

27 November 2021

By email

Principal Engagement Advisor
SA Health

Submission re: SALHN Community Engagement Strategy

To Brittany,

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission regarding the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network's Community Engagement Strategy.

This submission is being made on behalf of the South Australian Rainbow Advocacy Alliance (SARAA), a community led organisation that advocates for the rights and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) South Australians.

Our submission provides an overview of some of the key health disparities experienced by our communities and provides key recommendations on how SALHN can engage with LGBTIQA+ people to reach the strategy goal of building a healthier, stronger community that is diverse, inclusive and safe for today and into the future.

We commend the Strategy's intent to include LGBTIQA+ community members, and note the explicit inclusion of our communities in the consultation draft. We note additional mention of LGBTIQA+ people could be made on page 6 under 'Who we care for'. We are aware of a large and diverse community of LGBTIQA+ people currently living in the Southern region of Adelaide. While there is currently no accurate data available on the exact number of LGBTIQA+ people living in Australia, we believe it is important to acknowledge this gap in important population data in order to raise awareness of this fact, and to avoid rendering our communities invisible in documents such as these.

Many LGBTIQA+ people live happy, healthy and successful lives, unfortunately however, we also experience a disproportionate burden of ill health, which can be linked to the continued discrimination, harassment and violence which is also experienced by our communities as a result of who we are or who we love. There is a growing body of published literature in Australia that provides a clear picture of the issues and the solutions required to address them. Particularly pertinent reports include [Writing Themselves in 4](#) (SA report), [Understanding LGBTI Lives in Crisis](#), [Private Lives 3](#) and the [Health and Wellbeing of Transgender Australians](#). In addition, the [annual update on mental health statistics](#) provided by LGBTIQ+ Health Australia provides an up-to-date snapshot of important mental health and suicide trends. We strongly encourage your team to review these documents and consider the unique challenges, strengths and needs our communities have when accessing health services, as well as when engaging with us.

In 2020/21, SARAA was funded by the Department of Human Services SA (DHS) to establish an LGBTIQ+ Community Advisory Group to serve as a diverse but collective voice for the LGBTIQ+ community in public policy and decision-making. This work builds upon the 2019 LGBTIQ+ Roundtable held by Minister for Human Services, Michelle Lensink MLC.

The LGBTIQ+ Community Advisory Group report was delivered to DHS in July 2021 and outlines the key priorities for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, health and wellbeing in South Australia. Health service accessibility, particularly in relation to mental health, featured as a key issue of importance for our members and their experience is reflected in the following excerpt from this report.

Through our consultation we heard that we need:

- *to acknowledge that LGBTIQ+ people are at greater risk of suicide given experiences of abuse, discrimination, homophobia and transphobia*
- *to make it easier for LGBTIQ+ people to talk openly about who they are when accessing care and support*
- *better access to inclusive health and mental health services that understand the diversity of LGBTIQ+ communities*
- *more support for safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ people - some young people literally survived because of community-run drop-in spaces*
- *more inclusive, respectful communities free from homophobia and transphobia.*

These experiences are consistent with the findings of Private Lives 3 which found that 'many LGBTIQ people in need of mental health services are not accessing them and although mainstream medical clinics were the most utilised health service, they had the lowest proportion of participants who felt that their sexual orientation or gender identity was respected'.

Funding should therefore be expanded for LGBTIQ+ specific counselling and psychological support services, who provide a safe and inclusive space, with experts who provide best practice LGBTIQ+ health services. Additionally, providing mainstream services with training and opportunities to be formally accredited as LGBTIQ+ inclusive is essential to expand the pool of services that LGBTIQ+ South Australians can access for appropriate and culturally safe mental health care and support.

Community Advisory Group members also told us of their grave concerns regarding the lack of appropriate and accessible services providing gender affirming care for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people in South Australia. The CAG report articulates two relevant recommendations in relation to this area of concern, being:

- Maintain recently increased funding and resourcing of the Women's and Children's Hospital Gender Diversity team to ensure continuity of care for existing clients, and continued reduction in waiting times for new clients. This should continue until the state-wide model of care for gender diversity is developed and implemented.

- SA Health develop and implement a state-wide model of care for gender diversity in a transparent and accountable manner by providing regular updates to the LGBTIQ+ community, ensuring ongoing opportunities for community consultation and engagement, and ensuring community feedback is implemented.

We urge you to consult and engage with local LGBTIQ+ community members and groups in the Southern region of Adelaide, particularly [Pride of the South](#). You may also like to utilise the [Rainbow Directory](#) to find LGBTIQ+ groups, services and events which could be utilised in engagement and consultation strategies.

We encourage broad and multi-pronged strategies in engaging with our communities, acknowledging the broad diversity and intersectional identities we hold. With this in mind, attempts to ensure all engagement strategies (e.g. those targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people, children and young people, people with disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse people) should also invite and provide safety and inclusion for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the SALHN Community Engagement Strategy.

We would be very happy to discuss these matters with you further and invite you to contact Kelly, SARAA Policy & Project Officer at info@saraa.org.au should you wish to do so.

Kind regards,
Kelly Vincent
they/ them or she/ her

Policy & Project Officer
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SARAA acknowledges and pays respects to the Kurna, Nukunu and Ngarrindjeri people, whose land we operate and live on. Aboriginal land was stolen, never ceded, and we stand in solidarity with First Nations people, especially those who are also members of the LGBTIQ+, Brotherboy and Sistergirl communities.