

LHA's contribution to the disability safeguards consultation

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia made a submission to the Australian Government's consultation on the development of a new Disability Support Quality and Safeguarding Framework and a Disability Support Ecosystem Safeguarding Strategy.

The consultation sought views on what "safeguards" and "quality" should mean in practice, and how systems, services and workers can better protect people with disability from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. It also asked how people with disability can be supported to understand and exercise their rights, participate in co-design, receive person-centred support, hold services accountable, and experience better coordination across disability and mainstream systems.

In our response, LHA emphasised that safeguards and quality cannot be effective unless they explicitly recognise the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people with disability. We highlighted that many LGBTIQ+ people with disability face compounded risk, including discrimination, exclusion and identity-based harm, alongside other forms of violence and neglect. Safeguards must therefore go beyond physical safety to include cultural safety, dignity and respect for sexual orientation, gender and bodily diversity.

LHA argued that quality services must be inclusive and affirming, not simply clinically competent. We noted that services cannot be considered high quality if people are required to hide who they are, tolerate misgendering or educate staff in order to receive support. Workforce capability, including training developed with lived-experience organisations, was identified as a critical safeguard in its own right.

We also stressed the importance of genuine co-design with LGBTIQ+ people with disability and the organisations that support them. Consultation processes must be accessible, adequately resourced and trauma-informed, rather than assuming that general engagement automatically captures the experiences of all groups.

Across the submission, LHA reinforced the need for accountability mechanisms that can identify and respond to discrimination and identity-based harm, not only more visible forms of abuse or neglect. We highlighted the fear of retaliation experienced by many people who rely on services for daily support, and the need for safe, independent and trusted reporting pathways.

Finally, LHA emphasised that safeguarding must operate across the whole system, including mainstream health, mental health, aged care and justice services, where many LGBTIQ+ people with disability experience harm outside the disability sector.

Our submission was grounded in the National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ People 2025–2035 and recommended the use of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020. We highlighted that consistent, intersectional data collection is essential to measure whether new safeguarding arrangements are improving safety and wellbeing for LGBTIQ+ people with disability.

Through this submission, LHA sought to ensure the new safeguarding framework recognises intersectional risk, values lived experience, and delivers protections that work for all people with disability, including those who are LGBTIQ+.