

28 August 2009

Australian Social Inclusion Board Secretariat
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email to socialinclusionunit@pmc.gov.au

Dear Social Inclusion Board

Re: Compendium of Social Inclusion Indicators

I thank the Social Inclusion Board and Tony Vinson for producing *A compendium of social inclusion indicators* (the *Compendium*) and providing the community an opportunity to comment on the *Compendium*. It is encouraging and timely that social inclusion is now being recognised within government and social policy in Australia.

ACON (the AIDS Council of NSW) was formed in 1985 as part of the community response to the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Australia. Today, ACON is Australia's largest community-based gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) health and HIV/AIDS organisation. We work to improve the health and wellbeing of the GLBT community and people with HIV, and reduce HIV transmission. We also work with people who use drugs and sex workers to reduce HIV transmission.

ACON takes a holistic approach to improving our community's health and wellbeing. We recognise the fundamental role that social determinants such as socio-economic status, education, and importantly, discrimination, have on people's health. Consequently ACON's work in health promotion is influenced by the principle of social inclusion, and targets individuals and communities that have been socially excluded.

Discrimination as an indicator of social inclusion

Communities experience social exclusion in many ways, including as a result of the key forces identified in the *Compendium*: poverty/income, access to employment, networks, local neighbourhoods, access to services, health and local contexts. However, communities also experience social exclusion as a result of discrimination. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has operated to socially exclude GLBT individuals and community on its own, but also in conjunction with other forces identified in the *Compendium* such as access to employment and services.

ACON supports the definition of social exclusion provided by Pierson in the *Compendium* which includes discrimination as a cause of social exclusion.¹ Explicitly including discrimination is important in understanding the causes of social exclusion but also in methods of advancing towards social inclusion.

¹ T Vinson, (2009), *A compendium of social inclusion indicators*, Social Inclusion Board, p. viii.

equality ● empathy ● partnership ● community ● diversity ● courage

Social exclusion of the GLBT community

ACON welcomes the acknowledgment in the *Compendium* that some groups experience disadvantage in multiple ways and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion. It is disappointing however, that the GLBT community was not identified as one such group. Members of the GLBT community are on average more likely to experience social exclusion than the general population. Research has shown that for members of the GLBT community, 59% experienced homophobic or discriminatory treatment in employment.² Members of the GLBT community are more likely to experience abuse, harassment and violence with 56% of respondents in NSW reporting experiencing homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in the past 12 months.³ Members of the GLBT community are also more likely to have lower self-defined health status, and report higher rates of mental health issues.⁴

There are areas where different parts of the GLBT community experience disadvantage disproportionately to the general Australian public. For example, same-sex attracted young people face particular vulnerability in terms of violence, homelessness and mental illness including suicidal ideation.⁵ Statistics show that 38% of school students experienced unfair treatment based on their sexuality, 44% were subjected to verbal abuse and 16% had suffered physical abuse.⁶ Transgender members of the GLBT community are also more likely to experience discrimination in employment, poverty, violence and mental illness.⁷

The need for sexuality indicators in research

For social inclusion to be truly inclusive, the data must be analysed and disaggregated to understand the impact on the GLBT community and sections of the community, much like how data is analysed and disaggregated in terms of gender or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status. However, data should also be analysed in conjunction with other indicators of disadvantage, such as age, gender, income and race. This would recognise the multiple dimensions of disadvantage, and the complex relationship between multiple causes of disadvantage and also different manifestations of these disadvantages. A compendium of indicators must be able to include those who are the least socially included, including those who experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

A significant barrier to including the GLBT community in the indicators identified in the *Compendium* is the relative lack of statistics relating to the GLBT community. This can be addressed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) including a GLBT

² J Irwin, (2002), *The Pink Ceiling is Too Low: workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men and transgender people*, Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney.

³ NSW Attorney General's Department, (2003), *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe: a report homophobic hostilities and violence against gay men and lesbians in NSW*.

⁴ M Pitts, A Smith, A Mitchell, S Patel, (2006), *Private Lives: a report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, pp. 29-32.

⁵ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, (2005), *Writing Themselves in Again: 6 years on the 2nd national report on the sexuality, health & well-being of same sex attracted young people in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ M Pitts, A Smith, A Mitchell, S Patel, (2006), *Private Lives: a report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

identifier, thus enabling the ABS to collect, disaggregate and analyse GLBT specific data sets or GLBT respondents in general data sets.

Including the GLBT community would be an improvement, however, the *Compendium* can benefit from additional indicators in gathering a more holistic picture of social exclusion. Indicators on experiences of discrimination, vilification and hate crime would be key indicators that would improve understanding across a number of fields, including in employment, local neighbourhood and community networks, and access to services and health.

I congratulate the Board on producing this much needed *Compendium*. ACON supports the broad indicators that are included in the *Compendium*, however these indicators can be more inclusive of the experiences of the GLBT community by including statistics on the GLBT community and explicitly including discrimination in all of its manifestations as an indicator of social exclusion. This would bring some of the most marginalised and vulnerable members of the Australian society into the *Compendium* and provide key information on understanding social exclusion and promoting social inclusion.

Attached to this letter is a speech by ACON's President, Mark Orr, to the 2008 ACOSS National Conference on GLBT perspectives on social inclusion/exclusion, which provides further information on how social exclusion impacts on the GLBT community.

If the Board wishes to further discuss these matters, please contact David Scamell, Manager of Policy, Planning and Research at dscamell@acon.org.au or 02 9206 2048.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer