

CRANApplus Position Paper: Remote workforce Gender Identity and Sexual Diversity Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

It is well recognised diversity exists within the Australian health workforce. Employees are from a wide range of backgrounds inclusive of age, ethnicity, physical ability, religious beliefs, gender identities, sexual orientation, education and experience.

This Position Statement will aligns with the National LGBTI Health Alliance recognition of gender identity and sexual diversity¹, as a major grouping of individuals namely Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI), as well as recognising other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people and communities.

CRANApplus embraces diversity and strongly advocates for equality of all remote health professionals in the workplace, with the promotion of 'zero tolerance' and social inclusion being intrinsic to the workplace culture. CRANApplus believes that this will only be evident, by the behaviours health professionals demonstrate, such as positive engagement and respect for the needs of LGBTI health professionals.

The literature clearly states discrimination, stigmatisation and social exclusion and biases shown towards LGBTI health professionals in the workplace, can and does exist; driven by fear, attitudes and behaviours embedded in intolerance, lack of acceptance, bullying and abuse (verbal and physical). The workplace is a microcosm and a reflection of the wider community's attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, a sustainable healthy workplace requires the building of resilience in all staff, whereby negative attitudes towards LGBTI health professionals are vigilantly challenged. Thus, leading to greater job satisfaction for all and better health outcomes for all clients.

LGBTI and gender diverse people are much more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the broader population, and are at greater risk of suicide, suicidal ideation and self-harm. Research clearly indicates that discrimination; abuse (both verbal and physical), exclusion and prejudice are key contributors to depression, anxiety and at greater risk of suicide and self-harm.² There are currently no studies in Australia that specifically look at mental health and LGBTI in the remote health sector.

What is clear from more generalised studies is that individuals who identify as LGBTI experience poorer mental and physical health and higher suicidality. This is not due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or variations in sex characteristics but due to stigma, social exclusion, discrimination, bullying and rejection by friends, family and work colleagues³. These significant impediments to health and wellbeing for LGBTI health professionals are also a principle driver for tobacco, alcohol and other substance abuse⁴.

¹ National LGBTI Health Alliance, Accessed 18/06/19 <http://lgbtihealth.org.au/about/>

² Beyondblue Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex (LGBTI) and bodily, gender and sexually diverse people. Accessed 18/06/19 <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people>

³ Ankara, G. (2016) Making the Count: Addressing Data Integrity Gaps in Australian Standards for Collecting Sex and Gender Information [White paper]. Sydney, National LGBTI Health Alliance.

⁴ Draft National Drug Strategy 2016-2025: Australian Government Accessed 15/06/2016 <http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/draftnds>

CRANAplus believes that:

- The geographical context of remote and isolated areas and the issue of isolation for LGBTI health professionals places them at further risk of marginalisation due to overt and covert discrimination, lack of respect, bullying and harassment, stigmatisation and social exclusion.
- Remote health services must actively commit to the notion of social justice for all, whereby 'zero tolerance' and social inclusion are integral aspects of workplace culture.

CRANAplus recommends:

- Remote health service adhere to their jurisdictional workplace safety policies which strongly advocate social inclusiveness and equality of all health professionals in the workplace. Thus, ensuring all LGBTI remote health professionals have access to appropriate and non-discriminatory support in the workplace.
- A consistent approach across the remote sector regarding 'zero tolerance' to discrimination based on gender and sexuality diversity, whereby negative attitudes, biases and stereotypes in the workplace and the wider community are challenged.
- Health services provide educational opportunities for all staff to build their personal and professional resilience.

CRANAplus resolves to:

- Actively promote and uphold the rights of individuals (remote LGBTI health professionals) who have experienced marginalisation, and/or discrimination based on gender and sexual diversity through the provision of formal communication and social media to access services and support.
- Celebrate diversity and positively influence our members and stakeholders' attitudes and behaviour through upholding our organisation's values of social justice.
- Build sustainable relationships with our LGBTI members, supporters and service partners.