

# Media Release

## HOMOPHOBIC DISCRIMINATION HURTS

Victorians must join forces to eliminate the homophobic discrimination that is so entrenched in society, according to VicHealth CEO Dr Rob Moodie responding to a recent submission to an inquiry into the anti-genocide bill proposed by Senator Brian Gregg.

"We live in a very diverse community, rich in culture and heritage. It is abhorrent that still today, many members of our community still experience less favorable treatment than others on the basis of their sexual preferences," said Dr Moodie.

"Research confirms that discrimination on the basis of sexuality creates mental distress by diminishing self confidence and reducing opportunities at work, school and socially."

"For Australia's young people, sexuality is a significant issue affecting their mental health. A national report on same-sex attracted young people reveals that large numbers of Australia's young people report experiencing difficulties because of their sexual preferences."

"There is also evidence which indicates that a high percentage of young people who attempt suicide are gay, lesbian, bisexual or struggling with their sexuality. So are these young people inviting personal attack or violent retaliation as some RSL members have suggested?"

"Recent research tells us that young homosexuals are four times more likely to consider suicide as a way out than young heterosexuals. Health experts have blamed social isolation and a lack of community understanding.

"There certainly seems to be a lack of community understanding. We must remember that discrimination not only harms the victim, but it also diminishes the offender and the society that chooses to turn a blind eye to the evils of discrimination."

"Evidence confirms that mental health is linked to social and community connectedness, having supportive relationships, freedom from discrimination and a valued social position."

Dr Moodie questions what we have to gain from excluding and discriminating against people on the basis of their sexuality, their gender, race, ethnicity or other similar indelible characteristics of nature.

There is a definitive link between homophobic bullying and discrimination and its negative health impacts. Consider that the World Health Organization defines health 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. With this in mind, the link between discrimination and mental ill-health is evident in problems of lower self-esteem, social isolation, depression, drug and alcohol abuse and suicidal tendencies.

"Homosexual Australians are suffering, both mentally and physically from verbal abuse, physical violence, and isolation. They are the unfortunate victims of this homophobia disease."

"We must stop the cycle to avoid the human costs associated with homophobia. Discrimination and bullying must be stopped in all aspects of society - school, the workplace, the sports field, the church and in the media."

**For more information, please contact:**

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