

24 August 2007

Senator Lyn Allison
Senator for Victoria
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Inquiry into the Provisions of the Same-Sex: Same Entitlements Bill 2007

This submission to the Inquiry into the Provisions of the Same-Sex: Same Entitlements Bill 2007 is made on behalf of Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV) of which I am the Director. This Unit has been established for four years and in that time has reviewed all the current research relating to the health and wellbeing of GLBT people and has carried out Australia's largest ever survey of this population with 5,500 participants, *Private Lives* (2005)¹.

We now have in Australia a great deal of research data which indicates that there are very specific health needs for our community. *Private Lives* demonstrated that over 60% of participants modified their daily activities for fear of experiencing harassment and discrimination. This fear is not unfounded as a recent study by the Australian Institute (2005)² indicates that 35% of the Australian population who are 14 and older believed that homosexuality is immoral, this translates to 43% of men and 27% of women. It does not take much imagination to envisage how this endless vigilance in which GLBT people engage might impact on health and wellbeing. Studies done all over Australia on samples of gay and lesbian people are indicative of health problems which most closely relate to the stress of this daily management of a heterosexist world. Specifically these are mental health issues (anxiety, depression and self harm)³, and dangerous substance use⁴ at

¹ Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A., Patel, S. (2006) *Private Lives: A report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*. Australian Research Centre In Sex, Health and Society. Melbourne.

² Flood, M.& Hamilton, C.(2005) *Mapping Homophobia In Australia* Australian Institute Webpaper, Canberra.

³ Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A., Patel, S. (2006) *Private Lives: A report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*. Australian Research Centre In Sex, Health and Society. Melbourne.

McNair, R., Kavanagh, A., Agius, P., & Tong, B. (2004). The mental health status of young adult and mid-life non-heterosexual Australian women. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 29(3): 265-271.

rates much higher than their heterosexual peers. The cost to the community of this entirely preventable level of morbidity should be cause enough for it to be addressed as a priority. The tremendous toll of suicide and self harm on our young people is another⁵.

We argue that the heterosexism and homophobia that gay and lesbian people deal with every day is best addressed by public education and that there is no better means of educating than giving gay and lesbian couples equal rights under Australian Law. This sends a clearly understood message to the community that GLBT people are an accepted part of the rich diversity of Australian Society and have a legitimate right to pursue their life goals without fear of rejection, marginalisation and stigmatisation.

A number of the proposed changes will have a direct impact on aspects of health care for gay couples and their families, particularly those related to Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Nets and the higher rates for residential aged care for gay couples. We do however believe that by far the biggest impact of these changes on our health will be the achieving of equal entitlements and the enshrinement of our right as gay couples to access the benefits afforded to all Australian citizens.



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⁴ Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A., Patel, S. (2006) *Private Lives: A report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*. Australian Research Centre In Sex, Health and Society. Melbourne.

Hillier, L., de Visser, R. O., Kavanagh, A., & McNair, R. (2004). The drug-use patterns of heterosexual and non-heterosexual women: Data from the Women's Health Australia Study. In D.W. Riggs & G.A. Walker, (Eds.) *Out in the Antipodes: Australian and New Zealand Perspectives on Gay and Lesbian Issues in Psychology*, Bentley WA: Brightfire Press.

⁵ Hillier, L., Turner, A. & Mitchell, A. (2005). *Writing themselves in again - six years on: the second national report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same sex attracted young people*. Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, Melbourne, La Trobe University.