

VHA Board and staff support marriage equality

20 September 2017

As the peak body representing Victorian public health services including public hospitals, community health services and aged care providers, the Board and employees of the Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) support members to deliver equitable access and health outcomes to their communities regardless of diverse and specific needs and orientations.

A disproportionate number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) Australians experience poorer mental health outcomes and have a higher risk of suicidal behaviours than the broader community¹. These health outcomes are attributable to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The VHA considers that public health and policy have an important role to play in supporting healthy communities and that marriage equality is a powerful public health strategy to improve the health of LGBTIQ people, reduce societal and individual stigma, and discrimination. This view is supported by international literature, which confirms that marriage equality has positive effects and improves the health outcomes of LGBTIQ people².

Research conducted in the United States found that LGBTIQ people living in states where same-sex marriage is banned are more likely than their counterparts in other states to report symptoms of depression, anxiety, and alcohol use disorder³.

The VHA believes in inclusion, supports diversity, and recognises that all Australians should have the right to have their relationship recognised under the Marriage Act 1961, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. While the marriage equality debate continues, the VHA urges that all involved in dialogue not lose sight of the health and wellbeing of the LGBTIQ community, their family and friends.

¹ National LGBTI Health Alliance 2016, 'Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTI people', <http://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/> cited 20/09/2017

² Kealy-Bateman, W, & Pryor, L 2015, 'Marriage equality is a mental health issue', *Australasian Psychiatry*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 540-543, doi: 10.1177/1039856215592318

³ Hatzenbuehler M, McLaughlin K, Keyes K, & Hasin D 2010, 'The Impact of Institutional Discrimination on Psychiatric Disorders in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: A Prospective Study', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 100, no. 3, pp. 452-459, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.168815