

**Submission
No 7**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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**NSW Parliament Committee on Children and Young People
Inquiry into Youth Suicide in NSW**

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Sunday 27 August 2017

Dear Committee

Submission to Inquiry into Youth Suicide in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry.

In this submission, I will be focusing on items (g) and (h) from the inquiry's terms of reference: 'Approaches taken by primary and secondary schools' and 'Any other related matters' respectively.

Specifically, I will be discussing these terms of reference and how they relate to one of the groups that is disproportionately affected by mental health issues, depression and suicide: young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.

The National LGBTI Health Alliance confirms that LGBTI people, and especially young LGBTI people, are at much higher risk of suicide than non-LGBTI people. From the Alliance's July 2016 'Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTI People' (see <http://lgbtihealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SNAPSHOT-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-Outcomes-for-LGBTI-people-and-communities.pdf>):

"Compared to the general population, LGBTI people are more likely to attempt suicide in their lifetime, specifically:

- *LGBTI young people aged 16 to 27 are five times more likely*
- *Transgender people aged 18 and over are nearly eleven times more likely*
- *People with an intersex variation aged 16 and over are nearly six times more likely*
- *LGBT young people who experience abuse and harassment are even more likely to attempt suicide.*

Statistics for LGBTI Population:

- *16% of LGBTI young people aged 16 to 27 reported that they had attempted suicide*
- *35% of Transgender people aged 18 and over have attempted suicide in their lifetime*
- *19% of people with an Intersex variation aged 16 and over had attempted suicide on the basis of issues related [to] their Intersex status*

- 8% of Same-Gender Attracted and Gender Diverse young people aged between 14 and 21 years had attempted suicide, 18% had experienced verbal abuse, and 37% of those who experienced physical abuse.

Statistics for General Population:

- 3.2% of people (4.4% females; 2.1% males) aged 16 and over have attempted suicide in their lifetime; 0.4% of general population (0.5% females; 0.3% males) in the last 12 months
- 1.1% of people (1.7% females; 0.5% males) aged 16 to 24 have attempted suicide in the past 12 months.”

These statistics are obviously incredibly alarming, and reveal the scale of the challenge of mental health issues experienced by LGBTI people, and especially young LGBTI people.

What should not be forgotten is that there is nothing inherently ‘wrong’ with LGBTI people, and LGBTI young people – their disproportionate rates of suicide are in response to external factors, including a lack of acceptance (or feared lack of acceptance) from parents, other family members and friends, as well as society-wide homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersexphobia.

Another contributing factor to high rates of LGBTI youth suicide – and perhaps most relevantly to this inquiry – is the school environment. While some schools are welcoming to all young people, including those of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics, other schools are far less welcoming – and some are even outright hostile.

For the purposes of this submission, I would nominate two key factors that help determine whether a school is welcoming of LGBTI young people:

- Whether it has an explicit program addressing anti-LGBTI bullying (such as Safe Schools), and
- Whether it has an inclusive curriculum for LGBTI students, with content that is relevant to their needs.

The importance of these two factors is confirmed by the 2010 *Writing Themselves In 3 Report* (by La Trobe University), which found that:

- “61% of young people reported verbal abuse because of homophobia.
- 18% of young people reported physical abuse because of homophobia.
- School was the most likely place of abuse – 80% of those who were abused” (p39).

This last statistic is perhaps the most disturbing. Instead of being a place of learning, for far too many LGBTI young people, school is a place of intimidation, intolerance, and fear.

Although even more worrying is the fact that the proportion of students nominating school as a site of abuse increased from 1998 to 2004, and then again from 2004 to 2010 (p45) – rather than being more welcoming today, the schoolyard and the classroom is becoming more abusive.

Similarly, the *Writing Themselves In 3 Report* demonstrated that, in far too many schools, LGBTI students are not being included in the curriculum, both generally and specifically in relation to Health & Physical Education (including sex education).

From page 79: “10% of young people reported that their school did not provide any form of Sexuality Education at all.”

Even where some sexuality education was provided, it was primarily targeted at cisgender and heterosexual students. While almost 60% of students reported that the school provided information about heterosexual relationships, less than 20% received education about gay or lesbian relationships (p81).

And, while approximately 70% reported education about safe heterosexual sex, less than a quarter were instructed about safe gay sex and less than 20% about safe lesbian sex (p82).

Finally, roughly 1 in 10 reported learning that ‘homophobia is wrong’ as part of their sexuality education (p83), meaning that almost 90% of students were not receiving this important message.

Unfortunately, on both of these issues (anti-bullying programs, and an inclusive curriculum) NSW is clearly failing in its obligations to LGBTI young people.

First, in terms of Safe Schools, it was incredibly disappointing that the NSW Government abandoned this vital LGBTI anti-bullying program in April 2017.

Yes, there were some significant problems with this program – although not the ones that religious fundamentalists lied about in their dishonest campaign to undermine and destroy it.

Chief among the *actual* shortcomings of Safe Schools was the fact that it was an entirely optional program, meaning only a small proportion of schools had even begun to implement it by the time it was axed. Further, the schools that chose to implement it were likely the same schools that were already LGBTI-inclusive, while those that were less inclusive were far less likely to adopt the program.

Instead of abolishing Safe Schools, the NSW Government should have been working to ensure that it was rolled-out more widely, and ultimately to reach every school in the state (following the lead of Victoria) – because LGBTI students and young people exist in every school in the state.

Perhaps even worse than axing this program is the fact it has been replaced with a ‘general’ anti-bullying program and one that, based on media reports, does not

include appropriate materials and resources to address the specific needs of LGBTI students and young people.

As reported in the *Star Observer* (Experts Slam NSW Anti-Bullying Resource as 'Missed Opportunity for LGBTI Youth', 21 July 2017: <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/new-south-wales-news/experts-slam-resource-lgbti/160265>):

"Leading health organisation ACON has expressed concern over the lack of LGBTI-specific tools and information in the new [anti-bullying] resource, despite liaising with the government in the months leading up to its launch.

Chief Executive of ACON Nicolas Parkhill said the new resource failed to meaningfully address the bullying, abuse, and discrimination faced by young LGBTI people.

"Bullying is an acute problem for young LGBTI people and this resources does not respond to their unique needs," he said.

"Of concern is the absence of tools and resources that specifically address LGBTI bullying in schools – especially when we know it affects a significant proportion of young people.

"The government's own report released earlier this month stated that 16.8 per cent of secondary school students in Australia are attracted to people of the same sex. That's one in six students...

"We believe this resource falls short in responding to LGBTI bullying and there needs to be more emphasis placed on the needs of young LGBTI people."

Based on this critique, it appears that the NSW Government has axed a program that was specifically designed to address anti-LGBTI bullying – which, as we saw earlier, is a contributing factor to LGBTI youth suicide – and replaced it with a 'generalist' anti-bullying program that does little to reduce this behaviour.

That is clearly not good enough.

Recommendation 1: The NSW Government should roll-out the Safe Schools program, or a similar program that specifically and explicitly deals with anti-LGBTI bullying, in every school across the state.

The Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Syllabus is also not good enough in terms of how it includes – or, in many cases, excludes – LGBTI students and information that is relevant to their needs.

Earlier this year, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) released a new draft PDHPE K-10 Syllabus for public consultation. Unfortunately, it fell far short of what is necessary to educate LGBTI students across the state, or to contribute to a reduction in youth suicide among this group.

As I outlined in my submission to NESA about the draft Syllabus (see **Attachment A**), its problems include that:

- It does not define the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex
- It does not guarantee that all students in all schools will learn about these sexual orientations, gender identities or sex characteristics
- It does not include sufficient LGBTI anti-bullying content, and
- It does not offer appropriate, or adequate, sexual health education for students who are not cisgender and heterosexual, including a lack of information about sexually transmissible infections and diverse sexual practices.

If the PDHPE K-10 Syllabus is implemented without significant and substantive changes to the draft that was released, another generation of LGBTI young people will grow up without being told in the classroom that who they are is okay, and without learning vital information on how to keep themselves safe.

That would represent a failure of the NSW Government to exercise the duty of care that it owes to *all* students across the state.

Recommendation 2: The NSW Government should ensure that the PDHPE K-10 Syllabus is inclusive of LGBTI students, and provides content that is relevant to their needs, including comprehensive sexual health education.

The previous two issues – anti-bullying programs, and an inclusive curriculum – relate to term of reference (g) (Approaches taken by primary and secondary schools).

However, there is one final, non-school related matter that I would like to raise in this submission (under term of reference (h) – ‘Any other related matters’).

That is the issue of ‘ex-gay therapy’ or ‘gay conversion therapy’. As the name suggests, this practice aims to convince LGBT people that who they are is wrong, and that they should try to stop being who they are and instead attempt to be cisgender and heterosexual.

Let us be clear – ‘ex-gay therapy’ or ‘gay conversion therapy’ is not therapy, and does not offer anything ‘therapeutic’ to the people who are subjected to it. It is not counselling, nor does it have any basis in medical or scientific fact.

It is fundamentally harmful, and preys upon vulnerable people, exploiting their fears, their isolation and their insecurities. It leaves the vast majority of people feeling far worse, and can cause, or exacerbate, depression and other mental health issues, including leading to suicide.

Ex-gay therapy is psychological abuse, and the people who continue to ‘offer’ this practice are psychological abusers.

The NSW Government should outlaw this practice both because it is wrong, and because it is inherently harmful. This should be implemented by a criminal penalty for anyone conducting ex-gay therapy, with a separate penalty for advertising such services.

The imposition of ex-gay therapy on young LGBT people is particularly heinous, given they are especially vulnerable. Therefore, the fact that a person being subjected to ex-gay therapy is under 18 should be an aggravating factor for these criminal offences, attracting an increased penalty.

The prohibition of ex-gay therapy, and the protection of vulnerable LGBT people – and especially young LGBT people – from this practice is urgently required to help remove another cause of mental health issues, including possible suicide, of LGBTI youth in NSW.

Recommendation 3: The NSW Government should ban the practice of ‘ex-gay therapy’ or ‘gay conversion therapy’, making both conducting this practice, and advertising it, criminal offences. Offering these services to LGBT people under the age of 18 should be considered aggravating factors, attracting increased penalties.

Thank you for taking this submission into consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me at the details provided below should you require additional information, or to clarify any of the above.

Sincerely

Alastair Lawrie



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[REDACTED]

Wednesday 3 May 2017

Dear Ms Sidaros

Submission on Draft NSW PDHPE K-10 Syllabus

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission about the draft NSW Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) K-10 Syllabus.

This is a personal submission, reflecting my interest in this issue as an advocate for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, and builds on my previous submissions to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) regarding its development of the national Health & Physical Education (HPE) curriculum.

This submission is guided by one principle above all else:

Any student, in any school, could be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI). Therefore, the Government has a responsibility to ensure that every student, in every school, is taught a Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Syllabus that is inclusive of LGBTI students, and features content that is relevant to their needs.

This principle applies irrespective of the type of school involved, whether that is government, religious or otherwise independent. Importantly, the best interests of these LGBTI young people also take precedence over the views of other groups, including parents, parliamentarians, religious groups or the media.

Unfortunately, the NSW PDHPE K-10 Syllabus as drafted manifestly does not meet the needs of LGBTI students. It is not inclusive of students of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities, does not promote the acceptance of all students no matter who they are, and fails to provide adequate sexual health education for students who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual.

Disappointingly, some of the few occasions where the draft PDHPE Syllabus does attempt to include relevant content have been made optional (because it follows the words 'for example' or 'eg'), with individual schools and teachers free to teach, or not teach, this content, depending on their own view and not the best interests of the students.

In this submission I will make a number of recommendations to improve the PDHPE K-10 Syllabus by making it explicitly inclusive of LGBTI students, and ensuring that they receive information that is relevant to their needs. These recommendations will be organised around the following five main areas:

- Terminology
- Inclusive Information
- Acceptance & Anti-Bullying
- Sexual Health Education
- Life Skills

Terminology

The problems with the draft PDHPE K-10 begin with the terminology that is used, and not used, throughout the document, and particularly in the Glossary on pages 132 to 139.

For example, the document includes the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer exactly *once* each – all in the same dot point on page 97, in Stage 5:

“analyse how societal norms, stereotypes and expectations influence the way young people think, behave and act in relation to their own and others’ health, safety and wellbeing eg Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) health, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.”

That’s it. These terms are not used at any other point in the Syllabus, nor are they defined in the Glossary. Worse, because the words above immediately follow the use of ‘eg’, whether LGBTIQ health is mentioned in even this cursory way is entirely dependent on the views of the teacher and/or school involved.

As a result, the PDHPE Syllabus as drafted could mean many, if not the majority of, NSW students complete Year 10 having never heard the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex used in this Syllabus, let alone having them appropriately explained. This omission is negligent, and will be detrimental to the health of future generations of young people.

Recommendation 1: The Glossary must include definitions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

The almost complete absence of the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex from the Syllabus is compounded by the, in most cases, exclusionary definitions provided for the terms that are included in the Glossary.

This includes the definition of ‘sexuality’ on page 138:

“A central aspect of being human throughout life. It is influenced by an interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors. It is experienced and expressed in thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.”

In some respects, this is an incredibly ‘inclusive’ definition, acknowledging the wide range of factors that can contribute to an individual’s ‘sexuality’. On the other hand, it is so vague that it doesn’t actually include differences in sexual orientation, from heterosexual (which is not included in the Syllabus either) to bisexual and homosexual or same-sex attracted.

To remedy this, an additional definition should be added for ‘sexual orientation’, one that explicitly includes the words heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual (and, for the latter three, is linked to the newly-added definitions of these terms).

Recommendation 2: The Glossary should include a definition of ‘sexual orientation’, with links to the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual.

In contrast to the omission of sexual orientation, the Glossary does actually include a definition for the term ‘gender identity’ on page 135:

“Refers to a person’s sense of being masculine or feminine, both or neither, and how they identify. Gender identity does not necessarily relate to the sex assigned at birth.”

There are some positive elements of this definition, including recognition that gender identity can differ from the sex assigned at birth. However, it could also benefit from including additional detail, such as making explicit reference to ‘non-binary’ gender identities (beyond the acknowledgement of “both or neither” in the current definition) although this should be done in close consultation with trans groups.

Recommendation 3: The Glossary definition of ‘gender identity’ should be expanded, including use of the term ‘non-binary’ and linking to the term transgender. These changes should be made in consultation with trans groups.

The final term in the Glossary that requires updating is ‘diversity’ on page 133:

“Differences that exist within a group including age, sex, gender, gender expression, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, body shape and composition, culture, religion, learning styles, socioeconomic background, values and experience. Appreciating, understanding and respecting diversity impacts on an individual’s sense of self and their relations to others. Diversity can be acknowledged through shared activities that may involve building knowledge and awareness.”

It should be noted that this is the only time in the entire document that the phrase ‘gender expression’ is used – and it is not defined, meaning it does not

automatically include transgender students. Similarly, the use of the word 'sexuality' here is based on the existing definition that, as we have seen above, does not actually include lesbian, gay or bisexual students. Finally, the exclusion of the word intersex – and the failure to define 'sex', here or elsewhere – means students with intersex variations are not necessarily included either.

In short, the current definition of 'diversity' in the Glossary appears to be ironic, given it does not include students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

Recommendation 4: The Glossary definition of diversity should be amended to include references to differences in sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex variations.

Inclusive Information

The adoption of the above recommendations would be an important first step towards an inclusive PDHPE K-10 Syllabus. However, they will not have a significant impact unless the content of the Syllabus itself, and specifically the material that must be taught in its respective Stages, is also updated.

This means ensuring that the following concepts are introduced, and explained, at appropriate points in the Syllabus:

1. Sexual orientation

The concept of sexual orientation, including differences in sexual orientation and the existence of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, should be introduced by stage 3 of the Syllabus (at the latest). Equally importantly, it must not be 'optional' to teach the fact that people can be any of heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual, and that each sexual orientation should be accepted.

On a practical level, there are several places in the draft Syllabus where this could be achieved, including:

- In Stage 3, on page 66, where it says "examine how identities and behaviours are influenced by people, places and the media, for example: - distinguish different types of relationships and their diversity", the 'for example' should be removed. The words 'including relationships between people of different sexes, and of the same sex' should be added after 'their diversity'.
- In Stage 3, also on page 66, where it says "investigate resources and strategies to manage change and transition, for example: - understand that individuals experience change associated with puberty at different times, intensity and with different responses eg menstruation, body change emotional change, sexuality", both the 'for example' and 'eg' should be removed. The term 'sexual orientation' should also be added

after sexuality (acknowledging the different between these two concepts, as described above).

- In Stage 4, on page 78, after it says “investigate the impact of transition and change on identities: - examine the impact of physical, social and emotional change during adolescence on gender, cultural and sexual identity” add a new point ‘- examine and discuss different sexual orientations, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual’.
- In Stage 4, also on page 78, the point “describe how rights and responsibilities contribute to respectful relationships: - recognise types and variety of relationships” should be amended along similar lines to the first dot point above in relation to Stage 3, page 66.
- In Stage 4, on page 85, where it says “plan and use health practices, behaviours and resources to enhance the health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity participation of their communities: - design and implement health promotion activities targeting preventive health practices relevant to young people and those with diverse backgrounds or circumstances eg diversity of culture, gender or sexuality”, the word ‘eg’ should be removed, and the term ‘sexual orientation’ should replace ‘sexuality’.
- In Stage 5, on page 92, where it says “evaluate factors that impact on the identities of individuals and groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: - examine how diversity and gender are represented in the media and communities, and investigate the influence these representations have on identities” the term ‘sexual orientation’ should be added after gender (to read ‘diversity, gender and sexual orientation’).

2. *Gender identity*

The concept of gender identity should be introduced earlier than sexual orientation, especially given the recent (welcome) increase in children expressing their own gender identities, rather than identities that are expected of, or even imposed on, them. Ideally, this information would be featured from Stage 1 onwards, and acknowledge the diversity of gender identities that exist.

The concept of gender identity could also be added, or expanded upon, at several other points in the Syllabus, including:

- In Stage 2, on page 55, where it says “explore strategies to manage physical, social and emotional change, for example: - discuss physical, social and emotional changes that happen as people get older and how this can impact on how they think and feel about themselves and different situations eg friendships, gender identity, appearance, interests” both ‘for example’ and ‘eg’ should be deleted, so that it is mandatory for all students to learn about gender identity at this point.
- In Stage 4, on page 85 where it says “plan and use health practices, behaviours and resources to enhance the health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity participation of their communities: - design and implement health promotion activities targeting preventive health practices relevant to young people and those with diverse backgrounds or

circumstances eg diversity of culture, gender or sexuality”, in addition to the changes proposed earlier re sexual orientation, the term ‘gender identity’ should be added after ‘gender’.

- In Stage 5, on page 92, where it says “evaluate factors that impact on the identities of individuals and groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: - examine how diversity and gender are represented in the media and communities, and investigate the influence these representations have on identities”, the term ‘gender identity’ should also be added (so that it reads ‘diversity, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation’).

3. *Intersex*

As with gender identity, the concept of intersex – and the existence of people with intersex variations – should be introduced earlier than sexual orientation. Again, this should ideally be introduced in Stage 1, to allow students to grow up knowing that there aren’t just exclusively ‘male’ and ‘female’ bodies.

This recognition of bodily diversity should also be incorporated into the Syllabus in Early Stage 1 on page 35, and Stage 1 on page 45, where it includes references to learning about ‘male and female anatomy’. The discussion of intersex should then be incorporated at similar points to sexual orientation and gender identity throughout the remaining stages of the Syllabus.

Doing so would also help to meet one of the goals of the recent Darlington Statement of intersex organisations:

“54. We call for the inclusion of accurate and affirmative material on bodily diversity, including intersex variations, in school curricula, including in health and sex education.”ⁱ

4. *Rainbow families*

The existence of a diversity of families, including children who grow up with same-sex parents, should also be included in the Syllabus. There are already multiple points in the Syllabus where this could be easily added, such as:

- In Stage 1, on page 45, after “describe ways to develop respectful relationships and include others to make them feel they belong, for example: - explore kinship as an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures”, the ‘for example’ should be removed and a new point added “- explore the diversity of family types, including families with mixed-sex parents and families with same-sex parents.”
- In Stage 2, on pages 54-55, where it says “explore how success, challenge and overcoming adversity strengthens identity, for example: - explore contextual factors that influence the development of personal identity eg family, parents/carers...” both the ‘for example’ and ‘eg’ should be removed, and the term ‘rainbow families’ should be added (so that it reads ‘family including rainbow familiesⁱⁱ’).

- In Stage 3, on page 66, where it says “examine how identities and behaviours are influenced by people, places and the media, for example: - distinguish different types of relationships and their diversity” this could also include a reference to diversity in family relationships, including mixed-sex and same-sex parents.

Finally, as noted earlier there is already one place where the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex already appear in the curriculum – in Stage 5, on page 97. This point should also be made mandatory rather than optional, by removing the ‘eg’ (so that it reads “analyse how societal norms, stereotypes and expectations influence the way young people think, behave and act in relation to their own and others’ health, safety and wellbeing, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) health, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)”.

Recommendation 5: The content for the Stages of the Syllabus should be amended to ensure all students learn about sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex and rainbow families.

Acceptance & Anti-Bullying

One of the welcome features of the draft PDHPE K-10 Syllabus is the significant focus on combating bullying, and on promoting what is described as ‘upstander behaviour’.

This includes introducing content around confronting discrimination from Stage 2 onwards – see page 55 (“predict and reflect on how other students might feel in a range of challenging situations and discuss what they can do to support them eg confronting discrimination) and twice on page 57 (“recognise types of abuse and bullying behaviours and identify safe and supportive upstander behaviour” and “share ideas, feelings and opinions about the influence of peers and significant others in relation to bullying, discrimination, eating habits and nutrition, drug use, online safety and physical activity levels”).

However, I believe there is a need to ensure this anti-bullying content explicitly addresses anti-LGBTI bullying, given both its widespread prevalence and devastating impact on thousands of LGBTI young people. There are multiple opportunities to make these changes:

- In Stage 3, on pages 69-70, where it says “plan and practise assertive responses, behaviours and actions that protect and promote health, safety and wellbeing, for example: - practise safe and supportive upstander behaviour and discuss how they can prevent and/or stop bullying and other forms of discrimination and harassment” the ‘for example’ should be removed, and the words ‘including racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersexphobia’ should be added after ‘harassment’.

- Also in Stage 3, on page 70, where it says “recommend appropriate alternatives and take action to improve health, safety, wellbeing or physical activity issues within the school or wider community, for example: - explore initiatives that challenge stereotypes to support the diversity of individuals and communities eg racism, gender stereotypes, discrimination [and] - model behaviour that reflects sensitivity to the needs, rights and feelings of others and explore ways to create safe and inclusive schools for minority groups eg challenge discrimination, peer support” the ‘for example’ and two instances of ‘eg’ should be removed to ensure this content is mandatory. Further, either ‘anti-LGBTI prejudice’ or ‘homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersexphobia’ should be added to ‘racism, gender stereotypes, discrimination’.
- In Stage 4, on pages 79-80, where it says “discuss the impact of power in relationships and identify and develop skills to challenge the abuse of power: - discuss the influence of family, media and peer attitudes to power and explore how these may lead to an abuse of power in relationships eg bullying, homophobia, intolerance, family and domestic violence [and] - recognise forms of bullying, harassment, abuse, discrimination and violence and how they impact health and wellbeing”. It should be noted that this is the only time ‘homophobia’ is mentioned in the entire document and, unfortunately, it is after an ‘eg’, meaning it is entirely optional for teachers and schools to teach. The ‘eg’ should be deleted, and either ‘homophobia, *biphobia, transphobia and intersexphobia*’ or ‘anti-LGBTI prejudice’ should be added.
- In Stage 4, on page 83, where it says “investigate the benefits to individuals and communities of valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity: - explore their own and others’ values and beliefs towards issues of racism, discrimination, sexuality and investigate the impact of contextual factors on young people, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples [and] – describe how pro-social behaviour, respecting diversity, challenging racism and discrimination are inclusive ways of supporting and enhancing individual; and community health and wellbeing”. Based on the existing definitions of ‘sexuality’ and ‘diversity’ in the Glossary, these points currently do not include promoting LGBTI inclusivity. Even if those definitions are updated in line with the above recommendations, these points should still be made more explicit, with the first amended to read ‘racism, sexism, anti-LGBTI discrimination’ and the second to read ‘challenging racism, sexism, anti-LGBTI prejudice and discrimination’.
- In Stage 4, also on page 83, where it says “plan and implement inclusive strategies to promote health and wellbeing and to connect with their communities: - describe the skills, strengths and strategies required to contribute to inclusive communities and implement strategies to challenge racist and prejudicial views of diversity within the community”, it should be amended to read ‘challenge, racist, sexist, anti-LGBTI and prejudicial views’.
- In Stage 5, on page 93, where it says “investigate how the balance of power influences the nature of relationships and propose actions to build and maintain relationships that are respectful: - discuss discrimination as

an abuse of power and evaluate legislation, policies and practices that address discrimination eg past policies affecting Aboriginal Peoples such as segregation and Aboriginal Self Determination” the words ‘, or the Sex Discrimination Act’ could be added.

Recommendation 6: The content for the Stages of the Syllabus should explicitly include discussion of anti-LGBTI bullying and discrimination and how to address it, beyond the single – optional – reference to homophobia that currently exists.

Sexual Health Education

Another positive feature of the draft PDHPE K-10 Syllabus is the inclusive definition of ‘sexual health’ in the Glossary:

“A state of physical, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as a possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.”

The explicit acknowledgement of ‘pleasurable and safe sexual experiences’, and the need for sexual experiences to be ‘free of coercion’, is particularly welcome.

However, adopting an inclusive definition doesn’t mean much when the only time the phrase sexual health actually appears in the Syllabus prior to Stage 5 (which would generally be students in Years 9 and 10), is one brief reference in Stage 4 (covering students in Years 7 and 8), on page 84:

“explore the relationship between various health, safety and physical activity issues affecting young people and assess the impact it has on the health, safety and wellbeing of the community:

- *examine the impact that body image and personal identity have on young people’s mental health, drug use, sexual health and participation in physical activity.”*

This isn’t explicitly about teaching the fundamentals of sexual health, merely its connection to, and interrelationship with, ‘body image and personal identity’ (which, while important, is not sufficient in and of itself).

Similarly, there is only one reference in the general curriculum to ‘sexually transmissible infections’, also in Stage 4, on page 85:

“plan and use health practices, behaviours and resources to enhance the health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity participation of their communities:

- *identify and apply preventive health practices and behaviours that assist in protection against disease eg blood borne viruses, sexually transmissible infections”.*

Note that the reference to BBVs and STIs here also follows an ‘eg’, meaning that the decision whether to teach students about STIs (such as HIV) is discretionary. That is simply not good enough in 2017 – all students should receive information about STIs to empower them to control their own health.

Recommendation 7: Stage 4 of the Syllabus should include comprehensive education about sexual health, including mandatory information about sexually transmissible infections.

There is more information around sexual health in Stage 5 of the draft Syllabus, although even it is problematic. On page 95, it states:

“evaluate strategies and actions that aim to enhance health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity levels and plan to promote these in the school and community:

- *explore methods of contraception and evaluate the extent to which safe sexual health practices allow them to take responsibility for managing their own sexual health”*

Given ‘contraception’ is generally understood to mean prevention of pregnancy, this content is therefore skewed towards vagina-penis sexual intercourse. To address the fact there are a range of other sexual practices (not just for LGBTI students, but also for cisgender heterosexual students too), this point should be amended to explicitly discuss sexual health and STI-prevention with respect to a range of practices. To not do so means denying the stated aim for all students “to take responsibility for managing their own sexual health.”

Recommendation 7: The Syllabus should move beyond discussion of ‘methods of contraception’ to discuss sexual health education around a range of different practices so that all students can ‘take responsibility for managing their own sexual health’.

Life Skills

The students who are enrolled in the Years 7-10 Life Skills version of the PDHPE Syllabus can (obviously) also be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, and therefore also have the right for LGBTI content to be included throughout.

There are a variety of points at which the draft Life Skills content should be amended to achieve this important goal, including:

- On page 113, where it says “What personal characteristics make us unique? Students recognise personal characteristics that are the same and/or different as others, for example: - gender [and] – diversity” the terms ‘gender identity’, ‘intersex’ and ‘sexual orientation’ should also be added.

- Also on page 113, where it says “What changes do adolescents go through? Recognise visible features that undergo change during adolescence, for example: – female and male body changes” it should acknowledge the existence of intersex bodies.
- On page 114, where it says “recognise changes in relationships that occur in adolescence, for example: - social and emotional relationships with other genders” it should be reworded to say “social and emotional relationships with people of the same or different genders”.
- Also on page 114, where it says “understand that physical changes are a normal part of adolescence, for example: - identify the stages of the reproductive process, eg menstrual cycle, sperm production, conception, pregnancy, childbirth” it should also include discussion of sexual health, and sexual practices, that are not ‘reproductive’ in nature.
- On page 115, where it says “recognise factors that impact negatively on relationships, for example: - bullying, coercion, harassment, violence, threats, bribes [and] –sexism [and] –racism” it should also include either ‘anti-LGBTI prejudice’ or ‘homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersexphobia’.
- Finally, on page 122, where it says “identify matters associated with sexuality, for example: privacy and ethical behaviour – responsibilities associated with sexual activity for themselves and others – safe sex – contraception – fertility and pregnancy – sexually transmitted infections – sexual behaviours and expectations – appropriate sources for advice on and assistance – potential outcomes of sexual activity” once again it should explicitly include discussion of sexual health, and sexual practices, that are not ‘reproductive’ in nature.

Recommendation 9: The Years 7-10 Life Skills Syllabus should be amended to explicitly include LGBTI students and content that is relevant to their needs.

Thank you for taking this submission into consideration as the NSW Education Standards Authority finalises the PDHPE K-10 Syllabus. Please do not hesitate to contact me at the details below should you wish to clarify any of the information provided, or to seek additional information.

Sincerely
Alastair Lawrie

ⁱ For more on the Darlington Statement, see the OII Australia website:

<https://oii.org.au/darlington-statement/>

ⁱⁱ If the term ‘rainbow families’ is used at this point, it should also be defined in the Glossary.