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**Dear Members of the Joint Sessional Committee on Gender and Equality,**

Please find below Equality Tasmania's submission to the Gender and Equality committee's inquiry into Tasmanian experiences of gendered bias in health care.

Best wishes,  
Rodney Croome  
0409 010 668

**Equality Tasmania**

Equality Tasmania (formerly the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group) is Tasmania's leading advocacy group for LGBTI people and has been since it was formed thirty years ago. In that time we have advocated successfully for a range of reforms, including the decriminalisation of homosexuality, Tasmania's strong Anti-Discrimination Act, Tasmania's ground-breaking relationship laws, Tasmania's world-class gender-recognition laws, improved policies in schools, health and policing, and marriage equality. We regularly consult with the Tasmanian LGBTIQ community to determine our campaign priorities and to inform submissions like this one.

## The inquiry

There are eight Terms of Reference for the Joint Sessional Committee on Gender and Equality's Inquiry into the Tasmanian experiences of gender bias in healthcare. We will address the following five:

- (1) Examples of Tasmanian's lived experience of gender bias in healthcare;
- (2) Areas of healthcare in which gendered bias is particularly prevalent;
- (3) The impacts of gender bias in healthcare on overall health outcomes;
- (4) Systemic behaviours that cause gender bias in healthcare;
- (5) Best practice for addressing gender bias in healthcare;

We are disappointed the committee has not made it clearer that LGBTIQ+ experiences of health care come within the scope of the inquiry. This may not have been clear to us unless we had made inquiries and had our views solicited. Given the LGBTIQ+ community's history of invisibility, it is vital for parliamentary inquiries that seek to consult with the LGBTIQ+ community to make it clear our issues are included.

### **Examples of Tasmanian's lived experience of gender bias in healthcare**

We suggest the committee consult two excellent sources of lived experience. They include the Tasmanian Department of Health's LGBTIQ+ Learning Resources, in particular:

*Listen to the voices of members of the Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ community in these three short videos.* These videos provide an overview of the types of bias LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians still face when accessing health care. The link is: <https://www.health.tas.gov.au/professionals/education-and-training-health-professionals/lgbtiq-inclusive-healthcare/lgbtiq-professional-training-and-resources>

We also suggest the committee with the authors of *LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians: Telling Us the Story, Final Report*, December 2021. This report has a number of personal stories about bias in health care. The authors have much more material in this regard which they may be able to share with the committee.

### **Areas of healthcare in which gendered bias is particularly prevalent**

Equality Tasmanian recently engaged Drs Ruby Grant and Sharon Dane to conduct a survey of access to affirming health care for trans and gender diverse Tasmanians. The report of the survey, titled *Knowledge, Autonomy and Respect: Trans and non-binary people's experience of*

*medical gender affirmation in Tasmania*. It can be found here:  
<http://equalitytasmania.org.au/reports-and-resources/>

According to Dr Grant: "Our survey found critical shortcomings in the availability and quality of gender affirmation services in Tasmania, forcing some Tasmanians to seek care interstate."

"This is a problem because we know that gender affirmation leads to better health outcomes, but many trans people in Tasmania struggle to access it because of financial or geographical barriers."

The survey found Tasmanians wanting gender affirming hormone treatments can face long wait times and poor communication from healthcare providers.

This was the experience of one community member, Ash Russell, who said:

"It took me years to work up the courage to affirm my gender medically. When I finally did get an appointment after waiting months more for a space in their schedule, the experience was uncomfortable and stressful."

One of the most significant findings of the survey was that trans Tasmanians felt that healthcare providers were placing unnecessary and unfair hurdles in their path to accessing medical care.

Mx Russell: "I felt pressured to conform to gender stereotypes in order to be given access to care. I was then denied that care until a psychologist assessed my ability to understand the impact of treatment in a way that would never occur for any other medicines. This made me feel like my sanity was being questioned simply because I am trans."

On a positive note, the survey showed that once they gain access to services, many trans Tasmanians are satisfied with the care they receive, highlighting the importance of quality healthcare for this community.

Dr Grant said when trans people feel respected by healthcare providers they experience greater satisfaction with care and, importantly, lower levels of stress.

## **The impacts of gender bias in healthcare on overall health outcomes**

Working It Out's submission to the inquiry includes an excellent summary of the impact of bias on health. We defer to its summary.

## **Systemic behaviours that cause gender bias in healthcare**

This term of reference should also refer to attitudes. Much of the bias experienced by LGBTIQ+ people in health care is due to prejudice, stigma and stereotyping. Remedies for bias are ineffective unless they address systemic attitudinal problems.

Behaviour that constitutes and/or causes gender bias is documented in the above-mentioned resources.

Again, Working It Out's submission includes a good summary of relevant attitudes and behaviours.

### **Best practice for addressing gender bias in healthcare**

We endorse the recommendations of the *Telling Us the Story* report in regard to health. They include

- Funded mental health and suicide prevention strategy and services.
- LGBTIQ+ specific services.
- Measures to ensure safety and inclusivity in mainstream service provision.
- LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice training for all healthcare providers. Priority workforce training included, medical and nursing staff and students, then specialists, then professional staff and aged care staff.

In their recommendations in Equality Tasmania's trans health care access report, Drs Grant and Dane recommend:

increased funding for the Tasmanian Sexual Health Service to meet demand and reduce wait times  
ongoing professional development for healthcare providers working with the trans and gender diverse community.

[End]