

Prime Minister Scott Morrison
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House of Representatives
Parliament House
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Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you today to discuss what I believe to be a fundamental and archaic flaw in our blood donation system that reduces the supply of safe blood, and fosters inequality and exclusion.

Over the summer, spurred on by the Australian Red Cross Society's call for more blood donors, I went online to find where my local blood bank was. Knowing that the ARCBS has blood shortages I wanted to do my bit to help save lives.

While exploring the Red Cross' website I discovered a blood donation 'eligibility test'. I was of full belief that, being a healthy, young person, I would be able to donate blood without issue. However, like any Gen Z person, I love an online quiz and decided to take the test. In completing the test, to my horror and dismay I found that I was, in fact, unable to donate blood under the Australian Red Cross Society's policy.

The reasoning for this is because, according to the Red Cross, I had engaged in "at risk sexual behaviour". My 'at risk' behaviour was the act of having sex with another man. I had sex that was completely safe, using a condom, and yet the Red Cross believes that, because I am a man who has sex with men, I am at a high risk of carrying transmittable diseases.

To put this into perspective, a heterosexual person could have multiple sexual partners at any one time and providing they use a condom they are considered to be 'safe' to donate blood. Alternatively, a homosexual person could be in an entirely committed and monogamous relationship for many years and yet be too 'at risk' to donate blood. Common sense would determine that the more at risk person would be the one with multiple sexual partners, however, the Red Cross' policy determines otherwise.

Mr Morrison, we are in the 21st century. There is greater understanding now surrounding HIV. Modern medical advances mean that the detection window for transmittable diseases grows smaller and smaller.

It is absurd that people like me, who have safe blood to donate and who want to help save the lives of those in need, are excluded because of policies that were made almost forty years ago when HIV was little understood.

On top of that, the current policy stigmatises me and other gay and bisexual men as a threat to public health. This is an out-of-date attitude, especially coming off the back of the marriage

equality result in 2017. I now call on you to help provide more inclusion for LGBTIQ+ Australians.

It's time for a new blood donation policy that screens potential donors for the safety of their sexual activity, not the gender of their sexual partner.

When the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal examined this issue in 2008, they determined that ongoing scrutiny of the deferral policy was required to maintain blood safety and limit discrimination. That was 10 years ago. It's time that this policy is reviewed.

I call on the Liberal coalition to commit, prior to the 2019 Federal election, to providing a policy review into blood donation regulations in this country so that gay people are not discriminated against in donating blood, and there is a stable blood supply provided to those who need it.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Dudman

CC:

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