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## The Public Health Professionals Call for Marriage Equality

Leading public health organisations the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and the Council of Public Health Institutions of Australia (CAPHIA) have written to all Members of the Federal Parliament calling on them to support marriage equality as a public health issue.

CEO of the PHAA, Michael Moore, explained the health impact of the current, unsatisfactory situation. “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.

Professor Archie Clements at the Australian National University, a member of both organisations added “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”.

Professor Clements argued “There is a strong public health case for marriage equality”.

The letter draws attention to the approach of the World Health Organization (WHO) which has resolved that all member states, including Australia, take into account health equity in **all national policies**. Critically, this WHO resolution is targeted at all policy, not just health policy.

Mr Moore added, “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”.

He added that child welfare ought to be considered on the evidence rather than on an emotional response. “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”.

The PHAA and CAPHIA 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.

The letter to MPs and Senators concluded: “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”.

### For further information/comment:

Michael Moore, CEO, PHAA  
Professor Archie Clements ANU

0417 249 731  
0435 155 889