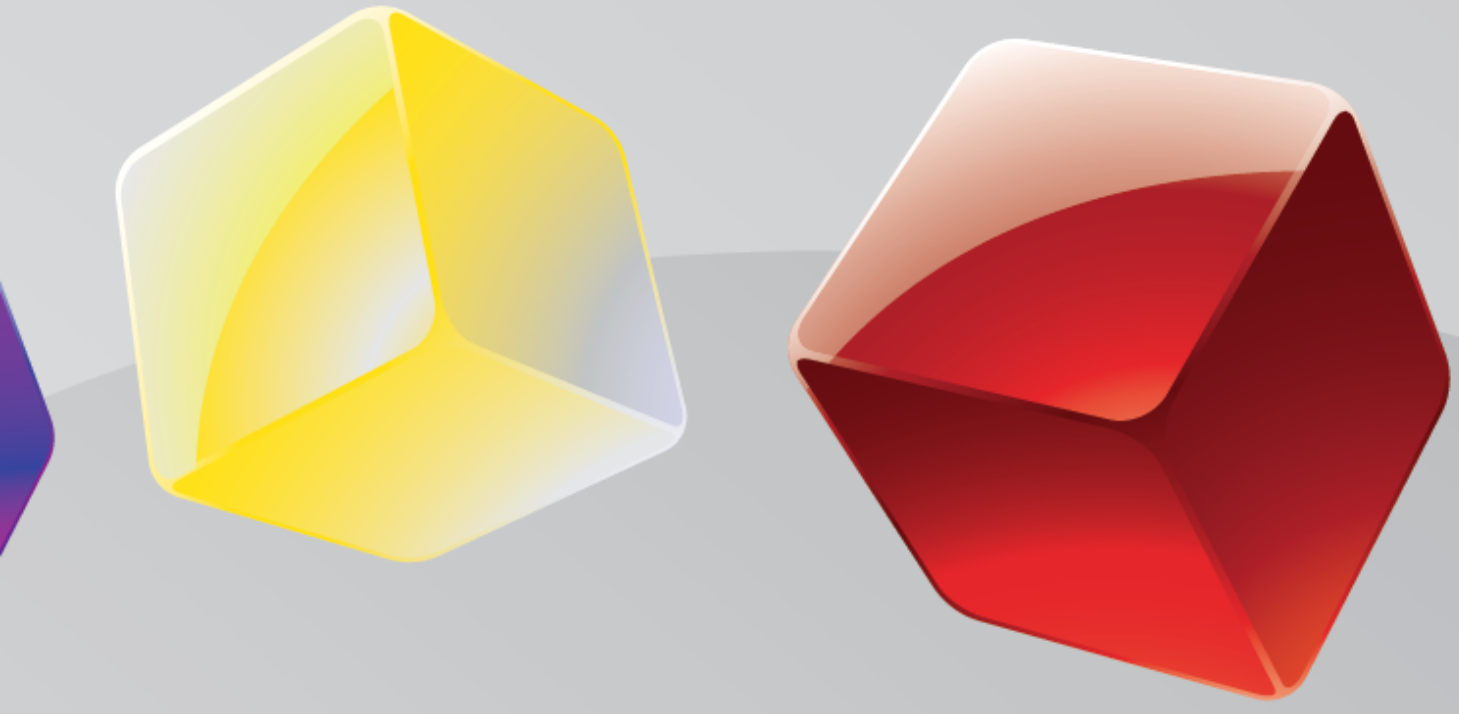

Beyond Homophobia

Meeting the needs of same sex attracted and gender questioning (SSAGQ) young people in Victoria

A policy blueprint

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Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society

GLHV

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the William Buckland Foundation which is managed by ANZ Trustees for funding this work and to Shaun Cannon whose generosity and support were vital to the project's genesis and success. Thank you to the members of the project steering group for their guidance and critical input and to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for their involvement. Thank you to Sue Hackney from WayOut for her wisdom and insights and all the young people at the OUTThere Rural Victorian Youth Council for Sexual Diversity who helped develop the project's research methodology. We would also like to acknowledge Tiffany Jones and Linda Randall for their excellent work on the literature review, Jennifer Blackman for her statistical analysis, and Sunil Patel for his inspired design.

Finally, to all the same sex attracted and gender questioning young people and those who work with them, thank you for participating in this project. Your strength, commitment and joy are already a world away from homophobia.

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Monograph Series Number 75
ISBN 978 192 1377 839
Cover design Sunil Patel

Suggested citation:
Leonard, W., Marshall, D., Hillier, L., Mitchell, A. and Ward, R. (2010) Beyond homophobia: *Meeting the needs of same sex attracted and gender questioning (SSAGQ) young people in Victoria.* A policy blueprint. Monograph Series Number 75. The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University: Melbourne.

This policy document comes out of a research project carried out by Daniel Marshall, Lynne Hillier and Anne Mitchell, between 2008-2009. The research findings will be published by Marshall, Hillier and Mitchell in a forthcoming research monograph.

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Glossary

Bisexual

A person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to people of both sexes.

Coming out

The process through which individuals come to recognise and acknowledge, both privately and publicly, their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.

Cultural competence or awareness

Cultural competence or awareness involves a sensitivity and responsiveness to the beliefs, values and practices of different groups or populations. The term is usually applied to different racial, ethnic and religious groups. However, more recently it has been extended to include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities whose sexual and gender identities are associated with their own beliefs, values and practices.

Gay

A person whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is toward people of the same sex. The term is most commonly applied to men, although some women use this term.

Gender identity

A person's deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, in between, or something other. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender questioning

Refers to the process whereby an individual comes to question the usefulness or validity of their current biological sex and/or assigned gender. This includes people who see the binary categories of male and female/masculine and feminine as meaningless or unduly restrictive, and those who feel that their gender does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Heterosexism

The belief that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual and that other types of non-heteronormative sexualities or gender identities are unhealthy, unnatural and a threat to society. Heterosexism includes both homophobia and transphobia (see below) and a

fear of intersex people who challenge the heterosexist assumption that there are only two sexes.

Homophobia

The fear and hatred of lesbians and gay men and of their sexual desires and practices that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

Inclusive service provision

The provision of services that are culturally sensitive and aware. This includes the provision of services that are able to meet the needs of GLBT people in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

Lesbian

A woman whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is towards other women.

Queer

This report uses queer as an umbrella term to include a range of alternative sexual and gender identities including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender or gender questioning.

Same sex attracted

An umbrella term often applied to young people to describe individuals who experience feelings of sexual attraction to others of their own sex. This includes young people who are exclusively homosexual in their orientation, bisexual, undecided young people, and heterosexual young people who have these feelings at some time.

Transgender

An umbrella term and for some people an identity term used to describe all kinds of people who sit outside the gender binary or whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender people may or may not feel the need to access hormone therapy and/or surgery.

Transphobia

A fear and hatred of people of who are transgender that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

Challenging homophobia? They go "Well, I'm not gay so how can I do that?"[1]

1 Introduction

Beyond homophobia traces an arc, a rainbow that moves from a time when homophobia was the norm, embedded in policy and practice, to a future in which the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities is valued and nurtured. The arc spans the current moment where, despite increasing legal and social recognition, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people continue to be subject to much higher levels of violence, harassment and discrimination (Flood & Hamilton, 2005: Leonard et al., 2008; Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, 2000).

The tension between increasing social acceptance and ongoing homophobia is particularly acute for same sex attracted and gender questioning (SSAGQ) young people. SSAGQ young people are under intense pressure as they negotiate their sexual feelings, attractions, and identities in environments that are hostile to people who are not exclusively heterosexual and gender normative. Unlike young people who identify with other minority populations—including indigenous, ethnic and religious young people—SSAGQ young people cannot be sure of support from their families or communities-of-identity. For many SSAGQ young people families are in fact one of the major sites of homophobic abuse, while the capacity of the GLBT community to support SSAGQ young people is compromised by claims of adult cooption and "homosexual conversion" (Marr, 1997; Pell, 1999).[2]

The tension between growing acceptance and ongoing discrimination is played out in policy development and service delivery. While social and diversity policies in Victoria typically recognise differences in race, gender, age, ability, geographic location, and religion this is not the case for sexual orientation and gender identity. With few exceptions, consideration of GLBT people remains an optional extra, often the result of case-by-case advocacy (Department of Health, 2009:7). There are few GLBT-specialist services, and mainstream providers rarely acknowledge the existence of their GLBT clients or provide GLBT-sensitive services and practices (Department of Health, 2009; Leonard, 2003).

1 Informant interview.
2 "Instead of accusing churches of homophobia, which we condemn roundly", writes Pell in his open letter to *The Age*, "we should be seeking the real reason for youth suicide". Pell goes on to claim that the real reason is "The gay agenda which aims to lower the age of consent and recruit new members to the subculture".

In the youth sector this has led to a fragmented and piecemeal approach to meeting the needs of SSAGQ young people (Marshall, 2005; Whole of Government Working Group, 2006). In the absence of a policy mandate the inclusion of SSAGQ young people in any given youth service depends on the good will of individual staff and senior management. The Victorian government has provided funding for a number of social and support groups for SSAGQ young people across the state. However, the majority of that funding has been project-based, short term, and non-recurrent (Whole of Government Working Group, 2006). As a consequence, individual support groups come and go, with subsequent loss of staff, expertise, and commitment. Efforts to develop and maintain both mainstream and specialist services that address the needs of SSAGQ young people have been frustrated by the lack of a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework, recurrent funding, or dedicated resources.

Beyond homophobia provides a policy blueprint that acknowledges and addresses the particular needs of SSAGQ young Victorians. At the same time it provides a practice guide on how to ensure that youth-related services and programs are sensitive to, and better able to meet the needs of SSAGQ young people. However, if we are to ensure that SSAGQ young people are no longer an optional extra, programs and services must be part of a coherent and mandated SSAGQ-youth policy and strategy. This requires the support of organisational champions like the William Buckland Foundation who are willing to work with the GLBT community and government to overcome fear and prejudice. Only then can we guarantee movement forward along the arc of shared responsibility that leads to a world in which homophobia, and not SSAGQ young people, is a thing of the past.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Levels of homophobic violence and abuse of SSAGQ young people

According to Australian research between 7 and 11 per cent of young people are attracted to others of their own sex or are unsure of their sexual attraction (Lindsay et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2009). There is little data on the percentage of young people whose gender identity does not conform to gender norms. However, studies conservatively estimate the percentage of the population who are transgender at 1 in 11,900 males and 1 in 30,400 females (Leonard, 2002:11).

Australian research shows that SSAGQ young people are one of the most vulnerable groups of young people. A recent national survey of the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted (SSA) young people aged 14 to 21 years, *Writing Themselves in Again*,

found that while more SSA young people felt great or good about their sexuality in 2004 than in 1998 (76% in 2004 compared with 60% in 1998), levels of abuse over the same period had remained largely unchanged (Hillier et al., 2005; Hillier et al., 1998). *Writing Themselves in Again*, found that:

- Forty-four per cent of respondents had been verbally abused because of their sexual orientation
- Sixteen per cent reported having had someone be physically abusive toward them because of their sexuality. The abuse ranged from having clothes and possessions damaged to rape and hospitalisation for injuries
- Thirty-eight per cent reported being treated unfairly because of their sexual orientation
- School was the place where most of that abuse took place (74 per cent), followed by the street (47 per cent), social occasions (34 per cent) and the family home (18 per cent); and
- SSAGQ young people who had suffered homophobic abuse felt less safe in all environments including school, at home, and in the community (Hillier et al., 2005).

A more recent report on heterosexist and homophobic violence in Victoria confirms these findings. Sixty per cent of SSAGQ respondents aged 14 to 24 years reported that they hid their sexual orientation or gender identity from family and 70 per cent when at an educational institution (Leonard, Mitchell et al., 2008).

Again there is little data on levels and types of violence against gender questioning young people. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that they are subject to similar if not greater levels of violence than SSA young people (Aizura, Walsh, et al., 2006; Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, 2000). These findings are supported by a recent national Australian and New Zealand study of transgender health and wellbeing in which over 87 per cent of respondents reported having experienced at least one form of stigma or discrimination and 19 per cent having been physically attacked because of their gender identity (Couch, Pitts et al., 2007).[3]

3 In another Australian study nearly 50 per cent of transgender respondents reported being sacked following gender reassignment while 38 per cent believed that they were subject to reportable incidents of discrimination at least once a week (National Transgender Needs Assessment and Conduct, 2004)

1.1.2 Effects of homophobic violence on SSAGQ young people

> I tried to kill myself because I was so badly teased at school for being a lesbian…it never ended and I got severe depression and I saw no other way to be happy.[4]

Australian research demonstrates that the homophobic abuse and discrimination experienced by SSAGQ young people resulted in poorer health and wellbeing compared with their heterosexual and gender normative peers. This includes not only increased risk of a range of health problems but also increased risk of social exclusion and isolation which severely limits their opportunities and ability to form social, personal and intimate relationships.[5] The data show that SSAGQ young people are at increased risk of:

- Attempted suicide (Howard, Nicholas et al., 2002)
- Contracting a sexually transmissible infection (Hillier et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009); and
- Drug use including marijuana and injecting drug use (7.8 per cent of SSA students compared to 1.3 per cent of opposite-sex attracted students report having ever injected drugs).[6]

SSAGQ young people are also at increased risk of homelessness with studies suggesting that over 14 per cent of homeless young people are SSAGQ (Cull, Platzer & Balloch, 2006; Rossiter, Mallett et al., 2003; Hillier, Matthews and Dempsey, 1997).

Research suggests that SSAGQ young people living in rural and regional Victoria may face added pressures due to higher levels of homophobia, increased surveillance, and reduced access to relevant information, resources and services (Leonard, 2003). One report puts the risk of attempted suicide for rural SSAGQ young people at six times the population average (Quinn, 2003). Other SSAGQ young people may be under increased pressure due to the religious or cultural beliefs of groups to which they belong (Mann, Horsley et al., 2006).

4 As quoted from Hillier, Turner and Mitchell, 2005:47
5 As the World Health Organisation notes, Being excluded from the social life of society and treated as less than equal leads to worse health and the risk of premature death (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003).
6 Smith, Agius et al., 2009 unpublished data.

Furthermore, the results of *Writing Themselves in Again* show a significant connection between the type of homophobic abuse and reduced health and wellbeing.[7] SSAGQ young people who had experienced physical abuse fared worse on every indicator of health and wellbeing than those who had experienced verbal abuse only. In turn, SSAGQ young people who reported verbal abuse only, fared worse than those who reported they had experienced no homophobic abuse. For example, the percentage of SSAGQ who reported self harm is highest at 60 per cent for those respondents who had experienced physical homophobic abuse. The figure drops to 40 per cent for those who had experienced verbal abuse only, and is lowest at 20 per cent for those SSAGQ young people who had experienced no homophobic abuse. The results show a similar correlation between levels of homophobic abuse and "self-reported feelings of safety" and "drug and alcohol use at dangerous levels". These findings are consistent with a growing body of research showing that systemic and ongoing discrimination are risk factors for reduced mental and physical well being (Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 2005).

The research clearly shows the negative impact of homophobia on the wellbeing of SSAGQ young people. In the short term this requires increased direct support for SSAGQ young people across the youth sector, including staff training and resources. However, the research is also clear that in order to address the long-term needs of SSAGQ young people what is required is a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to tackling homophobia and its effects. This includes not only policy and program coordination across government departments, but also ongoing partnerships among government, non-government agencies, and the private sector.

1.2 Aims and rationale

Beyond homophobia provides a blueprint aimed at improving the quality of services provided to SSAGQ young people in Victoria. The project was funded by the William Buckland Foundation and managed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University with assistance from Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria.

7 The third iteration of *Writing Themselves* In is due to be launched in October 2010.

The blueprint is divided into two parts. The first consists of a comprehensive, whole-of-government framework for addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people. The framework argues for:

- Inclusion of SSAGQ young people in all youth policies and programs
- Coordination of SSAGQ youth-related programs and services across government departments including the sharing of resources and personnel; and
- Oversight of the framework by a central government agency.

The second part of the blueprint is a good practice guide for the provision of services to SSAGQ young people.[8] The guide is targeted at both individuals and organisations and includes:

- The development and implementation of SSAGQ-youth sensitive practice and models of service delivery in the mainstream youth sector[9]
- The provision of resources and training to workers and management in both mainstream and SSAGQ-youth specialist services; and
- Information and referral networks for those working with SSAGQ young people.

To maximise the effectiveness and long-term viability of the SSAGQ youth sector, the development of SSAGQ sensitive practice needs to sit within and be supported by the policy and program framework. Working together, the policy framework and practice guide have the potential to challenge homophobia, moving toward a society in which sexual orientation and gender identity diversity is supported and valued.

8 The guide is informed by the Victorian Department of Health's recently released *Well proud: A guide to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex inclusive practice for the health and human services* (2009).

9 The William Buckland Foundation has provided 2 years additional funding (2010 to 2012) for the development of resources and strategies to facilitate the implementation of the policy framework and practice guide (see Section 5.3, p.40).

2 Methodology

Beyond homophobia is one of only a handful of reports in Australia that looks at the provision of services to SSAGQ young people (Marshall, 2005). While there is a growing body of research on the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people, little work has been done on the capacity of the youth sector to address their specific health and wellbeing needs.

In order to develop a comprehensive and effective blueprint for addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people, the project used a range of different research methodologies. These included:

- Literature reviews of research on the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people and current youth-related policies and programs
- Key informant interviews to provide an historical overview of past and current policies, programs and services directly or indirectly targeting SSAGQ young people
- A questionnaire sent to workers in the youth sector who work or could potentially work with SSAGQ young people; and
- Focus groups of SSAGQ young people and their allies asking them about the quality of existing services and their vision of SSAGQ-inclusive practice

Each of these different approaches provided its own particular information and insights. Together they enabled the development of an SSAGQ-youth policy blueprint and practice guide that is:

- Evidence-based
- Historically sensitive
- Informed by the experience and expertise of those working in the field; and
- Responsive to the current policy and program environment.

2.1 Literature review

The literature review consisted of two components. The first was a review of Australian research on the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people. It identified patterns of health and illness specific to SSAGQ young people, looked at the major health and wellbeing issues they face, and explored the relationship between their experiences of homophobic discrimination and reduced health outcomes.

The second was a review of current federal and Victorian government youth-related policies and programs. The review provided an assessment of the degree to which SSAGQ young people are included in current youth policies and programs and identified a range of key policies in which they are absent.

2.2 Historical overview

The second part of the project explored the history of SSAGQ-youth service provision in Victoria. It consisted of two sets of interviews with activists and workers in the field. The first were semi-structured interviews with four key informants who pioneered the development of SSAGQ-youth programs in the 1970s and 1980s. The interview data provided a first-hand account of their efforts to have the needs and interests of SSAGQ young people acknowledged and included in program development and service delivery.

The second were interviews with 19 key informants who as part of their professional duties were involved in the consolidation of SSAGQ-youth service provision in the late 1990s and 2000s. These participants were identified through an open recruitment process, in conjunction with advice from the Reference Group,[10] and were drawn from five sectors—education, housing, health, youth, and policing.

Data from both sets of interviews were analysed independently and in relation to the quantitative survey data (section 2.3) to identify and interrogate key themes.

2.3 Questionnaire

A non-random, online survey was sent to people who work with young people across a range of sectors asking them to comment on the capacity of their respective organisations to meet the needs of SSAGQ young people. Three hundred and eighteen people completed the survey.

The survey was developed in Zoomerang and linked to the same sex attracted young people's website, La Trobe University (**www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay**). It featured open and closed questions which were used to gather data from workers about:

- Their professional knowledge, experience and training in relation to SSAGQ young people

10 The Reference Group consisted of the Project Team and external representatives who provided project advice, including advice on participant recruitment.

- What supports or hinders them in delivering services that are inclusive of SSAGQ young people; and
- What changes are needed to improve the quality and reach of services they provide to their SSAGQ clients.

Workers were recruited from the following sectors: Education, Housing, Drug and Alcohol, Health, Youth, Disability, Policing, and Juvenile Justice. Public advertisements calling for survey participants were distributed through the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union, VIEUPoint (the newspaper of the Victorian Independent Education Union), the Victorian Council of Social Service's e-bulletin, Rainbow Network Victoria, and the gay and lesbian media. Members of the Reference Group also circulated the advertisement to relevant contacts.

Data analysis was consistent with the methodology employed in the *Writing Themselves in Again* study. Data received electronically was coded and transposed into quantitative (SPSS) and qualitative (Excel) programs and subject to descriptive and comparative statistical analysis.

2.4 Focus groups

Three focus groups were conducted with existing SSAGQ-youth groups and their allies in rural Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. Participants were asked about their experiences in dealing with institutions and service providers and their vision for service delivery that is inclusive of SSAGQ young people. In particular the discussions focused on:

- What do SSAGQ young people want from the services they engage with
- What would improve the quality of services provided to SSAGQ young people; and
- What strategies do SSAGQ young people deploy to deal with the negative or homophobic beliefs and practices of organisations and service providers.

As in Section 2.2, data from the focus groups were analysed both independently and in relation to the quantitative survey data (section 2.3) to identify and interrogate key themes.

3 SSAGQ youth-policy context

3.1 Historical

In Victoria the first efforts to address the needs of SSAGQ young people occurred within the education sector. As early as 1973, gay liberation activists had begun to visit schools, talking about homophobic discrimination and homosexual rights. In 1975 a coalition of teachers and students from the secondary and tertiary sectors formed the *Gay Teachers and Students Group*. Members of the group toured regional Victoria, from Shepparton, to Benalla, to Gippsland, promoting a greater understanding of homosexuality and its inclusion in school curricula. According to one key informant who helped establish the group its aims were twofold:

> …to protect the job rights of the gay teachers, and simultaneously…to do something to make for a better curriculum in the educational experience for young gays coming out.

In 1978 the Group produced Australia's first gay educational resource, *Young, Gay and Proud.* Another key informant who was instrumental in developing the resource recalls the panic that accompanied its release.

> We were very paranoid about how it was going to be received, whether we would be prosecuted…My recollection is that people in Melbourne wouldn't touch it…

In March 1979 the Minster for Education had the book banned. The Education Department in Victoria sent a memo to all secondary school principles ordering them "to ensure that copies of books seeking to foster homosexual behaviour are not available to children" (Marshall, 2005).

Given the homophobic climate of the time, the work of these early activists in promoting the rights of homosexual students and staff was remarkable. They challenged both the medical and legal status of homosexuality; in the early 1970s homosexuality was classified as a disease and was illegal in all Australian jurisdictions. At the same time, in opting for a coalition of students and teachers, they had to confront homophobic stereotypes depicting adult homosexuals as predators and paedophiles.

From the outset, however, this coalition model came under pressure from young people as they began to demand a more active role within their representative organisations.

Bill Calder recalls that at the 5th National Homosexual Conference held in Fitzroy in 1979 younger participants were already expressing their dissatisfaction at being ignored by older gay men and lesbians and given only menial duties (Calder, 1985). "They should be helping us to learn things", bemoaned one participant at the conference,

> not just giving us the cruddy jobs. It's easy for them, 'cause they know it all. They've got the jobs, houses, everything. Most of us are still stuck at home (p.3).

This growing frustration led to the formation of *Young Gays*, a separate youth-run organisation. *Young Gays* continued the advocacy of its parent organisation attending political demonstrations and visiting schools giving "gay is good" presentations. However, the group also provided a safe space where SSAGQ young people could meet, socialise, and support each other.

By the early 1980s a number of unrelated factors conspired to undermine the viability of the fledgling SSAGQ-youth sector. The advent of HIV and AIDS provided a new and compelling focus for gay and lesbian activism. The fight against HIV/AIDS consumed the energies of young and old alike, and led to a slowing if not lessening of interest in SSAGQ young people's issues. At the same time disagreement within *Young Gays* about its mission and future led to the organisation's demise. Pressures within the gay and lesbian community were compounded by a lack of support from without. There were no public resources or funds for those working with SSAGQ young people and no government policy framework that mandated this work or held mainstream youth services accountable for meeting SSAGQ young people's needs.

It was not until the mid 1990s that there was a resurgent interest in SSAGQ young people's issues. Over the intervening decade there had been a consolidation and gradual expansion of the GLBT community sector. Advocates began to lobby the Victorian government to develop a GLBT legislative and social reform agenda no longer dominated by HIV and AIDS (Leonard, 2003). At the same time there was a growing body of research documenting the high levels of violence and prejudice against GLBT people and the effects of this violence on their day-to-day lives. This included research on SSAGQ young people which revealed shocking levels of homophobic abuse and bullying and of young people's lives greatly diminished as a consequence (Hillier, Warr and Haste, 1996; Hillier et al., 1998).

In 1998 Minus18 was established, a Melbourne-based group that provides a safe space for queer young people to meet, socialise and explore GLBT community.[11] In the same year Rainbow Network Victoria was formed as a volunteer group to provide support,

11 At **www.minus18.org.au/**

resources and training to those working with SSAGQ young people in Victoria.[12] In 2002 WayOut Central Victorian Youth and Sexual Diversity Project was established to provide a space for young people to come together to combat homophobia and promote sexual and gender diversity in their local, rural communities.[13]

Those working with SSAGQ young people today have learnt from the strengths and limitations of the approaches developed in the 1970s and 80s. They have used their knowledge of what has and hasn't worked to develop new and diverse protocols for addressing the current situation and needs of SSAGQ young people. These protocols are the result of applied practice over time and suggest a number of principles for developing policies, programs, and services that meet the needs of SSAGQ young people. These include:

- Identifying homophobia and heterosexism as problematic rather than young people's same sex attraction or gender identity
- Consulting with SSAGQ young people in the design and implementation of policies, programs, and services where they are the target group
- Providing mentorship, guidance, and material support for projects, programs, and services run by SSAGQ young people without compromising the independence and authority of the young people themselves
- Ensuring that the needs of SSAGQ young people are addressed across all relevant sectors and not limited to education
- Encouraging a diversity of approaches for addressing the different needs of SSAGQ young people from SSAGQ only support groups to gay/straight alliances; and
- Ensuring that relevant mainstream youth services include SSAGQ young people as part of their core business.

This historical overview is also a reminder of how fragile and precarious efforts to address the needs of SSAGQ young people remain. One of the key lessons to be learnt from the experiences of those working with SSAGQ young people in the 1970s and 80s is the vital importance of material and policy support. In the absence of such support, mainstream services had little incentive to include SSAGQ young people as part of their core business and those working with SSAGQ young people often did so in a voluntary capacity. It was difficult to consolidate resources and expertise and the work could be derailed at any moment by the arrival of what were seen to be more pressing issues, as HIV and AIDS demonstrated.

12 At **www.rainbownetwork.net.au/**
13 At **www.wayout.org.au/**

While much has changed since the 1980s there are still only limited resources available for this work and polices that address the needs of SSAGQ young people are piecemeal, uncoordinated and do not mandate the provision of appropriate services to this target group. Furthermore, there is now an understanding of the need to ensure that SSAGQ young people are connected to and supported, not only by GLBT networks, but by the wider community. Without the provision of committed resources and funds, and in the absence of an overarching policy framework that not only supports and values SSAGQ young people but mandates their inclusion in relevant services there is a very real possibility that the gains of the last decade, like those of the 1970s and 80s, will again be lost.

3.2 Policy, programs and services

Over the last 10 years the Victorian Government has pursued a social justice agenda aimed at promoting diversity and human rights while at the same time addressing the causes and effects of systemic discrimination and disadvantage. As part of this agenda a raft of legislative reforms have been introduced that recognise some (but not all) of the rights and responsibilities of GLBT people and same sex couples. The inclusion of GLBT issues in the Government's social justice reforms provides an opportunity for the development of policies, programs, and services that address the specific situation and concerns of SSAGQ young people.

The following review identifies current government polices and programs that explicitly reference SSAGQ young people. These are listed in Table 1, p.24.The review also notes that SSAGQ young people are absent from a range of policies where their inclusion is warranted by both the evidence and the spirit of the government's reform agenda. While SSAGQ young people are included in a range of departmental policies and programs, there is no overarching SSAGQ-youth policy framework that draws these various initiatives together or ties them to the government's social diversity and human rights agenda. Furthermore, in the absence of a policy mandate the inclusion of SSAGQ young people in programs and services remains an optional extra dependent on the good will of individual staff or management.

3.2.1 Whole-of-government

The government's commitment to recognising and valuing the diversity of the Victorian population, and to addressing the effects and causes of systemic discrimination is reflected in its human rights legislation and social justice reforms. These reforms represent the first steps in the development of a human rights culture in Victoria in which every person is able to live their life free from discrimination.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

In January 2008 the Victorian Government enacted the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic). *The Charter* holds Government accountable for ensuring minimum standards of protection against discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In particular Section 38 of *The Charter* places a positive obligation on public authorities to ensure that their policies and procedures are compatible with human rights. As a consequence, efforts to protect the safety, rights, and dignity of GLBT people, including SSAGQ young people, can no longer be mislabelled as a demand for special treatment but must be seen as part the government's responsibility to ensure the rights of all Victorians.

Anti-discrimination legislation

The *Equal Opportunity Act* (Vic) promotes equality of opportunity as a universal right by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a range of characteristics or attributes. In 1994 the Act was amended to include "lawful sexual activity" as a protected attribute. In 2000 it was further amended to include "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" making explicit the intent of the 1994 amendment to cover both sexual acts *and* identities (including gay men, lesbians and bisexuals), while also extending protection to transgender and intersex people. These changes to Victorian equal opportunity legislation have been supported by further reforms at state and federal levels that recognise some but not all of the rights and responsibilities of same sex couples. These include the *Statute Law Amendment (Relationships)* and *Further Amendment (Relationships) Acts 2001 (Vic.)*[14] and Same Sex Relationships *(Equal treatment in Commonwealth Law–General Law Reform) Act* 2008.[15]

The *Equal Opportunity Bill* is currently before the Victorian Parliament and recommends replacing the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* with new legislation. The Bill's proposed changes include provision for representative organisations to lodge complaints on behalf of individuals. It also recommends granting the Victorian Equal Opportunity and

14 Accessed at Over the Rainbow **www.over-the-rainbow.org/state-legislation.php**
15 The Commonwealth reforms also include the Same Sex Relationships (Equal treatment in Commonwealth Law Superannuation) Act 2008. At **www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Humanrightsandanti-discrimination_SameSexReform**

Human Rights Commission increased powers to investigate systemic discrimination independent of individual complaints. These changes are particularly important for SSAGQ young people who may be experiencing discrimination in the provision of public services including schooling. Many of these young people have neither the resources, material or emotional, nor the stamina to pursue a complaint while others may be unwilling to out themselves as part of an individual-based complaints process.

However, the Bill also allows religious organisations to discriminate in education and employment on the basis of an individual's marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The exercise of these religious exemptions in schools will send a clear and unequivocal message to SSAGQ students that they are neither valued nor have a legitimate place or future in these institutions. Furthermore, the exemptions allow profoundly damaging religious beliefs about GLBT people to circulate in the public domain, fuelling homophobia and compromising the social gains of the past 20 years.

Social diversity policy

A Fairer Victoria was launched in 2005 and lays out the government's social policy blueprint for the next 10 years (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005). It aims to promote social diversity while tackling the disadvantage and discrimination that underpin entrenched population and place-based inequality. According to *A Fairer Victoria,*

> Some people are denied [services] because…of subtle prejudices still existing within the community…Sometimes these outcomes are the result of overt discrimination, at other times they are the result of structures and systems that may unintentionally lead to discrimination against certain groups of people.

A Fairer Victoria is perhaps the only whole-of-government policy that explicitly references SSAGQ young people. SSAGQ young people are identified as particularly vulnerable to the effects of homophobic discrimination and abuse.*A Fairer Victoria* allocated limited non-recurrent funding for a "Human Rights and Safety in Schools" project aimed at supporting students who belong to marginal groups including SSAGQ young people (p.29). Unfortunately, in subsequent iterations of the Government's social policy blueprint there is no reference to homophobic discrimination and the needs of SSAGQ young people and no commitment of new or ongoing funds.

3.2.2 Departmental

Education

> A policy framework is very important….*Now there's Supporting Sexual Diversity, VELS, School Reference Guide…*[16]

A range of national and state education policies either directly or indirectly address the needs of SSAGQ young people. These include policies that:

- Promote the development of inclusive curricula
- Address the welfare and safety of SSAGQ students and GLBT teachers and staff; and
- Advocate for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in staff training and development.

«National Education Policy

The *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* was produced by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MYCEETYA) in 2008. The national policy commits government, for the first time, to an education system free from discrimination including sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. The *National Safe Schools Framework* (2003) argues that the education system "value diversity" and recommends that sexual orientation discrimination be included in curricula, staff development, and training. In 1999 the Commonwealth launched *Talking Sexual Health: A national policy framework for education about STIs, HIV/AIDS and blood-borne viruses in secondary schools.* Although restricted in scope to matters relating to sexual health, the resource includes material on sexual diversity and same sex relationships.

In 2003 the Australian Education Union released its *Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People.* The policy aims to counter heterosexism and homophobia in schools at three discrete but interrelated levels—institutional, workplace and curriculum—and addresses the needs of SSAGQ young people and GLBT staff and teachers.

«Victorian Education Policy

In Victoria, equal opportunity legislation and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities create a statutory obligation on schools to ensure that students, staff and teachers are not treated less favourably due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.[17] The *Victoria Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and*

16 Teacher, online survey

17 These legal obligations are in addition to the general duty of care that falls on teachers, principals and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the safety and well being of all students.

Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT) aim to foster an open and supportive learning environment in which difference and diversity, including differences in sexual orientation and gender identity, are recognised and valued.[18] For example, VELS provides specific reference to same-sex attraction and homophobia in the Health and Physical Education domain. It also encourages discussion of sexual diversity and same sex relationships in the domains of English, the Humanities, and Civics and Citizenship. *Safe Schools are Effective Schools: A resource for developing safe and supportive school environments* (2006) includes material for teachers on how to address homophobic bullying (chapter 14) while the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide* (2007) includes a best practice guide for sexuality education that addresses sexuality-based discrimination and diversity of sexual expression.

In 2008 the Victorian Government released Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools which provides, for the first time in Victoria, a comprehensive policy framework for addressing the needs of SSAGQ students in public schools. It draws on human rights legislation in calling for an inclusive approach to supporting SSAGQ students. It details proven strategies for combating homophobia and promoting sexual diversity in schools, and argues that if these policies and practices are to be effective they must be championed by principals and school management

Catching On

Catching On sexuality education training and curriculum materials have been provided to Victorian schools since 2004. The resources are a joint initiative of the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Health (DH).

The term "catching on" has become synonymous with sexuality education resources in Victoria. The hard copy and on line resources range from program development and support (*Catching On Everywhere*) to policy and curriculum resources for primary, secondary and special schools. All focus on sexual diversity and include material on same sex relationships. The resources locate sexuality as part of young people's lives as a whole and deal with sexuality in the context of love, relationships, and responsibility and care for self and others. *Catching On* includes materials on safe sex, sexual negotiation, effective communication and decision making.

www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality

18 At **vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/**

School Focused Youth Service

School Focused Youth Service is a student wellbeing initiative that aims to increase support provided to schools in response to the recommendations of the Suicide Prevention Taskforce. It was established in 1998 and is currently funded out of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

The focus of the initiative is the co-ordination of preventative and early intervention strategies for young people, to be delivered through school and community clusters. It has the capacity to purchase services through brokerage funds to address current gaps in service availability as identified by the schools and community clusters. Over the last 12 years it has funded a number of projects directly related to the well being of SSAGQ young people.

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/sfyouthservices

Youth Services

In *Youth and The Future: Effective Youth Services for the Year 2015* the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme argues that youth services are not meeting the needs of gay and lesbian young people. This is a position that has been voiced at state policy level for almost a decade. In 2002 the Victorian Government launched *Respect:The Government's Vision for Young People*. The report, like the first iteration of *A Fairer Victoria*, identifies SSAGQ young people as a particularly vulnerable group of young people whose specific needs are not being adequately addressed (2002:14). The report documented one-off project funding through the Office for Youth[19] for a small number of locally-based, same sex attracted youth support groups.

The second iteration of the Government's youth policy, *Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians* (2006), like the second iteration of *A Fairer Victoria* is less definitive in identifying the structural and systemic nature of discrimination against SSAGQ young people. The report does not commit new or ongoing funds for SSAGQ youth related projects but does note funding for the roll out of teacher training on *Catching on Everywhere*, DEECD's sexual health and diversity module (p.25).

19 Located in what was formally the Department for Victorian Communities (now DPDC).

Zaque[20]

Zaque is a social networking group located in Ballarat. The group meets on a weekly basis and provides a safe and welcoming place for same sex attracted young people. Zaque is funded through a Youth Participation and Access (YPA) grant from the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD). Zaque has created a suite of resources including: Queer-Y Packs; Youth Packs, and a Youth Survival Homeless Pack. Members of the group have performed for 300 secondary school students in an interactive performance called 'Empowering the Bullied', held dance parties, art exhibitions, fundraisers, annual AIDS and awareness walks, and performed in the Awakenings Festival.

Zaque myspace: www.myspace.com/zaquegroup

Health *and* Human Services

The Departments of Health *and* Human Services are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable groups within the Victorian Community and reducing population and place-based health inequalities. The Departments' mission statements reflect the Government's social policy and human rights objectives and provide an opportunity and rationale for developing a coherent policy framework that addresses the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people.

In 2003 DHS launched *Health and Sexual Diversity: A health and wellbeing action plan for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) Victorians* (Leonard, 2003). The action plan was produced by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Health and applies a social model of health in developing a comprehensive framework for understanding GLBTI health and wellbeing. The plan makes recommendations to government aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Victorians, including the development of policies, programs and services targeting SSAGQ young people.[21]

20 For an evaluation of the effectiveness of SSAGQ social support groups for improving the wellbeing of SSAGQ young people see Hillier, 2007 and Walker & Hillier, 2005.

21 The action plan's key recommendation was government funding of an independent GLBT policy and resource unit, resulting in the establishment of GLHV in 2004.

WayOut Rural Victorian Youth & Sexual Diversity Project

WayOut is a partnership between Cobaw Community Health Service and Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV). It commenced in 2002 and is funded by the Victorian Department of Health (DH). The project works with communities in rural Victoria to raise awareness about the needs of SSAGQ young people and the discrimination they face. The project facilitates a group of young people in the Macedon Ranges Shire and convenes a partnership with nine other rural agencies that provide services and groups for SSAGQ young people to towns stretching from Warrnambool to Sale and Wodonga. The project also convenes state-wide initiatives such as weekend forums for young people and workers and provides general training, resources, and support to rural organisations and schools.

In 2008 the WayOut Project established the *OUTThere Rural Victorian Youth Council for Sexual Diversity.* It is composed of young people from across the state and aims to raise awareness and provide information to communities, youth services, schools, and government about issues facing SSAGQ young people in rural Victoria.

www.wayout.org.au

Rainbow Network

Rainbow Network Victoria is supported by Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV) and funded by the Victorian Department of Health (DH). The statewide network provides information, training, and resources for those who work with same sex attracted or gender questioning young people in community, health or school settings. It also keeps a list of SSAGQ support groups across the state.

www.rainbownetwork.net.au

A range of other DH and DHS population-based policies and programs identify SSAGQ young people as a target group including:

- *Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019 (2009)*
- *Opening Doors: Better Access for homeless people to social housing and support services in Victoria Framework (2008)*
- *Victorian Government's Suicide Prevention Action Plan (2006)*
- *Victorian Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2006-2009 (2006)*
- *Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2, 2006-2010 (2006)*
- *The Victorian HIV/AIDS Strategy 2002-2004 and Addendum 2005-2009 (2005); and*
- *Adolescent Health Policy (2000).*

Given data showing higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse among SSAGQ young people it is significant that they are not identified as a target population in key Victorian drug and alcohol policies (and programs) such as the *Victorian Drug Strategy 2006-2009 (2006) and Drug Policy and Services: An overview* (2004).

Family Access Network and alsorts transitional housing

Family Access Network (FAN) in partnership with The ALSO Foundation offers a case-managed transitional support initiative for SSAGQ young people. The program provides case management, access to brokerage funds for non-housing related needs such as education and employment, assistance for independent long-term housing options, access to positive role models, workshops, and community activities.[22]

FAN has ensured that the organisation's other programs, services, and operational systems are compatible with providing an SSAGQ youth friendly service. This has included an internal audit and review of organisational protocols and ongoing staff training and development at all levels. FAN also provides sector-wide information on the alsorts program and has championed the integration of SSAGQ young people within the broader homelessness sector.

www.fan.org.au

22 For an evaluation of the *alsorts* project see Desmond 2008.

Since the launch of *Health and Sexual Diversity,* DH and DHS have funded a number of projects that address the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people (see Table 1, p.24). In 2009 DH released *Well proud: A guide to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex inclusive practice for health and human services.* The guide provides evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving the quality of services provided to GLBT clients, including SAAGQ young people.

Justice and Police

> Much to my disappointment SSA [same sex attracted young people] is something that is overseen in my office and thus not addressed. Currently I'm trying to make it an issue to be discussed, with limited success.[23]

Juvenile Justice service provision is governed by *A Balanced Approach To Juvenile Justice in Victoria* (2000) and the *Children, Youth and Families Act* 2005. The Act states that the best interests of the child must always be paramount which includes consideration of the need to protect the child from harm and to promote his or her rights and development. In addition, the Act directs that when determining what action to take consideration must also be given to the following when they are relevant, "the child's social, individual and cultural identity and religious faith (if any) and the child's age, maturity, sex, and *sexual identity*…" (Italics added).[24]

Little research has been done on SSAGQ young people's experiences of the juvenile justice system or of the system's capacity to address their needs. In a 2003 study looking at rates of suicide and attempted suicide among SSAGQ young people one Victorian Juvenile Justice worker commented "Sexuality is a completely concealed issue among our clients" (Dyson et al., 2003:29). A report on the juvenile justice system in New York supports this worker's claim. The report concluded that when sexuality was not hidden it was used as an opportunity for discrimination and abuse, making the juvenile justice system an unsafe place for SSAGQ young people (Feinstein et al., 2001).

In Victoria responsibility for juvenile justice is split between DHS and DOJ. DHS has responsibility for the management of Victoria's three youth correctional facilities and childhood protection, early intervention and youth justice.[25] Clearly the inclusion of SSAGQ young people in juvenile justice policy and services will require policy and program coordination across these two departments.

23 Juvenile justice worker, questionnaire respondent
24 (See s. 10 Part 1.2 Principles, Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 No. 96 of 2005, p 24).
25 Within DHS, Service Delivery and Performance Division has responsibility for managing youth correctional facilities, while Children, Youth and Family Division is responsible for child protection, early intervention and youth justice.

Victoria Police's five-year strategic plan, *The Way Ahead* 2008-2013 explicitly mentions GLBT people. The plan states,

> Our lives are changing… At home, there are significantly more single parent families, couples without children, people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and people living alone, than at any other time in Australia's history.

Victoria Police have developed *Community Policing Procedures and Guidelines* to enable the provision of services that are sensitive to the diversity of the Victorian community. The plan includes provision for Aboriginal, multicultural, youth, and GLBT liaison.

Victoria Police Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit (GLAU)

In 2000 Victoria Police appointed its first full-time Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO). In 2003 the program was expanded with the creation of a Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit (GLAU) and the appointment of a full-time manager and a number of GLLOs across the state. The GLLO's mission is to "contribute to the creation of mutual trust between police, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, and intersex persons so they have increasing confidence in police through the provision of fair and equitable policing service." [26] The GLLOs work closely with a range of groups within the GLBT community including SSAGQ young people, and have a presence at a number of SSAGQ youth related events.

www.police.vic.gov.au/

26 At **www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=741**

Table 1 - Current Victorian Government policy and program support for sexual diversity and SSAGQ young people

Premier

Current Support
- No current direct support

Policy
- A Fairer Victoria 2009: Standing Together Through Tough Times.
- Respect Strategy (2009)

Education

Current Support
- Catching on sexuality education resources are inclusive of sexual diversity.
- Individual schools run groups for SSAT young people but no universal provision of services.
- School focused youth service.

Policy
- Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools (2008)
- Inclusive Sexuality Education Policy
- Safer Schools are Effective Schools.
- Gender Identity Policy for Students.
- VELS (VCA) Health and Physical Ed requires teaching in relation to sexual diversity.

Community Development

Current Support
- Funding for 8 part time SSAGQ support group workers.
- FREEZA funding for Minus 18 events
- Youth participation and Access (YPAP) funding for groups and projects.

Policy
- Future Directions: An Action Agenda for young Victorians (2006-2009)
- Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport (2010)

Health

Current Support
- Ministerial Advisory Committee on BLBTI health
- Funding for 5 part time SSAGQ support group workers.
- Ongoing funding for WayOut! rural youth project
- Funding for Rainbow Network Coordinator until 2011.
- Ongoing funding for Gay and Lesbian health Victoria (GLHV)
- Funding for 'Mind The Gap' HIV/STI prevention project.

Policy
- Health and Sexual Diversity Action Plan (2003)
- Well Proud Guidelines (2009)
- HIV Action Plan (2008-2010)
- Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy (2009-2019)

Human Services

Current Support
- Funding for Gay and Lesbian Switchboard.
- Inclusion of sexual orientation in the Youth Drug and Alcohol Survey.
- Funding for Family Access Network Alsorts Housing projects for homeless SSAGQ.

Policy
- Vulnerable Youth Framework (in development)

Justice

Current Support
- GLBT Ministerial Advisory Committee for Attorney General.
- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission offers training for sexual diversity.
- Funding for Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby to produce and print *'Over the Rainbow'*.
- Production of *'Initiatives Developed for GLBTI Victorians'*.
- Police Gay and Lesbian Liason Officers (GLLO)

Policy
- Equal Opportunity Act.

4 Findings from the questionnaire

> Convincing senior management to invest funding, time and resources into developing an organisation-wide strategy for more effectively engaging same sex attracted young people…[27]

One of the major gaps in research into the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people has been a needs assessment of workers (Marshall, 2005). Little is known of the experience and expertise of those who work with SSAGQ young people and even less of the barriers and disincentives they face in undertaking this work. Of the 318 workers who completed the online survey 74.2 per cent were female, the majority were under 40 years, and 63 per cent had 6 or more years of working in the field. The largest group were youth workers (27 per cent), followed by teachers (26 per cent), mental health workers (8 per cent), with drug and alcohol, housing, and school nurses each accounting for approximately 4 per cent of respondents.[28]

The majority of workers expressed a deep commitment and satisfaction in working with SSAGQ young people. Nonetheless, respondents identified a number of barriers they face in undertaking this work. These include: lack of organisational awareness and support of SSAGQ young people; potential harm to their careers if they work with this group, and frustration with short-term funding and high staff turnover.

4.1 Organisational awareness of SSAGQ young people

Despite the research showing that 1 in 10 young people experience feelings of same sex attraction, 28 per cent of respondents had no idea whether their client group included SSAGQ young people. Awareness of having SSAGQ young people as part of their client group was linked to indicators of improved professional practice and service delivery.

27 Female school nurse, questionnaire respondent.
28 The small number of respondents in the drug and alcohol, housing, school nursing and legal (not included here) sectors made comparisons across different sectors impossible.

For example, those respondents who had an awareness of SSAGQ young people as actual or potential clients were:

- More likely to belong to a network that supports people who work with SSAGQ young people[29]; and
- Had greater confidence that they could improve the quality of services provided to this group.

4.2 A supportive workplace culture

Respondents expressed concern over the levels of organisational support for their work with SSAGQ young people. For example:

- Only 57 per cent of respondents believed they would be supported by a majority of their co-workers if they put up a gay or lesbian poster
- Less than half (47 per cent) believed they would be supported by a majority of co-workers in organising GLBT or SSAGQ sensitivity training
- Only a quarter believed that they would be supported if they requested an increase in the time spent on SSAGQ young people's issues
- Only 39 per cent were confident that their organisation would be willing to undergo a GLBT or SSAGQ-sensitivity audit
- Only 36 per cent believed their manager or boss would speak publicly against homophobia; and
- Only 58 per cent believed they would receive majority workplace support if they "came out" as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Respondents suggested a number of organisational strategies for supporting those who work with SSAGQ young people and improving the quality of services provided to this group. They include:

- The inclusion of SSAGQ young people in organisational policies and practices
- Recognition of the needs of GLBT staff and those who work with SSAGQ young people
- Training and professional development in this area; and
- Developing and maintaining appropriate resources and a referral data base for both staff and clients.

29 Belonging to such a network was significantly linked to worker confidence in addressing homophobia and supporting SSAGQ young people.

Even when policies exist that clearly mandate the inclusion of SSAGQ young people they must be widely circulated and supported if they are to translate into practice. Despite the launch in 2008 of *Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools*, over half the teachers in the survey (52.6 per cent) and 39 per cent of all school staff reported that they did not include work on SSAGQ young people because "they don't know where they stand in terms of government policy".

Although a majority of workers (63.3 per cent) were confident of their professional capacity to address the needs of same sex attracted young people, 17.7 per cent were not. However, when asked about their professional capacity to address the needs of gender questioning young people the figures are reversed with only 37.1 per cent feeling confident and 50.9 per cent feeling not confident. This suggests that even amongst those who work with or have the potential to work with SSGAQ young people there is a pressing need for training and ongoing professional development, particularly regarding gender identity.[30]

A number of respondents suggested that organisations would be more likely to consider the needs of employees who work with SSAGQ young people and include SSAGQ young people as part of their core business if this work was mandated by departmental and whole-of-government policies. As one respondent put it,

Organisational policies, health promotion, community education and systemic reform… all are urgently needed to confront, challenge and eliminate homophobic attitudes, behaviours, procedures and modes of service delivery.[31]

4.3 Professional fall out

> …I am personally prepared to confront homophobia, however I am at risk of vilification and outing in my workplace. In this way my ability to work in the community is also under threat.[32]

A number of respondents expressed concerns over the potential consequences of working with SSAGQ young people or taking a stand against homophobia. These included a fear that they:

- Would become a target of abuse themselves

30 49.4 per cent of youth workers, 40.6 per cent or health workers and 37.0 per cent of teachers reported having done training on SSAGQ issues.
31 Female counsellor, questionnaire respondent.
32 Female counsellor, questionnaire respondent.

- May be accused of being a paedophile; and
- Would not be supported by their colleagues or organisation.

These concerns are particularly acute for teachers and other school employees. Almost a third of teachers (30 per cent) reported that fears over a media or community backlash were a major disincentive to their working with or addressing the needs of SSAGQ students. Just over 16 per cent of teachers (and 13.4 per cent of all school staff) reported that they do not address GLBT or SSAGQ youth issues in school for fear of being labelled a paedophile. Furthermore, almost a quarter of teachers were unsure of what the impact of addressing SSAGQ youth issues would be on their careers.

At the same time those who become organisational champions run the risk of being ghettoised and their professional expertise limited to working with SSAGQ young people alone. A number of respondents also reported that people who work with SSAGQ young people are often assumed to be gay or lesbian, raising complex issues about workplace privacy and confidentiality and the subtle ways in which such claims become problematic only within a homophobic environment.

4.4 Resources and funding

Policy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for change; policy needs to be supported by ongoing funding and resources.[33]

A majority of respondents reported frustration at short-term funding, lack of dedicated resources and high staff turnover. As one respondent put it "There is no systemic support for me to support same sex attracted young people…" Respondents talked of lack of dedicated support within their organisations for work with SSGAQ young people, lack of ongoing program funding, and a lack of funding and resources needed to implement and sustain SSAGQ youth-related policy recommendations.

In addition when asked what would increase their confidence and improve their support for SSAGQ youth related programs and services, a majority of workers included increased and ongoing resources and funding.

33 Female researcher, questionnaire respondent.

5 Blueprint

> Having a legislative framework that makes homophobia an offence would help in minimising violence and perhaps even the behaviours.[34]

5.1 SSAGQ-youth policy framework

As the data show there is a pressing need to include SSAGQ young people not only in policies that address the effects of systemic discrimination but also in those that celebrate the diversity of the Victorian population. While the inclusion of SSAGQ young people in the former recognises and seeks to address the effects of homophobic discrimination, their inclusion in the latter figures a movement within policy *beyond homophobia*. It represents our shared investment in a future where non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities are celebrated as two of the many differences that constitute the diversity of the Victorian community.

The SSAGQ-youth policy framework (Diagram 1, p.32) is derived from the review of whole-of-government and departmental policies documented in Section 3.2 and listed in Table 1. The framework operates across three discrete but interconnected levels:

- Whole-of-government human rights and social diversity agenda
- Cross-departmental youth policy; and
- Departmental policies and programs

Underpinning the framework is the material base—the funding and resources—that is needed to turn policy into practice.

5.1.1 Level 1 – Whole-of-government human rights and social diversity

The first level locates SSAGQ youth policy in the context of the Government's human rights and social diversity agenda. It is important that the Government include the promotion of sexual orientation and gender identity as part of the implementation of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.[35] This involves:

34 Questionnaire respondent

35 Interestingly, this is consistent with DHS's new approach to HIV/AIDS prevention among gay men outlined in *Something borrowed, something new: Addressing increased rates of HIV and STI transmission among gay men in Victoria* (2008). The introduction to the Action plan concludes, & it is only within a health promoting and non-discriminatory environment that individuals are able and willing to take responsibility for improving their sexual health and the sexual health of their sexual partners (p.1).

- Promoting and valuing the unique contribution that GLBT people and communities make to the life of the state; and
- Challenging deeply engrained homophobic prejudice and abuse, and its effects on the lives of GLBT Victorians.

There is an opportunity to explicitly reference SSAGQ young people and their needs in the implementation of the Charter. SSAGQ young people could be acknowledged under the umbrella of sexual and gender identity diversity as being particularly vulnerable to homophobia and its effects. This inclusion would provide support and authorisation at the highest levels of state government for the development of policies, programs, and services that address the needs of SSAGQ young people.

5.1.2 Level 2 – Cross-departmental youth agenda

This dual human-rights focus on challenging homophobia, while celebrating sexual and gender identity diversity, provides a context for the development of cross-departmental policy on SSAGQ young people, as well as programs and services that address their needs. One option is for the inclusion of SSAGQ young people in a cross-departmental youth policy framework, overseen by the Office for Youth, DPCD. The Office is the cental agency with oversight of government youth policy.[36] The policy could include a population-based analysis that acknowledges sexual orientation and gender identity as major determinants of young people's health and wellbeing. In turn, this would support a detailed and systematic policy needs analysis of SSAGQ young people and how their needs can be met by program and service development within and between relevant departments.

A cross department youth policy that includes SSAGQ young people as a priority group has the potential to:

- Identify current initiatives that include SSAGQ young people
- Identify gaps in current policies and programs where SSAGQ young people are absent but should be included; and
- Draw these initiatives together as part of a coordinated and comprehensive policy framework that develops links within and between departments and supports the consolidation and development of SSAGQ youth service provision within the youth sector.

36 This was one of the key recommendations of a forum on how to progress the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted young people in Victoria jointly hosted by the Department for Victorian Communities, the Departments of Education & Training and Human Services, and the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria. See Report on Progressing Health and Wellbeing for Same Sex Attracted Young People in Victoria: Government, community and young people working together, 2005.

It also ties departmental SSAGQ youth policy and programs to the government's human rights and diversity agenda. In so doing it not only provides legitimacy and authorisation for this work but holds departments accountable to meeting the needs of SSAGQ young people as part of the Government's obligations under the Charter and its commitment to valuing and supporting difference and diversity.

5.1.3 Level 3 – Departmental policies and programs

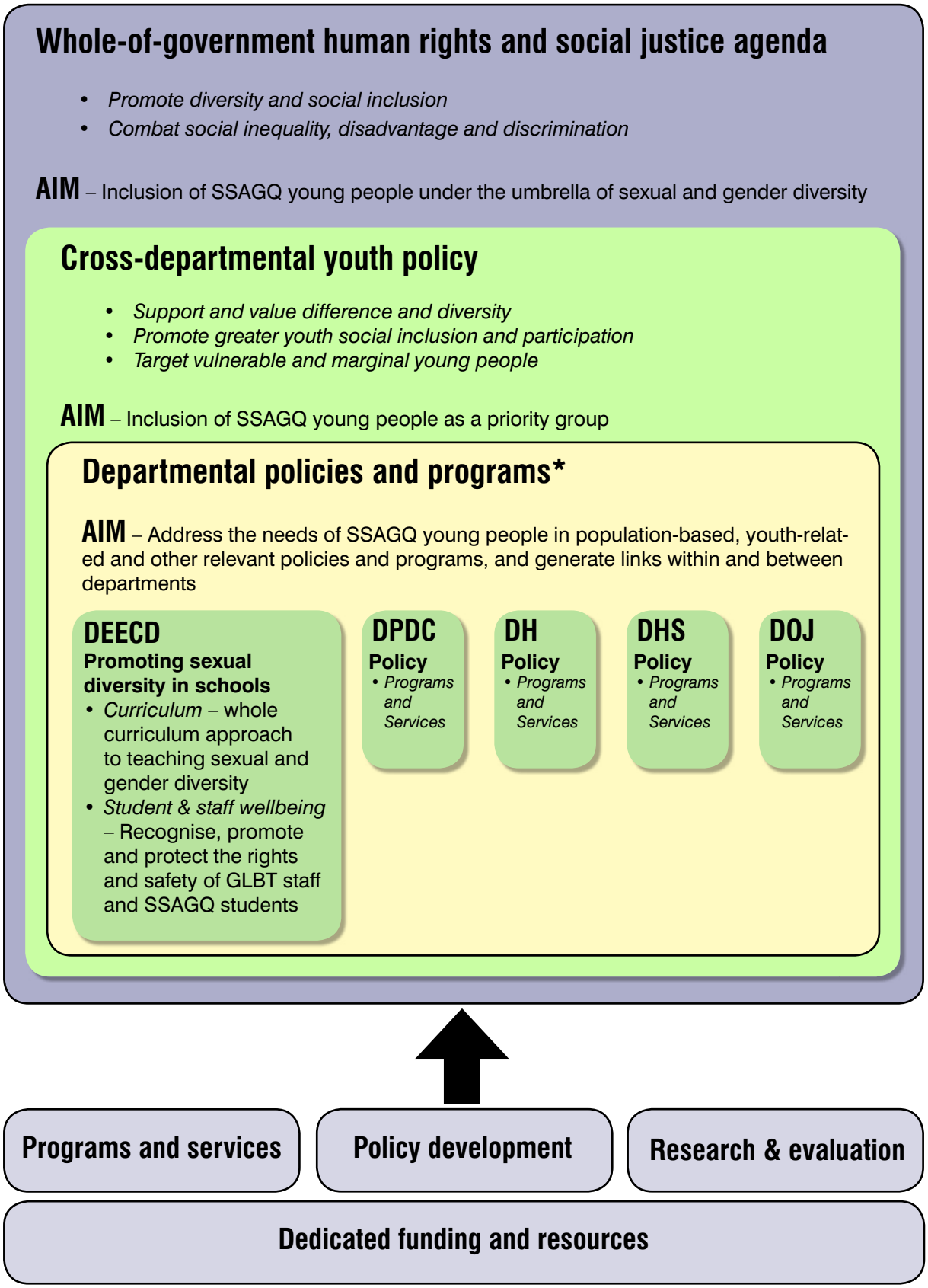
As Table 1 shows there are currently a number of departmental policies that include SSAGQ young people. However, in many cases their inclusion in policy is not matched by their inclusion in programs and services and the spread of such policies across departments is uneven. Furthermore, there is little consistency in how sexual and gender diversity, and SSAGQ young people and their needs, are conceptualised and addressed in these documents.

The inclusion of SSGAQ young people in departmental policies should be consistent with the position developed in the cross-departmental youth policy. This involves once again a dual approach to SSAGQ young people:

- Supporting and valuing SSAGQ young people as part of the everyday diversity of young people as a whole; while
- Acknowledging that SSAGQ young people are particularly vulnerable to homophobia and its effects.

This approach allows for flexibility in program development, particularly between departments, but ensures that programs are informed by a common understanding and shared objectives. In so doing it provides a means to link initiatives within and across departments as well as ensuring that SSAGQ young people's programs and services are consistent with the government's overarching human rights and social diversity objectives.

Diagram 1 – A whole-of-government policy framework for meeting the needs of SSAGQ young people



*DEECD is presented here as an example. In the implementation of the blueprint each department would be subject to a similar analysis and SSGAQ young people's issues drawn together under an umbrella policy.

5.2 Practice guide

The following practice guidelines provide recommendations aimed at supporting services to be more responsive to the needs of SSAGQ young people. The guidelines are evidence-based, drawing on:

- Research on the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people and their particular needs
- The wisdom and expertise of those who have worked with and for SSAGQ young people over the past 25 years; and
- The recommendations of workers in the field and SSAGQ young people documented in this report.

The guidelines are informed by the principles for working with SSAGQ young people listed in Section 3 .1 (p.12) and are consistent with the Victorian Department of Health's recently released GLBTI-inclusive practice guidelines for health and human services (Victorian Department of Health, 2009).

The guidelines are divided into two parts. The first consists of generic recommendations that apply to all youth-related services. They aim to assist mainstream services in the development of SSAGQ-sensitive practice and to include SSAGQ young people as part of their core business. The second set of guidelines provides additional recommendations for different sectors: education; health and human services; youth services, and juvenile justice. They complement the generic guidelines, acknowledging and responding to the different needs that each of these sectors addresses. Although the guidelines target mainstream, youth-related services they may also provide useful information and insights in the delivery of SSAGQ-specific services and programs.

5.2.1 Generic

It's not about the service as such but about the whole organisational culture – from the governance structure to the service interface. It is not just about being sensitive but about affirming and actively trying to support rather than just passively not trying to discriminate.[37]

Create an authorising environment

Organisational change, and in particular cultural change, can only occur and be maintained when it is championed at the most senior levels. When that change involves not only combating homophobia but also actively supporting and valuing the sexual and gender identity diversity of clients and staff alike, then that support is all the more needed. If an organisation is to meet the needs of SSAGQ young people, staff must be supported and valued in working with and providing services to this client group. There are a number or procedures and protocols that can be introduced to create an authorising environment for this work:

- Head of the organisation to take a leadership role in publicising and promoting policies and initiatives that include GLBT staff and SSAGQ young people
- Nominate a senior staff member to oversee the roll out and ongoing promotion of sexual and gender identity diversity policies and programs within the organisation and ensure the provision of sufficient and ongoing funds for this work
- Put in place processes for dealing with claims of homophobia and sexism in the work place
- Respect the right of staff and young people to privacy and do not pressure individuals to "out" themselves
- Include GLBT people and where appropriate SSAGQ young people in organisational policies, protocols and guidelines
- Mandate a consideration of the needs of SSAGQ young people in all program and service development and when they are not included a clear statement as to why; and
- Make sure that GLBT and SSAGQ young people are visible and recognised as part of the day-to-day culture of the organisation from their inclusion in staff newsletters and publicity material to annual events celebrating sexual and gender identity diversity.

37 Mann, Horsley et al., 2006:45

Develop inclusive mainstream practice and models of service delivery

Many SSAGQ young people experience homophobic abuse in both their public and private lives. There are few spaces where SSAGQ young people can be open about their sexuality or gender identity without fear of recrimination or rebuke, particularly SSAGQ young people in rural and remote areas, and those belonging to certain religious and cultural groups. It is vitally important that mainstream services provide an open and welcoming environment to SSAGQ young people where they feel valued and supported as SSAGQ. There are a range of procedures your organisation can adopt to make inclusive practice the professional norm:

- Undertake a GLBT/SSAGQ-sensitivity audit of your organisation's policies, protocols and practices
- Draw on the expertise of specialist evaluation agencies and relevant GLBT organisations to assist in auditing policies and procedures and developing diverse mainstream practices that address the needs of SSAGQ young people[38]
- Commit your organisation to an annual review and update of its policies, procedures and practices for addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people
- Consult with SSAGQ young people in developing practices and models that are sensitive to and able to address their needs
- Wherever possible invite representatives of SSAGQ-youth organisations to sit on relevant organisational committees; and
- Establish good practice around confidentiality and privacy for SSAGQ young clients, including documentation and record keeping.

Professional development

In order to ensure that organisations are better able to meet the needs of SSAGQ young people all staff and not only those involved in direct service provision need GLBT-sensitivity education and training. Topics for education and training that directly relate to SSAGQ young people include:

- Identifying and challenging discriminatory beliefs about, and practices directed at, SSAGQ young people (including heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia)

38 GLHV provides an informal, GLBT-sensitivity audit instrument that agencies can self administer. The Quality Improvement Council, which is responsible for carrying out safety and quality audits in the community sector, in partnership with GLHV and DH, is looking at including GLBT-sensitivities in a number of its current standards. See Victorian Department of Health, 2009:26 and 37-40.

- Familiarity with how homophobia effects SSAGQ young people's health and wellbeing[39] and how homophobia may be more pronounced for rural SSAGQ young people and those belonging to certain religious or cultural groups
- Organisational and staff obligations to their SSAGQ young clients under the *Equal Opportunity Act* Vic, the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* and recent federal and state legislation recognising same sex couples
- Use of inclusive and non-discriminatory language when dealing with SSAGQ young people and their partners, friends and family; and
- Recognition of the diversity of intimate and caring relationships including recognition of same sex and non-gender normative partners.

Resources and referral

As part of sensitive service provision organisations need to provide or refer both staff and SSAGQ young clients to appropriate information and resources. At the same time they should be able to refer their SSAGQ young clients to other agencies or services if and when the need arises. To build up resources and enable timely and appropriate client referrals the following strategies may be useful:

- Provide links on your organisation's web site and publications to GLBT/SSAGQ health, research and community organisations[40]
- Build up and make available to staff and clients information and resources on SSAGQ young people's issues including their health and wellbeing
- Develop and continually update a database of services that are friendly to and supportive of SSAGQ young people, including social support groups, alliances, health services, and agencies
- Develop protocols and procedures for referring SSAGQ young clients to appropriate health care providers and agencies; and
- Consider contacting Victoria Police's Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit on behalf of clients who may have been the victims of homophobic crime.

Linkages and partnerships within and across sectors

Building linkages between agencies in the same sector is important in improving the quality and reach of services provided to SSAGQ young people. It allows for the sharing of knowledge and expertise, minimises duplication of services in an environment

39 These include: the pressure on SSAGQ young people to hide their same sex attraction or gender identity (unlike other many other differences these can be hidden but often with serious costs to the individual); alienation from family and other social supports; discrimination from the state and certain religious organisations, and often limited support from teachers and other authority figures who for a variety of reasons may feel compromised in providing such support.

40 For example GLHV 's clearing-house provides a wealth of information and resources on GLBT and SSAGQ young people's health and wellbeing. **www.glhv.org.au**

where resources are as precious as they are scarce, and maximises the opportunity for different approaches to be used by different agencies within the same sector. At the same time forming links across sectors is vital to consolidating the fledgling SSAGQ youth sector itself. It provides for cross-sector exchange and cooperation and the development of joint initiatives, and has the potential to address the range of issues facing SSAGQ young people. It also provides a focal point for the ongoing development and implementation of whole-of-government SSAGQ youth policy.

To assist organisations forge links within and across sectors agencies might consider:

- Providing formal and informal mechanisms for staff from different agencies to meet and exchange information, resources and expertise
- Encouraging and providing the resources for staff to attend forums, conferences and events addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people
- Joining networks of organisations that have a common interest in addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people and/or those who work with them
- Looking for opportunities to undertake joint SSAGQ youth-related projects, programs, and research with other services and agencies within and outside your sector; and
- Lobbying government for funding and support to consolidate the SSAGQ youth sector by providing opportunities for linkages within and across sectors.

5.2.2 Sector-specific

Education

Schools are the only universal platform for the delivery of services to young people. They are places where young people, including SSAGQ young people, spend a large proportion of their time and where they are subject to high levels of institutional regulation and control. The data show that schools are also the places where many SSAGQ young people feel unsafe and where they are subject to the highest levels of homophobic abuse and bullying. Schools provide both unique opportunities and challenges for meeting the needs of SSAGQ young people and for dealing with homophobia and celebrating diversity. The following strategies may assist schools in developing a culture where SSAGQ young people can be open and feel supported and valued:

- Principals to take a public leadership role in championing a range of measures to support and value SSAGQ young people and GLBT staff including promoting zero tolerance to homophobic bullying

- Principals and senior school management to develop protocols for dealing with objections that may arise from parents, school councils, and religious, ethnic and cultural bodies, regarding sexual and gender diverse curricula and staff and student wellbeing policies
- Ensure that the school community is aware of their obligations and responsibilities regarding GLBT staff and of DEECD policies that support sexual and gender diversity in schools
- Ensure that GLBT staff who are open about their sexuality and gender identity are supported and can provide positive role models for SSAGQ students; and
- Develop protocols for providing SSAGQ students with information and referral to GLBT and SSAGQ youth support networks and groups

Youth Services

The SSAGQ related youth services referred to in this document are those funded primarily through the Department of Planning and Community Development. What percentage of the youth budget is spent on SSAGQ youth related programs or what percentage of any individual youth worker's time is dedicated to SSAGQ young people is a decision made at the local government level. In order to improve youth service access and quality for SSAGQ young people, agencies and/or local councils might consider:

- Lobbying government to provide recurrent, ongoing funding and resources dedicated to addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people
- Mandating dedicated youth worker time for working with SSAGQ young people and for providing assistance to mainstream youth programs to ensure SSAGQ are included
- Ensuring a mix of different approaches to addressing the needs of SSAGQ young people from SSAGQ young people only to gay/straight alliances
- Working with other agencies to provide support to parents, family and friends of SSAGQ young people when needed
- Working with a range of other youth-related local and community groups, from sporting clubs to religious, cultural and social organisations, to foster diversity and inclusion of SSAGQ young people; and
- Engaging in initiatives that promote SSAGQ young people within the school community.[41]

41 For example Gay History Month in the UK which is supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) **www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/index.htm**

Health *and* Human Services

The data show that SSAGQ young people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of homophobic abuse leading to increased risk of mental health, drug and alcohol, and sexual health problems, and homelessness. Service providers in each of these areas need to be particularly sensitive to and aware of the situation and needs of their SSAGQ young clients. This involves:

- Staff and senior management in each of these areas having a comprehensive understanding of homophobia as a social determinant of ill-health and in particular its effects on the health and wellbeing of SSAGQ young people
- Providing specialist GLBT/SSAGQ sensitivity training for workers in mental health, drug and alcohol, sexual health, and homelessness services
- Developing links and referral networks for SSAGQ young clients among mental health, drug and alcohol, sexual health and homelessness services
- Services in each of these areas developing a referral network of health professionals with specialist expertise and experience in working with SSAGQ young people; and
- Developing partnerships with organisations and networks that provide information and support to SSAGQ young people and where appropriate to their family and friends.

Juvenile Justice and Police

As the research and policy review show SSAGQ young people are only nominally acknowledged in Juvenile Justice's policies, programs, and protocols. SSAGQ young people who are detained in custodial settings are in prolonged contact with both staff and other detainees. The potential for homophobic abuse and reduced standards of care are particularly acute in these settings. Data also show that amongst GLBT Victorians, young people aged 14 -19 are the least likely to have heard of Victoria Police's GLLOs.[42] The following strategies may assist in improving service access and quality to SSAGQ young people in dealing with the juvenile justice system and Victoria Police:

- Government-funded research on SSAGQ young people's experiences of engaging with the juvenile justice system and the development of protocols that address their needs
- Provision of specialist counselling services for SSAGQ young people who are the victims or perpetrators of crime

42 Leonard, Mitchell et al., 2008:53.

- The development of protocols to ensure the safety and wellbeing of same-sex attracted and in particular gender questioning young people in custodial settings
- Provision of support from GLBT and SSAGQ youth agencies to SSAGQ young people in custodial settings; and
- Increasing the profile and awareness of the GLLOs among SSAGQ young people and developing protocols for reporting incidents of homophobic and heterosexist violence that are appropriate to this group.

5.3 Implementation

Finally, forging partnerships between different sectors including the government, private, philanthropic and GLBT-community sectors, is the only way of achieving the broader aims of this blueprint. That is, a world away from homophobia where SSAGQ young people are nurtured and valued by the entire community.

Appendix

Steering group membership

Name	Position/Organisation*
Rowena Allen	Chair, Ministerial Advisory Committee on GLBTI Health and Wellbeing
Justin Bowd	Research Officer, Australian Education Union
Kavitha Chandra-Shekeran	Policy and Projects Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Scott Davis	Manager, Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit, Victoria Police
Gemma DeMarco	Project Officer, Youth Services, ALSO Foundation
Chris Ellard	Community and Health Development Officer, City of Port Phillip
Mark Grant	Manager Policy and Youthcentral, Office For Youth, Department of Planning and Community Development
Meg Gulbin**	Senior Policy Advisor, Ministerial Advisory Committee on GLBTI Health and Wellbeing, Department of Human Services
Sue Hackney	Coordinator, WayOut Project, Cobaw Community Health
Lynne Hillier	Senior Research Fellow, ARCSHS, La Trobe University
Daniel Marshall	Research Fellow, ARCSHS, La Trobe University
Anne Mitchell (Chair)	Director, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria
Steven O'Connor	Senior Policy Officer ,Student Wellbeing Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Jakob Quilligan	Co-convenor, OUTThere Rural Victorian Youth Council for Sexual Diversity
Jan Watson	Senior Policy Advisor, Ministerial Advisory Committee on GLBTI Health and Wellbeing, Department of Human Services
Maurice Wilson	Co-convenor, The Australian Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Multicultural Council

* Position at time of appointment to the steering committee
** Meg Gulbin replaced Jan Watson as Senior Policy Advisor to the MACGLBTIHW in 2008.

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