funded, national peak-body to advocate for the rights and interests of LGBTI Australians

BACKGROUND

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Australians confront complex and diverse issues. There is a demonstrated need for a Government-funded national body to advocate for action in relation to these issues on behalf of LGBTI people and to act as an interface between the Government and the LGBTI community.

While it is difficult to estimate the percentage of the population who identify as non-heterosexual, 9 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women report experiencing same-sex attraction or having a sexual experience with someone of the same sex (Australian Study of Health and Relationships, 2003). Estimates of the number of intersex and transgender Australians also vary.

LGBTI people confront unique issues ranging from increased potential for negative health outcomes, to discrimination under federal and state law and higher risks of violence.

For instance, mental health indicators with respect to LGBTI Australians are cause for alarm and LGBTI Australians have consistently high rates of depression, suicide and self harm. Drug and alcohol use is also greater than within the heterosexual community. There is a correlation between poor health outcomes and access to appropriate services, with many health services ill-equipped to deal with diverse health needs. LGBTI people are also overrepresented as victims of verbal and physical assault (see www.lgbthealth.org.au for more information).

State and federal legislation continues to perpetuate social exclusion, with LGBTI Australians still discriminated against in a range of areas including; marriage equality & relationship recognition, birth certificates & registrations, blood donations, appropriate health & aged care and under a range of criminal codes.

The Gillard Government claims to be supportive of facilitating social inclusion, through its Social Inclusion Portfolio. Currently the Government provides funding for the following equity groups:

- People with disabilities;
- Regional and rural people;
- Culturally and linguistic diverse people;
- Young people;
- Seniors;
- Women; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (http://www.lgbthealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Govt-Response-Equity-Groups-2010_0.PDF)

Despite Government funding for the above equity groups, (including advisory bodies, national strategies and peak organisations), federal funding for a national LGBTI body continues to be ignored. It is evidently clear that there is a need to ensure LGBTI Australians are better engaged through policy development. Only then can Government produce more inclusive and effective policy outcomes. A nationally funded, peak-body would be the best way of facilitating this important work.

HOW THE PEAK WILL WORK

The Greens are committed to working with the LGBTI community and the representative structure already in place, to ensure the funding for this national organisation is directed to the most appropriate peak body. In doing so, we acknowledge that the LGBT Health Alliance are already undertaking many of these functions as a national sector peak and may be well placed to meet the organisation's objectives.

The peak will represent the rights and interests of LGBTI Australians at a national and international level, promote the health and wellbeing of LGBTI Australians and provide policy advice to the government and community on issues (including identifying areas for potential law reform) affecting LGBTI Australians and the LGBTI service and representative sectors. The Greens would allocate \$300,000 annually for four years to ensure the organisation meets these objectives.

Contact my office

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