

Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion

As the 2020 Summit discussion paper *Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion* notes, there is increasing diversity in family forms in Australia with no family structure being typical. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Australians contribute to the communities in which they live and the wider social fabric of our society. They work, pay taxes, form relationships, raise children and give care and support to their families and friends in the same way as all other Australians. However, a challenge facing this country over the coming years in strengthening communities and supporting all families is to address the social exclusion that GLBT Australians, and their families, face from the government level and within general society.

The Commonwealth needs to show leadership by removing all areas of law that continue to discriminate on the basis of sexuality and gender identity. At the Commonwealth level, enacting HREOC's recommendations to recognise same-sex de facto relationships and their children is an important first step. However, if Australia is to become a society that supports all families and is guided by the principle of social inclusion, then all Australians should have the same right to marry, irrespective of the gender of their partner. Social inclusion within our society can only be achieved when all Australians have the legal right to access the same civil institutions.

Formal equality through the legal recognition of same-sex relationships and same-sex parented families will send a strong message that GLBT Australians are a valued part of our society. However, along with removing discrimination and exclusion from our law books, government policy should work towards the same goal within Australian society. In order to achieve this there are a number of other steps that should be taken.

First, the Commonwealth should enact sexuality and gender identity anti-discrimination legislation (similar to the existing age, sex, race and disability laws), to provide protection in the social circumstances where discrimination against GLBT people may still exist. Anti-discrimination legislation can be an effective tool for behavioural change by educating the public that discrimination is unacceptable.

Second, unlike with other population groups in Australian society, there is a lack of routinely collected nationwide data on GLBT people. Our national census and other government-funded research should ask specific questions on sexuality and gender identity to improve the ability of government agencies and other non-government service providers to accurately include the needs of GLBT Australians within program and service delivery.

Third, the Commonwealth's social inclusion agenda should aim to address the high levels of discrimination and violence that GLBT Australians experience in the workplace, at school, at home and in public. The Commonwealth should aim to tackle homophobic prejudice through the mandatory provision of programs in schools and other educational settings that teach children, teenagers and young adults about diversity, tolerance and inclusion of all Australians regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.