

Everyone is welcome and included

Helping Hand and supporting
the LGBTIQ+ Community



Helping Hand

WELCOME

Helping Hand celebrates and embraces the diversity of people who use our services and are in our workforce. This includes diversity of sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics. We stand alongside the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual (LGBTIQA+) communities*.

It has not always been this way. Australian society, including aged care, has historically seen people as heterosexual and either male or female, and has rejected people who are LGBTIQA+. Many older LGBTIQA+ 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 LGBTIQA+ 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 LGBTIQA+ people.

We are changing this.

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

The 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 LGBTIQA+ communities.

We also must recognise that the LGBTIQA+ communities are not homogenous. Individual LGBTIQA+ people are as diverse as anyone else, for example culturally, life experience, where they live. In addition, while many of the LGBTIQA+ 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 sexuality, gender identity or sex characteristics, while recognising that this is an important part of who they are.

We strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination impacting these communities and to provide inclusive care and service delivery to all people. This Position Statement sets out our commitment to the LGBTIQA+ communities to provide aged care which is respectful and inclusive of diversity in all its forms.

*LGBTIQA+ is respectfully being used as an umbrella term to refer collectively to a wider range of people than just those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual and/or gender diverse. The use of the acronym is not intended to exclude people that may not be specifically represented by this term.



We recognise the lack of widespread community understanding of LGBTIQ+ experiences and the anxiety and prejudice this creates.

This Position Statement reflects our existing commitment to non-discriminatory, respectful behaviour and practices documented in our policies, our Code of Conduct and through our Values.

These core values are reflected in everything we do. They form the foundation on which we work, interact, make decisions and develop strategy supporting our mission.



Helping Hand

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 as a gay man

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.

SEXUALITY

Sexuality describes how people are emotionally and sexually attracted to other people. This attraction can be towards the same, or any genders. While most people associate the term gay as relating to men, some women use it as well.

Since identifying as a gay man when I was 12, I underwent much bullying.

I was anxious and felt invisible and very on my own. I was often sad.



My life changed with respect and understanding of who I am.

My experience as a trans woman

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

Gender describes someone's own understanding of who they are. Many people understand their gender as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. Trans (short for transgender) is someone whose gender does not exclusively align with the one they were assigned at birth.



My experience as an intersex person

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 altogether 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

An intersex person is born with atypical natural variations to physical or biological sex characteristics. These include variations in chromosomes, hormones or anatomy.



When I was born the doctors decided I should be raised as a girl.

But right from the start, I knew I was male.

I just want people to like me for who I am.

To coincide with the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Discrimination against people with an Intersex variation and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), Helping Hand launched its first LGBTI Position Statement on 17 May 2018.

This updated Position Statement reflects our ongoing learning and understanding as well as our continued commitment to providing care and support to LGBTIQA+ communities.

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.

Helping Hand is a South Australian, not-for-profit organisation supporting older people across metropolitan and regional South Australians with:

- help at home
- residential care
- allied health and wellbeing services
- respite care
- retirement living

We employ over 2,200 people, and we actively support and foster an inclusive and engaged working culture that welcomes and celebrates diversity.

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