



meridian

Strategy

2025–2030

Acknowledgement of Country

Meridian acknowledges the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, the traditional and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and region.

Meridian recognises the deep and enduring strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge.

We pay our respects to Elders, past and present and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are LGBTQ+, Sistergirls and Brotherboys, who live with HIV and who work alongside and guide us in our work promoting health, welfare and justice. Always was, always will be.

Artist: Ngunnawal Elder Tina Brown

Acknowledgement of our HIV positive elders

Meridian was built on the foundation of the community response to HIV. We acknowledge the elders who led the way in the early days of HIV, and who continue to support their community and fight against stigma and discrimination. We acknowledge and are inspired by the various ways HIV positive people continue to live with the impact of HIV.

Meridian continues to place the needs and experiences of people living with HIV at the centre of our organisation and work. We are committed to ensuring that people living with and impacted by HIV and AIDS are not overlooked as the world works toward the elimination of HIV. We see the immense value of their lived experience, and we acknowledge their contribution to the elimination of HIV.

Acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ people and communities

We are proud to be a part of the sexuality and gender diverse community. We see the rich diversity in our communities; we honour it, and we celebrate it together. We recognise that individuals within our communities have multiple, distinct and overlapping identities and experiences.

We also recognise the immense strength and resilience within our communities, and we thank sexuality and gender diverse people and organisations for their continued and tireless work to build a stronger community. Because of their efforts, the ACT is becoming an increasingly inclusive, safe, and welcoming place, where everyone can be their whole selves and diversity is celebrated.

CONTENTS

ABOUT US	3
Our vision	3
Our purpose	3
OUR COMMUNITIES	4
OUR VALUES	6
Led by our communities	6
Inclusivity.....	6
Self-determination	6
Equity.....	6
Courage.....	6
Accountability.....	6
Celebration	6
OUR CONTEXT	7
We see people living with HIV	7
Getting to elimination.....	7
Determinedly pursuing health, welfare and social equity	11
A plan for a digital age	14
It is about scale and impact	15
An ally and friend	16
Partner of choice in the Capital of Equality	17
OUR DIRECTIONS	18
Educate.....	19
Connect.....	20
Support.....	21
Champion.....	22
Sustain	23
REFERENCES	24



ABOUT US

Our name honours the Meridian Club, a social club established by LGBTQ+ Canberrans to create connection and joy.

Meridian means other things too.

The imaginary lines of longitude that run between the north and south poles are called meridians. They help us work out where we are and how to find each other.

We call our mornings *ante meridiem* (AM) meaning before midday and our afternoons are *post meridiem*. Meridians locate us in time.

The final meaning of meridian is zenith or high point, reflecting our efforts since 1983 to do more and be more for our communities.

Our vision

A future where our communities thrive: healthy and well, free from stigma, empowered by peer connection and supported by a just and inclusive society.

Our purpose

By you, for you, with you: Meridian champions health, dignity and justice for people living with HIV and of diverse sexualities and genders.

We live and work on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

Canberra's LGBTQ+ communities founded our organisation to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Our communities embrace all who are affected by HIV. Our work to end HIV continues.

We have learnt a lot about looking after our health, looking after each other and creating change.

Today, we are responding to all aspects of health, wellbeing, equity and justice for people of diverse sexualities and genders.

OUR COMMUNITIES

We value and honour our history as an organisation established by volunteers in response to the HIV epidemic in the early 1980s. Serving people living with HIV remains at the centre of our work.

Led by community, we have evolved to also respond to the health, wellbeing and social needs of people of diverse sexualities and genders. This includes people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual, asexual, trans, gender diverse and non-binary.



And this is only part of us. We recognise that, as individuals, we have multiple, distinct and intersectional identities and experiences. Within our communities are people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, sex workers, from diverse cultural backgrounds and living with disability. We honour older members of our communities for their trailblazing, struggle and wisdom and young people for forging new paths in uncertain times.



Today, we know our communities by many names, including LGBTIQ+. We recognise the experiences of people with innate variations in sex characteristics. Some are LGBTQ+, many are not. We welcome all intersex people and respect their calls for self-determination. However, we are not specialists in their experience beyond shared sexualities and gender identities.

Our communities share experiences of stigma, discrimination and marginalisation because of who we are. Coming out – the emergence from being alone, an abandoning of masks and of suppressing who we are – is life changing. It is our discovery of others in whom we recognise ourselves, whose journeys are different to our own but also the same. We work to ensure that people can connect and be part of a community that celebrates the rich diversity, strength and resilience of our individual and collective experiences.

Our communities also include organisations and groups that support our vision and purpose and have similar goals and objectives. Partnership and collaboration with others are critical in meeting the intersectional needs of our communities.

Our communities continue to emerge and evolve as community, social and political mores shift. As an organisation, we continue to learn and grow alongside our communities. Our commitment at Meridian is to be intentional in the words we use.

We deliver services to all people living with and affected by HIV and all people of diverse sexualities and genders, because inclusivity matters to us.



OUR VALUES

Led by our communities

We are created by and serve people of diverse sexualities and genders. Our work is grounded in the lives, leadership and aspirations of the communities we serve.

Inclusivity

We welcome and celebrate the strengths of all, especially those who experience stigma, marginalisation or exclusion because of who they are.

Self-determination

We respect the right of all communities to define themselves, speak for themselves and lead their own advocacy and care.

Equity

We work to eliminate health disparities and ensure people living with HIV and those of diverse sexualities and genders have access to services that affirm who they are and meet their needs.

Courage

We speak truth to power, challenge injustice and advocate boldly, even when it is uncomfortable.

Accountability

We are transparent, responsible and committed to keeping the trust of our communities. We work positively and collaboratively to achieve impact.

Celebration

Together, we celebrate the diversity and resilience of our communities.

OUR CONTEXT

We see people living with HIV

The mission to end HIV transmission by 2030 builds upon the labour of people living with HIV in taking treatment every day, because undetectable = untransmissible (U=U). The 2030 goal cannot be achieved without that effort. Yet, the visibility of people living with HIV has never been lower.

The experience of living with HIV today is more diverse than ever. For some living long-term, HIV is central to who they are. It is an identity built from friendships forged in the face of a frightening diagnosis, from stigma, poor health and financial distress. For others, HIV is managed with medication and regular clinical care, like other health issues and does not shape their sense of self.

Whatever HIV means for Canberrans with the virus, Meridian will be there when they need it for information, connection, services and advocacy. We know that stigma, health inequities and barriers to accessing services remain day-to-day realities. There is much for us to do.

We accept our responsibility humbly, knowing that across all the things we do, only Meridian exists to serve people living with HIV.

Getting to elimination

Australia's National HIV Strategy 2025-2030 charts a path to virtually eliminate HIV transmission by 2030. In the ACT, HIV testing and PrEP use by gay, bisexual and queer men is low and late HIV diagnoses are the highest in Australia. Increasing regular HIV and STI testing and PrEP use is a priority and special effort is needed to encourage testing among people who have not tested previously.

The ACT plays a special role getting to elimination as a leading destination for international students. Meridian must be a leader in making HIV prevention, testing and treatment truly accessible for people who may not know our health system or be confident asking for what they need. It means embracing the exponentially growing potential of digital tools.

Gay, bisexual and queer men in the ACT

HIV prevention and treatment

Of those with HIV:

96.6% are on treatment and
100% are undetectable.

34.3% of gay, bisexual and queer men in the ACT used PrEP in the last six months.

(Broady et al. 2024).

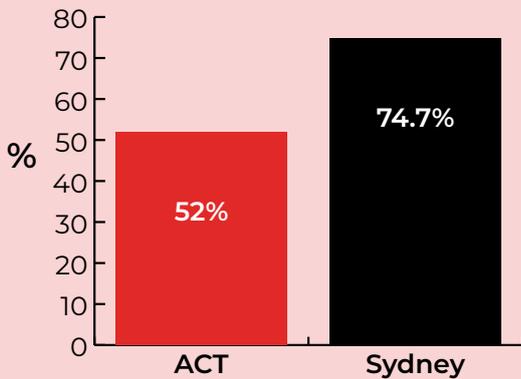
Used PrEP in the prior six months



HIV testing

The ACT has the lowest rate of HIV testing in Australia (Broady et al. 2024).

Had a HIV test in the prior 12 months



One in 8 (12.6%) have never had a HIV test.

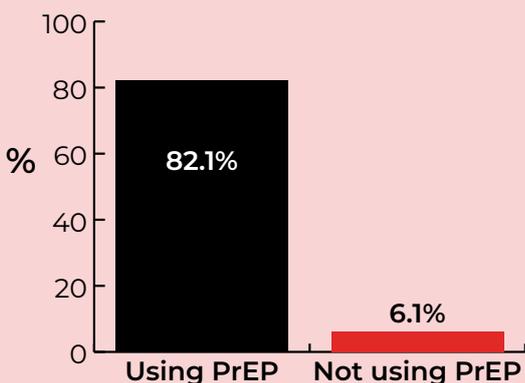
One in 6 (16.3%) do not know their HIV status.

Only 31.9% of men not using PrEP had a HIV test in the past year.

(Broady et al. 2024)

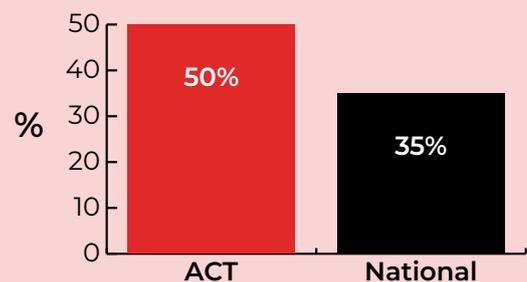
Testing is much more frequent among men using PrEP (Broady et al. 2024).

Tested 3 or more times in the prior 12 months



Half of those diagnosed with HIV in the ACT are diagnosed late, the highest rate in Australia (King et al. 2024).

Diagnosed late with HIV





International students

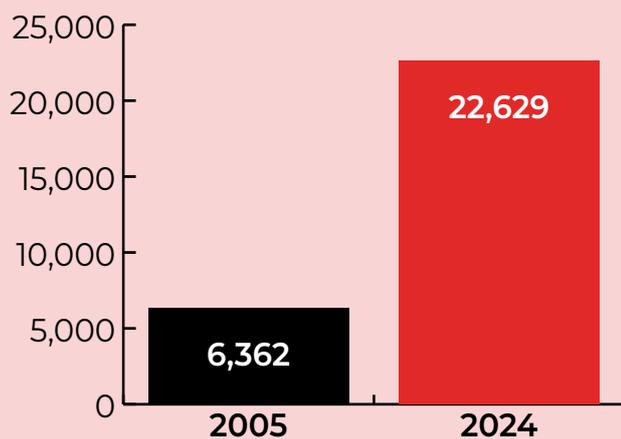
International students represent 4.7% of the ACT population, among the highest proportion of any state and territory (ABS 2024a; DoE 2025).

International students as a proportion of population in 2024

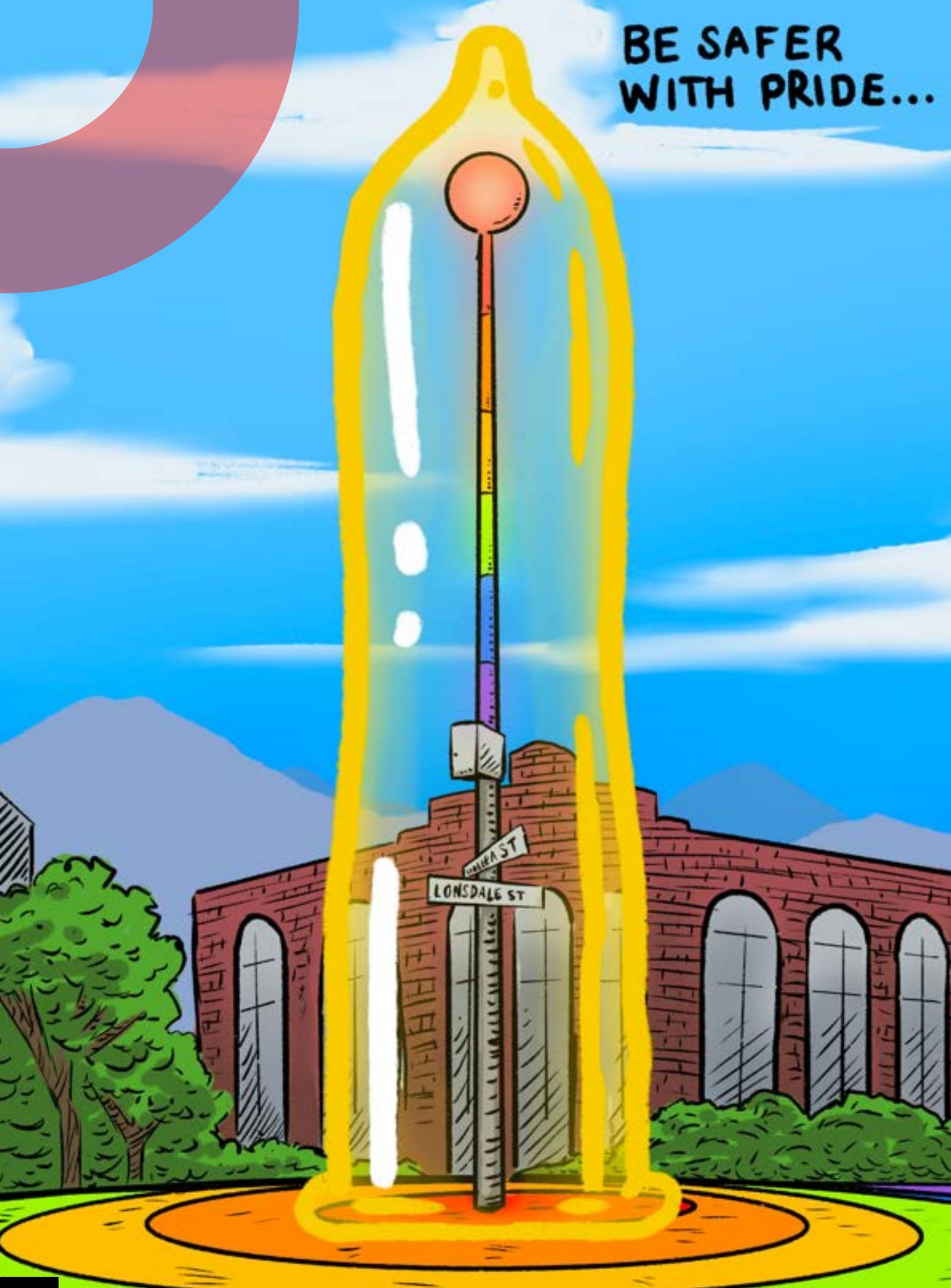


The number of international students in the ACT has quadrupled in the past 20 years (ABS 2024a).

ACT international student population



BE SAFER
WITH PRIDE...



Determinedly pursuing health, welfare and social equity

The secret of Meridian's success – its uniqueness – is that it combines two critical capabilities in its response to HIV: the determination to end the epidemic, and the community knowhow to do this successfully. This is the DNA of Meridian and its counterparts across Australia – a simple, but powerful combination. During this Strategic Plan, Meridian will apply the same capabilities to its work to end health inequity for people of diverse sexualities and genders.

The vision of *Australia's National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ People 2025–2035* is that LGBTIQ+ people achieve equitable health and wellbeing outcomes with access to safe, respectful, high-quality and inclusive health and wellbeing services. We welcome this vision.

Meridian will advocate for action that addresses the policy and program failures revealed by health, welfare and social data. When nine-in-ten LGBTQ+ young people are in distress, it is time to seek accountability from decision-makers and demand better. We will work with mainstream services to improve their capability and confidence working with people of diverse sexualities and genders. But we will not give equivalence to those services: Meridian and A Gender Agenda are qualitatively different, being by, for and of our communities. We call out that uniqueness as our strength.

Most of all, we will bring together our determination to reduce these inequities with the privileges that come from being our communities. This means we will be dogged with data, deliver our services with fidelity, work from the best evidence and follow trends over time. Our north star will be better health, better connectedness, better services and better quality of life.



LGBTQ+ people in the ACT

Around 20,000 Canberrans (5.6%) aged 16 and over identify as LGBTQ+, the highest proportion of the population of any state or territory in Australia (ABS 2024b).

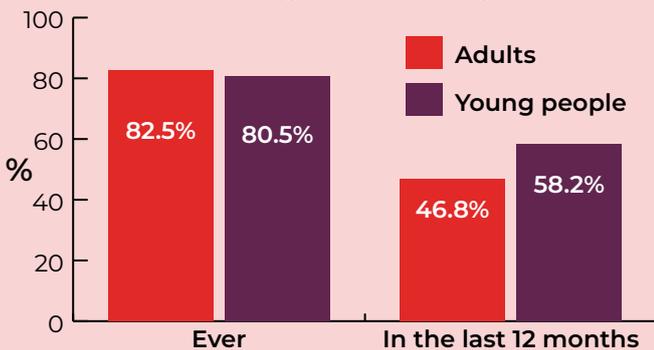
9.5%

of young Australians aged 16 to 24 years identify as LGBTQ+ (ABS 2024c).

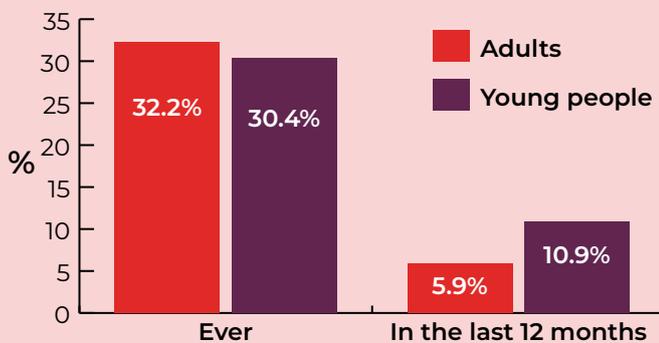
Suicidality and psychological distress

LGBTQ+ people experience much higher rates of mental health conditions, suicidality and psychological distress than their peers, with the ACT having the highest rate of LGBTQ+ adults with suicidal thoughts in Australia (Hinton 2025).

LGBTQ+ people in the ACT who have thought of taking their life



LGBTQ+ people in the ACT who have attempted suicide



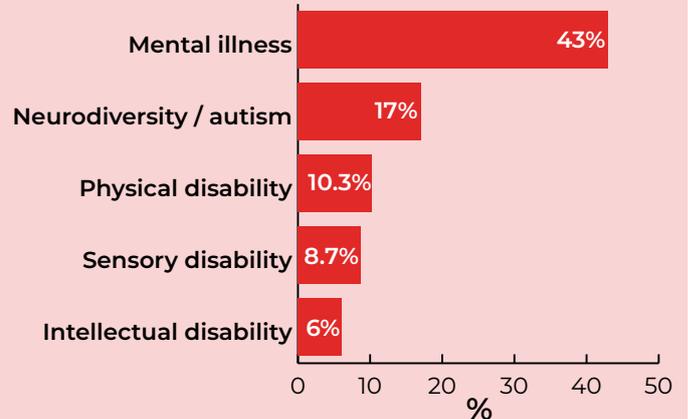
89.9%

of LGBTQ+ 16-to-17-year-olds experience high or very high levels of psychological distress, more than 3 times the level of their peers (27.3%) (Hill 2021).

Disability

Nearly half (46.3%) of LGBTQ+ young people have a disability or long-term health condition (Hill 2021).

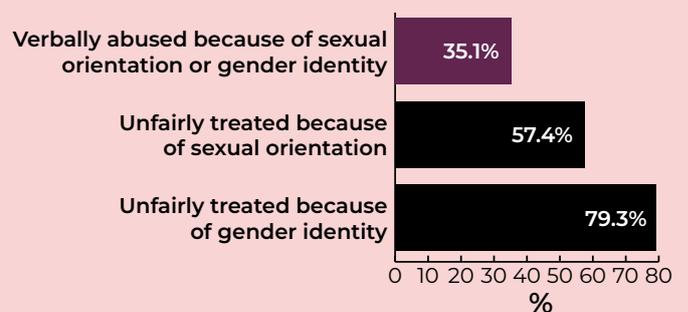
LGBTQ+ young people with disability or long-term health conditions



Discrimination

LGBTQ+ people continue to experience high rates of discrimination and unfair treatment (Hinton 2025).

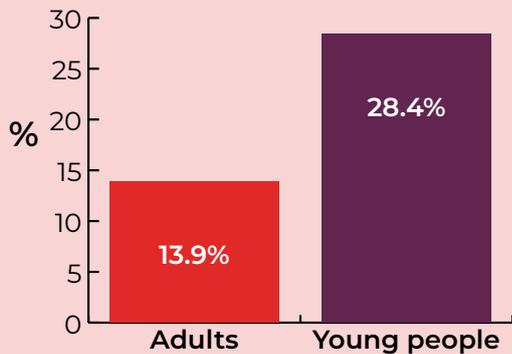
LGBTQ+ people's experiences of discrimination in the last 12 months



Experiences of violence

LGBTQ+ people in the ACT are subjected to elevated rates of sexual harassment and assault.

LGBTQ+ people's rate of experiencing sexual assault or harassment in the last 12 months



Two-thirds (65.7%) of LGBTQ+ adults have experienced violence from a family member and



58% have experienced violence from a sexual partner.

Adults with a disability are more likely to experience family violence.

(Hinton 2025)

Housing



Nearly one in 4 (23.5%) LGBTQ+ adults have been homeless (Hinton 2025).

Family and community



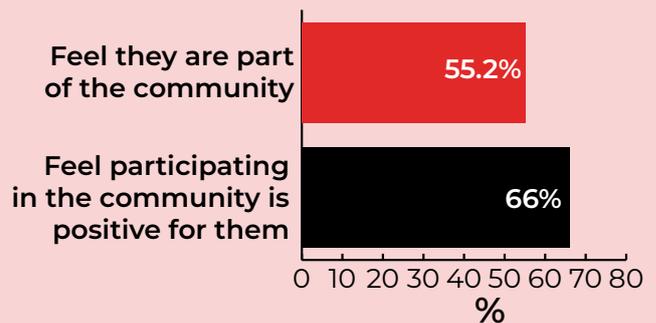
Half (52.4%) of adults feel accepted by family members most of the time.



62.4% of young people who are out to their family report feel supported, but this means 37.6% do not.

Over half of adults feel they are part of the LGBTQ+ community and two-thirds feel participating in the community is positive for them.

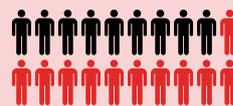
LGBTQ+ people's feelings about the LGBTQ+ community



Trans and gender diverse adults are more likely to feel like they are a part of the LGBTQ+ community

(Hinton 2025).

Accessing services



44.9% of adults feel accepted accessing a health or support service. This means 55.1% do not, at least sometimes.



67.3% of adults prefer health care from a service that is LGBTQ-inclusive (such as headspace) or LGBTQ-specific (like Meridian).

(Hinton 2025)

A plan for a digital age

Digital spaces are central to how people learn, work, connect and build community. People increasingly live in digital worlds. We must evolve to meet our communities where they are: online, on-demand and in environments shaped by technology and innovation.

Meridian will embrace digital platforms not just as tools, but as spaces for meaningful engagement, health promotion, peer support, service delivery and advocacy. We will invest in digital capability to ensure we are accessible, inclusive and responsive. This includes expanding our online presence, co-designing digital initiatives with our communities and enhancing digital literacy across our teams.

With standardised measures of sexual orientation and gender now routinely collected in large-scale surveys, more data is emerging about our health and welfare. This intelligence must inform our advocacy and guide our service delivery.

Our commitment is to ensure no one is left behind in the digital shift. Whether through virtual peer networks, telehealth services or digital storytelling, Meridian will create safe, affirming and empowering spaces for our communities to thrive.





It is about scale and impact

By almost any measure, people of diverse sexualities and genders experience poorer health, welfare and social equity outcomes, most often because we do not trust or cannot find appropriate services or receive poorer care when we do. Meridian can do more for its communities if it has the resources to do so. But despite devastating evidence that physical health, mental health, suicide, sexual assault, family and domestic violence and housing services are failing our communities, funders are yet to recognise the power of peer intervention and the need for community action.

This leaves Meridian with a choice: accept that it cannot meet its communities' needs at scale or find new ways of doing so.

Meridian's challenge achieving scale and impact is shared by countless other community organisations. There is no doubt organisations can achieve more for communities when they work together. Meridian has community standing, service excellence and local knowledge that is of exceptional value. Other organisations also have capabilities that our communities can benefit from.

In the period of this plan, Meridian will step up to this challenge, exploring opportunities for partnerships, deeper collaboration and joint ventures, always guided by the question: 'Does this lead to better outcomes for our communities?'



An ally and friend

Meridian was created by people of diverse sexualities and genders. At Meridian's core is the mission to end HIV transmission and serve people living with HIV until there is a cure for everyone. Meridian welcomes everyone who needs health and community support that is affirming of who they are. We partner with those of common cause across many social movements, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability and migrant communities. We celebrate their self-determination.

We are grateful for the warmth and productivity of our partnerships with A Gender Agenda (AGA), Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFPACT), the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA), Hepatitis ACT, Canberra Sexual Health Centre, the Capital Health Network and many others, not least the general practitioners and other clinicians who support our communities.

We seek to be allies to the intersex movement and to respect their autonomy and struggle for human rights, justice and equity. We welcome all people with innate variations in sex characteristics to our organisation.

We celebrate the success of sex workers in achieving decriminalisation in other parts of Australia and stand in lockstep to achieve full decriminalisation of sex work in the ACT.

Partner of choice in the Capital of Equality

Meridian is proud to partner with the ACT Government in delivering policies and strategies that recognise our communities and promise action to improve our experience of health, welfare and justice. In the *Capital of Equality Strategy 2024–2029*, the Chief Minister says it aims ‘to make Canberra the leading city in Australia for LGBTIQ+ equality, inclusion and belonging.’

We welcome the ACT Government’s commitment in the strategy to funding Meridian and A Gender Agenda:

We recognise the need to allocate resources and funding to support peer-led organisations and initiatives within the LGBTIQ+ community. These organisations play a crucial role in providing support, advocacy and services tailored to the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals. By investing in these organisations and community groups, we can empower them to continue their vital work and amplify the voices of LGBTIQ+ communities.

This is a recognition few governments make and we value it.

We are grateful to ACT Health and the Community Services Directorate for their unbroken 40-year partnership in our communities’ response to HIV. The challenges for the ACT Government in delivering for our communities are formidable: transformative change is required across many portfolios.

The First Action Plan for the Capital of Equality Strategy highlights priorities for law reform that we support:

- strengthening protections against conversion practices
- implementing amendments made to the Parentage and Discrimination Acts
- reviewing the Variations in *Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Act 2023*.

These were informed by Equality Australia’s *ACT LGBTIQ+ legal audit: Reforms for an inclusive ACT* report. Additional priorities include protections against discrimination based on sexuality and gender diversity in faith-based schools and organisations, and the decriminalisation of HIV and sex work.

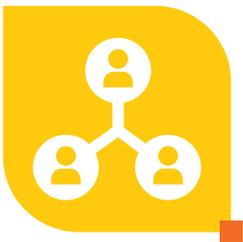
OUR DIRECTIONS

1. Educate



Deliver health promotion that empowers communities to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing, and use our knowledge and expertise to build the capabilities of other services.

2. Connect



Build and strengthen peer networks that foster belonging, reduce isolation and create safe and accessible spaces for our communities.

3. Support



Deliver person-centred services that meet the health, welfare and social needs of our communities, including for those facing stigma and exclusion.

4. Champion



Advocate for our health, dignity and rights by influencing policy and amplifying lived experience in decision-making.

5. Sustain



Grow Meridian so it can do more for our communities, ensuring that expansion is fully costed, carefully planned and financially sustainable.

1

Educate

Deliver health promotion that empowers communities to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing, and use our knowledge and expertise to build the capabilities of other services.

Priorities

- Deliver health literacy campaigns and education resources that respond to the needs of our communities.
- Deliver peer-led HIV and STI education programs across priority populations to build knowledge and promote and normalise prevention, testing and treatment practices.
- Implement targeted strategies to increase HIV prevention, testing and treatment among populations with lower levels of uptake, including those without access to Medicare.
- Promote and deliver HIV and STI testing and partner with others to normalise testing, routinely offer screening and promote testing based on symptoms.
- Provide inclusive practice training and consultation to build mainstream service capability delivering safe, informed, quality services for our communities.
- Develop education and service responses to HIV and the health of people of diverse sexualities and genders as needs change and opportunities and issues emerge (such as mpox).



2

Connect

Build and strengthen peer networks that foster belonging, reduce isolation and create safe and accessible spaces.

Priorities

- Stay true to Meridian's philosophy of community development by finding opportunities with our communities to celebrate pride and our strengths, and to create joy.
- Establish an annual forum for Meridian's leadership to meet with people living with HIV to discuss priorities and advocacy and hear about individual experiences of living with HIV.
- Lead and support events that build community connection and safety, and work to eliminate stigma and discrimination in the ACT community.
- Strengthen peer support programs for our communities that meet their health, wellbeing and social needs.
- Invest in organisation-wide transformation to deliver education, services and connection through digital channels to reach more Canberrans and increase our impact.
- Put those most likely to be left behind at the front of our digital transformation.
- Support Sex Worker Outreach Program (SWOP) ACT's peer-led education, drop-in, outreach and advocacy for sex workers.



3

Support

Deliver person-centred services that meet the health, welfare and social needs of our communities, including for those facing stigma and exclusion.

Priorities

- Expand Meridian’s professional, person-centred and affirming peer mental health, counselling and psychology services through digital and in-person channels.
- Provide case management and navigation for people living with HIV and of diverse sexualities and genders.
- Support older people from our communities to access aged care and other services they may need in their community.
- Provide information and support for people of diverse sexualities and genders living with disability in accessing disability services.
- Provide financial assistance to people living with HIV through the Trevor Daley Fund.
- Provide access to harm reduction equipment including sterile injecting equipment and safer sex products.
- Ensure our peer, counselling, support and clinical services meet best-practice standards through continuous monitoring, service-user review, co-design and accreditation.
- Offer fee-for-service support, always with a concern for equity, to build sustainable services for our communities.



4

Champion

Advocate for our health, dignity and rights by speaking for our communities, influencing policy and amplifying lived experience in decision-making.

Priorities

- Develop a policy platform and advocacy strategy for 2025–30 that includes engagement across the ACT Legislative Assembly.
- Strengthen Meridian’s role as a voice for our communities with the ACT Government.
- Build and promote evidence of unmet community need for HIV, sexual health, cancer and other physical and mental health services and suicide prevention.
- Advocate for and partner in the co-design of place-based suicide prevention initiatives that reflect local data and lived experience.
- Promote action to address domestic, family and sexual violence responses in our communities.
- Advocate for equitable access to inclusive sexuality and gender-affirming care.
- Amplify community voices when influencing policy and funding decisions.
- Support Scarlet Alliance and SWOP ACT in their advocacy for sex work decriminalisation.
- In partnership with the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA), protect the ACT from mandatory disease testing laws by building relationships with police, offering education and advocating for proper occupational health care.



5

Sustain

Grow Meridian so it can do more for our communities, ensuring that expansion is fully costed, carefully planned and financially sustainable.

Priorities

- Value our members and empower our volunteers to respect their vital roles in our organisation.
- Ensure effective governance through a skilled and supported Board and embed community advisory, service user and clinical governance forums in Meridian's decision-making.
- Prioritise financial sustainability and diversification, and ensure growth is carefully planned, funded and delivered.
- Invest in relationships with funders and donors through outstanding performance, professionalism and responsiveness.
- Pursue funding opportunities to grow and diversify our services and increase our impact.
- Explore opportunities for partnerships, deeper collaboration and joint ventures that offer new capability, reach and impact for our communities.
- Invest in Meridian's people through professional development and by monitoring and sustaining high levels of engagement.
- Prioritise communications with partners and our communities on successes and challenges, ensuring we stay visible and relevant.
- Improve Meridian's data collection, quality assurance and evaluation methods to maintain high standards and demonstrate impact.
- Translate the priorities of this plan to annual business plans, ensuring Meridian's staff recognise the contribution each will make to its success and establishing accountabilities for its delivery.



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meridian

PO Box 5245 Braddon ACT 2612

02 6257 2855

contact@meridianact.org.au

meridianact.org.au



@meridianact