Everyone is welcome and included

Helping Hand and the LGBTI Community
Helping Hand celebrates and embraces the diversity of people who use our services and are in our workforce. This includes diversity in terms of sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics. We stand alongside the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex (LGBTI) communities as allies in changing community attitudes and practices.

It has not always been this way. Australian society, including aged care, has historically seen people as heterosexual and either male or female and have rejected people who identify as LGBTI. Many older LGBTI Australians have lived through a time where they have experienced stigma, exclusion, discrimination, criminalisation, family rejection, social isolation, or inappropriate non-consensual medical treatment. Legislative reforms have helped to shape attitudes and promote and ensure equality. However, many older LGBTI people continue to fear or expect prejudice from the people around them, including health professionals and aged care service providers. As a result, they hide their identities and are less likely to access services. Such concealment and fear has had a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of many older LGBTI people.

We need to change this.

Helping Hand recognises the need for all individuals to feel welcome and included.

A first step is to support our staff to understand and consider the impact of historical and current discrimination and its effect on clients using our services, as well as our staff and volunteers from the LGBTI communities.

We also must recognise that the LGBTI communities are not homogenous. Individual LGBTI people are as diverse as anyone else e.g. culturally, life experience, where they live. In addition, while many of the LGBTI communities face similar types of discrimination, there are different challenges facing those who have diverse sexualities, gender identities and who are intersex.

We understand that people do not wish to be solely defined by their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics while recognising that this is an important part of who they are.

We will strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination impacting these communities, support our staff and to provide inclusive care and service delivery to all people. This Position Statement sets out our commitment to the LGBTI communities to provide aged care which is respectful and inclusive of diversity in all its forms.
We recognise the lack of widespread community understanding of LGBTI issues and the anxiety and prejudice this creates.

The responses in this booklet build on our existing commitment to non-discriminatory, respectful behaviour and practices documented in our policies and code of conduct.

We will
• Respect individuals for who they are.
• Be inclusive whether a person discloses or not.
• Provide health and personal support based on the individual.

Excellence
We believe in providing the highest standard that goes above and beyond everything we do.

Respect
We believe that everyone has the right to have their feelings, wishes and rights recognised and honoured.

Compassion
We believe in demonstrating our concern for others and doing everything we can do to help.

Community
We believe in creating relationships that foster a better connection with our customers, our teams, each other and our community.
**My experience**
For years, I’ve lived with fear of prejudice and discrimination. Coming out, for me, was never a single event. There was little recognition of my sexual preferences, in fact it wasn’t even recognised by law, so I felt I had to hide it from people or be “fixed”.

**How this affected me**
I was so anxious the real me often felt invisible. Sometimes it was just easier not to discuss my preferences. I felt socially isolated and depressed which had an impact on my general health. I felt afraid of seeking out services because I was frequently refused access. I’ve dealt with much grief and loss in my lifetime. Being rejected by family meant seeking support from a new community of friends, many of whom had similar experiences to my own.

**What I really need**
I need people to recognise and understand what I’ve lived through. I want people to avoid generalisations and acknowledge that my experiences are unique to me. I’d like to receive personalised care that meets my needs. I need privacy, confidentiality and a welcoming response to disclosure, where I feel safe and respected.

**LGBTI sexuality**
LGBTI sexuality describes how people are emotionally and sexually attracted to other people. The attraction can be towards the same, or any genders. While most people associate the term gay as relating to men, some women also use it.
My experience
It feels like prejudice and discrimination have always been a constant in my life. Even my friends and family didn’t fully accept who I was. I missed out on things that others simply took for granted, like employment and accommodation opportunities, legal recognition and professional healthcare. This all led me to periods of self doubt and a feeling that no-one understood me.

How this affected me
It started to affect my own sense of identity and I suffered mental health issues for a long time. I had to deal with feelings of shame, fear and low self-worth. It became a downward spiral that was hard to break out of. For a period I became unemployed and had nowhere to turn, so resorted to sleeping in my car.

What I really need
I need people to accept my gender and relationships, and be aware of my life journey. To give me privacy and confidentiality. I need respectful and appropriate care, related to my personal circumstances.

GENDER IDENTITY
Gender Identity describes someone’s own understanding of who they are; male, female, a blend of both or neither. It’s how people perceive themselves, as distinct from their physical characteristics.
My experience
As a child I was given hormone treatments and expected to dress and behave like a girl. But I always knew that wasn’t the real me. As I grew older I faced a great deal of prejudice and discrimination for being a “lesbian”! I became frustrated by constantly having to explain myself, yet still felt like no one understood.

How this affected me
I felt very isolated and alone because most people had no idea what being intersex meant. Even some health professionals! Sometimes I just avoided seeking help all together because I didn’t want to feel judged or like an outsider. I do worry about my health because no one knows the long-term health effects of hormone treatment.

What I really need
I need people to look beyond intersex and not focus on it. To not treat me as a trans person or assume I’ve had genital surgery. I need a welcoming response to disclosure and to feel safe and respected.

INTERSEX
Intersex people are born with physical sex characteristics that don’t fit medical or societal norms for female or male bodies. Intersex is not a form of Gender Identity, it’s about biology.
Helping Hand is a not-for-profit organisation offering home care services, retirement living and residential care homes to over 7,000 clients in metropolitan and regional South Australia.

Our sites and services are designed to be age friendly, inviting, and accessible for customers, carers, visitors and staff.

The wellbeing and quality of life of our residents comes first, and is the heart of everything we do. Our values and beliefs form the foundation on which we work, interact, make decisions and develop a smart strategy that supports our mission.

**To provide innovative and responsive services for older people, which support them to have the best quality of life.**