

Celebrating LGBTQIA+ human rights at work

For the first time, a country in the Southern Hemisphere will be hosting WorldPride – a global celebration advocating for LGBTQIA+ human rights. This year, Sydney will be hosting the WorldPride celebrations from 17 February until 5 March and coinciding with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

LGBTQIA+ rights impact on mental health

Two fundamental human rights that belong to all people include equality and freedom from discrimination. In Australia, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 makes it unlawful to discriminate based on a person's gender identity, sexual orientation or intersex status. Yet across the world, LGBTQIA+ people continue to experience discrimination, inequality, and even violence in their everyday lives, including at work, in public, at school or university and even accessing services such as healthcare.

Here are some facts about the LGBTQIA+ community, mental health and abuse from the Australian Human Rights Commission and research conducted by McKinsey & Company (2020):

- Up to 11 in 100 Australians may have a diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are three times more likely to experience depression
- When it comes to abuse:
 - Six in 10 experience homophobic verbal abuse
 - Two in 10 experience homophobic physical abuse
 - One in 10 experience other types of homophobia
- Transgender men and women experience significantly higher rates of non-physical and physical abuse compared with gay men and women
- 72% of LGBTQIA+ employees are broadly “out” at work
- Of the employees who are out at work, approximately 50% have reported coming out at work at least once a week i.e. sharing they are part of the LGBTQIA+ community to new individuals or colleagues

While we have come far in moving towards equality around the world, there is still work to be done.

Promoting LGBTQIA+ rights at work

Workplaces need to take action to ensure the protection of employees health, safety and welfare according to the Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011. However, it is one thing to have procedures and policies around

diversity and inclusion, and another to have safe, supportive and inclusive interactions between colleagues and leaders on a day-to-day basis.

1. **Understand the challenges face by those in the LGBTQIA+ community in workplaces.** These challenges include: the choice to (sometimes repeatedly) come out at work, facing discrimination, experiencing microaggressions from colleagues, leaders and even clients, and facing isolation if they are underrepresented in their team/organisation. It is important for leaders to be especially aware of these challenges and to continuously learn about the experiences of their LGBTQIA+ employees, and work to do better.
2. **Engage in reverse mentorship.** Leaders and individuals can be caught in a climate of fear when it comes to learning about LGBTQIA+ challenges and experiences. Reverse mentoring is when a junior employee mentors a more senior employee on an area in which the senior employee may not be as experienced in. By engaging in reverse mentoring with a LGBTQIA+ employee, leaders are provided with a safe space to learn, make mistakes and see how they can do better.
3. **Encourage micro-support to reduce microaggressions.** Instead of using terms such as husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, say friend, partner or spouse. Assuming a person is in a heterosexual relationship is a common (often unintentional) microaggression. Using inclusive terms such as partner illustrates respect, and awareness of the diversity of relationships.
4. **Train your team.** Whilst the effectiveness of unconscious bias training is largely untested at present, awareness training surrounding LGBTQIA+ challenges and experiences is beneficial to increasing understanding within your team. This training should include information around pronoun use, appropriate and inclusive language, microaggressions, micro-supports.
5. **Ensure your policies are inclusive.** From a strategic perspective, checking your policies are inclusive, and if they are not, encourage change. For example, does your organisation's parental leave policy include LGBTQIA+ partners / secondary caregiver?

Acceptance and inclusion at work has immense benefits for employee wellbeing, confidence and impact on mental health. It allows employees to feel safe to bring their whole selves to work. So how can you support and celebrate your LGBTQIA+ colleagues not only during World Pride, but all year around?

If you need support, contact the Centre for Corporate Health EAP on 1800 959 956, or make an appointment via the Resilience Box App.