

INQUIRY INTO ANTI-LGBTIQA+ HATE CRIMES IN VICTORIA

Respect Victoria submission

Attention	Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria
Response to	Inquiry into anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in Victoria
Closing date	Friday 1 May (extension granted to Friday 5 June)
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Acknowledgement of Country

Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We proudly acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their ongoing strength in being the world's oldest living cultures. We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside First Nations communities to effect change. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of these communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women, and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

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ABOUT OUR SUBMISSION

Respect Victoria is the state's dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women. Our vision is a Victorian community where all people are safe, equal and respected, and live free from family violence and violence against women.

Respect Victoria is alarmed and disheartened by the rise in violence against the LGBTIQ+ community in Victoria.

There is significant overlap between the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ people and violence against women, and thus we encourage a focus from the Committee on primary prevention in addressing the shared norms, practices and structures that allow violence against LGBTIQ+ people and gendered violence to occur.

It is important to consider that there are many communities of LGBTIQ+ people, and violence manifests in different ways. Any efforts to address harms must be inclusive of differing contexts, experiences and identities. Of note, and one that Respect Victoria is particularly concerned about is the rising tide of trans misogyny, and many cases of public discrimination and harm directed to all trans and gender diverse people.

Continuing and strengthening efforts to address harmful gender norms and attitudes is fundamental in preventing all forms of gendered violence, including violence against women, children and all LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

Primary prevention offers a shared solution to achieving a Victoria where everyone is safe, equal and respected - free from discrimination and violence, and where people of all genders and sexualities are accepted and supported. While this is our primary motivator, we acknowledge that efforts to achieve this goal must be nuanced, safe for, and inclusive of all LGBTIQ+ communities.

In the following submission, we directly respond to the [Terms of Reference](#) for this inquiry and provide a series of key considerations, that align with the recommendations previously presented to government in Respect Victoria's report [Maintain the Momentum: Three Yearly Report to Parliament on the Progress of Prevention 2022-2024](#), to support the Committee's deliberations.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

In response to this inquiry, we offer six key considerations to support the Committee's discussions:

1. Support and disseminate research and emerging practice evidence on men and masculinities, particularly considering how heteronormativity and cisnormativity contribute to violence against LGBTIQ+ people, particularly homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. This should include monitoring and evaluation of online environments, harms and rates of experiences of violence against all LGBTIQ+ communities.
2. Dedicated and sustained investment in primary prevention of all forms of gendered violence. Including for:
 - (a) initiatives that address the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities
 - (b) embedding intersectional and gender-transformative approaches in mainstream organisations and programs
 - (c) partnerships between mainstream primary prevention organisations and LGBTIQ+ community organisations
 - (d) increased meaningful visibility of LGBTIQ+ people who are representative of the diversity of communities in all state and national strategies and action plans, including reportable, defined actions and goals to normalise and embed inclusive practice design and resourcing.
3. Support workforce development and capacity building to ensure that prevention efforts include effective and evidence-informed, strategies and programs that address the drivers and impacts of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly trans and gender diverse people, across justice, community, health and mainstream family, sexual violence and prevention organisations.
4. Targeted resourcing and support for LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations that work with and support the diversity of communities experiencing harm to enable sustainability and long-term planning and create pathways into the prevention workforce for LGBTIQ+ people.
5. Require and resource inclusion of the perspectives and priorities of LGBTIQ+ communities in relevant government-funded prevention policy and program design.
6. Implement Recommendation 15d of [Respect Victoria's Three Yearly Report to Parliament 2022-2024](#), work with and advocate to the Australian Government and other Australian state and territory governments and agencies to address misogynistic radicalisation and gendered disinformation in online spaces. This should include increased responsibility of technology platforms to prioritise user safety.

BACKGROUND

Violence against women and LGBTIQ+ communities is deeply interconnected, with drivers of both rooted in many of the same harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Primary prevention offers a shared solution – by challenging and improving the underlying attitudes that enable all forms of gendered violence. In doing so, we also prevent ongoing discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ communities.

Violence against LGBTIQ+ communities

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia have no place in Victoria. Yet hate-crimes remain a real fear and reality for LGBTIQ+ communities. There is ongoing and intensifying anti-LGBTIQ+ backlash internationally and across Australia causing profound harms to LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly trans and gender diverse people, who have been targeted through hateful social and political discourse, direct violence and in some cases legislation and policies that can cause harm. This includes a [recent increase in targeted attacks against gay and bi+ men](#), lured through fake profiles on dating apps. Since January 2024, Victoria Police have made over 35 arrests related to these incidents, with many more occurring across Australia and internationally.

Where violence is motivated by hate, bias, or prejudice directed towards a person or group of people, because of an attribute or characteristic, including gender identity or sexuality, this is defined as a 'hate crime' by [Victoria Police](#). Data shows that LGBTIQ+ people report experiencing high levels of verbal and physical abuse, harassment and sexual assault. This violence can be experienced from strangers, or in the context of family violence or intimate partner violence (1).

LGBTIQ+ communities can experience distinct forms of violence, such as identity-based abuse. This can include threatening to 'out' someone to their community, pressure to conform with rigid gender stereotypes, denying gender affirming care, or social isolation due to their sexuality or gender (2).

Primary prevention of gendered violence

Primary prevention focuses on stopping family, sexual and all forms of gendered violence before it starts by targeting the deep underlying social drivers and conditions that allow it to occur in the first place.

[Change the Story](#) is Australia's national framework to prevent violence against women and their children that identifies the key gendered drivers of men's violence against women as:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

Effective, upstream prevention initiatives can, over time, reduce perpetration of family violence and gendered violence (3). These drivers must be considered alongside unique drivers of violence when working with different communities.

Drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities

LGBTIQ+ communities are impacted by many of the same gendered drivers of violence as cisgender heterosexual women, such as rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity (4). Hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ communities and people within communities (most commonly perpetrated by cis men) (2) operate as a means of policing gender roles and punishing those who step outside binary, rigid and reductive stereotypes of what a man or a woman *should* be. In addition, cisnormativity, heteronormativity and rigid gender binaries are core drivers of inequality, discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ communities (5).

Different LGBTIQ+ communities will be impacted by these drivers in varied ways, depending on their identification and expression of gender and sexuality. Trans and gender diverse people consistently experience disproportionate levels of gendered violence and discrimination, in comparison to cisgender members of the LGBTIQ+ community (1).

A [2023 national study by the Trans Justice Project and Victorian Pride Lobby](#), highlights that anti-trans hate is intensifying, with 85% of participants reporting an increase in online anti-trans hate, and 39% reporting an increase in in-person abuse, harassment and vilification over the same period.

Trans women and trans feminine people are frequently targeted due to transphobic and misogynistic attitudes that perpetuate discrimination and normalise violence. Outlined in Zoe Belle Gender Collective's, [Allyship in Action: Framework for Trans and Gender Diverse Inclusion in Prevention of Gender-based Violence Initiatives](#), transmisogyny is an additional driver of violence experienced by trans women and trans feminine people.

Additionally, overlapping and intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination (for example racism, classism, ableism, ageism) can intersect to influence people's experiences and further drive experiences of violence. Intersectionality encourages us to consider all forms of oppression in our work simultaneously, rather than a siloed approach which sees each form of discrimination as one unto themselves (6).

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The communication and recruitment methods of anti-LGBTIQ+ influencers and hate groups that endorse anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes, including those creating and sharing online content steeped in racism, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, far-right ideology and unhealthy masculinities.

Hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people and communities represent deeper cultural issues which have occurred over history stemming from hetero and cisnormativity and a desire to enforce traditional gender norms. The [recent increase in hate crimes against gay and bisexual men in Victoria](#) facilitated via dating apps should not be considered as episodic or fringe but a reflection of growing backlash to the progress LGBTIQ+ communities have gained, and a rise of conservative and regressive gender norms proliferated by anti-LGBTIQ+ online influencers and hate groups.

Rise of misogyny online

In Australia and internationally, there is a concerning increase in and convergence of misogyny, anti-feminism, homophobia, transphobia and far-right mobilisation, particularly in online spaces where misogyny, racism and anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives intersect and amplify each other. Misogynistic content has grown across social media platforms, forming a significant component of the 'manosphere', a network of online communities that promote anti-feminism, misogyny, and hatred of trans and non-binary people. Those in the manosphere present unhealthy representations of masculinity, where power and dominance are key (7).

Content that is created and shared reinforces rigid ideas about how men and boys "should" behave and what they should believe. Such stereotypes are identified in [Change the Story](#) as one of the key drivers of violence against women, as well as other forms of gendered violence. Research demonstrates that compulsory heteronormativity and transphobic attitudes are central to these reductive and unhealthy ideas of masculinity, including an imperative to 'police' other men's conformities with rigid gender norms (20). Further, adherence to these restrictive and exclusionary ideas about masculinity are key tenets of

other hate-based and far-right extremist groups and movements with links to homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, white supremacy and nationalism (8).

Popularity and recruitment methods

Online influencers use recruitment strategies that are specifically created to appeal to young boys. Manosphere content is often presented as entertainment through humorous forms such as memes, parodies or motivational content, an approach that masks and normalises hateful and violent misogynistic ideologies (7).

Manosphere content can also address and amplify disenfranchisement, anxieties and insecurities including body image, dating and mental health. These anxieties are presented as the fault of feminism and ‘the woke agenda’, obfuscating the role of harmful masculinities in creating these worries and offering a lens through which to understand these difficult experiences alongside more extremist and harmful content and ideas.

The role of algorithms

While these forms of online misogyny are emblematic of a wider cultural problem, it is exacerbated by social media algorithms that amplify anti-LGBTIQA+ beliefs and content to increasingly broader parts of the population, driving increasing radicalisation pathways (7). Research shows that algorithms on YouTube and TikTok actively push misogynistic, manosphere and violent content onto young male users, sometimes in violation of their own policies (7, 11, 12).

Respect Victoria and Body Safety Australia’s 2025 exploratory study, [‘Your image belongs to you’: Young people, social media and image autonomy](#) considers in what ways might social media algorithms be understood as a contributing factor to gendered violence. The report outlines:

‘Research suggests that while algorithms may appear to be neutral technologies driven by user-generated data, they are created by individuals and companies who hold their own biases, and prejudices, and they have been found to be trained on sexist and racially biased data (9, 10). Studies have included the creation of dummy social media accounts set up as male users of different ages to examine how quickly different types of content are pushed to children and young people. Results consistently found that all male accounts were fed ‘manfluencer’, anti-feminist and other extremist content regardless of whether users sought it out (7, 11, 12), sometimes within two minutes of viewing.’

The findings of this research suggests that:

‘Young people can overestimate the level of control over algorithms and what content is served to them on social media platforms. This belief that they curate their own online experience can mean that young people, especially boys, feel guilt or shame for being served harmful content and may therefore be less likely to seek help or invite conversations that allow them to unpack, challenge or resist the harmful content they are being fed. These dynamics highlight the need for digital literacy programs to take on a more comprehensive approach to teaching young people about algorithms and critique online content.’

While this content is created and shared online through social media platforms, young people do not often draw a distinction between online content and offline behaviours or attitudes (13). A UK survey found that children exposed to misogynistic content online were five times more likely to see physically hurting another person as acceptable (14). Other research suggests young men who are exposed to the manosphere content are more likely to display increased misogynistic attitudes (13).

Harmful business models

The manosphere is not only an online community, it is also a profitable, income generator for influencers and social media companies. Controversial and extreme opinions are particularly likely to receive attention, leading to greater engagement that can then push more the availability of increasingly radicalised content.

Manfluencers, self-styled gurus and ideological entrepreneurs operate within a digital attention economy that converts human insecurity into capital (15).

These influencers maintain and grow their audiences by tapping into young boys' insecurities, encouraging them to keep watching or buy their products or subscriptions to be a 'better man'.

Social media companies are also working within an income-generating model, designed to keep users on their platforms to view advertisements. The model is designed to serve viewers relevant content to match their interests, producing echo chambers where the same voices and ideas are pushed and reinforced (16).

There is an onus on governments to ensure that tech companies, digital platforms and anti-LGBTIQA+ influencers cannot profit off harm that is directed at women, and more broadly at LGBTIQA+ communities.

Supporting and disseminating existing research and emerging good practice evidence that enables safety is key to supporting tech companies, digital platforms, governments and the community to effectively understand and address these issues.

KEY CONSIDERATION 1:

Support and disseminate research and emerging practice evidence on men and masculinities, particularly considering how heteronormativity and cisnormativity contribute to violence against LGBTIQA+ communities, particularly homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

This should include monitoring and evaluation of online environments, harms and rates of experiences of violence against LGBTIQA+ communities.

3. Current anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crime prevention initiatives, and how they can be strengthened.

As Victoria's dedicated agency for primary prevention, Respect Victoria would like to highlight the important work of the prevention sector in preventing violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities.

The overlap in drivers of gendered violence and violence against LGBTIQA+ communities presents a clear opportunity to strengthen and extend existing primary prevention approaches to better address heteronormativity and cisnormativity supportive attitudes that drive homophobia, biphobia and transphobia – and, in turn, hate crimes against LGBTIQA+ communities.

Violence against women and LGBTIQA+ communities is deeply interconnected, rooted in many of the same harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that drive gender inequality. Primary prevention offers a shared solution – by challenging and improving the underlying attitudes that enable all forms gendered violence. This focus can also prevent ongoing discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTIQA+ communities.

Increased support and investment in primary prevention that has a deep understanding of these shared drivers is critical to building a safe, respectful and equal Victoria.

CASE STUDY: LOVE YOU QUEERLY

[Love You Queerly](#) is a collaboration between Zoe Belle Gender Collective and Respect Victoria, a seven part video series featuring trans and gender diverse Victorians reflecting on messages of love and support collected at Midsumma Carnival 2026.

Trans and gender diverse people have the right to enjoy safe and respectful relationships, and live free from discrimination and violence. Transphobia, transmisogyny and harmful beliefs about gender that can lead to hate crimes and other forms of violence often go unchallenged, and can be reinforced in the media and upheld in systems and policies. The project aims to share positive messaging that celebrates connection and collective care, highlighting that love, hope, community, safety and allyship are the path to change.

Primary prevention of gendered violence

Victoria has a well-established primary prevention system and workforce with significant expertise and experience in addressing the drivers of gendered violence, including violence against LGBTIQ+ communities (17).

A number of specialist organisations and professionals design and deliver evidence-based primary prevention programs aimed at addressing underlying drivers of violence to prevent it from occurring in the first place (18). This work takes a whole of population approach, including a targeted approach to support children and young people to strengthen understandings of equality, respect and healthy relationships.

The primary focus of the prevention workforce has been to address cisgender men's violence against cisgender women. However, following many years of advocacy and support by LGBTIQ+ led organisations and communities, the Victorian primary prevention and women's health sector has taken steps to expand the focus to preventing gendered violence more broadly in recognition of how harmful gender norms also impact LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly trans and gender diverse people (19).

Ongoing work is needed to ensure that mainstream primary prevention activity is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

CASE STUDY: NATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

In 2024, [Our Watch and Rainbow Health Australia](#) established a three-year partnership to develop a national, evidence-based framework to prevent gender-based violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people and communities, due for completion in 2027. Rainbow Health Australia has been funded by the Victorian Government since 2019 to deliver *the LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Prevention Project*, developing the Pride in Prevention framework and resources that led the way in incorporating the drivers of violence for LGBTIQ+ communities into mainstream prevention work.

The new framework aims to advance understanding of the drivers of gender-based violence against LGBTIQ+ people and communities and equip more individuals and organisations to take meaningful preventive action.

It is important that the forthcoming framework is supported and resourced so that it is embedded across primary prevention work. Importantly, this includes supporting holistic workforce capacity building for the sector, led by LGBTIQ+ community organisations.

KEY CONSIDERATION 2:

Dedicated and sustained investment in primary prevention of all forms of gendered violence. Including for:

- (a) initiatives that address the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities
- (b) embedding intersectional and gender-transformative approaches in mainstream organisations and programs
- (c) partnerships between mainstream primary prevention organisations and LGBTIQ+ community organisations
- (d) increased meaningful visibility of LGBTIQ+ people who are representative of the diversity of communities in all state and national strategies and action plans, including reportable, defined actions and goals to normalise and embed inclusive practice design and resourcing.

KEY CONSIDERATION 3:

Support workforce development and capacity building to ensure that prevention efforts include effective and evidence-informed, strategies and programs that address the drivers and impacts of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly trans and gender diverse people, across justice, community, health and mainstream family, sexual violence and prevention organisations.

Primary prevention and young people

[The Royal Commission into Family Violence](#) and Change the Story highlight education settings as a critical site for primary prevention, supporting children and young people to strengthen understandings of equality, respectful and healthy relationships. A central initiative is the [Victorian Government's Respectful Relationships initiative](#), which operates across all government schools and participating Catholic and independent schools, to build a culture of respect and gender equality, tackling attitudes and behaviours that can lead to gendered violence.

The proliferation of misogynistic and homophobic messaging through the manosphere are having harmful impacts on young people, educators and wider school communities. Female teachers and students are increasingly reporting experiences of misogyny and sexual harassment in classrooms, in some cases, causing teachers to leave the profession (33).

Respectful Relationships education and other school based programs, such as the [eSmart program](#), have been updated and established to provide digital literacy and online safety for students. There are opportunities to expand existing programs to more comprehensively address digital radicalisation, homophobia, transphobia and anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice. To support this, there is a need to provide capability building support for educators to safely navigate conversations about social media and the manosphere with young people (34).

Experience and expertise of LGBTIQ+ communities

There is significant experience and expertise across LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations in delivering primary prevention programs and initiatives. However, organisations and programs, particularly

trans and gender diverse organisations, often face funding insecurity or are not adequately resourced to do this work to the extent that is needed (19).

Community-led approaches and LGBTIQ+ leadership in both specialist and mainstream prevention activities are critical to ensuring the work is inclusive, relevant, meaningful and effective. Increasingly, LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations and the primary prevention workforce are partnering to prevent and respond to violence, with specialist expertise and experience in preventing violence against their communities.

CASE STUDY: ALLYSHIP IN ACTION - ZOE BELLE GENDER COLLECTIVE AND WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE NORTH

In April 2024, Zoe Belle Gender Collective, a trans and gender-diverse led advocacy organisation, partnered with Women's Health in the North to deliver the Allyship in Action forum. In 2026, the partnership published a [framework for trans and gender diverse inclusion in prevention of gender-based violence initiatives](#).

Allyship in Action demonstrates meaningful interest within the violence prevention sector in developing transformative frameworks that are responsive to both the shared and unique drivers of violence against women and trans and gender diverse people. This highlights that equitable partnerships between mainstream organisations and trans and gender diverse-led groups are essential – amplifying impact, sharing power and building mutual capacity.

To strengthen and expand primary prevention of gendered violence, including against LGBTIQ+ communities, sustained investment and targeted prevention initiatives that are relevant to different communities is essential. This includes adequately funding organisations to ensure they are properly resourced and remunerated so that they have a seat at formative policy and legislative discussion. This is critical to embed the perspectives, priorities, and leadership of marginalised and underrepresented communities in the design and delivery of government-funded prevention policies and programs.

KEY CONSIDERATION 4:

Targeted resourcing and support for LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations that work with and support the diversity of communities experience harm to enable sustainability and long-term planning and create pathways into the prevention workforce for LGBTIQ+ people.

KEY CONSIDERATION 5:

Require and resource inclusion of the perspectives and priorities of LGBTIQ+ communities in relevant government-funded prevention policy and program design.

Focus on men and masculinities

In recent years, there has been increased focus on the attitudes, beliefs and messages in society that convey that a 'real man' should be tough, dominant and comply with hetero and cisnormativity. These social pressures can lead to a culture of violence by men against themselves and those around them, including women and LGBTIQ+ people (20).

Stereotypical masculine norms emphasise homophobia and transphobia, which can condone and encourage violence against gender diverse people and more broadly members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, including men who do not align or conform to stereotypical forms of masculinity. Young men's levels of homophobia have been largely consistent over the last 5 years, with data from [The Man Box 2024 report](#) finding that one quarter of young men agree that it is not okay for heterosexual men to be friends with gay men or gender diverse people (23% and 22% respectively), and 39% agreeing that 'a transgender man is not a real man'.

[Man Box data in 2018 and in 2024](#) shows that while a significant minority of Australian men condone and perpetrate violence against women, and are homophobic or transphobic, the majority of men reject these ideals. Respect Victoria's 2024 report, [Willing Capable and Confident](#) further interrogates these findings, outlining that men's behaviours are shaped not only by personally-held beliefs, but also by feeling social pressure to be seen to align with these beliefs in order to maintain their social networks.

CASE STUDY: RESPECT VICTORIA 'WHAT KIND OF MAN' CAMPAIGN

Respect Victoria's ['What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be?' campaign](#) invites men to reflect on and interrogate the social pressures associated with masculinities and their role in building safer and more respectful relationships, families and communities.

The campaign features real Victorian men sharing honest stories about navigating harmful gender norms and taking accountability for their actions. The campaign was informed by the findings of the Man Box study, expert and sector consultation and community testing. It was designed to be embedded in and support primary prevention work with men and boys that focuses on healthy forms of masculinities.

Since June 2025, the campaign has reached over 3.1 million Victorians. It has resulted in more than 22.5 million video views and 22,000 websites visits. Future campaigns will deepen men's understanding of the link between rigid gender stereotypes and violence and how to safely and meaningfully challenge

Primary prevention efforts play a vital role in engaging with men as individuals, while also addressing the social systems, structures, organisations and communities that create and enable these masculine norms. This includes opening conversations about the many forms of masculinities and how they can challenge gender roles and stereotypes safely. Meaningful engagement with men and boys, requires a commitment to a gender transformative approach that examines, challenges and transforms the causes of gender inequality and strengthens actions that support gender equality (21). This is crucial in addressing the drivers that lead to hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ people and communities.

5. The role and responsibilities of social media and digital platform owners in preventing and responding to anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes.

The rise of anti-LGBTIQ+ disinformation and online hate

While online spaces can provide important opportunities for connection and exploration for LGBTQIA+ people, particularly young people, they can also be a site of significant harm (22). LGBTQIA+ people experience online hate at more than double rate of other Australians (23), and social media and digital platforms are increasingly being used to spread disinformation, hate speech and encourage violence against LGBTQIA+ communities (24, 25). This online discrimination can take many forms, such as hate speech, bullying, doxing, threats of violence or death. Social media and digital platforms can be used to normalise, dehumanise and vilify LGBTQIA+ people and communities through disinformation and extremist narratives that lead to significant offline harms, including hate crimes and physical violence (26).

Current online regulation measures in Australia

Historically, regulation of online safety has been approached through a largely 'libertarian' approach, with minimal government intervention, placing the onus on individuals to keep themselves safe online and promoting a 'use at your own' risk culture (27). However, this approach is beginning to shift in response to the rapid development and proliferation of technology, particularly AI and generative AI and significant increase in technology-facilitated abuse. Globally governments are increasingly moving towards greater regulation of technology platforms to require technology companies to take accountability for the safety of their platform users. The Australian Government has introduced several notable measures, including the [Online Safety Act 2021](#) and [Basic Online Safety Expectations](#), that grant the eSafety Commissioner legal powers and outline expectations that service providers will take steps to protect users.

Current regulatory measures set minimum expectations but the safety of LGBTIQ+ communities requires social media and digital platform owners to go beyond compliance and take genuine, proactive responsibility for the environments they create.

The role of social media and digital platform owners

Social media and digital platform owners play a critical role in preventing and responding to all forms of violence facilitated through their platforms. Despite the introduction of regulatory measures in Australia and internationally, social media and digital platforms continuously fail to provide safety and protection for LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

CASE STUDY: META'S HATEFUL CONDUCT POLICY

In January 2025, Meta Platforms, the world's largest social media company, [announced changes to their Hateful Conduct policy](#) with the justification that it would support greater free speech across their platforms.

These changes removed previous restrictions and content moderation on topics such as immigration, gender identity and gender. The updated policy permits users to describe LGBTIQ+ people and communities as 'mentally ill' or 'abnormal' and to call for their exclusion from professions, public spaces, and society based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Meta's policy changes demonstrate the power of individual tech companies to shape and enforce the prevention and response to harms on their platforms and limits to Australia's current approach to legislation and regulation.

Social media and digital platform owners have an ethical and legislated responsibility to establish safe online environments for all users, including LGBTIQ+ people. This includes preventing the creation and spread of online hate and discrimination that is proliferated through algorithms.

At a minimum, social media companies and digital platforms should consider aligning with the [eSafety's Commissioner's Safety by Design Principles](#) to safeguard users online risks and harms. This includes the development and enforcement of community guidelines, terms of service and moderation procedures against LGBTIQ+ hate, disinformation and violence.

KEY CONSIDERATION 6:

Implement Recommendation 15d of [Respect Victoria's Three Yearly Report to Parliament 2022-2024](#) which recommended the Victorian Government:

Work with and advocate to the Australian Government and other Australian state and territory governments and agencies to address misogynistic radicalisation and gendered disinformation in online spaces. This should include increased responsibility of technology platforms to prioritise user safety.

7. The impact of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes on diverse LGBTIQA+ communities, including Rainbow Mob, people with disability, and multifaith and multicultural community members.

LGBTIQA+ is a broad term that represents a diverse community with a wide range of sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics. The challenges and harms experienced by LGBTIQA+ individuals and communities are not uniform and may differ or be compounded depending on a person's intersecting identities and characteristics, including age, cultural background, migration history, faith and disability.

Anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes have widespread impacts on not just individuals but across communities as it undermines connection, belonging, safety and visibility.

Impacts of hate crimes on LGBTIQA+ individuals and communities

Hate crimes can cause significant psychological, physical, social and financial harms on individuals, families and wider communities. Crimes motivated by hatred because of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity can cause greater physical and emotional harm than similar crimes not motivated by hate (32). Additionally, LGBTIQA+ people who experience hate crimes can receive less empathy, less support and experience victim blaming when reporting (28).

Repeated exposure to direct or indirect experiences of discrimination and violence against LGBTIQA+ communities can lower the expectations of LGBTIQA+ people that they will be treated equally and with respect, and may normalise violence experienced within a family, particularly family of origin or within intimate partner contexts including dating relationships (4).

Beyond the individuals directly impacted by hate crimes, it can also have profound impacts on the broader LGBTIQA+ communities. Often designed to intimidate, these crimes can generate widespread fear, anxiety, depression which can translate into behavioural changes such as isolation if people feel that they need to hide their sexual or gender identities to protect their safety (29).

A 2026 paper by the [Digital Ethnography Research Centre, Digital harms: Consistency in definition, understanding and action](#), suggests that consistent and harmful content and interactions in online spaces, such as misinformation, hate and violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities, does not only harm those it directly targets, but also shapes the accepted attitudes, behaviours and norms across digital and physical spaces. Anti-LGBTIQA+ content, disinformation and violence have significant and wide-reaching impacts across individuals, communities and digital spaces.

As highlighted earlier in this submission, overlapping and intersecting drivers of violence, including racism, ableism and ageism connect to broader systems of social inequality and oppression that can shape and compound experiences of harm across LGBTIQA+ communities.

Rainbow Mob

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQA+ people, often referred to as Rainbow Mob, anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes can exacerbate existing trauma rooted in colonisation, systemic discrimination, and ongoing marginalisation (30).

Rainbow Mob can experience significant barriers to reporting hate crimes due to historical and ongoing experiences of over policing and institutional harm. Culturally safe, community-led responses and specialised response services are essential to adequately support Rainbow Mob.

People with disability

LGBTIQA+ people with disability experience disproportionately higher levels of harassment, abuse and discrimination. More than half (52.6% of young people) with disability reported experiencing verbal harassment due to their sexuality or gender identity in the last 12 months, compared to 34.7% of young people without disability (1).

Multifaith and multicultural community members

LGBTIQA+ people from multicultural and multifaith communities may experience unique challenges, navigating expectations of cultural and religious communities and broader social environments. Hate crimes targeting LGBTIQA+ people can cause further isolation for people whose faith does not support LGBTIQA+ identities. They can also report higher rates of family-based rejection and social exclusion, and may face additional barriers to reporting, due to language barriers, culturally safe services and fear of immigration consequences (31).

An intersectional approach is essential to the design and implementation of meaningful, inclusive and effective prevention and response services.

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