Letter to the editor

Social exclusion can have negative mental health consequences

There has been much debate in the media recently about same sex marriage and the national Safe Schools Program.

These are emotive topics and there is a range of strongly held personal beliefs that underpins the debate.

What we must not lose sight of is the impact that these discussions can have on the mental health and wellbeing of people in the community.

VicHealth has undertaken work to improve mental wellbeing and build communities and organisations that are more inclusive and respectful.

Evidence clearly shows that discrimination and exclusion of any part of our society has highly detrimental effects to those people's mental health. Among LGBTIQ populations, we know that discrimination, abuse (both verbal and physical), exclusion and prejudice are key contributors to increased rates of depression, anxiety and self-harm. When compared with heterosexual people, homosexual and bisexual people are twice as likely to experience anxiety and three times as likely to experience depression and related disorders.

Conversely, evidence also shows that belonging to a community and feeling connected leads to better mental health, wellbeing and productivity.

Beyond the individual, there is also a huge societal cost to this. In 2009 the cost of mental illness in young Australians aged up to 25 years was estimated at $10.9 billion.

Being part of a family is one of the most important protective factors in staying mentally well and diverse family structures are becoming ever more common. Indeed, a 2015 CSIRO and VicHealth report shows that future trends will see the increase of diverse family structures, including those with same sex parents.

Love doesn't discriminate. As a society we need to support families of any structure, encourage diversity and protect and enhance the health and mental wellbeing of all Victorians.

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