



The Voice of Multicultural Victoria

Response to the Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

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Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper

Overview

The Victorian Government has committed to develop the first ever state-wide, crossportfolio lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) policy document.

The Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy will guide the Victorian Government's efforts to achieve equality for LGBTIQ+ communities over the next decade.

In December 2020, following consultation with more than 800 people and organisations across Victoria about the issues that need to be addressed, the Victorian Government released its LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper.

The paper proposes a vision for LGBTIQ+ equality in Victoria and also identifies four high priority areas for change in systems, policies and services.

The Victorian Government sought further feedback on whether this vision and the directions in the paper adequately capture the community's vision for LGBTIQ+ equality in Victoria, and ideas for improving the lives of LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

ECCV submitted the following responses to the Victorian Government's online survey questions on the LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper.

Direction 1

EQUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

a. Do you agree with 'Equal rights and freedoms' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

b. Is it clear to you what this direction means?

c. Do you have any other comments to make about this direction?

ECCV agrees that equal rights and freedoms must be a key part of the Victorian Government's LGBTIQ+ Strategy, and supports the grounding of this position in specific civil and political rights charters and conventions. Equal participation in society and the right to uphold and express one's identity are basic human rights that must be respected and fulfilled.

LGBTIQA+ people from CALD backgrounds often report that they feel compelled to centre one of these identities, while the other aspects of their identities are erased. This double layer of isolation from community has many negative consequences related to access to services and support, emotional wellbeing and mental health.

LGBTIQA+ people do not only experience discrimination in relation to sexuality and gender identity, but may also experience discrimination on a range of grounds, including gender, race, religion, age, disability, socio-economic status, educational attainment, history of contact with the criminal justice system and many other factors. At any time, LGBTIQA+ people can be affected by multiple forms of inequality, oppression and privilege. The relevance of particular factors can shift in different situations.

All anti-discrimination measures must therefore be LGBTIQA+ inclusive, culturally responsive and culturally safe.

With regards to the protection of human rights and access to justice, ECCV strongly supports the suggestion of intensive LGBTIQ+ training for professionals working in the justice system. The Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council (AGMC) has highlighted that LGBTIQA+ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds perceive the police as being a source of discrimination. There must be strong accountability for police and legal system agencies to respect the rights of LGBTIQA+ people. LGBTIQA+ people from CALD backgrounds must have access to culturally safe supports when engaging with the legal system

Direction 2

EQUITABLE & ACCESSIBLE SERVICE SYSTEMS

a. Do you agree with 'Equitable and accessible service systems' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

b. Is it clear to you what this direction means?

c. Do you have any other comments to make about this direction?

ECCV is pleased to see several references to cultural and linguistic diversity in the Directions Paper, and some acknowledgement of population groups that face particular issues, such as refugees and asylum seekers.

LGBTIQ+ communities and CALD communities are not homogeneous groups. Culture, language and religion can be important factors that shape community experiences and understandings of sexuality, sex and gender diversity. However, factors based on migration pathways, visa status, history of migration to Australia, socio-economic status, disability, age, gender and geography also shape the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds. These factors influence the opportunities for LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds to access services, have their needs met, to be safe and to thrive. In many cases, these factors, and the interactions between them, are not well understood by many service providers.

This is especially the case for people with disabilities, who often report that they not are seen as sexual beings and observe discomfort from service providers in addressing sexuality. This often results in people with disability from CALD backgrounds not having their sexuality recognised, or an assumption of heterosexuality. LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities from CALD backgrounds can be subject to further silencing of their sexuality, due to predominant attitudes that stigmatise the sexuality of both people with disability and people from CALD backgrounds.

Although there are mentions throughout the Paper of LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, there is little mention of the specific issues that they often face. The uncertain visa status of many refugees and asylum seekers can limit their access to services and isolate them from potential peer support in their communities. Many also experience trauma due to invasive questioning about their sexuality and gender identity during hearings of their asylum claims. There remains a lack of referral pathways and support services for LGBTIQ+ refugees and people seeking asylum who are residing in the community.

A concern often expressed to ECCV by LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds is that most mainstream LGBTIQ+ organisations are predominantly led and staffed by white, Anglo people, and not inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds. It is important that all organisations providing services to LGBTIQ+ people are culturally safe.

Services addressing issues of importance to LGBTIQ+ people, such as housing and homelessness services, and family violence support in particular, must provide safe and culturally responsive access for people from CALD backgrounds.

The double layer of stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds can have serious repercussions around the prevention and treatment of blood-borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It can lead people to avoid testing, seeking treatment or accessing pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). This creates the danger of a two-speed HIV epidemic, with white men getting the necessary treatment, but some more isolated community members lacking access to these vital health services.

A final problem/barrier to service access faced by some LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds is the requirement to engage interpreting services. Concerns have been voiced to ECCV on several occasions about perceptions of prejudice by interpreters against LGBTIQ+ people or people living with HIV.

Addressing these issues requires both an intersectional approach, with capacity to address the multiple needs of LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds, as well as a person-centred approach.

Often LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds are represented with a deficit-based framing that does not recognise their strengths, creativity and capacities. A person-centred and intersectional approach in service provision must be responsive and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Direction 3

VISIBILITY TO INFORM DECISION MAKING

- a. Do you agree with 'Visibility to inform decision-making' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?
- b. Is it clear to you what this direction means?
- c. Do you have any other comments to make about this direction?

ECCV supports the emphasis in the Discussion Paper on the importance of participation by LGBTIQ+ people in decision-making at all levels and in all sectors, and in delivery of programs intended for them (“nothing about us without us”). It is important for LGBTIQ+ participation in decision-making to represent the full cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Victorian society, just as it for the CALD voices in decision-making to be fully LGBTIQ+ inclusive and represent the diversity of their communities.

Data collection can provide an important evidence base about how to deliver improved outcomes for LGBTIQ+ people and their families, but the data collection process must be cognisant of the varied ways in which people in diverse communities define and express their identities, which do not always correspond to western notions of “LGBTIQ+”. Furthermore, the data collection process must not force people to choose an identity which they do not feel safe and comfortable about, or which conflicts with or denies any other aspects of their identity.

A broad range of evidence and data must inform decision making. Conventional data sources may not be inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Further, disaggregating this data might compromise confidentiality. Many LGBTIQ+ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are also likely to not disclose information if they do not feel safe, or if they feel their information will be shared. It is essential that there are safe ways that data and evidence is collected.

Direction 4

SAFE, STRONG & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

a. Do you agree with 'Safe, strong and sustainable communities' being a key area for change in Victorian Government systems, policies and services?

b. Is it clear to you what this direction means?

c. Do you have any other comments to make about this direction?

The Directions Paper rightly notes the importance of ensuring that LGBTIQ+ spaces are welcoming to people of all backgrounds (page 16), and stronger visibility of LGBTIQ+ cultures, histories and community narratives (page 15). This visibility must include LGBTIQ+ people from multicultural and non-Christian backgrounds, who are often underrepresented in ethnic as well as mainstream media.

It is important that the “representations and celebrations of LGBTIQ+ communities” referred to on page 24 includes representation of people from a variety of cultural and faith backgrounds. Likewise, it is important that positive stories of LGBTIQ+ people from culturally diverse backgrounds are promoted and that community and ethnic media are encouraged and resourced to tell these stories.

In many cases, mainstream and government-led initiatives that promote LGBTIQ+ inclusion overlook migrant and refugee communities. This can tend to place LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds in unsafe positions where they need to defend their faith or ethnic community on the one hand, and to defend their sexuality and/or gender identity on the other. This approach often leads to backlash, as LGBTIQ+ inclusion comes across to CALD communities as an exclusively mainstream issue. ECCV is concerned at the lack of culturally responsive communications strategies about LGBTIQ+ inclusion, which leads to these avoidable, unnecessary and damaging divisions.

ECCV recommends that the Victorian Government addresses these issues through co-design of communications strategies with LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds and community leaders, and support for leadership of LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds in all spheres. Peak multicultural community organisations and sector bodies can play a crucial role in providing leadership in promoting inclusive and welcoming communities.

LGBTIQ+ members of diverse faith and cultural communities can be supported to form peer support groups, as means of support for those who have not been able to connect to mainstream LGBTIQ+ groups.

As the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council (AGMC) has noted, the western notion of “coming out” should not automatically be presumed to be the norm or the only desirable outcome in terms of self-acceptance. LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds may prefer other methods rather than a linear process of moving from an undisclosed to an “out” identity.

For many LGBTIQ+ people from CALD backgrounds who seek to ‘come out’, this process may be different from the mainstream ideal. ‘Coming out’ may involve negotiating a range of relationships in families of origin, extended family, and community, which may not necessarily involve being ‘out’ in all circumstances. It is important that LGBTIQ+ organisations and services understand the importance of working with families in this regard, and not assume that families of origin are an impediment to fulfilment for LGBTIQ+ people.

Further, it is important for public policy to include all cultural concepts of family, including extended family, families of choice, and queer kinship, and to acknowledge that many people (especially LGBTIQ+ people from refugee backgrounds) come to Australia to create new families and communities.

Direction 5 GENERAL FEEDBACK

a. Are there further comments you would like to make about the vision and directions outlined in the Directions Paper?

The Victorian Government’s LGBTIQ+ Strategy and its associated resources must use inclusive language that takes account of how its terminology is translated into community languages. Carefully considered constructions of inclusiveness can be lost completely if equal consideration is not given to the most appropriate terminology to use in translated resources.

The terms making up the initials “LGBTIQ+” may not be familiar to some people who do not speak English as a first language, and some people with diverse sexualities and gender identities from these communities may not identify with these terms.

Some languages are gendered to a much greater extent than English, and issues of defining one’s identity can be much more complex than use of third person personal pronouns. It is important to work with bilingual and bicultural community members to work through these issues.

This response refers to LGBTIQ+ communities as a group because in many cases, asexual and aromantic people identify as part of LGBTIQ+ communities. As a whole-of-government strategy, the forthcoming LGBTIQ+ Strategy would benefit from an inclusive approach to addressing all members of LGBTIQ+ communities.