



**Victorian Pride Lobby**

# **2021/22 Victorian Budget Submissions**

Making Victoria the Equality State

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# Introduction

**The Victorian Pride Lobby is a community-based advocacy group that works towards equality, social justice, and advancing human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and same sex attracted Victorians. We work constructively, cooperatively and respectfully with transgender, intersex, asexual and other organisations that support our organisation's mission and vision.**

The Lobby acknowledges and commends the Victorian Government for its commitment to LGBTIQ+ communities. We note that the 2021/22 Victorian Budget will include funding for the following initiatives that were included in previous budgets:

- \$800,000 for the Pride Events and Festivals Fund;
- \$800,000 for the Equality Branch, including the Commissioner and Taskforce;
- \$600,000 for LGBTIQ+ mental health and support services, including the homelessness grants program, support for survivors of conversion practices, and mental health support and family counselling services; and
- \$500,000 for trans, gender diverse and intersex health, including gender clinics, training for healthcare professionals, and peer support programs.

All attest to the desire and commitment of the Victorian Government to improve the lives of LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

Despite many positive strides, this budget submission highlights the unmet needs people from LGBTIQ+ communities still have. This submission is set out in the following parts: continuing funding for vital initiatives, tackling violence, providing safe housing, promoting health and wellbeing, addressing marginalisation, and celebrating our history.

If these recommendations are implemented, they will truly make Victoria the Equality State.

## Continuing funding for vital initiatives

**The 2021/22 Victorian Budget should continue funding for the vital initiatives that were included in previous budgets. These initiatives are vital because they support organisational development, leadership development, economic recovery, mental health, population retention, inclusion, capacity building, networking, broadening community support, and combating homophobia. The following recommendations support continuing funding for these vital initiatives.**

### 1. LGBTIQ+ Community Grants Program

The LGBTIQ+ Community Grants Program provides support for organisational development, capacity building and sustainability of LGBTIQ+ organisations and groups. The funding addresses organisational constraints that limit the ability of LGBTIQ+ organisations and groups to grow or meet their identified purpose. However, this funding expired in the last budget.

**Recommendation 1:** That the Government commit \$200,000 per annum to continuing the LGBTIQ+ Community Grants Program, with a particular application stream for collaborations between LGBTIQ+ organisations and equitable funding across the LGBTIQ+ communities.

### 2. LGBTIQ+ Leadership Program

The LGBTIQ+ Leadership Program gives leaders in LGBTIQ+ communities an opportunity to develop their skills and build their networks. The program builds the capacity of LGBTIQ+ leaders to be powerful change-makers across rainbow communities. However, this funding expired in the last budget.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Government commit \$800,000 per annum to continuing the LGBTIQA+ Leadership Program, including:

- (a) establishing a network for graduates of the leadership program;
- (b) expanding the mentoring program beyond those selected for the leadership program;
- (c) a commitment for a certain percentage of participants in the leadership program to be:
  - (i) Aboriginal;
  - (ii) culturally or linguistically diverse; and
  - (iii) rural or regional; and
- (d) establishing a LGBTIQA+ Youth Leadership Program for Victorians under 18.

### 3. LGBTIQA+ economic recovery grants program

The last state budget provided for LGBTIQA+ organisations that have been impacted during the pandemic. The funding ensures that LGBTIQA+ organisations can continue their important work in supporting LGBTIQA+ Victorians. However, this funding was for only one year despite the effects of the pandemic still being felt by LGBTIQA+ organisations.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Government commit \$2,000,000 in this budget year to continuing the LGBTIQA+ economic recovery grants program.

### 4. LGBTIQA+ Equality Rural and Regional Roadshow

The LGBTIQA+ Rural and Regional Program commenced with an LGBTIQA+ Equality Roadshow across rural and regional Victoria and, in later years, responded to emerging community needs and challenges in rural and regional Victoria. The program drives long term benefits for rural and regional LGBTIQA+ communities, including mental health, population retention, inclusion, capacity building, leadership development, networking, broadening community support, and combating homophobia and other forms of prejudice against the LGBTIQA+ community. However, the program ended in 2020.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Government commit \$500,000 per annum to combating homophobia and increasing connectivity of rural and regional LGBTIQA+ networks across the state, including through the LGBTIQA+ Equality Rural and Regional Roadshow.

## Promoting health and wellbeing

### 5. Community-controlled LGBTIQA+ health services

LGBTIQA+ people frequently report delays seeking healthcare and experience stigma, discrimination, and perceived or actual threats to their safety when accessing mainstream health services, with many not being out to their doctors and many having to educate their doctors on LGBTIQA+ health needs. LGBTIQA+ specialised services, including sexual health clinics, also often have long waiting lists and are primarily located in metropolitan areas. There is a high need for properly funding LGBTIQA+ community-controlled services which are responsive and inclusive to the needs of the LGBTIQA+ community.

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have been funded \$40,000,000 over two years in a service delivery fund, which is both needed and welcome. However, LGBTIQA+ community-controlled organisations serve a greater proportion of the population with similar health disparities and yet receive significantly less funding. To address this disparity, the Victorian Government should establish a service delivery fund for LGBTIQA+ community-controlled health services that at least matches what Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are receiving and which would help fund LGBTIQA+ health services.

In addition to this, the ability to search for safe and accessible health services in a person's local area is something our community needs. The currently volunteer-run service DocDir is the first LGBTIQA+ friendly

doctor directory that helps the community connect with healthcare professionals in their community. There is a need for funding to expand this service.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Government commit \$20,000,000 per annum to a service delivery fund for LGBTIQ+ community-controlled health services - including the DocDir service - to enhance their capacity to provide services across Victoria, address barriers to LGBTIQ+ people accessing services, and reduce the health inequalities experienced by LGBTIQ+ people.

## 6. Mental health services

The Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet and Family Safety Victoria have funded the Rainbow Door, which provides mental health and family violence support to LGBTIQ+ communities. However, there is a need to also fund mental health services to undertake training, upskilling and accreditation for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, particularly in light of the finding of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System that "there appears to be a reluctance among LGBTIQ+ people to use mental health services, often because of negative experiences with the system."

**Recommendation 6:** That the Government commit funding for:

- (a) Rainbow Tick accreditation of mental health services; and
- (b) training and upskilling of mental health workers to better equip frontline service-providers to provide services for LGBTIQ+ people.

## Tackling violence

### 7. Victim support

The Anti-Violence Project has a web-based online violence reporting service for LGBTIQ+ Victorians. However, it is important that this service is more widely promoted and that the data is accessible in real time to those who are providing third-party and assisted violence reporting with Victoria Police and other relevant agencies. There is also the opportunity to develop a similar smartphone application for violence reporting that allows LGBTIQ+ individuals and their close supports to report harassment, prejudice-motivated violence and relationship violence from their smartphones, and thus reduce the lag in violence reporting and increase the response time in engaging appropriate referrals and supports.

**Recommendation 7:** That the Government commit funding to facilitating the establishment of a mechanism for third-party reporting of violence, abuse and discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community modelled off the online reporting tool developed by the Anti-Violence Project. The estimated commitment required is \$20,000 in this budget year.

### 8. Family violence

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended that the Victorian Government provide funding and other resources to support LGBTIQ+ services and communities. Much has and is still being done to implement this recommendation. However, we make two recommendations: first, that the WithRespect LGBTIQ+ specialist service website be funded to develop and publish more resources for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing family violence, including resources on identifying, reporting and seeking support about family violence; second, that funding be provided to promote the WithRespect website across media and other outlets.

**Recommendation 8:** That the Government commit funding to WithRespect for:

- (a) development and publication of resources for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing family violence; and

- (b) expansion of the LGBTIQ+ community education campaign launched during the 2020 Midsumma Festival across media and other outlets to raise awareness of family violence and available services and supports.

## Providing safe housing

### 9. Housing and homelessness

The Department of Health and Human Services and Family Safety Victoria have funded a project to build capacity in housing and homelessness, including a training package for workers on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and a project to build the capacity of refuge services to provide safe and inclusive accommodation, including a toolkit on best practice in LGBTIQ+ service provision. However, we believe this funding can be expanded to include Rainbow Tick accreditation of service-providers, recruitment of specialist LGBTIQ+ officers, and the development of an LGBTIQ+ safe housing network.

**Recommendation 9:** That the Government commit funding for:

- (a) Rainbow Tick accreditation of housing and homelessness services;
- (b) training and upskilling of homelessness workers to better equip frontline service-providers to provide services for LGBTIQ+ people;
- (c) recruitment of specialist LGBTIQ+ homelessness officers; and
- (d) development of an LGBTIQ+ safe housing network of community controlled homelessness and housing services that can act as a community of practice.

## Addressing marginalisation

### 10. People seeking asylum or refuge

The LGBTIQ+ Legal Service provides free help for LGBTIQ+ people in Victoria with their legal problems, including discrimination, family violence, change of name issues, and more. However, there is a need to expand this or similar services to provide legal support for people seeking asylum, refuge, or residency, particularly where they face a serious threat to their lives and safety in their home country.

**Recommendation 10:** That the Government commit funding to a pilot project in partnership with a community legal centre such as the LGBTIQ+ Legal Service to provide accessible legal and related support services to LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum, refuge or residency.

### 11. International students

The Victorian Government has established the International Student Emergency Relief Fund grants of \$1,000 to support international students in Victoria who are experiencing financial hardship through lost wages and work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Victorian Government can do more to support LGBTIQ+ international students during the pandemic and beyond.

**Recommendation 11:** That the Government commit funding to an organisation such as the Pinnacle Foundation or the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Business and Enterprise to provide grants for LGBTIQ+ international students experiencing financial disadvantage to ensure that they are able to continue and excel in their studies. The estimated commitment required is \$20,000 per annum.

### 12. Multicultural affairs

Whilst LGBTIQ+ competence is lacking in multicultural organisations and services, racism and prejudice against religion is prevalent in many LGBTIQ+ communities, venues and spaces. The LGBTIQ+

Multicultural and Faith Project, which was funded by the Victorian Government, intended to trial a public media campaign that combines multicultural and faith identities and LGBTIQ+ identity. However, this project was defunded by the Government.

**Recommendation 12:** That the Government commit funding for a public media campaign to increase visibility and acceptance for LGBTIQ+ people from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds to be led by a community organisation such as the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council.

## 13. Employment

We Are Union Pride, which is based at the Victorian Trades Hall Council, have discussed holding an LGBTIQ+ workers conference. There has been a long history of LGBTIQ+ workers conferences in Australia, including the 'Workers Out!' conference (Sydney, 2002), 'Queer Rights at Work' conference (Brisbane, 2008), 'Raising Our Voices' conference (Melbourne, 2016), and 'Our Voice at Work and Beyond' (Melbourne, 2020). The Victorian Government could commit funding to hosting such a conference on an annual basis.

**Recommendation 13:** That the Government commit per annum funding to an annual pride conference for LGBTIQ+ workers run in conjunction with We Are Union Pride.

## 14. Bi5 Project

The Bi5 Project is a community-driven effort to improve the lives of bi+ and multi-gender attracted people by helping employers, service providers, and community groups to build up their knowledge about the particular needs of bi+ and multi-gender attracted people. It consists of a Bi5 Audit Process, which consists of an audit, support and training leading to an organisation becoming Bi5 Accredited. The project was funded \$100,000 for the first year of its two year span but has not yet had its funding renewed.

**Recommendation 14:** That the Government commit \$100,000 in this budget year to the Bi5 Project.

# Celebrating our history

## 15. History

The Australian Queer Archives, based in Victoria, is the only community organisation in Australia that actively collects and preserves LGBTIQ+ material from across the country, and makes it readily accessible. Particularly during the pandemic, there is a fabulous opportunity to create digital exhibitions from amongst the archives to enable LGBTIQ+ history to be disseminated and celebrated in an accessible way.

**Recommendation 15:** That the Government commit funding to the Australian Queer Archives to create interactive digital exhibitions of LGBTIQ+ history, so that LGBTIQ+ history is disseminated and celebrated in an accessible and engaging way.