

Dear,

The public health case for marriage equality

As Australia's leading experts in public health, we, the undersigned, endorse marriage equality.

Public health has long been concerned with addressing the social determinants of health that are recognized by the World Health Organization as critical drivers of health inequity – that is, poorer health outcomes among the vulnerable and marginalized. The WHO also recognises poor mental health as a global public health priority, and that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people experience higher levels of poor mental health, including suicide, than the general population.

Amongst the many social determinants of health adversely affecting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people are social exclusion, stigma and discrimination, often associated with poorer health service access and utilization, poorer sexual health, and poorer life expectancy. The WHO has resolved that all member states, including Australia, take into account health equity in **all national policies**. Critically, this resolution is targeted at all policy, not just health policy.

It is our belief that the Australian government has a responsibility to ensure that policy on marriage takes into account the mental and physical health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people. A definition of marriage that promotes the social exclusion of LGBTIQ people compounds health inequities worsening health outcomes. Children of same-sex couples are a vulnerable group that deserve consideration in policies on marriage. A definition of marriage that excludes the parents and families of these children unnecessarily compounds health inequities that result from social exclusion, stigma and discrimination.

There is a strong public health case for marriage equality.

We recognise that there are firmly held views for and against marriage equality in Australia. However, we are also concerned that the public debate on this issue will escalate in the coming year. We urge all public figures, in political, religious and civil society spheres, to consider the powerful effects of language on mental health and wellbeing. We ask all people engaged publicly in the debate to exercise restraint and compassion for vulnerable and marginalised Australians, including LGBTIQ people and their children.

Australia has made great progress towards the social inclusion of LGBTIQ people and their children in recent decades. We urge our national leaders to support marriage equality as part of their duty of care to all Australians.

Yours faithfully,



Catherine Bennett & Colleen Fisher
Chairs: CAPHIA



Michael Moore
CEO: PHAA