

Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022-32

Annual update 2022-23



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The strategy

We launched Victoria's first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ strategy in February 2022. The strategy is our plan to advance equality and inclusion for Victoria's diverse LGBTIQ+ communities in all government work over the next decade.

Working with LGBTIQ+ Victorians is central to the success of the strategy. We do this by working with the LGBTIQ+ Ministerial Taskforce, Health and Wellbeing and Justice working groups, and through consultation with communities. This ensures the voices, wisdom and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people guide us as we co-design policy and programs to improve equality for all Victorians.

We are already making progress in our four priority areas:



Priority area 1. Equal rights and freedoms

Strengthening existing legal protections for LGBTIQ+ Victorians and ensuring we create laws with an equity lens will benefit all community members.



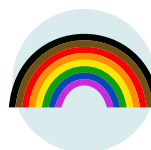
Priority area 2. Equitable, inclusive and accessible services

Services should be approachable, welcoming, safe and inclusive for all Victorians throughout their journey and when moving between services.



Priority area 3. Visibility to inform decision-making

Improving LGBTIQ+ data collection to build evidence will enable us to get a better picture of how LGBTIQ+ Victorians experience all parts of their lives.



Priority area 4. Safe, strong and sustainable communities

LGBTIQ+ people are a proud part of the Victorian community. By creating inclusive communities, we are making sure there is a place for all Victorians to be proud and live their life to the fullest.

Establishing our foundations

The strategy has a focus on ensuring services across Victoria are fair, inclusive and accessible to drive equality for LGBTIQ+ communities.

This is our first year reporting on the strategy's progress and our first opportunity to share our achievements so far. This baseline will show us the gaps and opportunities so we can achieve more over time.

In the first year, we have taken significant steps to lay the foundations for an equal society. But, we recognise that there is more to do. And that we can only do that in partnership with allies, friends, families, communities and LGBTIQ+ Victorians. Equality is a shared vision that we are all responsible for creating and maintaining.

We have developed an outcomes framework that will evolve as we achieve strategy actions and as we improve our LGBTIQ+ data capture and analysis. We will report on the progress of key indicators in our annual reports in future years.

LGBTIQ+ voices are at the heart of our work. We will keep engaging with our communities over the life of the strategy to understand needs and the best ways to meet them.

A whole-of-government strategy

Every Victorian has a role in making Victoria a safe, welcoming place for all LGBTIQ+ people. The words 'our' and 'we' in this document refer to the Victorian Government. Many LGBTIQ+ Victorians, allies, families, communities, departments and portfolio areas contributed to the achievements of the first year of the strategy. Even though we know there is much more to do, this work shows a whole-of-government and whole-of-communities commitment to come together and advance equality.



Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities highlights



A rural and regional tour promoting the strategy to 12 communities and 269 Victorians.



Rainbow Ready Roadmap (RRR) resources launched after wide consultation with 13 LGBTIQ+ communities. There were 29 consultation sessions that reached 240 people.



Worked with LGBTIQ+ organisations on the #IStandWithTransPeople campaign.



Worked with the Coroners Court, the Department of Health and Switchboard Victoria to release a new report with suicide data for LGBTIQ+ communities in Victoria from 2012 to 2021. This helps us to better understand suicide in our communities.

Case study

The Commissioner visited the City of Greater Bendigo and Headspace in Bendigo, together with partner organisation Rural Pride Australia. The Commissioner ensures LGBTIQ+ people with lived experience take part in meetings whenever possible.

During this visit, the Commissioner met a young trans person in distress. They experienced ongoing 'deadnaming' and misgendering in their school environment.

The Commissioner reached out to the Department of Education to change this young person's paperwork before their graduation. The Commissioner attended their graduation where this young person felt thrilled to have their gender publicly affirmed by their school.



What's next for the LGBTIQ+ strategy?

We have made significant progress in the first year of the strategy and recognise there is more work to do. Next, we will focus on implementing an ambitious election pledge work program. This includes ensuring all LGBTIQ+ Victorians are equal, visible, safe and celebrated.

- We will increase the number of community and mental health providers that are Rainbow Tick accredited. This will mean better care for LGBTIQ+ Victorians. It will help to make sure they are safe and included in our care, treatment and support services.
- We will develop the Pride in Ageing pilot. It will help older LGBTIQ+ Victorians have the dignity they deserve and remain connected to their communities.
- We will continue to support community organisations to celebrate and connect LGBTIQ+ communities.

To realise the vision of the LGBTIQ+ strategy over the next 10 years, we will need to work closely with LGBTIQ+ Victorians and allies, we will need leadership and we will need perseverance.



Strategy action priority areas



Priority area 1. Equal rights and freedoms

Laws need to be free from discrimination and reflect us if we are to have safe and inclusive communities.

Our first year of actions lays the foundations for an equal society, but we know that there is more work to do. We have strengthened legal protections for LGBTQIA+ Victorians and are ensuring we create laws with an equity lens.

We are improving justice and policing responses so LGBTQIA+ people receive fair treatment

- We set up a specialist legal service at the Victorian Pride Centre. The service is for LGBTQIA+ Victorians who experience discrimination and disadvantage based on their sexuality or gender identity.
- We released the *Victoria Police workforce diversity and inclusion framework 2023–2030* and the *LGBTQIA+ inclusion action plan 2023–24*. These aim to create more inclusive workplaces and a better future for LGBTQIA+ Victorians.
- We provided access to LGBTQIA+ awareness and sensitivity training for Victoria Police staff. We developed this with Thorne Harbour Health.
- We established a Trans and Gender Diverse Group as part of the Victoria Police LGBTQIA+ Portfolio Reference Group. It will focus on the needs of trans and gender diverse communities within policing.

We are reforming laws to ensure equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people

- We narrowed religious exceptions through the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Act 2021*. We did this in consultation with LGBTQIA+ communities, along with their tireless advocacy. Religious bodies and schools must now better protect LGBTQIA+ students, teachers and staff.
- We narrowed religious exceptions for religious bodies that provide government-funded goods and services. They can no longer discriminate when providing goods or services because of a person's sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. The lived experience of LGBTQIA+ communities informed these changes.
- We introduced the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*. The Act features new criminal offences and a civil response scheme. This is an important step. It will help prevent and respond to the damage and trauma caused by change or suppression practices for LGBTQIA+ Victorians.
- These reforms mean we are progressing equality and addressing the discrimination LGBTQIA+ Victorians experience.





Priority area 2. Equitable, inclusive and accessible services

LGBTIQA+ people must be able to access services that meet their needs.

We are working to ensure all Victorian Government services are approachable, welcoming, safe and inclusive.

We are reforming Victoria's mental health system and developing inclusive health care for LGBTIQA+ communities

- We partnered with Switchboard Victoria to deliver 3 suicide prevention programs. This included:
 - an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQA+ suicide prevention role
 - introducing the LGBTIQA+ Support After Suicide bereavement program.
- We provided \$4.8 million to more than 20 organisations that work with LGBTIQA+ communities, people with disability and multicultural communities through the Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Grants Program. This included funding for LGBTIQA+ organisations to provide better pathways to the mental health system.
- We collaborated with Intersex Human Rights Australia to develop resources to increase awareness of intersex variations. The resources are for parents, children, health professionals, service providers and community members.
- We boosted gender affirming mental health and primary care services at The Royal Children's Hospital, Monash Health and Orygen.

We are tailoring supports and building inclusive services to meet the needs of LGBTIQA+ people

- We launched the Pride in Place program to provide safe and inclusive recovery pathways for LGBTIQA+ people experiencing homelessness.
- There is now a Jobs Victoria Advocate at the Victorian Pride Centre. The service will improve employment outcomes for LGBTIQA+ Victorians.
- Rainbow Health Australia is undertaking an LGBTIQA+ Family Violence Capacity Building Project. The project is for specialist family violence services pursuing Rainbow Tick accreditation.
- We launched the Department of Transport and Planning's *LGBTIQA+ inclusion action plan 2022–26*. It includes commitments to improve LGBTIQA+ inclusion within the department.
- Safe Schools delivered over 150 sessions to school staff. They learnt about supporting LGBTIQA+ students and creating safe and supportive learning environments.

We are supporting LGBTIQA+ leadership across Victoria

- Our 2022 LGBTIQA+ Leadership Program supported 28 emerging leaders to develop their leadership skills and strengthen their networks across Victoria.
- 22 LGBTIQA+ organisations received funding through our LGBTIQA+ Organisational Development Grants 2022 program. These grants will strengthen their capacity to ensure our communities access the services they need.





Priority area 3. Visibility to inform decision-making

We are building an evidence base to better understand how LGBTIQ+ Victorians experience all parts of life.

Our actions in the first year of the strategy are helping to improve LGBTIQ+ data collection. With this, we can better identify needs, understand how services are performing and know where we need more investment.

We are co-designing with communities to build a better understanding of LGBTIQ+ intersecting experiences

- We worked with the LGBTIQ+ Taskforce, Health and Wellbeing Working Group, and Justice Working Group to get valuable community advice on LGBTIQ+ issues. This is helping us meet communities' needs as we action the LGBTIQ+ strategy.
- We engaged 10 organisations representing LGBTIQ+, multicultural and disability communities to support recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. This included 4 LGBTIQ+ organisations collecting LGBTIQ+ data. These insights will inform changes to current mental health data collection.

We are building the evidence base to better understand what the community needs

- We funded research to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family violence services for LGBTIQ+ people.
- We partnered with La Trobe University to build the evidence base on social and cultural practices of alcohol and tobacco use among lesbian, bi+ and queer women. They will share the results and translate them into practice through workshops, presentations and media.
- The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector conducted the public sector's workplace gender audit. This workforce data includes attributes other than gender, such as Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion and sexual orientation.
- We released the *Diversity on Victorian Government board guidelines*. These provide advice and support to departments to run inclusive board recruitment processes and better target priority groups, including LGBTIQ+ people. As part of this project, we are improving:
 - data collection and management
 - willingness to share LGBTIQ+ status
 - the safety and inclusiveness of boards.
- We delivered a dedicated LGBTIQ+ stream through the Government's Ageing Well consultations. We reached 1,200 members of our older LGBTIQ+ communities to better understand their experiences.





Priority area 4. Safe, strong and sustainable communities

LGBTIQA+ communities are a proud part of the Victorian community. Their critical lived experience voices guide our policy and program responses.

We are working to build a society where all people can be themselves and support one another. By working with and alongside diverse communities, we are making sure there is a place for all Victorians to be proud and live their lives to the fullest.

We are ensuring LGBTIQA+ people feel safe in a range of settings

- We supported Fitted for Work to work with trans and gender diverse clients on job-readiness. We collaborated with trans and gender diverse community networks, agencies and service providers to inform them about Fitted for Work's services.
- We announced \$3.2 million in the 2022–23 Victorian Budget for the design and delivery of LGBTIQA+ safe space services across Western Victoria. These will foster social connection and address mental health and wellbeing inequalities.
- We announced \$900,000 for 8 LGBTIQA+ organisations to address increased demand for support services in the first 6 months of 2023.

We are celebrating pride and connecting communities

- Over 49,000 people attended the Melbourne Pride street party. It marked 40 years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Victoria, and celebrated Victoria's diverse rainbow communities.
- We funded 37 organisations to deliver events to support and connect LGBTIQA+ communities across Victoria through the Pride Events and Festivals Fund.
- Over 300 people attended the Victorian Public Sector Pride Awards. The awards recognise people working to build a more inclusive public service.
- We committed to support opportunities for young and older LGBTIQA+ people to connect with peers and LGBTIQA+ communities in the *Ageing well action plan: an action plan for strengthening wellbeing for senior Victorians 2022–2026*.

We are working to ensure sport and recreation are inclusive for LGBTIQA+ communities

- We supported 3 projects through the Together More Active grants program. The projects will increase LGBTIQA+ inclusion and participation in sport and active recreation.
- We relaunched the Fair Play Code in October 2022 with the tagline 'Let's call time on bad behaviour in sport!'. The code sets behaviour standards for everyone involved in sport and active recreation. The standards aim to ensure safe and inclusive environments for all.
- Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust now have an all-gender public facilities policy for large events, such as the Australian Open. There are now all-gender facilities at Rod Laver Arena and Margaret Court Arena.
- We are investing in new and refurbished change room facilities so they are more gender inclusive. This is part of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund. Gender inclusive facilities support people from LGBTIQA+ communities to take part in sport.



Case studies

Transcend Australia

Transcend Australia delivers peer support services to trans and gender diverse young people and their families, parents and carers. In 2021–2022, Transcend first received funding from the Victorian Government as part of the initiative supporting mental health for trans and gender diverse young people.

In 2022, hundreds of Victorian families contacted Transcend. They asked for help to support their trans or gender diverse children. Most families received help in telehealth appointments. Others needed more intensive support across multiple sessions, including family members and secondary consultation.

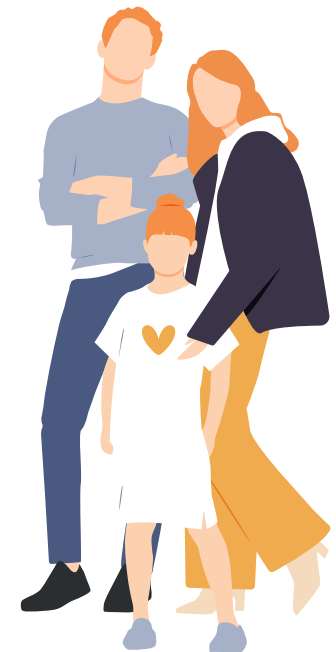
For one mum and her daughter, Transcend was lifesaving:

‘My incredible daughter expressed feelings about her gender identity from an early age. Her spark began to fade once she started school, where she was experiencing intense transphobic bullying and violence from other kids.

We linked in to Transcend around the time that our daughter expressed feelings about being transgender ... Transcend’s support to our family during this time was literally lifesaving. Transcend provided me with information and support so I could feel more confident to support my daughter, and the knowledge I needed to advocate for her. The help we received enabled us to navigate health systems and to connect with other families.

Through the activities that Transcend run, our daughter has even developed deep friendships and made a new best friend. She is also celebrated by her school community. Our child is now a 14-year-old girl who is so excited about her future and I couldn’t be more proud.’

We also engaged Transcend Australia in 2022 to lead a co-design process for the trans and gender diverse care and referral pathways project to improve care for trans and gender diverse young people and their families across primary, community and hospital services.



Proud 2 Play is getting sporting clubs Rainbow Ready LGBTQIA+ community experience in ageing well

LGBTQIA+ communities still face discrimination in community sporting clubs. This can lead to mental health issues, social isolation and a lack of lifelong involvement in physical activity.

Proud 2 Play is an organisation that aims to remedy this so the benefits of sport and active recreation are available to everyone.

Sport and Recreation Victoria proudly supports Proud 2 Play under the Together More Active grant program to deliver its Rainbow Ready Clubs program to 10 community sporting clubs in Cardinia Shire Council and Nillumbik Shire Council.

The Rainbow Ready Clubs program aims to increase the capacity of clubs to create and increase fair, diverse and inclusive spaces. This is through a 5-step process including assessment, education consultation, engagement and adoption.

'The Rainbow Ready club program has been a very informative and educational process for us. It has given us a greater understanding of the barriers into sport for the LGBTQIA+ community, and how we can possibly assist in breaking those barriers down. Some of the actions we have taken so far have been to place some posters around the gym, and include LGBTQIA+ inclusive language on our website, social media and email signatures. We are aiming to implement LGBTQIA+ focussed programs and create an event for a day of significance that features a LGBTQIA+ role model/athlete, after consultation with LGBTQIA+ community groups. We have already had anecdotal evidence that what we are doing so far is helping the LGBTQIA+ community feel more welcome at our gym, which is amazing!'

—Reach Gymnastics.

This program ensures clubs are better equipped to be welcoming and inclusive spaces. We are supporting all Victorians to be proud participants in sport and active recreation throughout their lives.

Older members of the LGBTQIA+ community experience health and wellbeing challenges at a much higher rate than the non-LGBTQIA+ population. Many experience loneliness and isolation at greater rates. They are also more likely to have had negative experiences in the health care sector.

Peter and Simon married recently after many years together. Now, as both near 85, they are considering care options for their later years. Aged care accommodation is not an attractive option. As Peter said, 'We are comfortable in our present home. I am concerned about the possibility of being discriminated against if we ever have to seek accommodation in an aged care facility.' Simon agreed, saying, 'I'm not sure I want to be a gay man in a straight care facility. I've already experienced homophobic behaviour in the health system.'

Quotes provided in the Ageing Well 2022 survey related to LGBTQIA+ experiences:

- 'Life is lonely. Growing up as a lesbian was awful because of dreadful discrimination and I consequently have a lot of internalised homophobia to deal with on a daily basis.'
- 'As an ageing single LGBTQIA+ man employed full-time, there aren't many opportunities to participate in LGBTQIA+ friendly activities to volunteer, engage with other gay men socially away from pubs, bars and clubs, etc.'
- 'Ageing LGBTQIA+ people have a need to socialise with "our own tribes" ... not easy for many rural and regional people. In addition, due to past oppression some older people are now coming out as LGBT and need support.'

Building the capacity of community organisations to deliver community-led supports

In 2022 and 2023, the THREE for All Foundation received funding through the LGBTIQ+ Organisational Development Grants to build the capacity of its Queer Refugee and Asylum Seeker Peers group.

This peer-led group supports LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum. It connects them with vital community services.

The grant funding supported the group to:

- deliver leadership and volunteer training events
- develop governance policies
- create a network to link the group in with other similar LGBTIQ+ organisations.

The THREE for All Foundation reported more confidence and engagement with those in leadership roles in the peer-led group.

‘Our activities contributed directly to the building of a resilient and connected LGBTIQ+ refugee community and skilled self-support group through provision of regular activity, safe spaces, leadership and training.’

—Ian Seal, Executive Director, THREE for All Foundation

By growing capacity and leadership, the organisation is now supporting over 300 people.

