

1 February 2019

Dear Stephen Jolly,

ATT: Funding for older LGBTI social isolation programs slashed weeks before Christmas

I am writing to seek urgent support in light of recent funding cuts to LGBTI Community Visitor Schemes (CVS) across Australia under the National Aged Care Grants and the proposed review by the current Minister Hon. Ken Wyatt.

Over the last month I have spoken with numerous government officials in the Department of Ageing and I now believe that all possible bureaucratic means have been exhausted.

BACKGROUND

On Friday 10 December, **two months after the advertised notice date and just 3 weeks before the contract end date of 31 December 2018**, Switchboard Victoria (along with other LGBTI CVS providers around Australia) received our offer of 2019–2021 CVS funding. As a CVS provider since 2014, we were extremely disappointed to see that our funding has been slashed by two thirds. With no prior notice and just two weeks before Christmas, the current Federal Government has left the vulnerable older LGBTI people we support in severe jeopardy and staff/volunteers unsure of their future going into the new year. This blatant disregard for the social connectedness and welfare of LGBTI seniors from a Department whose Community Visitors Scheme is established to address social isolation is completely unacceptable and discriminatory.

As you would have seen the Guardian just before Christmas covered how the [CVS funding cuts affected the mainstream](#) providers. There is similarities here between our service and the service outlined in the article, but we believe we have a separate case as we represent and support a priority population.

IMPACTS OF THE FUNDING CUTS ON LGBTI SENIORS

To give you an idea of the impacts of these cuts, here's what this will mean for Switchboard Victoria's Out & About specialist LGBTI Community Visitor's Scheme. Since 2014 we have been funded for 65 CVS positions and we have in excess of 350 LGBTI-identifying volunteers on our books waiting for an opportunity to give back to their communities by being matched with a socially isolated older LGBTI person.

Switchboard (Victoria) Inc
PO Box 21291 Little Lonsdale Street Melbourne Victoria 8011
03 9663 2474 | 0466 218 921
admin@switchboard.org.au www.switchboard.org.au
ABN 81 367 786 099

This allocation of 65 CVS funded positions have been cut to a mere 27 funded positions. This is a reduction of \$169,008 (from \$284,508 to \$115,500 over three years). In Year 1 we will receive just \$21,000 to cover all costs of supporting 27 older LGBTI recipients of this scheme (grant management and reporting; volunteer training, management and reimbursements; recipient referrals and support; outreach and promotion etc). This will significantly curtail our ability to support those in our LGBTI community in most need who are eligible for the CVS program.

Under the current funding regime we were already supplementing the program through other grants and donations up to the amount of \$25,000 a year.

STORIES BEHIND THE FUNDING

But these are just figures – the real impact is on the people whose lives have been transformed by their LGBTI volunteer visitors. We'd like to introduce you to a few of them.

“My partner of forty years passed away several years ago and I was so lonely. I was referred to Out & About and I soon had a volunteer ring me ... My contact with my Out & About visitor has been so fantastic over the years. I live in a rural town where I don't have any contact with LGBTI people, so to have my volunteer ring me is just so good. Occasionally we have been able to meet each other and have a real chin-wag as if we have known each other for many long years. [Home Care Package and CVS recipient]

“Coming into aged care ... it's a really big adjustment for anybody and it takes time. A majority of people that come into aged care these days have dementia, which is a sad thing to see. For myself, I feel very isolated, I've got really no-one I can talk to on the same level as myself – the only people I can talk to is staff and normally the only time staff have time to talk is the late night shift so I've got to develop a way to communicate with other people... One of the best things that's happened in the last few years is being involved in Switchboard's Out & About and the acceptance within the general community of the LGBT community that the government and the councils have done, such as the Coming Back Out Ball and the Governor General's invitation at Government House. These three things have personally lifted my distress and we have come a long way. But at the same time, we still have a long way to go. [Residential Aged Care and CVS recipient]

BARRIERS TO LGBTI OLDER PEOPLE ACCESSING AGED CARE SERVICES

There is a rapidly growing body of evidence that shows the importance of access to **BOTH** LGBTI-inclusive mainstream aged care services and age-appropriate LGBTI-specific services to meet the needs of older LGBTI Australians. The Department of Health's own Review in 2017 stated:

“LGBTI communities are diverse groups (Crameri et al. 2015), and individuals within them may overlap with other 'special needs' groups as defined by the Act. However, many individuals share long-term experiences of discrimination and exclusion, as well as universal issues and concerns related to ageing (Department of Health and Ageing 2012). Older LGBTI

people have experienced a history of discrimination in Australian society, suffering from criminalisation, violence, stigma, discrimination, rejection by friends and family, and social isolation (Department of Health and Ageing 2012). **Historically, distrust of the health and social services sector among LGBTI people often resulted in reluctance to utilise mainstream services, including aged care** (Panich et al. 2005, Robinson & Wilson 2012) ...

... In light of this history and enduring barriers to access, cultural safety has been nominated as ‘a critically important aspect of aged care services for older LGBTI people’ (Crameri et al. 2015, p. 24).

Recognising this, a key requirement of the new [Aged Care Quality Standards](#) is that each consumer is treated with dignity and respect; has their identity, culture and diversity valued; has access to culturally safe care and services and are supported to make connections with others and maintain relationships of choice (including intimate relationships) and communicate their decisions.

While capacity building of mainstream aged care services in LGBTI inclusion is essential to ensure cultural safety for older LGBTI people, international and Australian research shows the importance of continued funding for specific LGBTI projects and initiatives and improvements in the availability of, and access to, LGBTI inclusive services.

AGEING AND AGED CARE POLICY CONTEXT

In June 2017, the Federal Government released their [Final Report into the Review of the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex \(LGBTI\) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy 2014-2017](#). The report noted that:

“Meeting the needs of the various subgroups of the ageing population is a particular challenge for aged care providers. These subgroups include the ‘special needs’ groups identified in the *Aged Care Act 1997* (the Act), which was amended in 2013 as part of the *Living Longer, Living Better* reforms to include LGBTI people. (p6)”

The Review found stakeholders were strongly supportive of the principles and goals of the LGBTI Strategy. They considered that the LGBTI Strategy “... has played an important role in raising awareness and visibility of issues relating to LGBTI-inclusive aged care, and that the sector (for the most part) is open to the shift towards increased LGBTI inclusion. However, perceptions of the extent to which improved awareness has led to tangible changes in service provision were mixed.” (p3). A number of highlights were identified under the LGBTI Strategy including:

- Funding for specific LGBTI projects and initiatives
- Improvements in visibility and availability of, and access to, LGBTI inclusive services (p3).

A review of the implementation of Goal 2 of the LGBTI Strategy specifically reported on achievements against this Goal in relation to the establishment of LGBTI CVS (Appendix 1). Another key recommendation of the Review was the development of the National [Aged Care Diversity Framework](#) and upcoming LGBTI Action Plan (still to be released).



IMPERATIVE TO RESTORE CVS FUNDING

Since the Australian Marriage Law postal survey at the end of 2017 and the subsequent legalisation of same sex marriage in 2018, we have seen a significant increase in engagement, queries and referral to both Switchboard/QLife and the Out & About service. In addition, an increased number of referrals and engagement with our service has come from aged care services who have completed the Silver Rainbow LGBTI inclusive practice training.

The federal government has recently renewed funding for the national Silver Rainbow LGBTI Inclusive Practice Training in Aged Care, including support for Communities of Practice and Champions models under this training. These aforementioned federal government initiatives will only increase aged care providers' awareness of and capacity in identifying and referring isolated LGBTI older people accessing aged care and lead to a potential increase in referrals to LGBTI CVS programs.

Our service was previously recognised by the Department of Health for the important role we provide in addressing social isolation within a vulnerable target population ("special needs" group), so much so that we were listed as an "exemplary service" in the January 2017 Department of Health Review of the Community Visitors Scheme Final Report (p31). Yet the current offer of 27 positions only allows us to support those we currently support and provides no "stretch" goal over the next three years. Under the current offered funding from the Department, we know that many people will need to join a long waiting list, too long and too late for many.

This is nothing short than the worst time to decrease funding to a service like ours and I believe it is severely out of step with the current Federal Government's own [Aged Care Diversity Framework](#) and upcoming LGBTI Action Plan (still to be released).

With your support we urge the federal government to review and then restore/extend previous levels of funding to LGBTI Community Visitor Schemes (CVS) under the National Aged Care Grants.

Thanks for your time today.

Best wishes,

Joe Ball (pronoun: they/them)

CEO, Switchboard Victoria

PO Box 21291, Little Lonsdale st, Melbourne 8011

03 9663 2474 | 0455 777 182 | ceo@switchboard.org.au

APPENDIX 1

Final Report into the Review of the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy 2014-2017

3. Implementation of goals and actions

However, additional work is needed to better meet the needs of LGBTI people in rural and regional areas.

Goal 2: The aged care and LGBTI sectors will be supported and resourced to proactively address the needs of older LGBTI people

Community Visitors Scheme: Brian and Paul's story

Paul is a CVS volunteer who has been visiting Brian (77) on Saturday afternoons for the past six months. Brian is living with dementia and was isolated from the LGBTI community since having to go into residential aged care. Both Paul and Brian have benefited from the relationship and Brian is now able to remember Paul's name and when he is scheduled to come for a visit.

Paul and Brian spend their visiting time engaging in activities they both enjoy, such as personalising Brian's room to make it a space in which he can feel more comfortable. Mardi Gras and the memories of the parades that Brian has been to are now topics of discussion, something that Brian had not spoken about for many years – since going into care. Brian is much more alert, far more socially engaged and states that Paul is a close comfort to him.

Action Area 2.1: Make grants available from 2013–14 to expand the Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) to specifically include LGBTI people, their families and carers, to minimise social isolation

The CVS supports volunteers to provide regular visits to aged care consumers who are socially isolated.

In many cases, 'mainstream' organisations provide non-specific CVS services for LGBTI consumers, and are required to establish linkages with relevant community services to improve their knowledge of the specific needs of LGBTI consumers.

However, in 2013–14, grants were made available to fund LGBTI-specific CVS services. State-wide LGBTI services are now available in Victoria, New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

4. Stakeholder perspectives: achievements

Goal 2: The aged care and LGBTI sectors will be supported and resourced to proactively address the needs of older LGBTI people

Again, recurring themes and overlap with achievements related to the LGBTI Strategy's principles were noted in stakeholders' responses. With goals 2 and 3 both relating to sector support for providing inclusive care, the concrete steps taken (as identified by stakeholders) are presented together. These include:

- Policy and legislative change
- More funding provided for LGBTI places in aged care
- Training and access to resources by organisations such as GRAI, ACON, and the National LGBTI Health Alliance
- Queensland Association for Healthy Communities and aged care sector collaboration to create LGBTI Aged Care Champion training
- Expansion of the CVS for LGBTI-specific services
- Workshops run by the OPAN and others
- The Rainbow Tick initiative.

Goal 3: Ageing and aged care services will be supported to deliver LGBTI-inclusive services

Stakeholders identified legislation amendments that identify LGBTI people as a special needs group as an achievement toward this goal. It was also reported that significant steps have been taken to ensure systems and content are inclusive.

Training and access to resources emerged as key themes identified by stakeholders; those provided by GRAI, ACON, and the National LGBTI Health Alliance were seen as particularly useful.

Other specific steps identified included:

- LGBTI-specific CVS funding
- Rainbow Tick accreditation
- Queensland Association for Healthy Communities and aged care sector collaboration to create LGBTI Aged Care Champion training.

Goal 4: LGBTI-inclusive ageing and aged care services will be delivered by a skilled and competent paid and volunteer workforce

Similar to Goal 3, workforce training (e.g. cultural diversity education, ACON training on LGBTI inclusivity and awareness) was most commonly mentioned by stakeholders in relation to implementation of this goal, with respondents noting that there are 'many training programs from many different areas and funding sources' available. The Government has allocated \$2.5 million in funding for workforce training since 2012.