

## National Executive

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**Agenda item:** 6.2

**Meeting number:** 2024-02 NE

### Development of a National Scheme LGBTIQA+ Equity and Inclusion Strategy

#### Executive summary

LGBTIQA+ communities and individuals are a priority group for governments and the National Scheme, to address the higher levels of discrimination experienced than the wider community and disproportionate poorer health outcomes. Recent legislative amendments that seek to enfranchise people of diverse sexual orientation/s, gender identities and/or intersex variations, along with wider community expectations for socially progressive policies which empower under-represented communities, are also driving the need for Ahpra to consider a strategic approach to LGBTIQA+ equity and inclusion.

Ahpra has committed to two external quality frameworks—Rainbow Tick and The Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI)—to guide its development of a *National Scheme LGBTIQA+ equity and inclusion strategy* to provide measurable outcomes for LGBTIQA+ people.

It's proposed Ahpra develop a National Scheme strategy over the next 12 months which outlines the required actions to meet accreditation for both programs. The LGBTIQA+ strategy will then form part of the 2025 Scheme strategy and will include reforms of people policies and regulatory processes over a 3-5 year time horizon, with several phases of delivery to correspond with developing maturity.

Partnering with external organisations such as ACON's Pride in Health and Wellbeing, as well as working with the Community Advisory Council and other key National Scheme stakeholders, the development of a National Scheme strategy will be co-led by People & Culture and Strategy & Policy. People & Culture will lead on organisational capability and employer requirements, and Strategy and Policy will lead on improving access to the National Scheme, external engagement initiatives and National Board portfolios.

All directorates will need to provide input into the development of the strategy, which will require shared accountability for specific actions. It's proposed that a cross-functional working group be established to coordinate development of a strategy. The group will include representatives from across the organisation and seek to achieve a balance of visible LGBTIQA+ leaders and allies. Terms of Reference for this group will be developed subject to in-principle support from NE to progress development of the strategy.

#### Recommendations

That the National Executive:

1. approves the development of the *National Scheme LGBTIQA+ equity and inclusion strategy*, including plans to meet required standards for Rainbow Tick and AWEI accreditation,
2. provide in-principal approval for establishment of a working group with representatives from each relevant area of the organisation to coordinate and contribute to development of the strategy, and
3. appoint an Executive Sponsor of the strategy.

**Paper sponsored by**

Executive Director, People and Culture

Executive Director, Strategy and Policy

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## Context

There are number of reasons for Ahpra to consider LGBTIQ+ safety, access and inclusion to be priorities for the National Scheme:

1. People who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans/Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual, and other sexualities, sexes, and genders that aren't included in these letters (represented by a '+' symbol) individuals and communities experience disproportionate poorer health outcomes than their peers, as a direct result of discrimination, stigma and abuse. For example:
  - Compared to the general population, LGBTIQ+ young people aged 16 to 27 in Australia are five times more likely to have attempted suicide and transgender people aged 14-25 are 15 times more likely.<sup>1</sup>
  - LGBTIQ+ people are less likely to feel safe accessing services or participating in the workforce, with 34% of the community reporting needing to hide their identities while accessing services.<sup>2</sup>
  - 52% experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace in the past five years (compared to 31% of their heterosexual peers).<sup>3</sup>
2. *The National Scheme Engagement Strategy 2020 – 2025 and Ahpra's People Plan 2020 – 2025* include programs that seek to improve representation, including human-centred service design and delivery for people from a range of diverse communities and backgrounds.
3. LGBTIQ+ communities are one of the key focus areas identified by Health Ministers as a priority for engagement in their policy directives to Ahpra.
4. State and Territory governments are legislating across Australia for more protections for LGBTIQ+ people. These changes have intersections with the National Scheme, such as changes to legal sex descriptors and protections for intersex people against deferrable medical interventions.
5. In the most recent Employee Opinion Pulse Survey that was conducted in November/December 2023, 7.6% of respondents identified as LGBTQIA+. While this rate is an increase of 1.8% compared to the previous EOS conducted in March 2021, it falls short of the national population, which is estimated to be up to 11% of the Australian population<sup>4</sup>.
6. The Respect@Ahpra Framework highlights Ahpra's commitment toward developing and maintaining safe and respectful workplaces and reinforces appropriate standards of behaviour and conduct through a suite of policies. The Sexual, sex and gender-based harassment policy reinforces Ahpra's positive duty obligations in accordance with national and jurisdictional legislation, to ensure workplaces are free from sexual, sex and gender-based harassment and behaviour which contribute to unsafe and hostile work environments. The policy has adopted wide-ranging definitions to ensure that people of diverse sexual orientation/s, gender identities and/or intersex variations who are subjected to harassment on the basis of their sex, sexual, or gender orientation or identify have relevant channels for complaint and escalation.
7. Ahpra currently have membership with Pride in Diversity and the Diversity Council of Australia that help to provide guidance as thought leaders in this space.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, [Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTIQ+ People](#), October 2021 (accessed March 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, [Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People](#), 2014 (accessed March 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, [Everyone's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#), 2018 (accessed March 2023)

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, [National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex \(LGBTI\) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy](#), 2012 (accessed November 2023).

## Quality frameworks to underpin strategy development

**Rainbow Tick** is a quality framework that helps health and human services organisations show that they are safe, inclusive and affirming services and employers for the LGBTIQ+ community. It is widely recognised as the leading standard for LGBTIQ+ safety and accessibility in the health sector in Australia.

Accreditation is provided through independent assessment, provided by Quality Innovation Performance and Australian Council on Healthcare Standards.

The six standards include:

1. Organisational Capability – An organisation must be able to demonstrate that it has embedded LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices across all of its systems and continuously seeks out opportunities for improvements.
2. Workforce Development – All staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities to LGBTIQ+ consumers and are trained and able to deliver LGBTIQ inclusive services.
3. Consumer Participation – LGBTIQ+ consumers are consulted and participate in the planning, development, and review of the organisation's services.
4. A welcome and accessible organisation – LGBTIQ+ consumers can easily and confidently access services as the physical and virtual environments including information, structures, resources and processes, are welcoming.
5. Disclosure and documentation – LGBTIQ+ consumers, staff and volunteers feel safe providing personal information, including their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or intersex status, because they know information will be treated respectfully and that there are systems in place to ensure their privacy.
6. Culturally safe and acceptable services – Services and programs identify, assess, and manage risks to ensure the cultural safety of LGBTIQ+ consumers.

The **Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI)** stands as the definitive national benchmark on LGBTIQ+ workplace inclusion and comprises the largest and only national employee survey designed to gauge the overall impact of inclusion initiatives on organisational culture as well as identifying and non-identifying employees. The Index drives best practice in Australia and sets a comparative benchmark for Australian employers across all sectors.

The AWEI is comprised of the following areas throughout:

1. HR Policy and Diversity Practice – this is to ensure that all policies are clearly inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people
2. LGBTIQ+ Bullying, Harassment & Support – to assist in reducing heightened levels of targeted bullying & harassment that LGBTIQ+ people face
3. Inclusion of Trans & Gender Diverse Employees – an area that typically does not have the same level of awareness and/or support but one that is becoming critical for employers as more people openly identify with a diverse gender at work
4. Strategic Focus & Accountability – demonstration of targeted initiatives or plans in place to support LGBTIQ+ inclusion on an ongoing basis
5. LGBTIQ+ Employee Networks; Visibility of Inclusion; and LGBTIQ+, Awareness and Professional Development – areas that contribute significantly to an LGBTIQ+ inclusive culture
6. Executive Leadership & Engagement – culture is led from the top and Senior Executive support for D&I speaks volumes to employees
7. Data Analysis – which provides valuable information about the impact of your inclusion initiatives, highlighting where focus needs to be channelled or celebrated
8. Community Engagement – which sends a significant message of inclusion to those outside of the organisation
9. Survey Participation – optional participation within the annual AWEI Employee Survey
10. Additional Work – any workplace-related LGBTIQ+ inclusion work accomplished, not covered elsewhere within this submission

It's noted that whilst one of these processes focuses on the customer and one focusses on the employees, there are deliverables which cross over between the two. To ensure Ahpra has a well-rounded approach to LGBTIQ+ inclusion, it would be imperative for Ahpra to complete both accreditations

### **Executive Sponsor**

The LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy will require an Executive Sponsor to drive the work's importance across the National Scheme.

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