

ADVANCING **LGBTQ+** SAFETY AND INCLUSION

*UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND
HEALTH NEEDS OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSE
PEOPLE IN GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY*

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Abbreviated report

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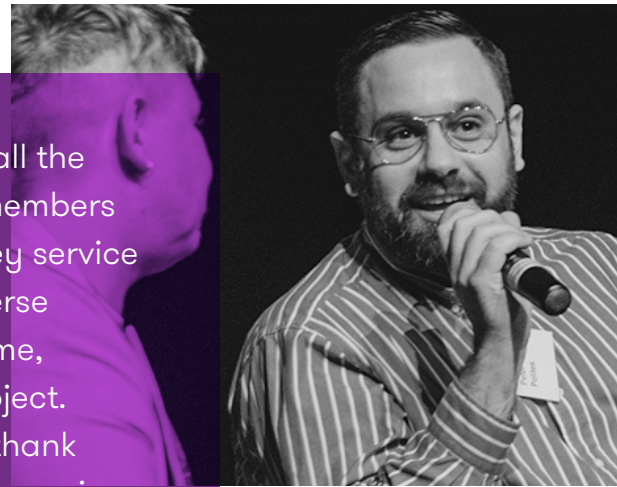
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Recommendations



The following recommendations are goals for whole of government, health, social and community sectors, LGBTQ+ Leaders and others that provide services to sexuality and gender diverse communities in Greater Western Sydney. A number of the issues and recommendations contained in this report are relevant to NSW more broadly and so consideration should be given for approaches that can be scaled-up and locally contextualised across the state.

ACON has included in green the pilot-initiatives that the current Safety and Inclusion Project will undertake utilising codesign with LGBTQ+ leaders, Inclusion Networks, local community groups, and sector partners against recommendations in 2020-21.

ACON recognises that work undertaken in a meaningful way has sustainable outcomes and impacts for sexuality and gender diverse communities in Greater Western Sydney. ACON will advocate for collaborative approaches to secure investment to further address the needs identified in this report.

Not all issues identified in this report are able to be mitigated programmatically, as they arise from structural inequalities requiring strategic reform to address. However, these data provide evidence to inform long-term advocacy by individuals, groups, organisations and governments. In addition, it is likely that many of the issues raised in this report will be in alignment with the soon to be released NSW LGBTQ Health Strategy, which presents yet another strategic opportunity for continued advocacy efforts.

Importantly, study participants identified five distinct geographical regions within Greater Western Sydney each with population variations; Campbelltown-Macarthur-Wingecarribee, Canterbury-Bankstown, Parramatta and surrounds, Liverpool-Fairfield and Penrith-The Hills-Hawkesbury. Participants communicated a strong preference for local LGBTQ+ services and support networks and an unlikelihood of participating in programs and services outside of their local regions.

Area A

Health, Social Services and Community Sector

A1 **Recommendation** **Health, social and community services are welcoming of people of diverse sexuality and gender**

While health, social and community services in Greater Western Sydney were primarily identified as being welcoming to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, religions and language groups, they were viewed as less welcoming and at times unwelcoming to gender and sexuality diverse people. Study participants shared that part of determining whether a service was likely to be welcoming was looking for visual cues such as promotions they could see themselves in, rainbow flags and resources that reflected sexuality and gender diverse people and their health needs.



ACON will promote and provide free Welcome Here membership for up to 150 community, health and social services of Greater Western Sydney.

A2 **Recommendation** **Sexuality and gender diverse people have access to quality inclusive and culturally aware healthcare services and their workforces are suitably trained.**

As the healthcare sector was especially the focus of participants' concerns, especially access to inclusive, quality service provision, it is recommended that General Practitioners (GPs), and other health care professionals (including those working in hospital settings and allied health professionals), in Greater Western Sydney Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health Networks (PHNs), and services funded by LHDs and PHNs receive LGBTQ+ awareness, cultural safety and sensitivity training and specific training on LGBTQ+ healthcare needs. Training should include evidence-based information on health disparities experienced by sexuality and gender diverse communities, and the needs of trans and gender diverse people including improved access to culturally safe gender affirming health care.

This training should also address how intersectionality of identities (e.g. gender, sexuality, Aboriginality, ethnicity, 'race', disability, age) can lead to multiple experiences of discrimination and result in increased inequalities. GPs and other health care professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds with multiple language skills provide important referral avenues and may need to be specifically supported to meet the needs of the diverse LGBTQ+ communities in Greater Western Sydney.

Further, support staff and administration staff working with GP's and in other health care services also need to be included in targeted awareness.



ACON will deliver five LGBTQ+ Awareness training for up to 125 workers from Greater Western Sydney health and social services providers.



ACON will deliver one Inclusive Practice Masterclass Series consisting of three workshops for up to 25 representatives from Greater Western Sydney health and social services providers.

A3

Recommendation

Sexuality and gender diverse people have access to quality inclusive and culturally aware mental health and wellbeing services and their workforces are suitably trained.

It is essential that Greater Western Sydney LGBTQ+ residents have sufficient access to counselling and mental health services staffed by professionals who are knowledgeable and affirming of sexuality and gender diversity and intersectionality. Healthcare workers need to understand that the higher rates of mental health distress, depression, anxiety and suicidality is not due to their diverse identities but society's response. This includes maintaining familiarity with resources to support LGBTQ+ service users and knowledge about social, medical and legal gender affirmation and referral pathways. Services should involve LGBTQ+ consumers and people with lived experience in service design and implementation.

-
- ✓ ACON will ensure the inclusion of mental health services providers in the aforementioned inclusive training and Masterclasses.
 - ✓ ACON will work with stakeholders through a community of practice to identify referral pathways and available mental health resources.
 - ✓ ACON will develop three resources for services providers on topics identified by an LGBTQ+ Leaders community of practice.
 - ✓ ACON will promote the importance of working with LGBTQ+ people with a lived experience of mental health in stakeholder capacity building training, forums and promote the Rainbow Mental Health Lived Experience Network.

Area A

Health, Social Services and Community Sector

Recommendation

A4

Exploration and advocacy for specific healthcare delivery service models for targeted health needs of sexuality and gender diverse people of Greater Western Sydney.

Study participants conveyed a preference for travelling to neighbouring areas for inclusive service options benefiting from the anonymity, confidentiality and perceived increased safety in travelling for inclusive health services. The importance of having the choice of local inclusive service options accessible by public transport was viewed as integral in order for GWS to meaningfully embrace sexuality and gender diverse communities, as well as demonstrate their commitment to having local service options were viewed as integral for Greater Western Sydney embracing sexual and gender diverse communities, commitment to equitable healthcare access and increasing visibility.

Participants identified the following additional confidential local health services specifically addressing the needs of sexuality and gender diverse communities providing possible models for consideration. These services would increase visibility, sense of community and offer access to vital targeted resources. Financial investment and other in-kind commitments from national, state and local governments, non-government organisations, trusts and foundations, and corporations would be required to enable the expansion of services in the region.

- Establishment of a supportive and affordable gender affirming clinic in Greater Western Sydney that supports all trans and gender diverse people including those under 16 years old and their families. Currently Westmead Hospital provides limited services with federal funding to young people under the age of 16.
- A LGBTQ+ HealthCare Hub serving the sexuality and gender diverse community in Greater Western Sydney.
- Due to the expansive size of the Greater Western Sydney region, which has several major urban centres, it is recommended that a LGBTQ+ HealthCare Hub needs to be mobile and able to service these centres in the region via outreach.
- Availability of telehealth services to increase access for Greater Western Sydney of specialist LGBTQ+ and HIV services.



ACON will host a community launch of the report and disseminate the Greater Western Sydney LGBTQ+ Wellbeing and Inclusion Research Project report to decision makers at all levels of government and pursue advocacy opportunities to explore LGBTQ+ healthcare delivery in Greater Western Sydney.

Area B

Education sector and professional membership bodies

The education sector, both at school and tertiary levels, was identified as an important area for initiating change in terms of addressing the prevalence of sexuality and gender related prejudice to improve the health outcomes of sexuality and gender diverse people in Greater Western Sydney. This includes the role of professional membership bodies in influencing industry-based and tertiary course content for degrees like social work, psychology, nursing and medicine.

Recommendation

B1 | Professional membership bodies embed sexuality and gender diverse competencies and content in their accreditation processes.

Recommendation

B2 | Tertiary Education incorporates LGBTQ+ awareness, cultural safety and sensitivity training needs to be embedded in relevant professional training pre-service courses.

Tertiary education institutions (e.g. universities, other tertiary education providers, TAFE) delivering training for medical and healthcare professions, social welfare, community, and police services must embed LGBTQ+ content throughout relevant degrees and courses, not one-off sessions.

Recommendation

B3 | Primary and secondary schools in Greater Western Sydney commit to being more inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQ+ students and families.

Inclusive education and resources in school curricula and syllabi are made available to address awareness and sensitivity of gender and sexuality diversity. ACON or other LGBTQ specialist organisations support schools undertaking inclusive practices.

Area C

Build the capacity of LGBTQ+ community groups and leaders of Greater Western Sydney

LGBTQ+ community groups and leaders are key to changes in their own local communities. As such, existing and emerging local community groups and leaders need to be included in strategies designed to build resilience, connection and affirmative health care. Support currently provided by Eastern and Inner Sydney LGBTQ+ community organisations should continue; however funding is required to support the establishment and maintenance of local community groups and leaders to drive local action.

Participants reported the division between Western Sydney and Inner Sydney suburbs which are traditionally seen as being the queer epicentre. They reported experiences of exclusion, lateral discrimination and violence within the sexuality and gender diverse communities. Transphobia, biphobia, racism, classism, ageism, misogyny and discrimination around disability and religion/faith experienced by LGBTQ+ community members from within sexuality and gender diverse communities was an important finding of this research. Exclusionary experiences were heightened for CALD participants, who reported that LGBTQ+ community groups and events were not welcoming or did not take steps to be inclusive of people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Recommendation

C1

Provide education and capacity building opportunities within sexuality and gender diverse community groups and to community leaders to begin to address lateral discrimination.

Community groups are encouraged and supported to engage with Western Sydney sexuality and gender diverse communities. Ways this may be fostered include local pride events such as Parramatta Pride, targeted promotion and invitations to Western Sydney LGBTQ community groups, joint hosting/sponsorship of LGBTQ community events in Western Sydney, community campaigns, resource development and bystander workshops.

Recommendation

C2

A campaign celebrating diversity within sexuality and gender diverse communities of Western Sydney.

A multifaceted campaign is required to raise community awareness of intersectionality and include call-to-action messaging for inclusion and allies and bystanders to speak out against lateral discrimination. This campaign could be state-wide or local to Western Sydney, though, either way, should feature Western Sydney and should highlight the strengths of religious and cultural intersectionality.

Recommendation

C3 | Encourage the sponsorship and partnering with Western Sydney LGBTQ+ community groups to support community events in Western Sydney.

Eastern-Sydney focused LGBTQ+ community organisations and groups are encouraged and supported to engage with Western Sydney sexuality and gender diverse communities. Ways this may be fostered include local pride events such as Parramatta Pride, targeted promotion and invitations to Western Sydney LGBTQ community groups, joint hosting/sponsorship of LGBTQ community events in Western Sydney.

- ✓ ACON will establish and support a Community of Practice among existing and emerging LGBTQ+ community leaders or Western Sydney
- ✓ ACON will provide two training/mentoring capacity building sessions to LGBTQ+ community leaders of Western Sydney
- ✓ ACON will provide sponsorship for LGBTQ+ Community groups of Greater Western Sydney to host local LGBTQ+ community events.
- ✓ ACON will leverage their existing relationships with major LGBTQ+ festivals to extend their reach into Western Sydney and for Western Sydney communities to see themselves within those festivals.

Area D

Working with specific groups in Greater Western Sydney

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ Peoples in Greater Western Sydney

Current health, social and community services in the region need to provide culturally inclusive programs and resources that target the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ people. Potential outreach options should include: Providing visual evidence of inclusivity of Aboriginal LGBTQ+ people; cultural awareness and competency training for services providers in both Aboriginal and LGBTQ+ cultures; the need for health professionals to 'listen' to patients who know their specific healthcare needs; and the need for inclusive services outside the current major hubs.

Recommendation

D1

Raise visibility and increase the capacity of health, social and community services in Greater Western Sydney to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ Peoples.



ACON will codesign training workshop with Aboriginal LGBTQ+ groups and individuals that raises awareness and competency for service providers. Training will be delivered in partnership with Aboriginal LGBTQ+ community leaders.



ACON will explore community interest in establishing an Aboriginal LGBTQ+ Community of Practice.



ACON will codesign and support the delivery of a cultural practice and mentoring forum about LGBTQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for service providers in Greater Western Sydney.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) LGBTQ+ people in Greater Western Sydney

Current health, social and community services in the region need to provide culturally inclusive programs and resources that target the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse LGBTQ+ people. Potential outreach options should include: Providing visual evidence of inclusivity of CALD LGBTQ+ people; cultural awareness and competency training for services providers in cultural diversity and LGBTQ+ cultures; the need for health professionals to 'listen' to patients who know their specific healthcare needs; and the need for inclusive services outside the current major hubs.

Recommendation

D2

Raise visibility and increase the capacity of health, social and community services in Greater Western Sydney to meet the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse LGBTQ+ people.



ACON will codesign training workshop with CALD LGBTQ+ groups and individuals that raises awareness and competency for service providers. Training will be delivered in partnership with CALD LGBTQ+ community leaders.



ACON will codesign and support the delivery of a cultural practice and mentoring forum about LGBTQ+ CALD people for service providers in Greater Western Sydney.

Older LGBTQ+ People in Greater Western Sydney

Older sexuality and gender diverse people living in Greater Western Sydney experience social isolation impacting on their health and wellbeing and quality of life, this is especially so for older women. Older sexuality and gender diverse people often feel excluded from LGBTQ+ events more generally. It is important that organisers of such events are aware of the inclusion of older community members.

Recommendation

D3

Provide financially supported social opportunities for older LGBTQ+ people to meet regularly, to engage in targeted activities and events to meet their specific needs, and to build social networks.



ACON will actively promote and engage older LGBTQ+ people from Greater Western Sydney in the LOVE Project and associated ageing programs and activities.

Recommendation

D4

Develop a campaign celebrating older sexuality and gender diverse community members featuring Greater Western Sydney.

Area D

Working with specific groups in Greater Western Sydney

Young LGBTQ+ people in Greater Western Sydney

Although young sexuality and gender diverse people under 18 were not included in this scoping research, LGBTQ+ Community Leaders and Service Providers highlighted the importance of addressing the health and wellbeing needs of these young people in Greater Western Sydney. Also identified was the social isolation and exclusion faced by sexuality and gender diverse young people living in Greater Western Sydney. It is worth noting the important role that families, particularly parents, play in supporting trans and gender diverse trans young people and the critical role of parents of trans young people being able to talk to other parents of trans young people.

Recommendation

- D5 | Identify and promote local youth services that provide supportive confidential medical, mental health and wellbeing services and ensure that these services are aware of the specific needs of these young people, close to transport, free of charge and with online access.**

This will require the supporting local youth interagencies and networks to map referral pathways including the involvement of local government, local health districts and primary health networks.

Recommendation

- D6 | Social support services that cater for the specific needs of sexuality and gender diverse youth of Greater Western Sydney.**

This will require providing financial support to organisations working with these young people, to develop targeted programs, provide spaces to meet and hold events. All new service design and implementation should be done in co-design with sexuality and gender diverse youth. May require training and capacity building of local youth organisations.

-
- ✓ ACON will disseminate the report to decision makers at all levels of government and facilitate opportunities to engage in policy discussions with partner organisations that work with LGBTQ+ young people, their families and relevant service providers.
 - ✓ ACON will explore future partnership opportunities with LGBTQ+ and mainstream youth services, such as Twenty10.
 - ✓ ACON will support further research on the needs of young LGBTQ+ people in Western Sydney, in partnership with organisations like Twenty10.

Area E

LGBTQ+ Safety in Greater Western Sydney

Participants raised the need for greater awareness of safety in urban planning and design in Greater Western Sydney for sexuality and gender diverse community members particularly with regards to intersections with other aspects of identity, for example being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; socio-economic status; having a disability; women; age; or living alone.

Recommendation

- E1** | Consideration given to safety needs of sexuality and gender diverse community members when organising events and activities in Greater Western Sydney.
-

Recommendation

- E2** | Sexuality and gender diverse people are engaged in urban planning and codesign of evidence-based safety initiatives to address gender-based violence and harassment experienced in the broader community including locally in Greater Western Sydney.
-

Recommendation

- E3** | Older sexuality and gender diverse people are engaged in codesigning a safety initiative to address gender-based violence and harassment experienced in the broader community including locally in Greater Western Sydney.
-



ACON will disseminate the report to decision makers at all levels of government and facilitate opportunities to engage in policy discussions

Area F

Decision Makers foster LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Greater Western Sydney

Participants spoke of experiencing exclusion, discrimination, and violence for being sexuality and gender diverse in Greater Western Sydney. These experiences stem from entrenched attitudes of sexuality and gender related prejudice

Recommendation

- F1 | Decision makers initiate and foster safe and respectful community dialogues between LGBTQ+ community leaders and leaders from broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural, multifaith and disability communities of Greater Western Sydney.**

To begin to address issues and the recognition of similarities including mutual values, it is crucial to identify long-term opportunities and strategies that bring various Greater Western Sydney community leaders together including with local and state government decision makers.

Recommendation

- F2 | Local, state and Commonwealth governments and Members of Parliament (MPs) of Greater Western Sydney commit to advocating LGBTQ+ people's needs, ensuring meaningful inclusion in public policy and investment.**

Recommendation

- F3 | Governments and MPs openly and visually demonstrate their commitment to our communities.**

Examples of visibility include ACON's Welcome Here project signage, flags on local government buildings, representation of sexuality and gender diverse communities in local government decision making for and the presence of LGBTQ+ organisations at local festivals.



ACON will disseminate the report to decision makers at all levels of government and facilitate opportunities to engage in policy discussions.



ACON will promote the benefits of the Welcome Here project to government departments, services and buildings.



Executive Summary

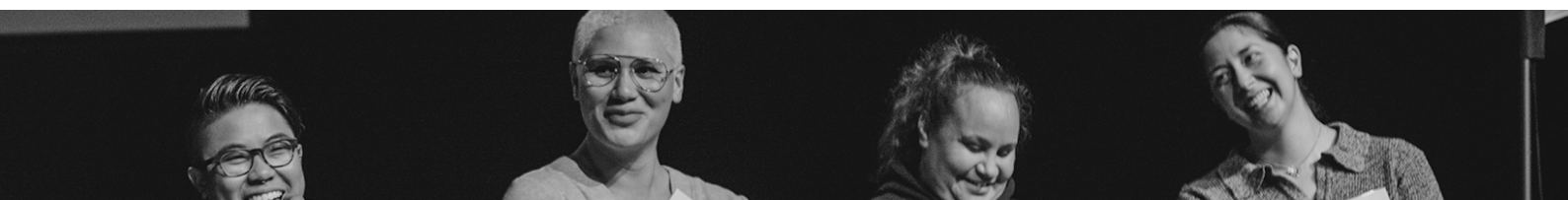
Introduction

This scoping research, conducted in 2019-2020, was a collaboration between Sexualities and Genders Research (SaGR) in the Diversity and Human Rights Research Centre at Western Sydney University and ACON. The research was funded by NSW Health, through the South East Sydney Local Health District, and ACON. This scoping research was an exploration of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people, of the issues they encounter in relation to access to services in the region, and of best practice service provision to sexuality and gender diverse communities in Western Sydney.

The objectives of the research were to understand how best to: build capacity in sexuality and gender diverse communities in Western Sydney;

- to foster safety and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the region;
- to enhance service provision to these communities; and
- to improve LGBTQ+ community members' overall wellbeing.

The research participants included LGBTQ+ community leaders and members as well as key service providers from relevant organisations in Western Sydney.



Greater Western Sydney (herein 'Western Sydney') is an extensive area that is home to a vast number of diverse communities from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). With such cultural diversity comes a mixed range of social values and beliefs about life, marriage, and relationships. Of importance is that Western Sydney includes a cluster of federal electorates that represented the largest number of 'No' votes in the 2017 marriage equality plebiscite in Australia (Beaumont, November 15th, 2017). How these tensions around gender and sexuality diversity, marriage equality and relationships are experienced in the daily lives of LGBTQ+ people living in the region requires further attention in research. There are few research studies (Bonson, 2017; Dune, Caputi & Walker, 2018; Kilicaslan & Petrakis, 2019; Pallotta-Chiarelli, 2016) that have focused on access to services, the lived experiences and the intersections of these for LGBTQ+ culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Western Sydney. This scoping research contributes to filling this gap.

Of the limited studies completed to date, research indicates that LGBTQ+ people who are also part of multicultural, multifaith, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, face particular challenges not as well understood as the experiences of LGBTQ+ people from white, Anglo, English speaking communities (Hillier *et al.*, 2010; Kassiseh, 2017; McNair, 2017; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2016; Reeders, 2010). These challenges include compartmentalising family life and queer social life; pressure to create family in culturally appropriate, heteronormative ways; fear of violence; fear of being outed as queer – a particular issue facing for example, Muslim LGBTQ+ people (Abraham, 2009); prejudice from white LGBTQ+ communities (Ruez, 2017); and homophobia from religious community leaders (Kassiseh, 2017). Some of these issues were serious concerns and challenges raised by participants in this scoping research.

There has been extensive research highlighting that the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people is often poorer than that of the population as a whole (Carman, Corboz, & Dowsett, 2012; Couch *et al.*, 2007). This is primarily due to being at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination and violence as a result of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and intersections of these with racism, misogyny and sexism. This can lead to exclusion and fears for personal safety (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011; Leonard *et al.*, 2012; Robinson,

Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014). This scoping research reinforces the finding that sexuality and gender diverse populations experience poorer mental health and wellbeing influenced by external factors – sexuality- and gender-based stigma and discrimination, intersecting with racism, misogyny, sexism and discrimination based on disability. Respondents reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress than the Australian population generally, based on answers to the K5 measure of Psychological Distress Scale (Department of Health, 2018).

LGBTQ+ people are often under served and marginalised by health and related services (Davies, *et al.*, 2020; Dune, Ullman, Ferfolja, Hanckel, & Garga, 2018). Further, people from multifaith and multicultural communities underutilise healthcare services, particularly sexual healthcare services (Asante, Körner, & Kippax, 2009; Botfield, Newman, & Zwi, 2018). The reasons for this include not wanting to access services in their local community, largely due to concerns about confidentiality; and services not being able to provide private spaces in which to hold discussions with LGBTQ+ people about sexuality, gender and related health issues (Koh, Kang, & Usherwood, 2014). Healthcare professionals and service providers acknowledge that service provision to sexuality and gender diverse communities in Western Sydney needs to improve and many are keen to support changes in this area (HIV and Related Programs Unit South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, 2017). However, there is little research on how this can be achieved. This scoping research also contributes to filling this significant gap.

Overall, this scoping research project offers greater insight into the issues that LGBTQ+ people encounter on a daily basis living in Western Sydney that hinder their access to services, and undermine their safety, inclusion and wellbeing. What is highlighted in this research is that working closely with community members and leaders to build their capacities to work more effectively within their respective communities is critical to enhancing the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people in the region. The inclusion of key relevant service providers in this study has also provided the unique opportunity to discuss the issues raised by community members and leaders about accessing services, with the aim of supporting the development of more inclusive and culturally safe service provision to sexuality and gender diverse communities in Western Sydney.

Aims of this Scoping Research Project

The aims of this project were to:

01

Identify the needs of sexuality and gender diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multifaith and multicultural communities in Western Sydney in order to improve their wellbeing, safety and inclusion.

02

Develop strategies to build the capacity of sexuality and gender diverse leaders and Western Sydney service providers to engage and support sexuality and gender diverse communities in Western Sydney in order to improve their wellbeing, safety and inclusion.

03

Ascertain what sexuality and gender diverse communities consider to be inclusive best service provision practices, so these can be shared with key relevant service providers in the region.



Research Methodology

This mixed method research included both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

(i) An online survey targeting LGBTQ+ community members living in Western Sydney.

This survey was completed by 278 respondents. The survey was developed by the research team, with input from the project Advisory Group and informed by pertinent relevant issues identified in an extensive literature review. The survey included the Kessler – 5 (K5) measure of psychological wellbeing, which allowed for comparisons between survey participants and the general population. The items assessing individuals' interactions with service practitioners were adapted from research conducted by Dune, Ullman, Ferfolja, Hanckel, and Garga (2018). The survey also included original items developed specifically for this investigation.

Western Sydney was defined as the 13 local government areas of Blacktown, the Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly. Inferential and descriptive analyses were performed. We compared the responses of CALD respondents to non-CALD respondents, trans and gender diverse respondents to cisgender respondents. We also reported separately on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander responses.

The areas addressed by questions in the survey included: respondent demographics (age, cultural and ethnic background, education, household composition, disability, work status, gender, sexuality, religion, language spoken at home, migration, local government area in the region which participants are living; utilisation of services; interactions with service providers; access to services; involvement in social groups; issues related to safety and inclusion; community attitudes; psychological wellbeing (K5); and participants' perspectives on important areas for change.

Limitations

The authors would like to note that measurement of gender identity is an evolving space. Accordingly, we recognise that a limitation of this research is that the gender identity indicators used at the time of data collection (see Appendix, for further detail) may not have allowed participants to self-identify with the level of specificity they may have wished.

Where there are specific references to homophobia and transphobia, these relate to questions asked of participants. This does not diminish experiences of other types of sexuality- or gender-based stigma and discrimination.

(ii) Focus groups with LGBTQ+ community leaders in Western Sydney.

One face-to-face focus group was held with 12 LGBTQ+ community leaders. Written responses were also provided by seven (7) community leaders who were unable to attend the scheduled focus group. In addition, LGBTQ+ community leaders from CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were given the opportunity to provide further input on the issues (beyond the one face-to-face LGBTQ+ community leaders focus group). Although this additional input was originally organised as face-to-face focus groups with these specific community leaders, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this process, which resulted in leaders providing written responses. Two (2) LGBTQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and three (3) LGBTQ+ culturally and linguistically diverse community leaders gave additional written comments.

Focus group questions with community leaders covered: the needs and issues facing their respective LGBTQ+ community members in Western Sydney; experiences with service providers; and suggestions for improving service provision, safety and inclusion of their community members living in Western Sydney.

(iii) Focus groups with key relevant service providers from organisations in Western Sydney.

Two (2) face-to-face focus groups, including a total of 17 participants, were conducted with service providers. The focus group questions for this group covered: current approaches to fostering access and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the service or organisation; issue and barriers to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people encountered by the organisation; perceptions of the findings from the community members' survey and community leaders' focus group; and suggestions for enhancing LGBTQ+ access, safety and inclusion practices in the organisation.

Main points from the research

The following are the main points arising from the findings in this scoping research project:

01

Respondents reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress than the Australian population generally, based on answers to the K5 measure of Psychological Distress Scale (Department of Health, 2018). Over half (56.6%) of survey respondents reported 'high' or 'very high' levels of psychological distress (37.0% 'very high' and 19.6% 'high'). This is in comparison to 13.5% (5.5% 'very high' and 8.0% 'high') of non-Indigenous persons reporting 'high' or 'very high' levels of psychological distress in the general population (Cunningham & Paradies, 2012).

02

Of the respondents who reported 'very high' psychological distress, at least half cited that the lack of access to the following services had caused them worry or stress: a counselling or mental health service (70%), suitable employment opportunities (56%), and low cost housing (53%).

03

Trans and gender diverse participants (TGD) reported experiencing statistically significantly higher levels of psychological distress on the K5 measure than cisgender participants, with 49% of TGD participants reporting 'very high' levels of psychological distress, as compared to 34% of cisgender participants. Pointing to the impact of external influences on TGD individuals' wellbeing, TGD individuals were significantly less likely to report feeling safe at a variety of locations in Western Sydney, including educational spaces and religious venues. TGD participants who felt safer and more included in Western Sydney reported better psychological health.

04

While majority numbers of participants reported 'always' or 'often' feeling safe or included in their own homes in Western Sydney, survey data showed that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) participants were statistically significantly less likely than non-CALD participants to report these feelings of wellbeing while at home. 53% of CALD participants 'always' felt safe at home, as compared to 68% of non-CALD participants.

05

Majority numbers of participants reported witnessing negative attitudes about particular cultures or religions as well as racist behaviours in Western Sydney. CALD participants reported personally experiencing these attitudes in larger percentages, with over one-third reporting experiences of racism and a quarter reporting experiencing negative attitudes about their culture.

Access To Services

Issues raised by LGBTQ+ Community Members



Access to welcoming, inclusive, culturally safe services in Western Sydney was a high priority for LGBTQ+ community members and leaders, with healthcare services of utmost importance.

Many had negative experiences accessing healthcare services in the region, resulting in poor quality care.

Positive experiences were associated with having respectful, supportive, knowledgeable, proactive, responsive, friendly, and trustworthy healthcare providers.

Culturally safe and appropriate mental health and sexual health provision were highly requested.

It was difficult to access primary care where GPs were bilingual or multilingual with an understanding of intersectional cultural issues as well as gender affirmative care, or healthcare that was inclusive of sexuality diversity.

Sexuality and gender based stigma and discrimination, and racism were often experienced from healthcare practitioners, administrative staff, and from other clients attending the service.

Access To Services

Issues raised by LGBTQ+ Community Leaders



LGBTQ+ community leaders expressed concerns for community members' safety (including young people) while accessing services, including mental and sexual health services in the region.



Community leaders also identified older LGBTQ+ people as a population requiring special attention, especially middle to older aged women who may be experiencing difficulty accessing culturally appropriate healthcare and may also be experiencing homelessness.



Gender affirming healthcare for young people at a paediatric hospital in Western Sydney was identified as a major gap in service provision, negatively impacting trans and gender diverse young people and their families in Western Sydney and across Sydney more broadly.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders identified access to culturally safe services and the absence of a wholistic approach to wellbeing as critical issues impacting their community members in Western Sydney. Racism, homophobia and transphobia were identified as further compounding culturally safe access to services.



Young people require youth friendly services that are culturally safe and also have user friendly opening hours, with services located close to public transport.



Young LGBTQ+ people, including young people with a disability, experience particular barriers to accessing inclusive education, health and support services.



Community leaders expressed concerns about LGBTQ+ people accessing inclusive and culturally safe aged care in Western Sydney.



Many community members want to access services discretely to maintain confidentiality and safety.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders highlighted that access to housing and a safe environment were linked to improved mental health, cultural connection, and employment.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ elders and community members need to be central to future planning and program implementation.



Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) LGBTQ+ community leaders identified intersectional discrimination in service provision as a key issue with which community members regularly contend, especially when accessing healthcare and employment services.



CALD LGBTQ+ community leaders identified young people as a priority group, as they may experience strict curfews, negative messaging and may not have awareness of organisations and groups that affirm and support gender and sexuality diverse identities.



CALD LGBTQ+ community leaders emphasized the need for tools and resources translated in culturally safe ways in community languages.



CALD LGBTQ+ community leaders considered funding was core to addressing culturally safe service access, including but not limited to funding a peak body, targeted events, and capacity building.



CALD LGBTQ+ community members need to be central to future planning and program implementation.

Access To Services

Issues raised by Service Providers

- Service providers identified that many people and organisations do not have the knowledge, understanding and expertise to address the needs of LGBTQ+ community members, especially those with CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.
- Service providers highlighted that attitudinal barriers associated with diverse genders and sexualities was challenging to address in Western Sydney.
- Service providers did not know what to do with trans and gender diverse young people because there were no services that families could access and afford.
- Service providers highlighted education and training as a priority to addressing barriers to service access, with a preference for ongoing comprehensive training offering professional accreditation rather than a one-off course.
- Partnerships and collaboration with services already specialising in these areas such as ACON, Twenty10 and others were viewed as key to reducing barriers and improving access to services.
- Strength-based approaches, accurate data collection, inclusion of community leaders, and inclusion of allies were highlighted as key to the success of service provision for LGBTQ+ community members in Western Sydney.

Safety Concerns

- Safety was also a major concern for LGBTQ+ community members. Generally, a lack of acceptance for sexuality and gender diversity in the region (generally equated with religious conservatism), led to experiences of overt and covert threats of violence in public spaces (particularly so for women (cis and trans)). Safety concerns were also exacerbated by poor safety planning in the region (e.g. poor lighting in public spaces) and perceived higher rates of crime in the area. Poor safety provisions and lack of security at LGBTQ+ events were also raised as an important concern.

Social Connection and Isolation

- Lack of social connections and feelings of isolation were common experiences among members of diverse LGBTQ+ communities.
- Community leaders expressed concerns that LGBTQ+ events are focused at younger people who consume alcohol, other substances and attend parties. There are few events fostering community connection that are culturally appropriate and designed in consultation with older community members.



For the full research report please visit acon.org.au



For more information about this report, access to the full report or the Greater Western Sydney Safety and Inclusion Program, please direct all enquiries to:

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Front Cover Photo: (left to right) Devina Blanca, Virgo Hawkins, Jinny-Jane Smith, Bankstown Arts Centre, 2019. Back Cover Photo: (left to right) Lauren Foy and Peter Polites, Bankstown Arts Centre, 2019.

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