

31/07/2015

To: The Hon. Sussan Ley MP (sent via email)

RE: Marriage Equality Legislation

Dear Minister Ley,

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body for Australia's 17 000 medical students. AMSA believes that Marriage Equality is important for the health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people, and as such believes that it would be appropriate for you, as Australia's Minister for Health, to adopt a stance in support of marriage equality.

The link between social policies and the health of the Australian population may not be immediately apparent; however, social policies such as marriage equality can be considered under the social determinants of health framework developed by the WHO.

Social determinants encompass the cultural, economic, environmental and political factors which can have a direct, tangible, measurable impact on the healthcare of people, and in this context, LGBTIQ people. A [2010](#) study from the USA compared lesbian, gay and bisexual populations living in states of the USA which instituted bans on same-sex marriage between 2001 and 2004-05. It found that in states where same-sex marriage bans were legislated, lesbian, gay and bisexual populations were more likely to experience worse mental health outcomes, including mood disorders, generalised anxiety disorders, alcohol use and psychiatric comorbidities.

In the Australian community, LGBTIQ people already experience significantly poorer mental health outcomes than heterosexual individuals. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are 2.47 times more likely to attempt suicide (4.28 times for gay and bisexual men) and are 1.5 times more likely to suffer depression, anxiety disorders and alcohol and other substance dependence.

Lea, Wit and Reynolds ([2014](#)) found that Australian LGBTIQ young people are at a higher risk of psychological distress and suicidality due to discrimination based on their sexuality. Similarly, Leonard et al (2015) theorised that marriage equality fosters social connections and the development of meaningful relationships, both of which can be powerful protective factors against minority stress/mental illness. Part of minority stress is the extent that same-sex attracted people experience that the wider population holds a negative attitude towards their sexuality, including expectations of prejudice and discrimination. In a country without marriage equality, it is no surprise that minority stress significantly contributes to poor mental health outcomes.

The considerable impact of mental health disorders in our country is well noted by your [department](#). Mental health is the single largest cause of disability in Australia, and the cost to the government in 2006-07 totalled \$4.7 billion, representing 7.3% of all government spending. Further to government spending, mental illness decreases workforce participation or productivity which your department estimates to cost \$10-\$15 billion dollars every year.

The economic and human life cost of mental illness are felt day to day and year to year. The National Mental Health Strategy has invested heavily into providing services and support however preventative measures such as marriage equality are more effective and less expensive than tertiary medical care.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or



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infirmity.” By advocating for the social rights of LGBTIQ people, AMSA believes we are advocating for their overall health and well-being.

The evidence shows that there is a link between discriminatory legislation and the health of the individuals it affects, and as such AMSA believes that Australia should legislate marriage equality for same sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex people. Medical students would strongly support you publicly supporting marriage equality in your role as health minister, and we look forward to discussing this with you further.

Yours Sincerely



James Lawler
AMSA President 2015