

MEDIA RELEASE

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The right to marry is a basic human right.

Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists support marriage equality 2017

Members of the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Association of Australasia (the PPAA) are in a unique position to observe the impact of discrimination, in all its forms, and the contribution of such discrimination to a variety of mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicidality. The PPAA respect the rights of all people— regardless of sexual orientation, religious belief, age, gender, ability, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances - to live with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships in all their diversity. This position is, of course, consistent with The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: [http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-5/8_udhr-abbr.htm](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-5/8_udhr-<u>abbr.htm</u>) Therefore, we support marriage equality as a step toward the reduction of discrimination based on sexual orientation in Australia.

PPAA Position

The Council of the PPAA:

- supports initiatives to remove legislative discrimination against people based on their sex, sexuality or gender identity
- supports the right to marry as a basic human right
- recognises the right of all LGBTIQ clients, employees, volunteers, families and communities to be free of prejudice and discrimination and to have the same rights under Australian law
- believes that social inclusion is an integral aspect of a healthy society, while exclusion and discrimination contribute to increased mental health problems and unnecessary suffering
- recognises that enshrining human rights in law and addressing discrimination and prejudice are essential to promoting positive mental health for all Australians

On this basis, the Council of the PPAA, on behalf of its members, supports marriage equality - the right of all Australians to access marriage with their partner of choice, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation.

Background

It has long been known, both in Australia and elsewhere, that risk of serious anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicidality is significantly increased for the LGBTIQ communities. In part, this is related to the frequently reported experience of explicit discrimination from being part of a minority group. However, both research and clinical observations indicate that the impact of institutional discrimination, wherein LGBTIQ people are excluded from participation in mainstream groups, activities and customs, plays a significant and damaging role. PPAA support marriage equality as a step toward redressing the institutional discrimination implicit in the historical exclusion from access to marriage of LGBTIQ people.

Importance of Recognition

The PPAA recognises that discrimination in all its forms is damaging. Members of our associations in all states and New Zealand encounter the impact of discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals and communities in their daily work with patients. While it is our view that it will take generations to completely redress this deeply embedded, and often unconscious discrimination, we support any actions to remove institutional discrimination based on sexual orientation.

It has long been recognised that members of LGBTIQ communities suffer an increased risk of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicide. (1,2,3) Stonewall, a UK organisation which promotes equality for people of diverse sexual orientations, reports that “lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to have experienced depression or anxiety, attempted suicide or had suicidal thoughts, and self-harmed than men and women in general” (4). For example, gay and bisexual men report moderate to severe levels of depression and anxiety at double the rate of men in general, with even higher rates of reported depression (49%) among lesbian and bisexual girls. They further report (5) that in 2012, 3% of gay men had attempted to take their own life, compared to 0.4% per cent of all men during the same period. Research from Australia (6) and elsewhere in the western world (7) is consistent with these findings.

Unsurprisingly, experiences of bullying are disturbingly common in the lives of LGBTIQ members of our communities. Stonewall reported (8) that 55% of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people experience homophobic bullying in Britain’s schools. Of significance, they report a noteworthy proportion (35%) of gay young people who are not bullied still suffer high levels of depression, compared to 5% of young people generally.

There is a growing body of research and clinical experience which suggests that a significant contribution to the adverse mental health impact of belonging to the LGBTIQ communities occurs via exclusion and alienation. In the research literature, this has been referred to as “minority stress” (9) a model which postulates that members of sexual and other minorities are at greater risk for health problems,

because they face greater exposure to social stress related to prejudice and stigma (10,11). Stigma-related experiences can include verbal and physical assault, social and employment discrimination, and the expectation of discrimination regardless of actual discriminatory circumstances (12,13,14). In Australia, the existence of institutional discrimination contributes to this alienation and minority stress, and we would argue, as our colleagues have done elsewhere in the world (15,16,17), that the removal of discrimination in relation to access to marriage is a crucial step to reducing the adverse impact of institutional discrimination.

Implications and effects of the voluntary non-binding postal poll and the associated campaign on LGBTIQ people and their families.

We hold serious concerns about how this issue of marriage equality has been raised via a public campaign and a non-binding postal vote which unnecessarily exposes already vulnerable people to divisiveness, derision of their personal and intimate relationships with consequent emotional stress, where the deleterious effects on the mental health of many such individuals is well known.

We cannot presume to speak on behalf of all our members, but we can say that our members are concerned with the hostility, negative publicity and misleading advertising material which has arisen around the issue of marriage equality. We understand this to be damaging to people who identify as LGBTIQ and their families, leaving them more vulnerable to further denigration, invalidation and 'othering' that they are already exposed to.

With this in mind we can also say that our members are concerned to protect and nurture the well-being of children and couples of same sex unions.

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The PPAA is a federated body member associations in most Australian States and New Zealand. Its members come primarily from professional backgrounds in psychology, medicine, psychiatry and social work

The Member Associations of the PPAA are a resource for mental health support for those suffering discrimination:

New South Wales Institute of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: nswipp.org

Victorian Association of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists: vapp.asn.au

Association for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy of Western

Australia: appwa.org.au

Queensland Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Association: qppa.com.au

and

New Zealand Institute of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: psychotherapy.co.nz

Victorian Child Psychotherapists Association: <http://www.vcpa.org.au>

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