

## A COALITION OF MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS



### **MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

**A wide range of key organisations in mental health band together to support marriage equality in Australia.**

**Organisations involved include the Black Dog Institute, headspace, Spur Projects, Suicide Prevention Australia, ReachOut Australia and many others.**

**These organisations warn that one of the highest contributing factors of mental illness amongst Australia’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities is the risk of discrimination and exclusion.**

A wide range of organisations in the mental health field have banded together in a united front to highlight their expectation of all political parties to approve marriage equality legislation in Australia.

Black Dog Institute, headspace, Spur Projects, Mental Illness Fellowship of Queensland, Suicide Prevention Australia, ReachOut Australia, Roses in the Ocean, the JED Project and Batyr have all submitted open letters to the government. Mental Health First Aid Australia have also endorsed the initiative.

Lee Crockford, of Spur Projects, said “The fact is that the rate of attempted suicide amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is currently 14 times the national average. That is utterly shameful. The big contributing factors are exclusion and discrimination. It has to stop.”

6 Australians currently take their lives every day and it’s the number one cause of death for Australian males and females aged 15 to 44.

Rates of suicide are much higher in Australia’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Lee Crockford said, “The Marriage Equality Bill is a really important step towards all Australian citizens being treated equally under Federal Law. We have to remove exclusion and discrimination from Civil and Federal Law.”

“These organisations have joined together to highlight that marriage equality is much more than a piece of paper. It’s a vital step to increase mental well-being and reduce suicide.”

“The current law means people are treated differently purely because of their sexuality. That contributes to marginalisation, anxiety and isolation. In short, poorer mental health. 19 countries now have full marriage equality. It’s Australia’s turn. We are lagging behind the world. What is exciting is that change is coming – that can only be a good thing.”

“It is estimated that 75% of the Australian public now supports marriage equality. I believe people just want to see the change happen. Times change and in a modern Australia, same sex marriage is the obvious next step.”

**Media enquiries to Lee Crockford on 0421 964 986**



## SPUR PROJECTS

A BOLD NEW APPROACH TO SUICIDE PREVENTION

1ST JUNE, 2015

Members of Parliament

It is with great pride and duty that we write to you in full support of marriage equality for same-sex couples in Australia.

Spur Projects is deeply passionate and committed to ending suicide in Australia.

With those in the LGBT community attempting suicide 14x more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts, we need to examine, as a nation, why this is so.

Research has consistently shown the primary contributing factors to poor mental health amongst the LGBT community are the risk of exclusion and discrimination. It only stands to reason that we should stand opposed to discriminative and exclusive civil laws that exist at a federal level.

Despite the facility of civil unions for same-sex couples, history has proven that “separate but equal” is inherently divisive and exclusionary.

Marriage equality is an arguably small, yet symbolically significant step towards a society where the LGBT community are no longer marginalised - a vital step in reducing, and ultimately ending, suicide in Australia.

We believe that marriage equality represents far more than a legal document - it is a mental health issue that embodies the fundamental values of the Australia we want to see: Equality, fairness and justness.

LEE CROCKFORD

Founder & CEO  
Spur Projects Ltd.



Date: 1 June 2015

To: Members of the Australian Parliament

Re: **Marriage Equality**

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**headspace** unequivocally supports marriage equality.

The ages between 12 and 25 years are a critical period for the development of identity, and uncertainty and questioning regarding gender identity and sexual preference are common.

Young Australians who are LGBTI have a higher risk than their peers of having or developing mental health issues including depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, and substance use. This higher risk is significantly related to homophobic abuse, difficulties associated with disclosure, community attitudes and discrimination.

Same-sex attracted young people are six times more likely to attempt suicide. Six times! That is truly astonishing and we must all play a part in trying to eliminate that figure.

The current marriage law that continues marriage inequality perpetuates the discrimination and homophobia that young Australians are experiencing.

Respect and acknowledgment of sexual orientation and gender identity is fundamental to addressing homophobia.

**headspace** believes that affording those who are same sex attracted the same opportunities and rights that we all value in a democratic and inclusive society will send a positive message to the community as a whole. We believe that this will subsequently have an impact on homophobic attitudes over time and will ultimately impact the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians who identify as LGBTI.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Tanti", is enclosed in a thin black rectangular box.

**Chris Tanti**

Chief Executive Officer

**headspace** National Youth Mental Health Foundation Ltd

2 June 2015

Dear Members of Parliament

**Re: Federal Bill to Legalise Marriage Equality**

We are writing to express our support of a Federal Bill to legalise marriage equality in Australia.

We believe that all people throughout Australia and the world should be able to live free from stigma and discrimination so often experienced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, and other sexuality and gender diverse people and communities.

In Australia, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other sexuality and gender diverse Australians are up to 14 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual peoples. Suicide prevention research has identified a number of risk and protective factors that individually and combined, that can have significant impact on these figures. This includes stress related to coming out and/or relationship disclosure, invisibility and lack of recognition of relationships, as well as ongoing self-censorship and medication of behaviour (such as avoiding public displays of affection).

Suicide Prevention Australia acknowledges work being done by our members and others to strengthen LGBTI health and wellbeing with specific support for suicide prevention policies and programs.

We stand with our members in supporting this Bill as just one of a number of steps that need to be taken to reduce stigma and prevent suicide in the LGBTI community.

Kind regards



Sue Murray

Chief Executive

Suicide Prevention Australia

**Brisbane**  
298 Gilchrist Avenue, Herston Qld 4006  
PO Box 22, Royal Brisbane Hospital LPO, Herston Qld 4029  
**P:** (07) 3358 4424  
**E:** brisbane@mifq.org.au

Tuesday 2 June, 2015

The Mental Illness Fellowship Queensland (MIFQ) supports the federal bill to legalise marriage equality,

Everyone has the right to lead lives which fully express love, mutuality and commitment – and that includes the right to marry.

There is no place in a modern society for cultural bias, i.e. where same sex relationships are viewed as abnormal. It's this bias that ultimately leads to social exclusion at best, and persecution at the worst.

This bill is about diversity, equality and healing. It's about feeling valued in society and not being judged for personal choices.

In countries and cities where same sex marriage has been legalised there has been an almost immediate shift in attitudes and reduction in discrimination.

MIFQ believes it is an important step in identifying our nation as one that will take steps to ensure the mental wellbeing of all Australians is on the agenda.



Tony Stevenson  
CEO Mental Illness Fellowship Queensland

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Roses in the Ocean

stemming the tide of suicide

June 1<sup>st</sup> 2015

Members of Parliament

RE: FEDERAL BILL TO LEGALISE MARRIAGE EQUALITY

We wish to strongly express our support of a Federal Bill to legalise marriage equality in Australia. There are so many reasons why this change in legislation is the right decision, but today we write to you specifically with regard to the impact such a decision would have on the extremely high rates of suicide amongst our LGBTI communities throughout Australia.

Suicide rates of LGBTI Australians is 14 x higher than their heterosexual peers - a frightening fact that must be addressed.

Whilst suicide is a complex and difficult social issue, there are significant changes that can and ought to be made to the way we as a nation perceive and approach suicide prevention. We know that a significant number of suicides are unrelated to any mental illness. We know that stress, lack of connectedness, purpose and meaning in life can all play a significant role in a person getting to a stage where they see ending their own lives as their only option. Add to that the marginalisation, stigma, discrimination and judgement that members of our LGBTI communities experience every day, and the risk factors for a person considering, attempting and acting on suicidal thoughts significantly rise.

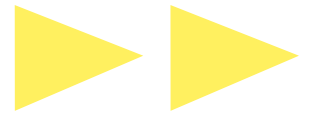
Through our work hosting public suicide prevention awareness events, collaboratively operating the Suicide Prevention Lived Experience Speakers Bureau, and various other consultations we have with people throughout our communities we believe that the legalisation of marriage equality would be an enormous step forward in accepting and supporting our LGBTI Australians, and provide a very important piece of the suicide prevention puzzle in our country.

Bronwen Edwards  
Founder and CEO  
Roses in the Ocean

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## Marriage equality is important to young people, so it's important to us.

“Everyone deserves to love and be loved in return ... gender or sexual orientation has nothing to do with it.” – Maizy, a 24-year-old ReachOut Youth Ambassador from Western Australia.

**Acceptance and equality can make growing up easier for young Australians. Amending the *Marriage Act* to accept a union of two people will signal to all young Australians that their love is equal to any other person's love.**

Every month, nearly 20,000 young Australians visit ReachOut for advice on sexuality, sex and gender identity. About 65 per cent of them say that they're going through a tough time, and that they're looking for help.

Jono Nicholas, CEO of ReachOut Australia, says “It's clear from the large numbers of LGBTQI young people who visit ReachOut each month that sexuality is a pressing issue for young Australians. Sexuality is often a factor in bullying, feeling accepted and discrimination – all of which can negatively affect a young person's mental health. But this doesn't have to be the case.”

Christiana, a 19-year-old ReachOut Youth Ambassador from Victoria, says “Marriage equality will be a step in the direction of validating homosexual relationships, and reduce the social stigma surrounding them. This goes a long way to easing the stress of this affected group, especially young people, who are still very impressionable.”

In Australia, 81 per cent of young people aged 18–24 years support marriage equality (Galaxy 2012). ReachOut Youth Ambassadors, who volunteer their time to help young Australians through tough times, know better than most the impact that marriage equality will have on their peers.

“I have many LGBTQI friends who wish to marry their significant others. It makes them depressed and angry that they have not been allowed to do so ... they feel it's a breach of basic human rights,” says Maddison, a 19-year-old ReachOut Youth Ambassador from New South Wales.

Sam, a 22-year-old ReachOut Youth Ambassador from Victoria, says “Not having equality makes people feel ostracised, different, abnormal, shameful. It can lead to self-doubt, shame and guilt, which can decrease quality of life and be the start of mental health problems.”



The television show *Married at First Sight* recently sparked suggestions of a double standard when it comes to marriage, something that hasn't gone unnoticed by ReachOut Youth Ambassador Christiana.

"If we truly believed that marriage was a pure and religious thing, why have we allowed the social experiment *Married at First Sight* to be aired? If it's ok for complete strangers to marry for another's entertainment, then it should not be denied to those who love another of the same gender," adds Christiana.

Marriage equality is important to young people, so it's important to us. With suicide and self-harm an issue of concern for 41 per cent of LGBTQI young people (Growing Up Queer 2014), it's clear that equality can play a significant role in improving youth mental health. We hope to see equality achieved in the *Marriage Act* in 2015, and we hope you'll join the call for equality, too.

### **Here's what else ReachOut Youth Ambassadors say about marriage equality:**

- "Marriage equality allows young people to feel free enough to be who they are without judgement from any other persons." – Madeleine
- "We pride ourselves on being a country that provides equal opportunities for all. This cannot be successfully achieved until issues such as marriage equality have been dealt with." – Rachael
- "Marriage equality is important for young people's mental health because they can be proud of who they are and have the same rights as everyone else instead of being told what they want is wrong." – Amber
- "I believe everyone deserves to be loved and to show love to another, whether it be either man or woman. Some might say that they can do this without having to get married as such, but why should they have to have a limit? Love has no limits. If a man and a woman are able to bring together their families and friends for one day to show how much they love each other, then why can't two men do this? Or two women?" – Chelsea
- "People who might be in same-sex relationships deserve the right to be happy and get married too." – Jake
- "We don't live in the Middle Ages anymore. Today's society is more accepting of people's personalities and lifestyles. A couple's love should not be dictated by a book written centuries ago!" – Zac
- "There are so many young people who are going through this, and they're are afraid of the judgment of others. We need to allow everyone to have the same opportunity." – Zoe
- "I have lots of friends who can't get married, have spent lots of money to go overseas to get married, who are discriminated against because technically their love is deemed illegal and quite simply can't enjoy the basic privileges of their straight friends." – Sam
- "I'm gay and I know that one day I'll want to get married, and I don't want to have to leave the country to do it! I and many of my friends in the LGBTQI community feel like second-class citizens in this respect." – Katie
- "Marriage equality makes a broad statement about equality of LGBTQI people in the community. This will show much greater acceptance and support, as opposed to the exclusion that can lead to mental health difficulties." – Anonymous



**GIVING A VOICE TO  
THE ELEPHANT  
IN THE ROOM**

June 2 2015

Members of Parliament

RE: FEDERAL BILL TO LEGALISE MARRIAGE EQUALITY

It is with great passion that we express our unwavering support of a Federal Bill to legalise marriage equality in Australia. Among many reasons why passing this Bill is the right decision for our secular government, it is a huge step towards a mentally healthy country where all individuals are accepted as equal, contributing and valuable members of our society regardless of their sexual orientation or identity.

Our support of the passing of this Bill directly relates to our understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of young LGBTI Australians through the work we do. We run mental health education programs in schools and universities to encourage young people to reach out to the many services that are available to them (including government funded service providers).

We know that the suicide rate of LGBTI Australians is 14x higher than their heterosexual peers, a devastating statistic. Through our work, we know that one of the biggest barriers to young people seeking help for mental health issues is the stigma they feel surrounding poor mental health. Our programs aim to break down the stigma around poor mental health by using the personal stories of young people who have successfully managed (or continue to manage) mental ill health through reaching out for help. Our focus is to create an open, empathetic environment where every young person feels their voice is both valid and heard.

It is for that reason that the legalisation of marriage equality is crucial in continuing to improve the mental health of young people. By having the government contribute to the outward acceptance of all individuals, including LGBTI Australians, we can work together to create a hope-filled society where every person knows that they deserve to live their lives to the fullest and seek out any help they need to navigate tough circumstances or illness of any kind.

We look forward to having a government that recognises how truly important this Bill is to creating the fairest, healthiest country we all deserve to live in.

Sam Refshauge  
CEO & Executive Director  
Batyr

6/1/2015

Members of Parliament,

RE: FEDERAL BILL TO LEGALISE MARRIAGE EQUALITY

As the President of The JED Project, an organisation waging war on youth suicide, I am writing to show my organisation's support for Labor's marriage equality bill.

Devastatingly, suicide accounts for nearly a quarter of all deaths in young men aged 15 – 24 in Australia. Moreover, approximately one in four young Australians currently has some kind of mental health condition. These rates increase significantly for people who identify as LGBTI. At The JED Project, we are committed to starting real conversations about these issues to help overcome the current stigma and social taboo associated with mental health.

This bill is a positive step towards building a more accepting Australian society, which we believe will ultimately lead to improved mental health in the LGBTI community.

Thank you for your time in recognising my support of this bill.

Sincerely,



Thomas Davies

**President**

**The JED Project**

**<http://www.thejedproject.com/>**