To Whom It May Concern,

I write to express my disbelief and disappointment in the Red Cross Society’s eligibility criteria for blood donations. Last week I attempted to donate blood, something I had wanted to do for a long time but had never quite managed to get around to doing so. I decided to look online for where I could donate blood in Hobart. While on the Australian Red Cross Blood Service website, I discovered an eligibility test. I decided to take the test, despite being confident that as a healthy, young person I would be able to give blood. When I came across the question of whether I had participated in “at risk” sexual activity in the past twelve months I decided to seek more information about what was considered to be “at risk” sex. To my horror and dismay, I learnt through your website, that “at risk” sexual activity included within the last twelve months having “Had oral or anal sex with another man, even ‘safer sex’ using a condom (if you’re a man)”

As a proud, gay man I am unashamed to say that in the last twelve months I have had sex with another man. What is disappointing is that I have had safe sex, using a condom and yet I am still unable to donate blood under these guidelines. I have recently had a sexual health screening as part of a general check-up with my General Practitioner. The results of this test determined that I carry no sexual diseases and thus my blood is clean. So, why can’t I donate blood?

I believe that the Red Cross Society’s eligibility criteria for donating blood is unfair, outdated, and blatantly homophobic. You claim on your website factsheet that these policies are not discriminatory and instead they are based on an assessment of risk, however, this cannot be accurate. Under your criteria, two men can be in an entirely monogamous and dedicated relationship for many years and will never be able to give blood, despite having healthy blood to donate. Under the same criteria, a heterosexual person can have sex with many different people and therefore commit sexual behaviour that is realistically more at risk and yet they are still able to donate blood.

Research has found that HIV being detected in gay men is decreasing, while detection in heterosexual people is increasing. With this in mind, how can the Red Cross claim it is not being discriminatory? The twelve month deferral period is an unreasonable timeframe, HIV will be detectable in a person’s bloodstream within three months after being infected. As the Red Cross tests all blood before use, it is unreasonable for a deferral period of more than three months to be held against gay men in Australia.

I write because I feel that it is time that the Red Cross changes their eligibility criteria for donating blood. My blood is healthy and clean, as is the majority of gay men’s in this country. There are lives that can be saved with blood donated by gay men and the Red Cross’ criteria must be updated to consider modern medical advances, so that gay men are not discriminated against and blood can be donated to those who need it most.

I urge you: my blood is clean, I am willing to donate it, let’s help someone in need. Allow me to donate my blood.

I thank you for your time in reading this letter and I eagerly anticipate your response.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Dudman