

A Multicultural Future... for all of us



Response to Discussion Paper

Introduction

The Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC) welcomes the review of Queensland's cross-government approach to the needs of people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. LGBT people from a CALD background are currently invisible in multicultural policy and there are no specific services for this group in Queensland. LGBT people from a CALD background can experience double exclusion - homophobia from their family/ethnic community and racism from the LGBT community. Queensland's multicultural policy needs to reflect sexual and gender diversity within CALD communities, and provide support to ethnic minority organisations and LGBT organisations to be more inclusion of LGBT people from a CALD background.

About QAHC

The Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC) is a state-wide, not-for-profit community based organisation which promotes the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Queenslanders and develops the capacity of LGBT communities in Queensland. Formerly the Queensland AIDS Council, in 2006 we extended our remit to address a wider range of health issues for all in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

QAHC currently receives recurrent government funding for our HIV prevention and sexual health promotion work with gay men (including Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander gay men and sistergirls). All other activity (e.g. ageing, women's health, trans health, history, community developing, advocacy, mental health, alcohol and other drugs) is made possible by occasional one-off grants and volunteers, donations and sponsorships.

We facilitate an LGBT CALD Action Group which brings together multicultural organisations, LGBT groups and individual LGBT people from a CALD background to highlight issues, improve services and deliver projects. The issues in this paper were discussed among the Action Group, but represent the views of QAHC, not necessarily all members of the Action Group.

Background

The term LGBT is used in this paper, however we recognise that for some people this is a western term and may not be the way individuals and communities identify and talk about their own

sexuality or gender identity. We recognise that there is a diversity of cultural understandings of sexuality and gender identity and work in this area should be inclusive and not seek to impose western values, identities or ways of working.

The term CALD is used to describe people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This includes people from different countries and regions of the world, as well as people with different journeys to Australia (e.g. second⁺ generation, recent immigrants, refugees, temporary students/workers). We recognise that many people do not identify with the term CALD, but rather identify with a specific country or region. Multicultural or cultural diversity are terms more easily understood by the general public.

According to the 2006 census 789,000 Queenslanders were born outside of Australia/Oceania and 110,000 people spoke a language other than English at home. The Australian Study of Health & Relationships found 2.5% of men and 2.2% of women (16 years and over) identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual (giving minimum number) and 9% of men and 15% of women had ever had a same sex attraction or sexual experience (giving maximum number). This would suggest there are roughly between 14,000 and 102,000 LGBT people from a culturally or linguistically diverse background in Queensland.

There is little research available on the needs of LGBT people from a CALD background. Small scale studies of LGBT communities usually do not have enough CALD respondents to do any analysis and studies of CALD communities or the general community do not usually ask sexual orientation or gender identity. Sexual orientation and gender identity questions should be included in future research projects. QAHC tried to hold a community consultation with CALD LGBT people in Brisbane to inform this paper, however there was insufficient registrations for this to go ahead. We suggest that a qualitative research project be funded, where LGBT CALD people are trained to undertake interviews with peers, recruited through a snowballing technique.

A range of issues for LGBT people from a CALD background have been identified by QAHC staff and volunteers through both professional work and personal contacts.

Country/Family of Origin – Many LGBT people from a CALD background wish to maintain a strong relationship with their biological family and have family obligations. Depending on views on sexuality/gender identity in their country of origin, there may be a conflict between their family's values and their sexual/gender identity. Where people are coming from countries where homosexuality is illegal, there can be a fear of disclosing identity to government agencies or services or experience of abuse.

Newly Arrived – People who are newly arrived in Australia/Queensland may lack an understanding of western LGBT cultures and ways of communicating etc. They may also not be aware of laws relating to sex and sexuality/gender identity (e.g. unequal age of consent). Coming to Queensland is a significant period of transition, where LGBT people may be able to explore their sexuality/gender identity away from family/friends. This can provide people with greater freedom to be who they are, but can also remove them from support structures.

Cultural Differences/Perspectives – Different cultures have different views and attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity, often linked to religious opinion. LGBT people from different cultures may have varying experiences of being/doing gay than those of people from western backgrounds, including communication styles, gender norms and values around sex and sexuality. There may need to be a period of adjustment and acclimatisation, and where values conflict, people will need support. It should be recognised that some cultures will be more advanced on attitudes towards sexuality/gender identity, and so the adjustment will be to a more regressive environment in Queensland.

LGBT Community – Some LGBT people from a CALD background may not participate in the organised LGBT community. This could be the result of not knowing how to connect, language difficulties or fear of being outed. It may also be because of racist behaviours in the LGBT community, including sexual stereotyping by gay men of some ethnic groups.

Services/Support – There are no services for LGBT people from a CALD background in Queensland and very few for any LGBT people. People from a CALD background may not be aware of the range of LGBT social/support groups, media and venues in Queensland. There are few role models of happy, healthy LGBT people from a CALD background in either the LGBT media/community or ethnic minority communities. Many ethnic minority services don't recognise that there are LGBT people in their communities/service and may also not be aware of referral points. LGBT people from a CALD background are in danger of being excluded from their ethnic community because of their sexuality/gender identity and from the LGBT community because of their ethnicity.

Sexual Health – There appears to be lower rates of HIV and STI testing among gay men from a CALD background (although data collection for CALD people is poor in Queensland). People from high prevalence countries may be at higher risk of transmission if they have sexual contact with people from those areas (e.g. visits 'home'). Anecdotally there is a perception that there is no HIV among ethnic minorities in Australia as people with HIV would be 'screened out' and not allowed to enter the country. Depending on the class of visa, some may not have access to HIV treatments in Australia under the PBS or Medicare. HIV and sexual health may not be a priority due to other pressing issues (e.g. income, housing).

Economic Benefits

Education services are Australia's third largest export industry, with \$1.689 billion being contributed to the Queensland economy by international studentsⁱ. Anecdotal information suggests there is an over-representation of LGBT people among the international student population. LGBT international students are drawn to Australia by the level of tolerance and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, which may not be available in their home country or families. Time spent in Australia provides an opportunity to explore their sexual or gender identity, away from the confines of family and friends.

In order for Queensland to continue to attract LGBT international students it will need to continue the process of law reform and promoting social inclusion as well meeting their specific needs. Queensland has more regressive laws than other states and territories in Australia (e.g. unequal age of consent, no civil partnerships) and provides no social/support services for LGBT people, including those from a CALD background. Australia is less advanced on LGBT issues than other western countries with whom we compete for international students (e.g. UK and Canada). Promotional material for international students should include reference to a (generally) supportive environment for LGBT people in Queensland.

Access to Services

There are no government funded or supported services for LGBT people from a CALD background in Queensland, or indeed for any LGBT people (apart from HIV services for gay men). There are however a range of volunteer led, unfunded social support groups and services for LGBT people, including two social groups for Asian gay men in South East Queensland.

LGBT organisations need to be supported to provide services for LGBT Queenslanders. These organisations also need access to cultural competency training, especially in relation to LGBT people from a range of different cultures and religions. People from a CALD background should feature in promotional and educational material produced by these organisations and ethnic specific communication channels should be used to reach out to LGBT people in these communities. These promotions should use culturally appropriate language and imagery to describe the diversity of sexual and gender expression.

Many multicultural organisations tend not to recognise the existence of LGBT people in their service or communities. QAHC has experienced gatekeepers in positions of power who prevent any work on sexuality/gender identity from happening, often based on cultural or religious reasons.

Mainstream and multicultural services need to create a safe environment that acknowledges and welcomes LGBT people from a CALD background and celebrates sexual and gender diversity. This can be achieved through:

- LGBT awareness training for staff/volunteers/management committees
- Review of policies and procedures for inclusion of LGBT people and sexuality/gender identity issues
- Displaying LGBT relevant information in the service (e.g. posters, fliers)
- Being aware of and making referrals to LGBT community groups, venues and media
- Recording sexuality and gender identity on assessment or intake forms and ensuring gender inclusive language is used

LGBT people from a CALD background may be protective of their confidentiality, especially when accessing ethnic specific services. They may prefer to access some services from ethnic specific organisations and other services, especially related to sexuality/gender diversity, from LGBT or

mainstream organisations. Where possible, services may need to be provided anonymously via the phone or internet.

Community Development and Participation

LGBT community organisations should be resourced to work with ethnic minority organisations to promote the inclusion of LGBT people. This may involve working with community leaders or other influential people in the community to promote awareness and acceptance of LGBT identities and needs. An event bringing together ethnic minority and LGBT organisations should be planned, to build greater understanding, links and partnerships. Particular attention should be paid to faith based organisations as many LGBT people are personally conflicted by their sexuality/gender identity and the teaching of their religion.

LGBT organisations need to think creatively about how to promote their services to people from CALD communities. Given the reluctance of some to openly access a service, this may involve:

- LGBT organisations participating in multicultural events
- Placing promotion materials in community/organisation newsletters and other media
- Promoting LGBT services, through ethnic/mainstream organisations

Accessing services for people who do not speak English can be difficult. Access to interpreter services is problematic as this currently needs to be organised by the service provider, requiring the client to contact them first. This needs to change to a similar system as used by deaf and hearing impaired people, who initiate contact with the translation service themselves, who then contact the service provider.

Multicultural Identity

QAHC supports the approach of promoting and celebrating multiculturalism and cultural diversity. However this needs to also include sexual and gender diversity. There are no initiatives to promote or celebrate sexual or gender diversity in Queensland. As some ethnic communities/religions have negative views on LGBT people and sexuality/gender identity, it is important that diversity and respect is promoted, through social marketing campaigns, events and local projects. In addition, as there is a level of racism in LGBT communities, there should be specific initiatives to challenge discrimination and celebrate cultural diversity within LGBT communities.

Specific support should be provided to LGBT people who are newly arrived in Queensland, including international students. As this can be a time of great personal change and experimentation for LGBT people, it is important that they understand the culture of LGBT communities in Queensland, are aware of the availability of LGBT support services, groups, media and venues and have access to health information (especially sexual health). A printed and online information resource, developed by LGBT people/groups, should be made freely available to people to help them settle in the community. This could be distributed through educational institutions, student health insurance

companies, backpackers & other accommodation providers and included in travel guides (e.g. Lonely Planet).

Other social support services should also be explored, including:

- peer social support groups (opportunities to come together in a safe environment with other newly arrived LGBT people)
- buddy support programs (training volunteers from the LGBT community to provide support to newly arrived people)
- conversation classes (to provide practice in conversational English)

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Thanks to the members of the QAHC LGBT CALD Action Group for their input into this paper.

ⁱ Australia, Access Economics, *The Australian educator sector and the economic contribution of international students*. April 2009 < <http://www.hta.org.au/documents/accesseconomics.pdf> >