



TO	Health Committee
FROM	UniQ Victoria, Uni Q Massey Wellington, UniQ Massey Palmerston North, UniQ Otago, QCanterbury, UniQ Waikato, Out@AUT
DATE	December 11, 2019
SUBJECT	Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to make a written submission on the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Bill*. We also wish to make an oral submission to the Committee.

1. Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of various student groups who represent the interests of LGBTQIA+ students in tertiary education institutions. Together, our organisations represent LGBTQIA+ students from across seven different tertiary education institutions in Aotearoa, New Zealand. These include Victoria University of Wellington, Massey University - Wellington, Massey University - Palmerston North, University of Otago, University of Canterbury, University of Waikato, and Auckland University of Technology.

UniQ Victoria

UniQ Victoria (UniQ) is the Queer Students' Association of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. We are a student-led group, controlled by queer¹ and queer-allied students, working in the interests of all queer students, advocating for and representing their views. We provide students with social support and services that promote their health and wellbeing and ensure the University is a safe and inclusive environment. UniQ is recognised by Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) as the Representative Group for all LGBTQIA+ students.²

¹ Queer includes, but is not exclusive to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, takatāpui, whakawahine, tangata ira tane, intersex, fa'afafine, fakaleiti, mahu, vakasalewalewa, palopa, akava'ine, fiafifine and fakafifine, queer, questioning, genderqueer, genderfluid, asexual, aromantic, pansexual, all who identify as such and those who prefer no label at all.

² As per Schedule 6 of the VUWSA Constitution and Schedules found <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/560c5149e4b0bab049399fc9/t/5a8f228bf9619ae182bb4748/1519329936686/VUWSA+Constitution+as+of+August+2017.pdf>

Uni Q Massey Wellington

Uni Q is a Queer representative group, providing support and running events for queer students and friends at Massey Wellington.

UniQ Massey Palmerston North

UniQ is a volunteer-run social & recreational group for Palmy uni students who are LGBTIQ+ or questioning and their allies. Our purpose is to provide a safe, non-judgemental space for students to be themselves and make new friends. Too often, LGBTIQ+ young people are made to feel like they can't fully be themselves, even amongst their friends and family. Everyone needs a safe space to flourish, and UniQ is about providing that space.

UniQ Otago

UniQ Otago is a student-led Otago University Students Association (OUSA) club that provides social support for Dunedin-based queer and questioning students. UniQ Otago provides safe, queer-friendly spaces and regular social events. We have a presence both on campus and in the wider community, working in collaboration with other groups such as Dunedin Pride and OUSA Queer Support. Due to our position in the community, we are often the first point of contact for individuals seeking support. We provide advice and recommendations for students and members of the community who are seeking queer-friendly resources, social spaces, or mental health and wellbeing services. We also welcome students from Otago Polytechnic to join us and utilise our services.

QCanterbury

QCanterbury is the Queer Students' Association of the University of Canterbury. We are a student-led group, controlled by queer and queer-allied students, working in the interests of all queer students, advocating for and representing their views. We aim to provide a safe space for LGBTQIA+ students at University and run queer-led social events throughout the year. QCanterbury is recognised by University of Canterbury Students' Association (UCSA) as the Representative Group for all LGBTQIA+ students.

UniQ Waikato

UniQ Waikato is the Social/Support Group for all Gender, Sex, & Sexuality Diverse, Questioning or Ally Students at the University of Waikato.

Out@AUT

Out@AUT is Auckland University of Technology's club for Rainbow students and provides social support to its members within a friendly and accepting environment. Out@AUT aims to encourage growth for members who are part of the rainbow community along with providing support and help to members who identify as part of the rainbow community. It also aims to provide education around issues faced by those who identify as part of the rainbow community, as well as their friends, support people and Whānau.

2. Overview

We support the intention of the Bill. The establishment of an independent commission dedicated to creating better and more equitable mental health and wellbeing outcomes for people is a necessity for Aotearoa.

We welcome the Commission's role in holding the current and future governments to account for improving mental health and wellbeing.

We also welcome the focus on both government and non-government contributors to mental health and wellbeing being emphasised. Those providing oversight often ignores the social determinants and cultural contributors to mental health and wellbeing.

We want to stress our support for the recognition of the groups most likely to be impacted by poor mental health and wellbeing. In particular, we are appreciative of the attention given to Māori, Pasifika people, disabled people, and young people. This is of particular importance to us as representatives of LGBTQIA+ students as much like how people rarely experience one factor (that contributes to their mental health and wellbeing) in isolation; people rarely experience their identity within the confines of a single group. Many of us within our communities are LGBTQIA+ as well as Māori, or disabled, etc.

3. Obtaining views of specific groups

Within the explanatory note for the Bill, rainbow communities are among those explicitly identified as experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes and being one of the groups that the proposed Commission will improve equity for.

We find it concerning that, with this in mind, rainbow communities are not explicitly identified in the Bill among the groups the Commission must establish mechanisms to ensure that there are effective means of seeking the views of in **section 13(1)**. It is not clear to us why we were excluded in this way.

RECOMMENDATION

In **section 13(1)**, insert where appropriate "rainbow communities"

Rainbow communities are one of the groups most likely to have worse mental health or wellbeing experiences. As advocates for a large number of queer students, we believe that rainbow communities must be one of the groups with which the Commission must establish mechanisms to ensure that there are effective means of seeking the views of. This consultation would work to ensure that the experiences of our communities are heard and taken into account.

We recognise that rainbow communities are not explicitly excluded, with **section 13(1)(d)** being able to encompass rainbow communities, as well as the other specified groups for whom rainbow people also fall under. However, we also know that rainbow communities have specific needs and experiences.

We feel that without explicit inclusion, the views and needs of rainbow communities will not be heard by those on the proposed Commission.

4. Recognising the Diversity of Rainbow Communities

Rainbow communities are inclusive of those belonging to a vast range of identities and lived experiences. Our communities comprise of those who identify as/with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, takatāpui, whakawahine, tangata ira tane, intersex, fa'afafine, fakaleiti, mahu, vakasalewalewa, palopa, akava'ine, fiafifine and fakafifine, queer, questioning, genderqueer, genderfluid, asexual, aromantic, pansexual, and so many more identities.

For the Commission to effectively seek the views of rainbow communities, we must be explicitly included, as per our recommendation.

Our communities are made up of people with different sexual and romantic orientations, genders, and sex characteristics. Some are more recognised than others by those both outside of and within our communities. If rainbow communities were to be relegated to **section 13(1)(d)**, we fear that the diverse range of needs and experiences within rainbow communities will not be effectively obtained and addressed by the Commission.

These sections of the community have very different lived experiences. Contributors like health, housing, employment, and justice impact their mental health and wellbeing in different ways.

Some examples of those who have specific needs and experiences that we believe will not be obtained and addressed by the Commission should rainbow communities not be explicitly mentioned include, but are not limited to, those who are:

- Transgender;
- Non-binary;
- Intersex;
- Bisexual;
- Asexual;
- Takatāpui; and
- Fa'afafine.

5. Mental Health and Wellbeing of Rainbow Communities

In *He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction*³, rainbow communities are frequently explicitly mentioned as among the groups of those who have specific mental health and wellbeing needs and experiences. We are identified as:

- Having “unmet mental health needs” - Pg. 11;
- “groups with special needs” - Pg. 26; and
- “Under-served or marginalised” - Pg. 42;

With the Bill stemming from the recommendations in *He Ara Oranga*, it is concerning that rainbow communities were not explicitly included among those that the Commission has to establish mechanisms to ensure that there are effective means of seeking the views of.

To not be named, we feel, is to be excluded. The current iteration of the Bill, while having a provision that could be interpreted as being inclusive of rainbow communities, we fear doesn't do enough to ensure our voices and experiences are heard and taken into account. The rainbow community, as a whole, is vast and diverse. We encompass those with many different sexual and romantic orientations, genders, and sex characteristics. We believe the only way for all these different experiences and needs to be recognised with the explicit inclusion of rainbow communities within the Bill.

RECOMMENDATION

In **section 13(1)**, insert where appropriate “rainbow communities”

Transgender and Non-Binary Communities

Our transgender and non-binary whānau (among other gender minorities) in Aotearoa, New Zealand experience significantly poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes. This is something we feel would be lost if rainbow communities are not explicitly mentioned.

The *Counting Ourselves* report is a useful resource that highlights the exact challenges transgender and non-binary communities experiences in this regard. For example, 32% of transgender and non-binary participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they were able to cope with everyday stresses of life.⁴ This is in comparison to the results from the general population (age 15+) in the *New Zealand Mental Health Survey 2016*, which see only 5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

³ Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction (2018). *He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction*. Department of Internal Affairs. Retrieved from:

<https://mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz/assets/Summary-reports/He-Ara-Oranga.pdf>

⁴ Veale J, Byrne J, Tan K, Guy S, Yee A, Nopera T & Bentham R (2019). *Counting Ourselves: The health and wellbeing of trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato: Hamilton NZ. Retrieved from:

https://countingourselves.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Counting-Ourselves_FINAL.pdf

Statistics like this are repeated across nearly every measure of mental health and wellbeing for transgender and non-binary communities. Whether its depression, anxiety, eating and weight control, self-injury, suicide, attempted suicide, life satisfaction or any other measure, transgender and non-binary are consistently found to experience poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Takatāpui

Takatāpui is a term for Māori of diverse genders and sexualities.⁵ The mental health and wellbeing outcomes for takatāpui reflect their position as both members of rainbow communities and as Māori.

This intersection of identities is among those that we feel the needs and experiences of will be lost with the current iteration of the Bill. The wishes of takatāpui when it comes to mental health and wellbeing consistently refer to explicit inclusion and focus⁶. Special attention is required to adequately take into consideration the needs and experiences of takatāpui.

These are just among some of the various identities that are encompassed within rainbow communities. While we share many experiences and needs in terms of mental health and wellbeing, there are some that are unique to each individual community under the rainbow umbrella. We are concerned that these unique needs will not be addressed adequately by this Commission if rainbow communities are not explicitly included.

6. Concluding Statement

The mental health and wellbeing outcomes for rainbow communities are well recognised as being poorer than the general population. We see it in our work in social and support service providers to tertiary students. The Government recognises it. This is evident by the *He Ara Oranga*, the speeches made by MPs during the first reading of the Bill, and in the Bill itself. With this in mind, it is not clear to us why rainbow communities were not included in **section 13(1)** as among the groups the Commission must establish mechanisms to ensure that there are effective means of seeking the views of. This is the basis of our submission.

RECOMMENDATION	In section 13(1) , insert where appropriate “rainbow communities”
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⁵ Kerekere, Elizabeth (2015). *Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau*. Auckland: Tīwhanawhana Trust and Mental Health Foundation Retrieved from:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/A-Z/Downloads/Takatapui-Part-of-the-Whanau.pdf>

⁶ RainbowYOUTH & We Are Beneficiaries (2018). *Sharing The Stories And Wishes Of Queer, Gender Diverse, Intersex, Takatāpui, MVPFAFF And Rainbow Communities Around Aotearoa's Mental Health And Addiction Services*. RainbowYOUTH: Auckland. Retrieved from:

https://genderminoritiesaotearoa.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/outloud_report_web_final.pdf

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