



Victorian Pride Lobby

2022/23 Victorian Budget Submissions

Continuing the path to equality

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, queer 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 commends the Victorian Government for its commitment to LGBTIQ+ communities. The previous state budget was an enormously positive step in the right direction for the state's LGBTIQ+ community and committed more than \$45 million to progress equality, improve health and mental health outcomes, and address the needs of LGBTIQ+ communities.

We note that the 2021/22 Victorian budget included, amongst others, funding for the following initiatives:

- \$6.4 million for Switchboard's Rainbow Door peer-led support program;
- \$2.4 million for Healthy Equal Youth grants;
- \$4.6 million for a diverse communities mental health and wellbeing plan;
- \$21.3 million investment in trans and gender diverse health;
- \$1 million for Melbourne Pride
- \$800,000 for the LGBTIQ+ Community Grants Program
- \$200,000 to the LGBTIQ+ Leadership Program

These initiatives 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 still unmet needs of people from LGBTIQ+ communities. 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 2022/23 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 \$800,000 per annum to continuing the LGBTIQA+ Community Grants Program, with a particular application stream for collaborations between LGBTIQA+ organisations, and equitable funding across the LGBTIQA+ communities.

2. LGBTIQA+ Leadership Program

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

Recommendation 2: That the Government commit \$200,000 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;
 - (iii) people with disability;
 - (iiii) rural or regional; and
- (d) funding Minus18's Young Leaders Program.

3. LGBTIQA+ economic recovery grants program

The 2020/21 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 during the period of COVID recovery. However, this funding was not continued in the 2021/22 state budget.

Recommendation 3: That the Government commit \$2,000,000 in this budget year to reinstating 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 legal rights and safety

5. Pride Community Legal Service

The Victorian Government has recognised that there is a significant unmet need in the LGBTIQ+ communities in relation to legal service provision, information, education and reform. The 2016 Victorian Access to Justice Review identified the LGBTIQ+ community as one of the groups within Victoria that experienced particular issues in this regard.

Recommendation 5: That the Government commit \$6,000,000 over four years for the establishment of the Pride Community Legal Service.

6. 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 supporters 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 6: 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.

Promoting health and wellbeing

7. LGBTIQ+ community-controlled health services

LGBTIQ+ 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 LGBTIQ+ health needs. LGBTIQ+ 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 LGBTIQ+ community-controlled services which are responsive and inclusive to the needs of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have been funded \$40,000,000 over two years in a service delivery fund, which is both necessary, needed and welcome. However, LGBTIQ+ 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 LGBTIQ+ community-controlled health services to help fund LGBTIQ+ health services.

Recommendation 7: That the Government commit \$20,000,000 per annum to a service delivery fund for LGBTIQ+ community-controlled health services 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.

8. Mental health services

The Department of Health and Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing), Department of Premier and Cabinet and Family Safety Victoria have funded the Rainbow Door recurrently, 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 8: 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.

9. Research

There is a need for ongoing funding for a program of research into LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing needs. A program of this kind could include the two major, large-scale surveys conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (one for adults: *Private Lives*; and one for young people: *Writing Themselves In*). Large-scale surveys of this kind require considerable community consultation across intersectional communities and health and wellbeing areas (e.g. mental health sectors, AOD, homelessness, educational contexts, etc) to ensure utility of data to inform service and intervention design and delivery.

The anticipated suite of outputs from this research program includes headline reports (one per project) with disaggregated data by gender, sexuality, area of residence, ethnicity and disability; as well as focused community and health briefing papers that synthesise data across both projects and propose development of services and interventions to meet community need, outcome monitoring reports to track progress against outcomes in the whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ Strategy, and different approaches to dissemination of data (podcasts, presentations and disaggregated data reports).

In 2020, the Lobby undertook a survey of attitudes towards and experiences of policing. The response was the largest dataset of its kind on the experiences of the Victorian LGBTIQ+ community of police and policing, which was the basis of the landmark report *Upholding our rights: LGBTIQ+ attitudes towards and experiences of policing in Victoria*. Whilst surveys provide an important feedback mechanism for our communities, the Lobby is seeking funding to support the collection of more reliable, accurate and consistent data about the experiences of LGBTIQ+ Victorians and the police to support our efforts to drive equality and positive change.

Recommendation 9: That the Government commit to funding LGBTIQ+ research which includes;

- (a) \$500,000 per annum for an LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing research program. This would include funding for two full-time research fellows, management, and survey advertising.
- (b) \$90,000 to fund a second iteration of the Police Attitudes Survey.

Tackling family violence and homelessness

10. 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 10: 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.

11. Housing and homelessness

The then 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 11: That the Government commit funding for an LGBTIQ+ housing and homeless package, which includes:

- (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.