

# LGBTIQ Policy



## *Introduction*

**Baptcare recognises that there are a wide range of challenges facing members of the community who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ) and/or identify as a gender which does not match their sex assigned at birth.**

In order to be fully included in society as whole and healthy human beings, Baptcare believes that access to services in accordance with their level of need is a fundamental right for all Australians.

However, Baptcare, the community sector and government have become increasingly aware that persons who identify as LGBTIQ face barriers to accessing relevant services. Baptcare recognises that extra efforts are needed to deliver LGBTIQ-inclusive care to this group. As a provider of aged care and family and children's services in Victoria and Tasmania, we are committed as an organisation to a process of listening and dialogue, and embedding LGBTIQ-inclusive practices so that LGBTIQ Australians of all ages across the life spectrum have access to welcoming, safe and quality care.

## *History and background*

Prior to the gay liberation movement on the 1970's and 1980's, diverse sexual orientations were not affirmed in society. Many LGBTIQ people have lived through a time when their only protection against discrimination, harassment, arrest and violence was to make themselves invisible and to publicly deny their sexual orientation and gender identity. During this era, their sense of self was shaped by the dominant medical, legal and religious institutions of their youth that defined them as sick, criminal or immoral (Barrett et al, 2014). Homophobic discrimination and abuse had devastating impacts on the lives, health and relationships of LGBTIQ people of all ages.

The Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) state that 'Human rights are basic entitlements belonging to every person regardless of their beliefs, gender, sexuality, race, religion, background, and physical capabilities. Human rights are based on the values of freedom, equality, respect and dignity, and acknowledge the fundamental worth of each person.' The Victorian Human Rights Charter places responsibilities on government to consider people's rights when developing laws, policies and delivering services (VCOSS, 2017).

Unfortunately, within the Australian community LGBTIQ people have traditionally faced barriers and systemic limitations on their ability to receive appropriate care and services. Further, there is a growing recognition among researchers, the health and community sectors and government that the needs of LGBTIQ people have received limited attention in the planning and delivery of services.

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### *Current context and situation*

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Research on LGBTIQ people have identified a range of core issues that need to be addressed if they are to have access to their rights for care. Examples of such issues relate to the impact of historical discrimination and trauma for those who grew up in an age where their sexuality/gender identity was labelled a mental illness, immoral, or even treated as a criminal offence by law. There is also a lack of confidence within LGBTIQ communities that the health and welfare sector which assumes heterosexuality in its attitudes and practices will not accept them, meet their needs, nor understand their concerns; as well as strong fears around confidentiality and disclosure.

Across the life spectrum, other issues affecting the LGBTI community relate to a range of complex health issues including; higher rates of mental health problems, depression and suicide rates (particularly amongst youth, during a critical time of puberty, sexual formation and development), legal rights and issues, loneliness, isolation, family rejection, bullying in the workplace and at school. Further, those LGBTIQ persons who come from migrant or cultural backgrounds (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and others) may face greater adversity in terms of shame, fear of disclosure and personal safety.

Those who come from rural areas may find there is less tolerance to diversity, more homophobia and reduced social networks. In Australia today, while there has been more tolerance towards same sex partnerships and parent families, there is no formal recognition of gay marriage in Australia.

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### *Baptcare's Mission & Christian Witness*

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Baptcare's Vision is "Communities where every person is cherished" which articulates an aspiration for Baptcare to nurture communities in their entirety, developing and delivering services inclusively to all members. This Vision is inspired by Jesus who routinely went out of his way to ensure that those without a voice or a place in their community were reinstated with dignity.

Baptcare's Mission is "Partnering for fullness of life with people of all ages, cultures, beliefs and circumstances". Our focus is on working with everyone who needs support to enable them to achieve their goals, regardless of their identity and how they mediate it. To this end we work at both the individual and community levels to facilitate the best outcomes for people who encounter our services.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together." Our society is weakened when we don't acknowledge or serve all its members including those who have historically been marginalised like the LGBTIQ community. Baptcare is committed to partnering with the LGBTIQ community to ensure that its services are accessible and welcoming of LGBTIQ people.



## *A better future / what needs to change*

The starting place for building inclusive care is to understand the 'cycle of invisibility' that surrounded LGBTIQ issues in the community sector and until recently, legal reform. The 'cycle of invisibility' (as described by Harrison et al 2013) can be represented as:



Research of LGBTIQ people found that what they value in a service provider includes the use of inclusive language, a non-judgemental approach, a focus on developing trust, being known as LGBTIQ-friendly, staff trained in LGBTIQ competency (as well as cultural competency more generally), LGBTIQ welcome symbols on signage and websites which reflect genuine understanding and inclusiveness (not just as a business strategy). Inclusiveness must be visible and proactive.

As a provider of family and community services and aged care, Baptcare is committed to the equality of outcomes for people of all ages across the life spectrum and is therefore committed to LGBTIQ-inclusive practice. Baptcare will ensure this via service audits, staff training, the use of inclusive language in communications and procedures, consumer engagement, and dialogue with the wider LGBTIQ community.

Baptcare's policies in this area include a commitment to diversity awareness and sensitivity in our relationship with aged care residents, families and children, employees and volunteers; policies on social inclusion and on equal opportunity; and the prohibition of discrimination, harassment and abuse on the basis of personal attributes, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

Baptcare strives to provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive space for all people identifying as LGBTIQ so they may confidently access their right to quality care and service provision. By doing so this will help the LGBTIQ community fulfil healthy, happy and wholesome lives based on acceptance and inclusion.





## Policy position

- 1 Baptcare affirms that access to quality support services is a fundamental human right of all Australians.
- 2 Baptcare recognises diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity as one of many diversities within our population. Baptcare is committed to equality of outcomes for all and therefore is committed to LGBTIQ-inclusive practice.
- 3 Baptcare recognises with regret, the trauma and discrimination LGBTIQ people have experienced via the medical, legal and religious systems and the impacts this had on their lives and wellbeing. In contrast, Baptcare desires to provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive space for LGBTIQ people so they may confidently access vital support services.
- 4 Baptcare assures our Baptist stakeholders that we affirm our faith basis and spiritual dynamics of grace through our hospitality, our Mission and Vision, and LGBTIQ-inclusive practices.
- 5 As an aged care and community services provider in Victoria and Tasmania, Baptcare is committed to continuous improvement in inclusive care. Baptcare will ensure this via service audits, staff training, the use of inclusive language in communications and procedures, consumer engagement, and dialogue with the wider LGBTIQ community.

## References

**Alford, M., Harrison, J & Baldwin, J.** (2013). 'Breaking the silence: dementia and the LGBTI community', *Australian Journal of dementia Care*, April/May 2013, Vol 2, No 2, pp22-25.

**Barrett, C; Whyte, C; Leonard, W. and Comfort, J.** (2014). *No Need to Straighten Up: Discrimination, depression and anxiety in older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex Australians*. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

**Victorian Council of Social Services.** (2017). *Policy position: Human Right – Our View*. <http://www.vocoss.org.au/social-justice/human-rights>. Viewed 14 May 2017.

Baptcare is a customer focused, faith centred and purpose driven organisation working across Victoria and Tasmania, providing residential and community care for older people and support to children, families, and people with disability, financially disadvantaged people and people seeking asylum.