

# **Supporting LGBTI Young People in New Zealand**



**MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIAITO TAIOHI

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## Background

In 2014 the Ministry of Youth Development commissioned members of LGBT<sup>1</sup> (a term used here to describe people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) communities to think about how they could work together with government agencies to improve the lives of LGBTI young people in New Zealand.

This work involved an extensive consultation process and included face-to-face meetings with LGBTI organisations, as well as targeted processes through Facebook, email and phone calls. The consultation identified a range of areas in which LGBTI young people can be better supported.

### The evidence shows that LGBTI young people are an important population group to focus on

For many young people the experience of finding out who they are and how they fit into the world can be complicated by, or at odds with, widely understood social norms. Everyday things that many people take for granted, such as which bathroom to use, are not always clear. These kinds of questions add to the already complex challenge of going through adolescence and becoming an adult.

The scale and frequency of these challenges, and how they are responded to, contribute to LGBTI young people being at risk of poor mental health as a result of discrimination and social exclusion. A report commissioned and published as part of the Ministry of Health's Suicide Prevention Research Fund in 2012 found that LGBTI people have higher lifetime risk for mental health problems including depression, anxiety, suicide and self-harm, substance misuse and eating disorders, than their peers.

Of the young people who completed the 2012 survey "Young People Attracted to the Same Sex or Both Sexes Report" (part of the *Youth 2000 Survey Series*) who reported same or both sex attraction, 59.4 per cent had deliberately self-harmed in the previous 12 months and 47.7 per cent reported seriously thinking about suicide<sup>2</sup>. Within the population of school students who identified as LGBTI, 57.9 per cent had been afraid that someone would hurt or bother them at school (one or more times in the previous year) and of those students who had been bullied, 46.1 per cent reported they were bullied because they were gay or because people thought they were gay.

These statistics show that we need to do more to support LGBTI young people.

### There are six objectives to focus on

Six high-level objectives were identified through consultation and the work undertaken by the LGBTI community, who were supported by the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) and Ara Taiohi in this work. This response, *Supporting LGBTI Young People in New Zealand*, is framed around these six objectives. The What we heard sections reflect a summary of the issues identified by the LGBTI community through their work. The six objectives are:

- LGBTI young people are included, visible and valued
- the LGBTI youth sector is strengthened and supported
- young LGBTI people participate confidently in their communities and whānau
- LGBTI young people have access to positive environments for learning
- LGBTI youth access appropriate healthcare when they need it
- LGBTI young people access supportive social services when they need them and are treated with dignity in the justice system.

### This is the start of an on-going conversation

Government agencies acknowledge that there are some areas of work that cannot be progressed at this time, but consider this response an opportunity to highlight work underway that supports LGBTI young people. It is a platform from which to continue on-going conversations across communities about ways to support LGBTI young people and ensure that their voices continue to be heard and responded to.

The More Information section on the last page of this document contains links to further details on some of the initiatives discussed in this response.

Government agencies look forward to working with members of the LGBTI communities in the coming months to continue to develop and explore further options to support this population group.

<sup>1</sup> LGBTI is a recognisable term used in this document. The New Zealand Government recognises that LGBTI is not all encompassing, but want to reassure that the contents of this report covers and applies to the full diversity of sexual orientations and gender/sex identities. This is inclusive of but not exclusive to: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Takataapui, Whakawahine, Vakasalewalewa, Fakaleiti, Tangata Ira Tane, Tongzh, Mahu, Palopa, Fa'afafine, Akavaine, Fakaffine, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Genderqueer, Pansexual, and Genderfluid.

<sup>2</sup> This can be compared with the statistics reported in the Youth 2012 survey where 29% of female students and 19% of male students reporting deliberately self-harming in the previous 12 months and 21% of female students and 10% of male students reported seriously thinking about suicide in the previous 12 months.

## Objective One: LGBTI people are included, visible and valued

### What we heard

The LGBTI community identified that for government agencies to better meet the needs of LGBTI young people, adequate data and information is required. In addition, the community identified that raising the profile of, and public understandings about, the experiences of LGBTI young people is crucial to making sure that they have positive life experiences.

Some ways that the LGBTI community identified this could be achieved included:

- the experiences of LGBTI young people being included in research and data collection
- the development of best practice models and training packages for those working with this population
- improving the quality of, and access to, information about sexuality and gender identity.

In addition, in July 2015, Statistics New Zealand released a new statistical standard for gender identity which supports agencies to accurately capture information about all gender identities, including people who do not identify as male or female. This is explicit recognition that everyone has the right to expect their preferred gender identity to be recognised as a core part of who they are. This will also increase the visibility of the gender diverse population enabling their preferred gender identity to be captured. This standard was used by MYD in the application process for Youth Parliament 2016.

### Resources are being developed which support knowledge growth and understanding about LGBTI people and their experiences

Access to quality information about sexuality and gender identity is important for raising awareness of, and understanding about, LGBTI young people. This requires a long-term and sustained approach that encourages and supports the public to engage in conversations about the experiences of LGBTI young people.

The recently released [Inside Out resource](#) is one activity which supports these on-going conversations. The resource was created through a partnership between RainbowYOUTH, Core Education, the University of Auckland and Curative. Funded by the Ministry of Social Development, the resource was developed with involvement from more than 100 people from the LGBTI community, including more than 70 young people.

It comprises an online video series and lesson resource for schools, aimed at educating students about the experiences of LGBTI young people, addressing the bullying they experience, and stimulating discussion among intermediate and secondary school-aged students about the impact of homophobia and transphobia. This resource is intended to be utilised by schools across the country to improve the knowledge and understanding of young people about their LGBTI peers.

### Our initial response

It is important to ensure that LGBTI young people are included, visible and valued. People working with LGBTI young people need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

A range of work is underway which supports an increase in the visibility of LGBTI young people and increases the volume of information being collected about their experiences. Government agencies will continue to work with the LGBTI communities to look at new ways to include the LGBTI youth voice in research and data. Alongside this, government agencies will explore ways that additional training and support can be provided to people and organisations working with LGBTI young people.

### Government agencies are looking at ways to collect information about the LGBTI population

From 1 July 2015 MYD funded providers have been expected to report on the number of young people identifying as gender diverse who are accessing youth development opportunities.

## Objective Two: The LGBTI youth sector is strengthened and supported

### What we heard

Consultation identified the importance of the LGBTI youth sector being strong and supported, both now and into the future.

LGBTI communities specifically identified the importance of:

- working together to recognise and support the expertise of LGBTI young people
- involving LGBTI young people in youth development activities
- building the capacity of LGBTI youth to contribute to their communities
- making sure that the LGBTI youth sector has adequate support networks both now and into the future.

### Government agencies are supporting the sustainability of the LGBTI community

The expertise of LGBTI young people is recognised and supported through the Queer and Trans Youth Grants, funded by MYD and administered by Ara Taiohi. These grants support sexuality and gender diverse young people, their work and the wider LGBTI youth community. For example in previous grant rounds, funding has been provided for the establishment of social and support groups for young people who identify as LGBTI.

Government agencies will work with the sector to identify ways we can best support LGBTI communities to be strong and have a valuable impact on the things that matter to them.

Government agencies understand the importance of developing ways to ensure sustainability across the LGBTI community so that knowledge can be shared, even if the people taking an active role in representing the community change.

### Our initial response

#### Government agencies will continue to engage with LGBTI young people on a range of issues affecting them

At present, MYD engages with young people in a range of ways. For example, national and regional youth advisory groups support a range of youth voices to be heard. One example of MYD's work is the consultation on the update of the bullying prevention guide Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools, produced by the Ministry of Education in early 2015. As a result of the MYD-led discussions, the guidelines include a section on preventing bullying for sexuality and gender diverse young people.

MYD and the Ministry of Social Development will continue to lead conversations with representatives of the LGBTI community to determine the most effective way to support the community to have a voice now and into the future.



## Objective Three: Young LGBTI people participate confidently in their communities and whānau

### What we heard

The LGBTI community identified there are a number of ways to help ensure LGBTI young people participate confidently in their communities. Specifically, the LGBTI community highlighted the need to:

- provide information, education, and support for whānau, families, and Child, Youth and Families carers
- address discrimination by increasing awareness and educating the community
- increase support networks so that Takatāpui and Pasifika LGBTI youth are supported.

Government agencies will continue to work with the LGBTI communities to explore ways to best support LGBTI young people, communities, and whānau to work together for positive impact.

#### **Government agencies are committed to understanding both the strengths and gaps in the LGBTI sector**

In 2015 Ara Taiohi held a number of Snapshot Forums to get a picture of the LGBTI sector, and identify strengths and gaps in both capability and capacity. The Snapshots took place in Christchurch, Auckland and Hamilton. They identified some of the challenges being faced by the LGBTI sector, including that rural towns can be isolating and unsafe for LGBTI young people wanting to explore their identities. In addition, the forums identified that there are very few resources available that support families to come to terms with the sexuality or gender of their child and very little available on LGBTI relationships for families or people wanting to start families.

### Our initial response

It is important that LGBTI young people have the confidence to participate in their communities and whānau, and they need to be adequately supported to do this. There are a number of actions already underway that support LGBTI young people to increase community understandings of LGBTI perspectives, and support LGBTI young people to participate in their communities.

#### **Resources are being developed to raise awareness and understanding of LGBTI young people**

One example of this is the cultural competency training packages being developed by Ara Taiohi to support people and organisations working with LGBTI young people. Development of the packages involves consultation across the sector and is a positive step towards increasing the knowledge and skills of people working with LGBTI youth.

Each of the host regions discussed how proud they are of people coming together and supporting one another, and of the leadership displayed by their young people. The next step will be to harness these findings and explore ways we can grow this leadership across communities.

## Objective Four: Young LGBTI people have access to positive environments for learning

### What we heard

The LGBTI community identified the role of positive learning environments in supporting LGBTI young people to achieve success. More specifically, the following was highlighted:

- the importance of schools, alternative education facilities and youth justice learning environments being positive and safe environments for learning
- the need for sexuality education which provides high quality information about sex and gender identity, as well as gender and sexual diversity
- the value of positive peer support networks for LGBTI young people.

The survey highlighted the importance of acknowledging and normalising LGBTI young people, having strong anti-bullying policies for all LGBTI students, and educating students and teachers on sexuality and gender diversity. The knowledge obtained from this survey will be useful in identifying other actions we can take to support LGBTI young people in learning environments.

#### **Conversations about sexuality and gender identity are being encouraged**

The [Revised Sexuality Guide](#) was released by the Ministry of Education in 2015. This guide aims to support schools to create safe and positive environments to help improve student wellbeing. It encourages schools to question gender stereotypes and assumptions about sexuality, including discussion of culturally appropriate practices and processes for working with Māori and Pasifika students. While not mandatory, the guide provides clarity on issues including consent, coercion and safety. The New Zealand Curriculum is supported by the values of diversity, equity, respect and recognises human rights. These values ensure the rights of all students to self-expression, identification and support. Sexuality education is based on these values.

#### **There is a real focus on creating positive learning environments which support all students to achieve**

Through School Charters, individual schools are required to be welcoming, cater for diversity, and provide appropriate learning environments to enable all students to achieve in an inclusive and supportive environment.

The [Positive Behaviour for Learning](#) school-wide approach supports schools to build a culture where positive behaviour for learning is the norm, and the environment, systems and practices in place at the school support students to make positive choices. The framework helps to ensure that schools are a safe place for LGBTI young people who, as the LGBTI community identified, can feel unsafe and isolated.

### Our initial response

Adolescence is a difficult time for many young people, and this can be particularly so for LGBTI young people who are often confronted with additional challenges. Schools and other learning facilities play an important role in providing comprehensive education to young people, as well as being a place where young people feel safe and supported. The Ministry of Education, together with other Government agencies, continues to support schools to deliver educational programmes in a safe and supportive environment that meets the needs of the range of students in the community.

As part of an on-going conversation, government agencies will continue to work with the LGBTI community to explore additional ways to foster positive learning environments for LGBTI youth. Some of the things we are already doing that support positive experiences are detailed below.

#### **Government agencies are supporting schools to reduce bullying**

[Bullying Prevention and Response](#) (released May 2015) is a guide for schools that provides practical advice on how to prevent bullying and respond effectively when it does occur. MYD led an online survey to grow knowledge of LGBTI perspectives on bullying and ensure that the LGBTI youth voice was present in the development of the guidelines.

## Objective Five: LGBTI youth access appropriate health care when they need it

### What we heard

The LGBTI community identified the need to support the health and wellbeing of LGBTI young people.

The community highlighted the importance of:

- ensuring that appropriate healthcare is available to LGBTI youth
- improving healthcare for intersex children and youth
- improving access to healthcare for gender diverse youth.

Young people have shown a high level of confidence in YOSS and youth-friendly practices, as evidenced by the comparatively high provider consultation rates for sexual health and mental health services. There is a significant opportunity to take what we know about young people's experiences of YOSS and apply this knowledge to improve access to health services for LGBTI young people.

### Upcoming Work on Suicide Prevention

Too many young New Zealanders take their lives, and we know that LGBTI youth are represented in those statistics. Work is underway to refresh the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy. The wider LGBTI community has already been identified as a potential focus for the new Strategy. The Ministry of Health is leading this work and would welcome the opportunity to work with the LGBTI community, including LGBTI youth, to develop policy that will address their needs.

### The Northern region is developing better health services for transgender people

The Northern Region District Health Boards (Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau) are currently working on a proposal to develop a better health service for transgender communities within the region. An Advisory Group with transgender representatives has been listening to, and talking with, community groups and health professionals about how to develop a better health service. Government agencies will continue to engage with the LGBTI youth communities as this work develops.

### Our initial response

Government agencies would like to acknowledge the complexity of some of the issues raised by the LGBTI community, and note that some of these issues raise a number of challenging and intricate ethical issues. Some of the recommendations made by the LGBTI community are not able to be progressed at this time. For example, the Ministry of Health is not currently considering legislative changes with regard to the provision of gender re-assignment surgery. Those things that can and are being progressed are discussed below.

#### To support young people, Government is providing specific youth-friendly healthcare services

There are a number of things that government agencies are doing which support LGBTI young people. For example, [Youth One Stop Shops](#) (YOSS) provide youth-friendly healthcare services to young people. There are currently 11 YOSS located across New Zealand. YOSS link health and social services support in a youth-friendly way and offer a range of health care services, including nurse and GP consultations, sexual and reproductive health care, mental health care, and drug and alcohol counselling.

In recognition of the wide variety of services that they provide, the Government recently allocated \$8.6 million from Vote Health (contracted by the Ministry of Social Development) over four years towards supporting YOSS. This is part of the [Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project](#), which aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young New Zealanders.



## Objective Six: LGBTI young people access supportive social services when they need them and are treated with dignity in the justice system

### What we heard

The LGBTI community identified the importance of:

- ensuring justice and social services are supportive and respectful of LGBTI young people
- improving the experiences of LGBTI young people working with Police, Work and Income and other social services, and their confidence to access these services..

School Community Officers play an important role in supporting positive environments in school communities through partnering in initiatives such as PB4L and bullying programmes aligned to the Bullying Prevention and Response guidelines, for example Kia Kaha. In addition the 2015 version of ‘Loves-Me-Not’ (the Police led relationship violence workshop for secondary schools) incorporates examples of diverse relationships in its programme delivery.

### There are opportunities to consider how to improve interactions with the justice sector

The Ministry of Justice currently provides standard training to staff on customer service. This training looks at how staff interact with a wide range of clients and does not explicitly consider LGBTI young people as a stand-alone population. However, there may be scope to further explore development of more explicit training for staff across a range of organisations, through conversations with the LGBTI communities about how to better support staff to work with LGBTI young people.

In their work, the LGBTI communities noted the need to consider whether any changes to policy or the Sentencing Act 2002 are needed to protect LGBTI people’s right to safety. The principles of sentencing include that the court must take into account any information provided to the court concerning the effect of the offending on the victim.

The Sentencing Act 2002 also explicitly states that committing an offence partly or wholly in hostility to a group of people who have an enduring common characteristic (for example gender identity, sexual orientation, or age) is an aggravating factor in sentencing. It is acknowledged that these provisions do not refer explicitly to LGBTI young people. However, they do provide a framework through which to consider the personal circumstances of both offenders and victims. There is no plan to review the Sentencing Act at this time.

### Our initial response

All young people should be respected and have positive interactions with social and justice services.

There is a range of work underway which supports improved access to these services by providing guidance and support to people working with LGBTI young people, to increase both their knowledge and understanding about this important population group.

#### New Zealand Police are committed to supporting diversity

The New Zealand Police continue to build their support for the LGBTI communities and it is intended that their on-going work will result in LGBTI young people being confident to engage with them. Police have formally introduced and embedded diversity as one of their organisational values. This commitment is also reflected in the New Zealand Police Code of Conduct and shows that Police are making a real effort to recognise the LGBTI population.

[New Zealand Police Diversity Liaison Officers](#) are located throughout New Zealand to liaise between Police and LGBTI communities.

The New Zealand Police is an active participant in the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group and has assisted in the development of the Bullying Prevention and Response guidelines. Further, Police is strengthening its response to bullying through the development of clear practice and policy guidelines.

**The Department of Corrections has introduced a more flexible system for transgender prisoners**

In line with international practice, the Department of Corrections (Corrections) has introduced a more flexible system for transgender prisoners. If the sex on their birth certificate has been changed, these prisoners will be managed in accordance with their legal sex. Transgender prisoners whose sex on their birth certificate has not been changed can apply to be moved into a prison with their identified gender, excluding those serving or facing charges for serious sexual offending. The Chief Executive will consider these applications on a case-by-case basis. This new policy took effect in February 2014.

In adopting a more flexible approach around the placement of transgender prisoners, Corrections can better address risks of victimisation and assault, while taking into account the welfare of all prisoners.

**Cultural competency training packages which will support people working with LGBTI youth are being developed**

Child, Youth and Family has been developing practical guidance for staff working with LGBTI people which will support positive interactions with their services. In addition, MYD recently announced funding for Ara Taiohi to develop cultural competency training for people and organisations working with LGBTI young people. This work will involve collaborations with a range of LGBTI youth organisations and communities to develop resources and approaches to grow understanding about LGBTI issues.

Government agencies look forward to working with the LGBTI communities to continue to build sector understanding and capability for working with LGBTI young people, and supporting LGBTI young people to have positive interactions with Government services.

## More information

This section contains links where you can find more information about the work discussed in this response.

**Bullying Prevention and Response Guide**

<http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/student-wellbeing/bullying-prevention-and-response/>

**Inside Out resource**

<http://insideout.ry.org.nz/>

**Ministry of Youth Development Website**

<http://www.myd.govt.nz/>

**New Zealand Police Diversity Liaison Officers**

<http://www.police.govt.nz/contact-us/local-contacts/diversity-liaison-officers>

**New Zealand Police School Portal**

<http://www.police.govt.nz/advice/personal-and-community-advice/school-portal/about-portal>

**Positive Behaviour for Learning**

<http://pb4l.tki.org.nz/>

**Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project**

<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/mental-health-and-addictions/youth-mental-health-project/background-youth-mental-health-project>

**Revised Sexuality Guide**

<http://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-guidelines>

**Youth One Stop Shops**

<http://www.yoss.org.nz/what-we-do.html>

**Youth 2000 Survey Series**

<https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/en/faculty/adolescent-health-research-group/youth2000-national-youth-health-survey-series/youth2012-survey.html>

