

Media Release

POLICE MOVE SENDS POSITIVE MESSAGE AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

The decision by Police Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon to remove the ban restricting uniformed police from participating in gay and lesbian pride festivities sends a strong message that discrimination on the basis of sexuality is unacceptable, said Dr Rob Moodie, CEO of VicHealth.

It's a positive thing to have the head of the Victorian police force leading officers in the March. This sends a powerful message to the rest of us that we must join forces with the police force to stop discriminating and excluding members of our gay and lesbian community.

A recent VicHealth study of 1500 Victorians shows that while they are prepared to accept people of different backgrounds and can agree that we should be tolerant of all people no matter what their background, belief or lifestyle, they are much less likely to accept people who choose same sex partners.

"It is ironic that in the same survey, Victorians rated 'feeling safe from crime' as an important factor relating to their physical health and emotional wellbeing, and yet members of the community do not formally recognise gay and lesbian officers who are instrumental in making our community feel safe. Why should valuable members of our police force be excluded on the bases of their sexual preference?"

"I think most of us want to belong and be part of something-our local street or workplace. Imagine that until now gay and lesbian police officers have not been officially recognised by force command- have not 'belonged' to their workplace or community."

"Why should we be concerned? Discrimination is a health concern. Research confirms that discrimination on the basis of sexuality creates mental distress by diminishing self confidence and reduces opportunities at work, school and socially."

"A high percentage of young people who attempt suicide are gay, lesbian, bisexual or struggling with their sexuality in an environment that supports intolerance. Young homosexuals are four times more likely to consider suicide than young heterosexuals. Health experts blame social isolation and a lack of understanding."

"Research also indicates that they are at significantly greater risk of homelessness and depression, and are far more likely to experience bullying and harassment at school."

"Consider that research by the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Right's Lobby found that 84% of Victorian gays and lesbians have experienced discrimination or abuse linked to their sexual preferences. From a health point of view it is unacceptable that people experience less favorable treatment and on this basis.

"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."

"It's a positive thing that Victoria's police force is no longer turning a blind eye. This affirms the value of these individuals to our community. It's time to stop the exclusion."

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