



BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING

Submission to:

House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Family, Community,
Housing and Youth inquiry into the
impact of violence on young
Australians.

October 2009

Extract from a Report made to ACON's Anti-Violence Project:

Location of Incident – suburb → Darlinghurst

Location specification → Oxford Street

Type of Incident → Physical assault

What happened →

Victim was walking along Oxford Street (after leaving the Oxford Hotel and en route toward the Midnight Shift) when four men attacked him from behind near a convenience store. Victim was first hit in the back of the head. He stumbled forward and was then hit again. Victim fell over and, in a state of shock, picked himself up and tried to retaliate. He was then attacked again and perpetrators bashed him unconscious.

What was said by the perpetrator(s) → “Take that, you f**cking poofter”

This extract comes from a report of the brutal bashing of Sydney man Craig Gee in Darlinghurst, made to ACON's Anti-Violence Project in December 2007. ACON's Anti-Violence Project receives around 100 reports of violence, harassment and bullying annually.

This incident, and others like it, sends shockwaves through the Australian gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities. While this incident is an extreme example, homophobic violence, bullying and harassment occur in varying ways and in a variety of settings – in our schools, on our streets, on line, and even in our homes.

The impacts go beyond those for the individual and reinforce for many the need to dress differently, behave differently and for some, may serve as an additional barrier to 'coming out'. For the GLBT community, the fear of violence, bullying and harassment is real; particularly because **85 percent** of people in our community have experienced some form of homophobic violence.

These are the reasons ACON makes this submission.

About ACON

ACON (formerly known as the AIDS Council of NSW) was formed in 1985 as part of the community response to the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Australia. Today, ACON is Australia's largest community-based gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) health and HIV/AIDS organisation. ACON provides information, support and advocacy for the GLBT community and people living with or at risk of acquiring HIV, including sex workers and people who use drugs.

ACON is home to the Lesbian Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP), the Community Support Network (CSN), the Positive Living Centre (PLC) and the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP). ACON has its head office in Sydney as well as branches in the Illawarra, Northern Rivers, the Hunter region and the Mid North Coast.

ACON has two youth specific projects, *Fun and Esteem* working with young same-sex attracted men up to the age of 26, and the *Young Women's project* working with young same-sex attracted women up to the age of 26. These two projects use peer education to educate and support young people to improve their health through harm minimisation strategies and building personal resilience.

The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project

The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) initially started in 1991 as a result of the report *Streetwatch* published by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby in 1990. Since 2000, the AVP has been a part of ACON.

The AVP maintains a Violence Report Line in order to monitor levels, locations, and types of violence being experienced by members of our community. The Report Line receives an average of 91 reports annually, although for some years, this number has been as high as 145 (2004). Approximately 20% of these reports are from women and 80% from men. Verbal abuse accounts for the largest number of reports to the AVP (340 incidences), however harassment/intimidation (223) and physical assault (205) reports were also reported in very high numbers.

The AVP provides support and referrals for victims of violence related issues, including:

- One-off incidents and ongoing abuse
- Verbal and/or physical abuse
- Domestic violence in same-sex relationships
- Homophobic abuse and violence within the family
- Service providers seeking support and information

The AVP delivers an annual average of 500 individual occasions of services relation to support and referrals for victims of violence. In addition to individual support and advocacy to improve the outcomes for victims, the AVP works to address the underlying causes of violence by:

- Developing anti-homophobia public education initiatives
- Promoting anti-homophobia education in schools
- Educating the GLBT community about keeping safe, including providing self defence classes

- Lobbying relevant authorities for better services for our community
- Working closely with police, government and community organisations on a range of violence prevention initiatives

General Comments

Violence experienced in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community continues to be higher than violence experienced in the general community. According to a report by the NSW Attorney General's Department, 85% of the GLBT community in NSW have experienced homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in their lives.¹ Furthermore 56% of the GLBT community in NSW have experienced homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in the past 12 months.² A large National study into same-sex attracted people reported that 44% experienced verbal abuse and 16% experienced physical abuse.³

Given this unacceptably widespread experience of violence in the GLBT community, it is no surprise that members of the GLBT community also feel less safe. In the NSW Attorney General's Department's report, *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*, 46% of lesbian respondents reported that they felt '*less safe than most other women*', and 65% of gay men felt less safe than most other men. For respondents aged between 20-29 years, almost three quarters reported feeling less safe.⁴

In the context of an evidence base indicating high rates of violence perpetrated against the GLBT and same-sex attracted youth, ACON consulted GLBT and same-sex attracted young people in three locations to allow same-sex attracted young people to discuss their experiences and thoughts about violence. In October 2009, 39 young people were consulted in three locations across Sydney to provide specific input to this submission. Some of their stories appear later in this submission. This is in addition to ACON's broad expertise in almost 25 years of working with the GLBT community, including through the AVP and youth projects.

Concern about violence against GLBT and same-sex attracted people exist across the general community. Both community based and mainstream media outlets have reported on these issues, highlighting the significant level of community concern about these issues (See attachments A and B for recent media articles).

Violence Against Same-Sex Attracted Youth

Violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth in Australia still occurs in a context of homophobia, discrimination and prejudice. Young people are particularly vulnerable to homophobia because they often do not yet have the skills or resources to remove themselves from harmful situations. This can be particularly damaging if homophobic abuse is experienced in multiple environments, such as at school, at home and in the street. This leaves no safe place for same-sex attracted young people, leading to a much more complete form of isolation and causing a state of fear. In fact, settings where

¹ NSW Attorney General's Department, *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*, (2003), p. i.

² *Ibid.*

³ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *Writing Themselves In Again: 6 years on The 2nd national report on the sexuality, health & well-being of same sex attracted young people in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, (2005), p. 35.

⁴ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

violence can occur are diverse, including in education institutions, at home, in the street and on the Internet.

The context of discrimination and prejudice is also a barrier for same-sex attracted young people in accessing services. This is of particular concern if they perceive that figures of authority are homophobic or do not care about homophobic abuse, for example their teachers, their counsellors or their religious leaders.⁵

The violence same-sex attracted young people experience can include verbal abuse, bullying, harassment, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Verbal abuse is the most common form of homophobic abuse, it can include name calling, insults, threats and rumour spreading.⁶ Much of this abuse is upsetting to the victims and is perpetrated by other students.⁷ Physical abuse can include damage to a person's property, bodily harm, rape, often resulting in hospitalisation and even sometimes death.

Young people who identify as or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender fear violence due to their sexuality or gender identity at very high rates.⁸ A report from the NSW Attorney General's Department found that young people were particularly concerned about the relationship of violence and their appearance. Some young people "agreed that the amount of abuse experienced from strangers has a lot to do with how visible an individual is as lesbian or gay. Someone who fits a stereotypical image will be 'more visible' and thus more vulnerable to abuse."⁹

*'So much is about how we look. What does a lesbian look like?'*¹⁰

The report also commented:

'However, one participant pointed out that whilst you can select your clothes in the hope of being safe from homophobia, there are many things about your appearance that you cannot change so easily. Another suggested that lesbians and gay men are always having to weigh up the cost of violence against the cost of losing their sense of self'¹¹

The figures from ACON's AVP presented earlier in this submission highlight the enormous impact violence and other homophobic behaviours have on same-sex attracted young people. This work within ACON receives very little support in terms of funding. ACON has experience in partnering with other organisations to prevent violence as well as providing psychosocial support for victims of violence in our community. This experience and ACON's unique placement makes ACON a perfect partner for government to deliver properly funded initiatives in this important area. Attachments C, D and E provides a few examples of the AVP's resources.

⁵ L Hillier & A Mitchell, *Why Homophobia needs to be named in bullying policy*, Australian Research Centre in Health, Sex and Society, La Trobe University, at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/assets/downloads/Homophobic%20bullying.pdf> (accessed 19 October 2009).

⁶ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁹ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

In Education Institutions

A total of 74% of respondents to *Writing Themselves in Again* who have suffered abuse experienced at least one incident at school.¹² For respondents aged 14-17, the figure increased to almost 9 out of 10.¹³ The experience of violence in schools was mirrored in a report from the NSW Attorney General's Department in 2003, with participants expressing:

'People in high school were the worst'

'There was very overt bullying in my school'

'There was this graffiti that said "X is a lesbian. Beware"'

*'I got lots of harassment, at a boys' Catholic school. I got spat on, ball bearings thrown at me, names engraved on the wall, work graffitied on. A boy above me had committed suicide and the assumption was that it was because of homophobia. The school counsellor said: "Don't come out."'*¹⁴

In the consultations conducted by ACON, schools were also raised as a location of homophobic violence:

'At school I think it's a really big thing, homophobia at school. Being picked on for being effeminate, it affects you. You ask "is there something wrong with me? Why can't I be the way I am?'

- Penrith consultation participant

Violence against young people can occur in many different forms. The impact of verbal abuse, bullying and harassment are just as serious as physical and sexual abuse. The subtleties of violence in the school environment can include socially isolating an individual, which can cause lasting mental health issues.

'When I did come out, like I pretty much felt ostracised afterwards. I would see these people fairly regularly before, and when I did come out... one guy who I was friends with didn't even shake my hand'

- Penrith consultation participant

Physical abuse was also present in schools. 15% of respondents to *Writing Themselves in Again* experienced physical violence, a majority in schools.¹⁵ *Writing Themselves in Again* identified the school toilets was a site for homophobic violence:

'School – Daily bashing, taste testing of the urinals or making sure people's shit was the right colour'

- (Kevin, 17 years)¹⁶

'I was cornered in the school toilets and three guys took turns punching the shit out of me'

- (Tristan 18 years)¹⁷

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Other areas of the school were also sites of homophobic violence:

'Pushed down the stairs and into a wall at high school'

- (Tori, 20 years)¹⁸

'One guy threatened to kill me and I found that I had to stop going out in case the person was there! They were very abusive and I know that the person would bash people up for no reason at all! This guy and his brother both sorta pushed me around and ruined yr9[sic] and yr 10 for me!'

- (Tyron, 16 years)¹⁹

'My bed at boarding school was pissed on. I was subjected to other guys pretending to have sex with me. Broomsticks inserted in my anus.'

- (Hugh, 21 years)²⁰

Although there are very obvious forms of prejudice based violence in school settings, there is an inconsistent response from staff and the school community. Young people talked about teachers ignoring homophobic abuse and not taking it as seriously as they would racist or sexist abuse.²¹ There is a perception that some teachers will help, but that it is out of the norm and going beyond the call of duty to do so.

'Teachers just ignore it... clearly gay remarks, [teachers] just ignore it or let it [go] by, don't even stop it. They seem to ignore it and don't acknowledge it unless they're forced to.'

- UTS consultation participant

'At school I had one amazing teacher, she was there, she put me on to the counsellor, it was up to the teacher who went beyond her job.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Teachers often do not have the skills to be able to address homophobic violence the same way that they can address racist or sexist violence. However, it may also be the case that teachers may share homophobic attitudes or fear being stigmatised if they "stick up" for same-sex attracted young people, especially if not supported by school policies.²² Participants at the UNSW consultation commented that "*Teachers don't know how to handle it*" and suggested that training was required for teachers and counsellors.

The impact of violence, harassment and social isolation can create an environment where homophobic violence is acceptable or even expected. This can lead to more violence and abuse as well as an escalation of violence and abuse. Some students who do not hold these views may internalise the homophobia and perpetrate homophobic violence due to peer pressure.

When homophobic violence is perpetrated within the school but not addressed by the school, this can lead to an elevated fear for GLBT students that it may happen to them next. For example, the homophobic environment at school lead to feelings of "anger" and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40, Penrith consultation, UTS consultation, UNSW consultation

²² L Hillier & A Mitchell, *op. cit.*,

“anxiety” in a consultation participant.²³ The fear of homophobic abuse can often lead to many people hiding their sexuality.²⁴

‘I did feel the pressure, “like a ton of bricks” to sleep with women. It just got too much, it was hard, it was really difficult.’

- Penrith consultation participant

For many, schools are a safe environment to learn, develop and be themselves, and this also should be the case for same-sex attracted youth. This is particularly important because same-sex attracted youth may face homophobia, rejection and violence at home, in religious institutions or in the community. Schools often can be the only place of refuge.

At Home

Violence at home can come from parents, siblings, relatives and/or partners.

Incidents of violence from parents were more rare. Two incidents were reported in *Writing Themselves in Again*:

‘My father and stepmother... believed that I wouldn’t be gay if they knocked it out of me, quite literally used to slam my head against the wall, gave me a headache, but I’m still gay.’

- (Miriam, 19 years)²⁵

‘Got smashed by my dad.’

- (Owen, 15 years)²⁶

Verbal abuse from family members were also reported:

““You fucking faggot” – from my brother

- (Keith, 20 years)²⁷

‘My dad went psycho at me when I yelled it to him in an argument, it was the only way I can tell him.’

- Penrith consultation participant

Although abuse from family members is reported to occur less frequently than abuse from elsewhere, the impact is much more significant. What family members say or do is often more hurtful and upsetting.²⁸ Furthermore, for many same-sex attracted youth, their family and their home is not an environment that they can avoid or escape from due to the fact that young people do not have the economic or social capacity to safely move out of home.

Also it is evident that fear of violence associated with sexuality also impacts same-sex attracted youth in the home.

²³ Penrith consultation participant.

²⁴ 70% in an Victorian study hid their sexuality at school, W Leonard, A Mitchell, S Patel, C Fox, *Coming Forward: The underreporting of heterosexist violence and same-sex partner abuse in Victoria*, Australian Research Centre in Health, Sex and Society, La Trobe University, (2008), p. v.

²⁵ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

'Fear of violence in their family if they come out to their family.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Young people in relationships may also be at risk of domestic violence from their partners.²⁹ Research shows that the level of domestic violence is similar to heterosexual relationships, however certain aspects such as the threat of outing, and the fear of discrimination in services distinguishes same-sex domestic violence from other forms of domestic violence.

Street Based Violence

In a report from the NSW Attorney General's Department, almost one third (29%) of the most recent incidents of violence occurred in the street.³⁰ In a national study on same-sex attracted young people, almost half experienced violence in the street.³¹ Street-based violence can include both physical and verbal violence.

'My partner and I were displaying affection to each other, some guys noticed that and some started abusing us. We jumped in a car, and they also jumped in their car and three cars pursued us. When we stopped at red lights, they would jump out and kicked and trash our car. [We] called police but they were ineffective, we felt isolated.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I was victimised on the bus, some guy next to me, started making comments, physically grabbing me, shaking me, screaming vitriol in my face. Ended up with the bus physically being stopped. I wasn't doing anything, only my appearance was enough to provoke something life threatening.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I was at the world youth day protests, and a pilgrim attacked me. I made it on the news and that's how my mum found out I was gay.'

- UTS consultation participant

The case of Aaron and Greg was widely reported in the gay media. Aaron (21) and Greg (27) were attacked by a group of men with bottles and metal poles, calling them "fucking faggots".³² Aaron "spent two weeks in Blacktown Hospital with a fractured skull and bleeding on the brain. He could not walk or talk, had migraines, ongoing vomiting and intense sensitivity to light and noise."³³ Aaron was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and is still recovering from the physical and psychological impacts of the attack.³⁴

ACON and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (NSW) conducted a community forum regarding the review of the *Charter of Victims Rights* by the NSW Government in August

²⁹ W Leonard, A Mitchell, S Patel et al, *op. cit.*, p. 45; ACON, *Fair's Fair: A snapshot of violence and abuse in Sydney LGBT relationships 2006*, p. 13.

³⁰ NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³¹ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 39

³² *Sydney Star Observer*, (25 August 2009), at <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/2009/08/25/gay-basher-walking-free/15492>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*; ACON and Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (NSW) Charter of Victims Rights community forum, (26 August 2009).

2009. Aaron and Greg, along with other community members attended this forum. The forum participants highlighted the creation of fear and concern in the community that share the identity of Aaron and Greg, an identity for which they were attacked for.

Hate crimes can also cause lasting physical as well as psychological harm to young people, especially during a period of their lives when they may be confused and stressed about their own identities.

Hate crimes have a chilling effect not only on the victims, their family and friends, but also on the entire community who's identity was the basis for the attack. Hate crimes committed against same-sex attracted young people have contributed to many young people living in a state of fear and concern for their safety. In ACON's experience, there is widespread acknowledgement that the fear of homophobic violence is always felt, and this is often manifested in them modifying their behaviour to what they think is the "norm".

'Can't underestimate how big that [fear] is, your relationship is actually being affected by the invisible threat of violence.'

- UNSW consultation participant

'I always get nervous, ingrained modification of behaviour.'

- UTS consultation participant

'I still can't go to a Penrith Panthers game. I feel scared. I don't want to put myself in a situation where someone who knows I am gay is going to be there.'

- Penrith consultation participant

'I rejected [public] displays of affection. I always have to be conscious.'

- UNSW consultation participant

The right to safety of young people is a right that should not be compromised due to sexual identity. ACON's position is that public safety includes individuals being safe whilst being who they are. Safety that only exist if same-sex attracted young people have to pretend is an illusionary safety and still causes fear and stress for these young people.

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

The emergence and popularity of internet based communication such as social networking sites (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter etc.), internet chat programs (MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Google Chat etc.) and email have lead to increased opportunities for the perpetration of homophobic abuse on the internet.

Cyber bullying can cause significant mental stress, especially if it is continued over a significant period of time and/or multiple individuals are targeting the victim.

'In year 12 when I came out, we had a web forum. If ever I mentioned I found a guy attractive, it was like "go and do it in your own thread [discussion space]". Small things that kept going. It was run by year 12 students, it wasn't something that you can take to the school.'

- UNSW consultation participant

Cyber-bullying often occurs without any supervision from adults, and online forms of communication are often not moderated adequately to remove homophobic threats, vilification or incitements to violence.

Homophobic abuse on the internet can also incite or result in homophobic violence being perpetrated beyond the internet. The Anti-Discrimination Board in NSW has “warned that statewide violence is being fuelled by an increasing number of homophobic websites run by Australians.”³⁵

Impacts of Violence on Same-Sex Attracted Youth

Apart from direct impacts of violence, the experience of verbal and physical abuse significantly decreases the feeling of safety for same-sex attracted youth.³⁶ A report from La Trobe University states that having experienced verbal abuse or physical abuse dramatically increased the likelihood of self harm, in a sample of 1750 same-sex attracted youths, having experienced verbal abuse doubled the likelihood of self harm, and having experienced physical abuse tripled the likelihood of self harm.³⁷ This is consistent with much higher numbers of attempted suicide and self harm reported for the GLBT community³⁸ when considering the higher levels of violence experienced by the GLBT community.

‘When so many people tell you how disgusting you are, you start to feel disgusting and at many times in my life, I know I have wanted to turn my back on the person looking back at me in the mirror. When it got particularly bad I used to scratch patterns in my face until it bled out of disgust for myself.’

- (Aiden, 19 years)³⁹

‘I tried to kill myself because I was so badly teased at school for being a lesbian.. it never ended and I got severe depression and I saw no other way to be happy, I was in hospital for 2 months trying to control my depression and because doctors thought I would hurt myself again if they let me out and it also forced me to drop out of school.’

- (Claudia, 16 years)⁴⁰

Violence against same-sex attracted youth also has an impact on drug and alcohol use, with a significant increase in the rate of drug and alcohol use for same-sex attracted young people who have experienced verbal abuse and even higher rate of use for those who have been physically abused.⁴¹

This submission has already mentioned the impact of violence in creating fear, and the constant modification of behaviour by same-sex attracted youth to avoid violence.

The impact of homophobic violence and fear of violence can result in physical harm, social isolation and psychological harm. These factors can also lead to depression, suicidal ideation, self-harm and suicide.

³⁵ Sydney Morning Herald, *Websites fuel hate crimes*, 15 June 2009

³⁶ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁸ Suicide Prevention Australia, *Position Statement: Suicide and self-harm among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities*, (2009), p. 2.

³⁹ L Hillier, A Turner, A Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44

Strategies and Responses to Reduce Violence and its Impacts

Data collection

The vast majority of data collection at both the national and state level does not include sexuality indicators, making it very difficult for researchers and policy makers to consider the evidence for, and design programs in response to issues affecting GLBT and same sex attracted populations. This gap in the evidence base exists across health, criminal justice and other portfolios relevant to this inquiry.

Also the collection of homophobic abuse and hate crimes reported to state police are not all recorded or reported to a national authority.

Although research and studies conducted outside of policing have provided some insight into violence against Same-sex attracted youth, having statistics from police jurisdictions across Australia in relation to hate crimes would present a much fuller picture. Statistics can then thus be analysed and provide future directions for policy.

Recommendation

1. All routine and one off national data collections should include a sexuality indicator to address this unacceptable gap in the evidence base.
2. All Governments implement data capture strategies to accurately record and report statistics to the Australian Institute of Criminology, and for the AIC to be funded to analyse and publicly report this information.

National Strategy

As this submission has pointed out, the scale of homophobic violence is widespread and is causing significant physical and psychological harm. While ACON is aware of the NSW Government's strategy to reduce violence in the GLBT community (*Working Together: Preventing violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people*), there is currently not a consistent approach in addressing homophobic violence at a national level. In many cases, there is not stated plan for reducing such violence.

General approaches to crime prevention and anti-violence programs are welcome, however given the gravity of the impact, specific focussed attention is required to reduce violence against GLBT people.

Leadership from the Commonwealth Government in the context of crime prevention and social inclusion is necessary for coordinated action in this important area.

Recommendation:

3. That the Commonwealth Government develops and funds a strategy to reduce violence against the GLBT community and the impact of such violence.
4. That new and existing crime prevention, social inclusion and other relevant strategies and programs identify the GLBT community as a priority group.

In Education Institutions

Much of the homophobic violence that occurs in schools and many examples of street-based violence are perpetrated by young people between 20 to 29 years.⁴² This makes schools key institutions for reducing violence against Same-sex attracted young people.

Educational settings are critically important in the development of attitudes and beliefs of young people. The recognition of early life transition points experienced in adolescent years can fundamentally affect young peoples' views about themselves, as well as others in the community.

Schools need to create a safe environment for same-sex attracted youth. This can be facilitated by the development of a clear, well understood (by staff and students) and enforced policy around anti-homophobic violence has been identified as necessary by many consultation participants. This can be in the form of an anti-bullying policy that covers GLBT specific abuse, or a specific policy that targets GLBT related abuse.

'Policies for schools, should be followed up and enforced.'

- Penrith consultation participant

'There should be negative consequences for perpetrators doing the actions. They're the ones that need to be scared.'

- UTS consultation participant

Training for teachers and staff is key in ensuring that staff can identify and address homophobic attitudes and/or violence, as well as to provide support to students who have experienced homophobic violence.

By teachers and schools setting an example that homophobic abuse is not acceptable, this will challenge some of the views held by perpetrators and abusers. The school curriculum is another area in which prejudices can be challenged and examined so that diversity and inclusivity are supported and encouraged. Many young people consulted by ACON wanted GLBT issues to be covered in a range of classes including personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE) and history. By presenting the existence of GLBT people and the positive contributions they have made, it can provide affirmation to the student that is depressed about his/her sexuality as well as to discourage homophobia.

'Teach in history, there are same-sex attracted people in each every era.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Recommendations:

5. The Commonwealth Government consider gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in the development of a national curriculum.
6. The Commonwealth Government requires schools to have anti-homophobic abuse policies in place and for schools to enforce these policies. These policies can be GLBT specific or as a part of an anti-bullying policy.
7. The appropriate inter-governmental committees consider a range of actions that can serve to reduce violence and homophobic attitudes toward GLBT people.

⁴² NSW Attorney General's Department, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

8. The Commonwealth Government provide leadership in this area by funding a national youth based anti-homophobia education campaign and cooperating with the State and Territory governments through the appropriate intergovernmental committee.

Anti-Discrimination

Violence against same-sex attracted youth that are motivated by discriminatory attitudes and prejudices need to be challenged. The Commonwealth Government has an opportunity to clearly state that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is not acceptable in Australia by passing legislation to that effect.

The current gap in anti-discrimination protections suggest that although the Commonwealth Government considers it inappropriate to prejudice people on the grounds of race, sex, disability and age, it is acceptable to prejudice people on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.

A federal anti-discrimination law should also prohibit vilification and harassment to directly address the verbal abuse, bullying and harassment that is experienced by same-sex attracted youth. Such a mechanism would allow an opportunity for young people to not accept the abuse that is committed and challenge the abuse.

Any federal anti-discrimination legislation need to apply to all schools (public and private) given the importance of the school environment in social and emotional development and the necessity to ensure a consistent anti-homophobia message to all young people.

The government now has an opportunity to build on the same-sex reforms passed earlier this year to legislate for full equality for same-sex relationships. Participants felt that it was important for the Commonwealth Government to affirm that same-sex attracted youth are of equal worth and value and therefore deserve the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts.

'We need same-sex marriage, currently it implies that we are less than and are not equal to heterosexual people. People see that is the case, people will think it is ok to bash or verbally abuse gay people. Once same-sex marriage is allowed, it will have an impact for kids in schools. I think it will be a big helpful affirmation.'

- Penrith consultation participant

Recommendations:

9. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation prohibiting discrimination and vilification on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.
10. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation that legalises and recognises marriages between two adults regardless of sex or gender.

Services

A number of services are required for victims of homophobic abuse to assist them in preventing, escaping and recovering from abusive situations.

Programs that visit schools to discuss issues of sexuality and violence can assist in students placing a real person to the victims of violence and the consequences of homophobic abuse. This can also normalise the existence of same-sex attracted youth and assist in changing homophobic attitudes and prejudices.

Services that provide support for same-sex attracted young people through counselling, group therapy, capacity building and emergency housing are currently underfunded and cannot provide services to all those who need it. To ensure that the negative impacts of homophobic abuse are minimised, support services are crucial.

Recommendations:

11. All Governments prioritise the provision of prevention programs and support services to reduce homophobic violence and the impact of homophobic violence against young people.

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

As more and more communication and social networking happens online, there is a need for education about the internet safely and providing services that can assist in addressing cyber-bullying.

Recommendations:

12. The Commonwealth Government fund services that educate young people about internet safety.
13. Given the rapidly increasing popularity and reach of social networking internet sites, the Commonwealth Government prioritise the funding of services that address cyber bullying.

List of Recommendations

1. All routine and one off national data collections should include a sexuality indicator to address this unacceptable gap in the evidence base.
2. All Governments implement data capture strategies to accurately record and report statistics to the Australian Institute of Criminology, and for the AIC to be funded to analyse and publicly report this information.
3. That the Commonwealth Government develops and funds a strategy to reduce violence against the GLBT community and the impact of such violence.
4. That new and existing crime prevention, social inclusion and other relevant strategies and programs identify the GLBT community as a priority group.
5. The Commonwealth Government consider gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues in the development of a national curriculum.
6. The Commonwealth Government requires schools to have anti-homophobic abuse policies in place and for schools to enforce these policies. These policies can be GLBT specific or as a part of an anti-bullying policy.
7. The appropriate inter-governmental committees consider a range of actions that can serve to reduce violence and homophobic attitudes toward GLBT people.
8. The Commonwealth Government provide leadership in this area by funding a national youth based anti-homophobia education campaign and cooperating with the State and Territory governments through the appropriate intergovernmental committee.
9. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation prohibiting discrimination and vilification on the grounds of sexuality and gender identity.
10. The Commonwealth Government passes legislation that legalises and recognises marriages between two adults regardless of sex or gender.
11. All Governments prioritise the provision of prevention programs and support services to reduce homophobic violence and the impact of homophobic violence against young people.
12. The Commonwealth Government fund services that educate young people about internet safety.
13. Given the rapidly increasing popularity and reach of social networking internet sites, the Commonwealth Government prioritise the funding of services that address cyber bullying.

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