



## Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Dear Registrar

### **Inquest into the death of Bridget Erin Flack – COR 2020 006727**

I write in response to the findings made by Coroner Giles on 29 August 2024 into the passing of Bridget Erin Flack, and recommendations made to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (**department**).

Coroner Giles made two recommendations that require a response from the department.

I provide the following responses to each recommendation on behalf of the department and note these are framed in alignment with the delivery of the Victorian Government's *Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022-32* (**LGBTIQ+ strategy**).

Launched in 2022, the LGBTIQ+ strategy provides the framework and 10-year vision to improve the disproportionately poorer outcomes experienced by Victorian LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities, including trans and gender diverse (**TGD**) communities. The responses focus on two of the LGBTIQ+ strategy's four priority areas for action:

- Priority area 2: Equitable, inclusive and accessible services
- Priority area 4: Safe, strong and sustainable communities.

I also acknowledge the Department of Health has released the Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy 2024-2034, which is a call-to-action to the entire Victorian community to unite to reduce the incidence and impact of suicide and suicide-related stigma over the next decade. The strategy is accompanied by an accountability framework and rolling implementations plans (the first of which covers a two-year period from 2024-26). It emphasizes the need for compassionate and responsive systems that actively prevent suicidal distress, particularly for groups disproportionately affected by suicide, such as LGBTIQ+ communities. The department will work closely with the Department of Health to

ensure both Pride in our future and the Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy 2024-2034 work in concert to address barriers and overlapping forms of discrimination, stigma and power imbalances based on characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation and identity.

I note these responses should be read in conjunction with the response from the Department of Health, as the services and supports described are designed to be mutually reinforcing and provide comprehensive, wrap-around supports for TGD Victorians.

#### **Recommendation five**

**That the Victorian Department of Health as lead, in conjunction with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and any other relevant Victorian Government departments, consider urgently increasing resourcing to meet the growing demand for publicly funded health services delivering gender-affirming care to TGD patients, in order to reduce the current waitlists and to support and expand the existing health workforce delivering such care. The Department may consider whether this should involve revision of the existing framework for delivery of gender-affirming healthcare and supports to TGD Victorians.**

The department supports this recommendation in principle. The department is committed to working collaboratively with the Department of Health to ensure appropriate support is available for TGD patients and the workforces that support them. Implementation of the recommendation would be contingent on relevant consultation with stakeholders and future government funding and resourcing decisions.

The department recognises that the framework for delivering gender-affirming healthcare and supports to TGD Victorians extends beyond clinical medical support and includes wrap-around supports such as peer support, counselling, and allied health services. While responsibility for delivering publicly funded health services providing gender-affirming care to TGD patients sits with the Department of Health, the department is delivering aligned initiatives to improve LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in health services at a system level, such as the Rainbow Tick accreditation program for community and mental health services. The department is also delivering support to TGD people through targeted programs at the community level. These programs help meet the specific needs of TGD communities by providing peer and social supports directly to TGD people across all stages of their gender affirmation journey, independent of whether they are pursuing a medical transition pathway.

*The following system and community level initiatives are being delivered through the LGBTIQ+ strategy priority area 2: Equitable, inclusive and accessible services.*

#### **Statewide inclusion training and resources (\$2 million over two years from 2021-22)**

The department supported statewide training and resources commencing from 2022-23, of which \$1.85 million was allocated to Rainbow Health Australia to provide free foundational

HOW2 LGBTIQ+ inclusion training with a focus on community and mental health organisations and their workforces.

TGD Peer Support Program (\$2 million over four years from 2021-22)

The TGD Peer Support program, in partnership with Transgender Victoria, provides low and no-cost services for gender exploration and affirmation for people across all stages of their gender affirmation journey and is inclusive of the growing number of people who are not seeking medical transition. The program strengthens the health and wellbeing of TGD Victorians through mental health support, promoting community connection, championing the voices of TGD communities and building a shared sense of identity. This is an early intervention approach to help address the higher risk of acute mental health and suicidality experienced by TGD people. Continuation of this investment is contingent on government funding and resourcing decisions.

Rainbow Tick accreditation (between 160-200 services over four years from 2023-24)

The department has implemented a work program to boost the number of Rainbow Tick accredited community and mental health organisations across Victoria. Increasing the number of accredited service providers will improve safety in these settings for LGBTIQ+ people and improve access to and experiences with health services for TGD people.

**Recommendation seven**

**That the Victorian Department of Health, as lead, in conjunction with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and any other relevant Victorian Government departments, consider ongoing funding options available to ensure that TGD people and their families have appropriate access to culturally appropriate:**

- i. social and emotional wellbeing supports; and**
- ii. suicide prevention, postvention and bereavement supports, as a means by which to address the high levels of suicidality, social exclusion and mental ill health in the TGD community.**

The department supports this recommendation in principle and is actively working to improve the sustainability of the LGBTIQ+ sector. The department currently supports programs that address recommendation seven (i), with a summary of these programs provided below.

While primary responsibility for delivering recommendation seven (ii) sits with the Department of Health, the department supports the below programs that contribute to addressing “high levels of suicidality, social exclusion and mental ill health in the TGD community”. Continued delivery is contingent on program evaluation outcomes, relevant consultation and future government funding and resourcing decisions.

*The following wellbeing support and social connection initiatives are being delivered through the LGBTIQ+ strategy’s priority area 2: Equitable, inclusive and accessible services.*

### QHub (\$3.2 million over three years from 2022-23)

The QHub program supports regional Western Victoria’s young LGBTIQ+ people and their families with place-based mental health and wellbeing support services and social connection initiatives aimed at driving down rates of suicide in these areas. QHub is delivering the only LGBTIQ+ service to improve rural mental health access for LGBTIQ+ youth in Western Victoria. QHub fills a service gap as LGBTIQ+ people face complex challenges in accessing rural mental healthcare, including “discrepancies in approachability, acceptability, availability, affordability, and appropriateness of rural mental healthcare”<sup>1</sup>.

QHub’s model includes co-located services, referral services and greater access to targeted medical and emotional support for LGBTIQ+ communities. QHub also provides specialist support for neurodivergent and TGD young people’s needs – such as peer support, counselling, binding classes, and attending hormone replacement therapy appointments.

### Pride in Ageing (\$4.5 million over four years from 2023-24)

The Pride in Ageing initiative is an innovative outreach program that seeks to address the social connection needs of older LGBTIQ+ Victorians. The four-year pilot is being delivered by Switchboard, a community-based not-for-profit organisation that provides peer-driven support services for LGBTIQ+ communities. Switchboard has a high level of capability in providing safe and inclusive support for TGD people.

Work is underway with older LGBTIQ+ Victorians to co-design tailored supports to ensure they are connected, safe and live freely as their authentic selves. The program includes peer-led elements to foster increased social connection and capability-building work to improve inclusion in residential and aged care settings. The program will work with mainstream providers and local councils to ensure older LGBTIQ+ Victorians have every opportunity to age well in place.

### Grants to TGD organisations through the department

The department also delivers three grant programs: the LGBTIQ+ Sector Strengthening Program, the LGBTIQ+ Organisational Development Grants Program and the Pride Events and Festivals Fund. All Equality grant programs’ assessment criteria are weighted to prioritise funding for projects that engage with identified priority cohorts, including TGD communities. For example, in 2023-24, the department provided \$100,000 to Transcend Australia to support families by establishing a drop-in peer support space at the Royal Children Hospital’s Gender Service and \$50,000 to Transgender Victoria to support reaching regional and rural TGD communities through the LGBTIQ+ Sector Strengthening program.

*In addition, the following awareness raising initiatives to promote the inclusion of TGD Victorians are being delivered through the LGBTIQ+ strategy priority area 4: Safe, strong and sustainable communities.*

<sup>1</sup> Reynish, T.; Hoang, H.; Bridgman, H.; Nic Giolla Easpaig, B. (2023) ‘Psychological Distress, Resilience, and Help-Seeking Experiences of LGBTIQ+ People in Rural Australia’, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 20, 2842. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20042842>

The Unsaid Says A Lot (\$1.2 million over four years from 2021-22)

The department is delivering a statewide public awareness raising campaign, The Unsaid Says A Lot, and resources to promote LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The campaign focuses on the experiences of trans and gender diverse communities to raise awareness, reduce discrimination and foster acceptance. The campaign was co-designed and delivered in partnership with TGD Victorians, including a TGD commercial director and TGD actors.

To inform the campaign focus and approach, extensive market research was undertaken to understand barriers to inclusion for LGBTIQ+ people. The research showed that TGD people, in particular, are not widely understood in the broader Victorian community, which in turn presented an opportunity for a campaign to highlight the discrimination and lack of equality faced by TGD communities and raise awareness and acceptance of TGD people, including older and multicultural TGD people.

The department has also released a better practice guide in November 2024 for public and private sector agencies. The guide gives practical advice on including and empowering TGD people in all aspects of public awareness campaign development and implementation to influence inclusion and positive change across a wide range of industries.

While there is more work to do as evidenced by these recommendations, the department through the LGBTIQ+ strategy is:

- delivering system and community level initiatives and wellbeing support and social connection initiatives to support TGD people and communities through Priority area 2
- delivering awareness raising initiatives to promote inclusion of TGD people as part of the Government's 10-year LGBTIQ+ equality reform agenda through Priority area 4.

Yours sincerely



**Peta McCammon**  
Secretary

27/11/2024