

# Insights into the lived experiences of WA Aboriginal/LGBTIQ+ people

Community Summary Report

2021



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

This study was designed, developed and implemented on Whadjuk Noongar Country. We acknowledge and respect our continuing association with the Noongar people, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our Western Australian campuses stand. ECU is committed to reconciliation and recognises and respects the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' communities, cultures and histories.

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## Glossary

The use of current and appropriate terminology for this study has been the result of wide-ranging consultation. The terminology that is used by different interest groups is evolving and the research team have strived to be as inclusive as possible. The research team have been guided by LGBTIQ+ peak body literature and specifically the Glossary compiled by Black Rainbow (<https://www.blackrainbow.org.au/>). We acknowledge that people may identify under an individual description such as “gay” while others may use multiple descriptors. The research team uses the ‘catch all’ descriptor of LGBTIQ+ as a short-hand way of capturing the diverse ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may identify their sexual and gender identity/ies within multiple contexts. The intent of this usage is to encourage an expansion rather than limiting of identity/ies for sexually and gender diverse Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in Western Australia.

| Terminology     | Explanation  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>LGBTIQ</b>   | This is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer.   |
| <b>LGBTIQ+</b>  | This is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer the + symbol represents self-identifying members of the community who are not included in the LGBTIQ+ acronym.   |
| <b>Lesbian</b>  | This term is used to describe women who experience sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction to other women.<br><br>*Some women may also refer to themselves as Gay and when doing so the same definition below applies, but in a female context.                 |
| <b>Gay</b>      | This term is used to describe men who experience sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction to other men.<br><br>*As above, women who are Lesbian may also use the term Gay to describe themselves.  |
| <b>Bisexual</b> | Bisexuality is an umbrella term for people who experience sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction to people of two or more genders. The term ‘pansexual’ is also used to describe forms of attraction that are not limited to binary male or female identities. |

| Terminology        | Explanation  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Transgender</b> | Transgender is an umbrella term that describes people that do not identify with the genders they are assigned at birth. This includes transgender men and women, gender fluid (flexible identification), and a range of other gender diverse identities. Sistergirl and Brotherboy can also be used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Transgender people. See below.                        |
| <b>Sistergirl</b>  | Sistergirl is considered a culturally, as well as a socially, accepted term to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Transgender people who identify as female.   |
| <b>Brotherboy</b>  | Brotherboy is considered a culturally, as well as a socially, accepted term to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Transgender people who identify as male.   |
| <b>Intersex</b>    | Intersex people are those who are biologically gender variant. Intersex Human Rights Australia defines Intersex people as those who are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies.   |
| <b>Queer</b>       | Queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender communities. Queer is also used to describe gender and sexual variance where other identifications (gay, lesbian, bisexual) are deemed too limited. For example, people may identify their gender as 'genderqueer' or 'non-binary' as they do not primarily or permanently identify as male or female. |
| <b>Questioning</b> | This is used to describe a person who is not completely sure of their sexual or gender identity as fixed and may still be trying to define this for themselves.  |

## Breaking the Silence Research Team Profile



*he/him*  
Braden Hill

Professor Braden Hill is a Noongar (Wardandi) man from the southwest of Western Australia and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Indigenous) and Head of Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research.

He has significant experience in Aboriginal education, as well as leading a range of equity initiatives including Sage Athena SWAN, Respect Now Always, Reconciliation Action Plan and Disabilities and Access Inclusion Plan within the tertiary sector. His current portfolio responsibilities include leading ECU's commitment to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement, Equity and Diversity initiatives and working across the University to provide an environment that welcomes, and facilitates the success of, students and staff from a range of diverse backgrounds. Professor Hill's research interests include Indigenous education, identity politics, queer identities in education and transformative learning.



*she/her*  
Bep Uink

Dr Bep Uink (Master of Applied Psychology (Clinical), PhD) is a Noongar woman from Perth, WA. She works at Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University as a researcher. Her research focuses on understanding how socially determined disadvantage impacts the social emotional wellbeing of young people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and how social systems such as higher education can support young peoples' wellbeing. Her work spans investigations into adolescent emotion regulation, the barriers and enablers of Indigenous student success in higher education, gendered barriers to higher education, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ youth mental health.



*he/him*  
Dameyon Bonson

Dameyon Bonson is of the Mangyari (NT) and Maubiag peoples of the Torres Strait. He is a gay male and is recognised as Indigenous suicide prevention subject matter expert, specifically in Indigenous LGBTIQ+ suicide prevention. Dameyon has extensive experience working in and with remote Indigenous communities in suicide prevention and in 2013 founded of Black Rainbow, Australia's first and only national Indigenous LGBTIQ+ suicide prevention charity organisation. He holds a post graduate qualification in Suicide Prevention studies and is currently undertaking a Master of Suicidology. Dameyon developed and delivers the country's first Indigenous LGBTIQ+ cultural competency program for suicide prevention, health and social services. His work has been the catalyst for three Indigenous LGBTIQ+ suicide prevention and wellbeing research studies underway in Australia. Dameyon currently leads a co-design project with Indigenous LGBTIQ+ young people of the NT, with aims to create safer homes and communities. He is an independent practitioner and lives and works in his hometown of Darwin in the Northern Territory (NT).



*she/her*  
Anne-Marie Eades

Dr Eades is a Noongar woman from WA and a descendant of a Wiilman father and Minang mother. Dr Eades' research interests relate to the role of psychosocial factors in chronic disease and building resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. She has a particular interest in women's issues and children in out of home care. Dr Eades has a background in Nursing and her PhD study was understanding how individual, family and societal influences impact on Indigenous women's health.



*she/her*

Sian Bennett

Sian is a proud member of the Aboriginal/LGBTIQ+ community. Currently undertaking a PhD in Education, Sian has extensive experience in teaching under-represented student cohorts at university. She has a diverse disciplinary background in the sciences, womans studies and education. Her current research focuses on student engagement and success in higher education and enabling education.



*she/her*

Jenny Dodd

Dr Jenny Dodd is a non-Indigenous woman who has lived in Perth WA for 35 years. She is a researcher who works at Kurongkurl Katitjin, ECU. Her research over 20 years has focussed on maternal and child health, social and emotional well-being of parents, fathers and young people, including Aboriginal people and people from culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse backgrounds. In recent years she has worked with senior Aboriginal researchers on various research and evaluation projects associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, maternal health, child health, education, social and emotional well-being.

## Introduction and Background

The ‘Breaking the Silence’ research project is one of the first to focus on the unique experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people living in Western Australia. Research focusing on the intersection of Indigeneity and gender/sexual diversity is severely lacking in Australia. This is the first survey to comprehensively capture the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians. Previously, major research pertaining to LGBTIQ+ Australians rarely just focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander same sex attracted or gender variant individuals (Bonson, 2017; Dudgeon, et. al., 2017; Growing Up Queer, 2014; Hill, et. al., 2021; Uink, et. al., 2020; Whitton, et. al, 2015).

This summary report presents the *key findings* of a state-wide survey completed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, living in Western Australia and identifying as LGBTIQ+. Findings about discrimination, homophobia and the ways in which participants are included and accepted within their own families and the wider community are presented.

The report also provides a focus on the positive aspects of participants’ lives; including how they experience pride and inclusion and a sense of belonging to their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or LGBTIQ+ communities.

This summary report has important information for organisations that provide health and social support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+, including the extent to which diverse health, social and emotional wellbeing; education and community services meet the needs of participants. This report also includes a section describing how the findings from the community compare and contrast with those of workers in a range of health, social support and education services from the first phase of the study. (See: “Breaking the Silence: Insights from WA Services Working with Aboriginal/LGBTIQ+ People.”).

## **What we did for the study – Methodology**

The ‘Breaking the Silence’ Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+ led research team, has used a strengths-based, participant focussed, mixed-methods methodological approach. This has included the development and facilitation of community forums, workshops and collaborative research partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander senior people who also identify as LGBTIQ+. Research directions and approaches have also been directly informed by professionals and workers from key health and social support organisations including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in Western Australia.

This research approach has enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ to safely articulate their experiences about how they currently negotiate this intersection and the kinds of supports they find most useful.

### **Eligibility criteria for participants**

- Identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+
- Aged 18 years and over
- Currently living in Western Australia

## The Participants (Sample)

Official statistics on the proportion of people who identify as LGBTIQ+ in the national population have only been collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) since 2014 in selected surveys such as the General Social Survey (2014). While official ABS statistics report a relatively low national percentage (3%) other studies estimate that the proportion of LGBTIQ+ people in the national population may be up to 11% (ABS 2014; Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). The percentage of people who are not heterosexual in the general population of Western Australia has been estimated at 51,108 or 2.6 % in one study (Wilson & Shalley, 2018). This raises the possibility that the proportion of people who identify as LGBTIQ+ in Western Australia may similarly be under-reported in official statistics.

There are currently no official national or state statistics that measure the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are also LGBTIQ+. This demonstrates an urgent need for accurate data to be collected about the proportion of the general population that identifies as LGBTIQ+ nationally, by state and territory and by how many of these individuals also identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. As one of many measures recommended by the Close the Gap Steering Committee (2020) about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can direct responses to their own health and well-being concerns; one of these is particularly pertinent. Recommendation 6 of the report states they (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people: *“be put in charge of their own data (and decisions) by recognising and upholding the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty,”* (p.7). For this to occur, the data needs to be collected consistently and effectively by official statistics bodies such as the ABS.

The ‘Breaking the Silence’ sample of 63 participants was diverse in sexual orientations, although less so with gender. The survey was not developed to specifically target people who identify as trans and more research is needed in this area, particularly studies that are led by trans people.

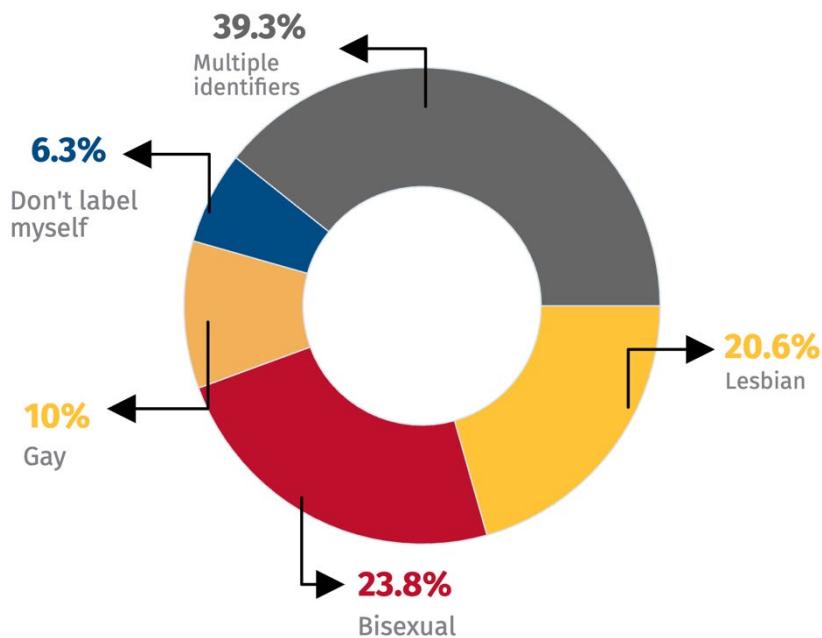
Participants were invited by the survey to describe their understanding of their sexuality and their gender.

Of the 63 participants, 20.6% identified as Lesbian only and nearly 16% as Gay only. Nearly 20% of participants selected multiple LGBTIQ+ identity labels, suggesting that one label may not be adequate in describing an individual’s complex sexual orientations and gender identity/ies. Only one person described themselves as ‘intersex,’ as shown in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Participants own descriptions of their sexuality**

| Description  | Number<br>of<br>people | Percent      |
|--|------------------------|--------------|
| Bisexual   | 15                     | 23.8         |
| Bisexual, Asexual, Questioning   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Bisexual, I don't label myself, Questioning  | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Bisexual, Other, please describe   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Bisexual, Pansexual  | 2                      | 3.2          |
| Gay  | 10                     | 15.9         |
| I don't label myself   | 4                      | 6.3          |
| I prefer not to say  | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Lesbian  | 13                     | 20.6         |
| Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Pansexual  | 3                      | 4.8          |
| Pansexual, Questioning   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Bisexual, I don't label myself, Questioning                                     | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Gay   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Gay, Bisexual   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual  | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, I don't label myself, Other, please describe | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Gay, Other, please describe   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Lesbian   | 1                      | 1.6          |
| Queer, Pansexual   | 2                      | 3.2          |
| Questioning  | 1                      | 1.6          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>63</b>              | <b>100.0</b> |

## Survey Respondent Sexualities



Just over 44% of participants who responded to the question about how best to describe their current gender stated 'woman' and 28.6% described this as 'man.' Other participants (15%) selected more than one category illustrating the diversity of gender descriptors within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community. Less than 2% identified as 'sister-girl' or 'trans.' Of those who said 'other,' descriptions included: bi-gender, not having a sex, pan-gender and cis male.

12 (19%) participants indicated that their gender identity was different to how it was described on their birth certificate. Of these, 12 participants, 11 provided descriptions of their gender identity, which included: Bigender, Female, Male, Non-binary, while others stated that they struggled with the category of gender describing this either as being fluid or being unsure.

These findings demonstrate the fluidity within and between categories of gender and sexuality and also that for some people none of the labels 'fit' and that they would prefer not to be identified under any of the categories that were presented in the survey.

One third of the participants stated they were parents. The participants were also a relatively young cohort – with 63.5% between the ages of 18-30 years old as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Age of participants and proportion**

| <b>Age Profile</b> | <b>Number of People</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| <b>18-25</b>       | <b>26</b>               | <b>41.3</b>    |
| <b>26-30</b>       | <b>14</b>               | <b>22.2</b>    |
| <b>31-35</b>       | <b>11</b>               | <b>17.5</b>    |
| <b>36-40</b>       | <b>7</b>                | <b>11.1</b>    |
| <b>41-45</b>       | <b>2</b>                | <b>3.2</b>     |
| <b>46-50</b>       | <b>1</b>                | <b>1.6</b>     |
| <b>51+</b>         | <b>2</b>                | <b>3.2</b>     |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>63</b>               | <b>100.0</b>   |

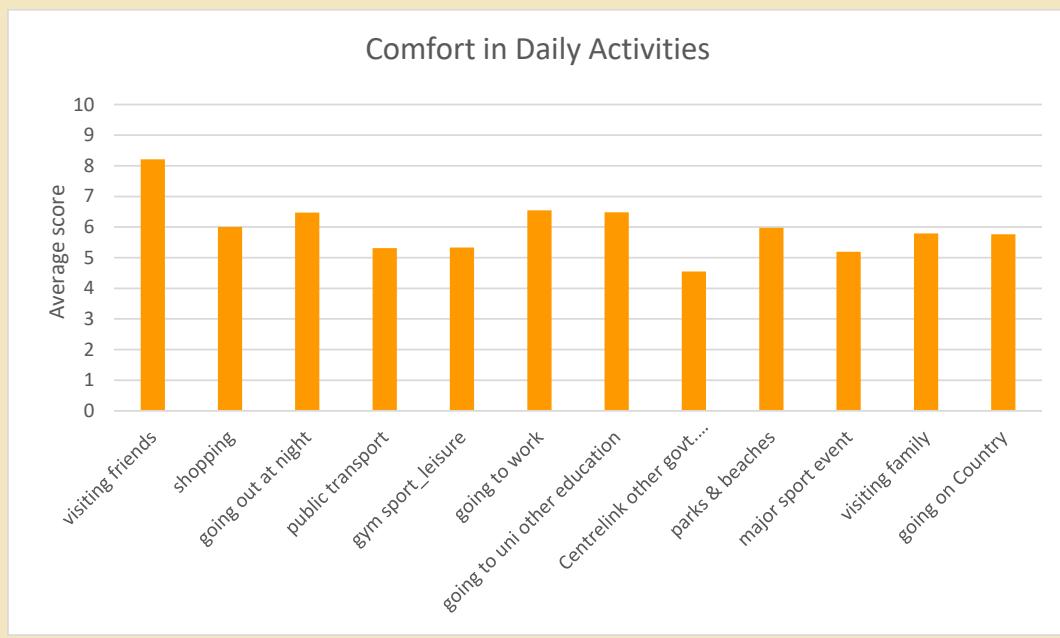
According to the Census of Population and Housing (ABS 2016) nearly 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Western Australia live in major metropolitan or regional urban areas. 85.7 per cent of the participants from the ‘Breaking the Silence’ study were from Perth Metro, 14.3% were from rural areas outside of Perth Metro.

# Discrimination

## Experience of discrimination going about daily life in the community

Participants were asked to identify their feelings of comfort when going about their daily life in the general community. The survey results for 'Breaking the Silence' showed that participants often experienced feelings of discomfort when going about their daily activities as shown in the Figure 1 below with 1 being least comfortable and 10 being most comfortable:

**Figure 1: Participant level of comfort going about daily activities**



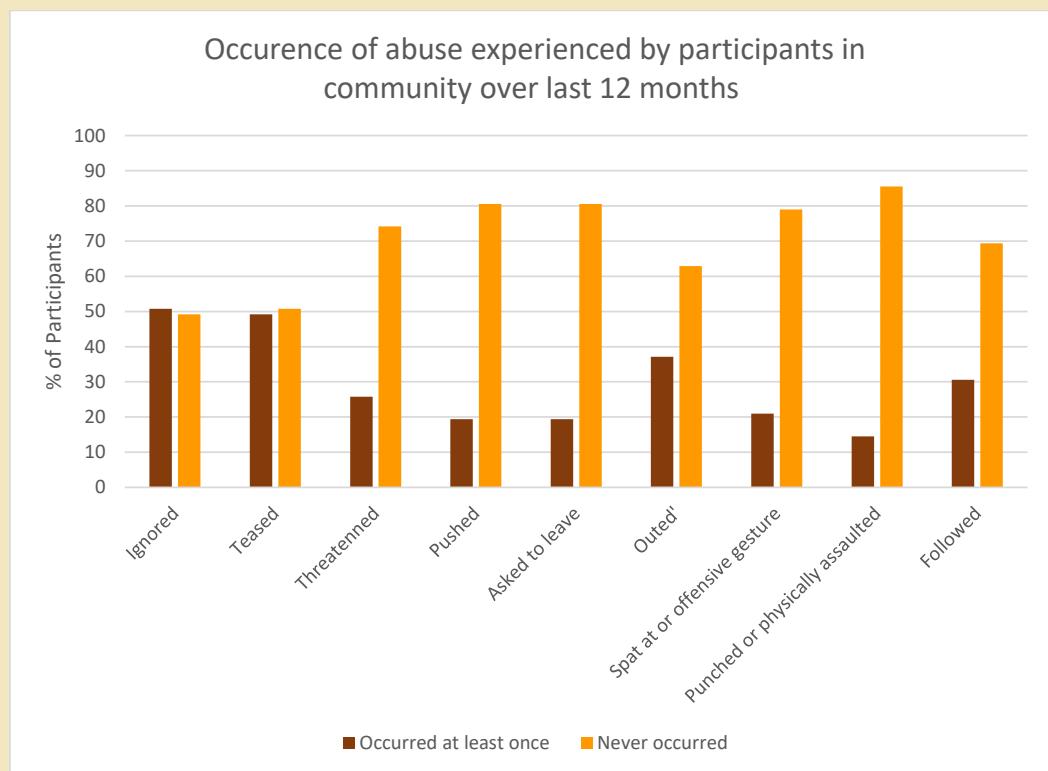
Participants were most comfortable visiting friends, going out at night and least comfortable using public transport, going to the gym, visiting government offices such as Centrelink and attending sporting events.

The survey asked participants how frequently in the last 12 months (up to the present day) they had experienced discrimination (being treated in a worse way) because of their sexual or gender identity.

As Figure 2 below shows a majority (73 per cent) of the 62 participants who responded to this question had experienced discrimination either sometimes, half the time or every day going about their daily activities in the past 12 months:

- 12% of participants were victims of crimes being subjected to punching or other forms of physical assault
- 50% had been ignored or teased because of their sexual or gender identity
- 30% had been followed
- 38% of participants had been ‘outed’ (having their sexual and/or gender identity divulged by other people).

**Figure 2: Participant experience of occurrence of abuse in last 12 months**



In response to a separate question about housing insecurity 12.7% of participants also stated they had experienced homelessness or housing insecurity because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians may often feel uncomfortable going about their daily activities, be experiencing frequent discrimination, including physical assault, and are at-risk of experiencing housing insecurity, because of their sexual and/or gender identity.

## **Relationships and Dating**

Social media and dating apps are used as a means of reaching out, connecting and being sociable with other people. It is well established that strong social connections, relationships and engagement with other people are important for the mental health of individuals (Holt-Lunstad, et. al., 2019; von Soest, et. al., 2018). The survey asked participants to consider the many social media and dating apps available, whether they used them and what their experience was of them.

- Just over half of participants (52.4%) did use social media and/or dating apps.
- 93% of participants using social media accessed Facebook
- 36.5% of participants used Tinder
- 41.9% of participants stated they did not disclose they were an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person when using dating apps.

The reasons for not disclosing one's Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity included: fear of rejection, judgement, racial stereotyping, discrimination such as perceptions that individuals were on welfare, or participants said they looked '*white*' and did not want to respond to comments about how they '*did not look Aboriginal.*'

These findings suggest that while a large portion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians may access social media and dating apps they can be subject to racial discrimination and stereotyping via these mediums. Some qualitative reflections on how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may 'hide' one or more aspects of their identity are discussed later in this report. The results show that stress may be experienced by participants because of the constant weighing up about how 'safe' they feel about disclosing either their Aboriginality and/or their sexuality and/or their gender identities.

## **Experience of discrimination in the workplace**

Participants were asked the same questions about discrimination and how these applied when they were in their workplaces. Workplaces seemed to offer some protective factors (perhaps due to workplace policies or expected standards of behaviour) from more extreme forms of abuse or discrimination. Nonetheless, 20% of participants stated they were ignored or teased at work because of their sexual or gender identity, while 20% also reported they were 'outed' at work.

## Interpersonal Violence

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (2014-16) (State of Victoria, 2016) found that the family violence experience of LGBTIQ+ people was different to those who were not LGBTIQ+. Although there is little research into the experiences for LGBTIQ+ people about the prevalence of family violence, the commission found it to be as least as high as in the general population. Due to the complex histories of colonisation, dispossession, Stolen Generations and other social determinants of health and well-being the prevalence of Interpersonal Violence is also much higher for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Despite this, the commission also found that many service providers had limited knowledge about the existence of family and interpersonal violence in LGBTIQ+ communities or how to support the needs of this group (State of Victoria, 2016).

Interpersonal violence (IPV) emerged as a key concern among the sample for Breaking the Silence. IPV was defined as any physical, emotional and financial harm perpetrated by another person. Alarmingly, over 65% of participants had experienced interpersonal violence from within their family circle and and/or close family friends or partners; a majority had done so from multiple perpetrators.

Of those participants who selected that they had experienced IPV from **one** person, fathers were most often selected (n=4); Partner (n=3); while, brother, sister, cousin and aunt were identified by (n=1). While mothers were not selected by anyone as **singly** being a perpetrator, mothers were the most frequently selected **in combination** with others as perpetrators (n=14) as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Frequency of IPV (multiple perpetrators) experienced by family and/or intimate/close friendships**

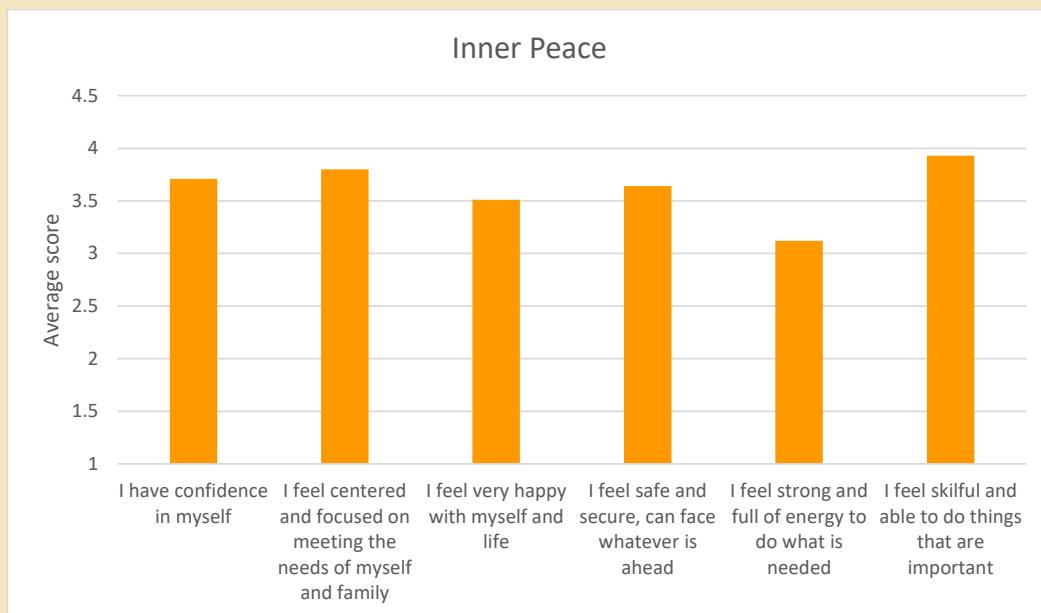
| Perpetrator          | No. of people who experienced |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mother               | 14                            |
| Partner/Husband/Wife | 13                            |
| Father               | 11                            |
| Brother              | 10                            |
| Uncle                | 8                             |
| Close family friends | 7                             |
| Sister               | 6                             |
| Pastor/Priest        | 4                             |

## Wellbeing

Given the potential challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians (as illustrated above), there was concern that levels of wellbeing would be low among this population. This section of the report presents findings from a series of questions developed from a selection of items from the Growth Empowerment Measure (GEM; Haswell, et. al., 2010). The GEM has been developed by Indigenous scholars in Australia and validated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults. It measures a sense of holistic wellbeing, consistent with Indigenous conceptualisations of wellbeing, rather than a sole focus on mental health difficulties or psychological distress.

Participants completed six questions from the *Inner Peace* section of the GEM (“I have confidence in myself”; “I feel centred and focused on meeting needs of self and family”; “I feel very happy with self and life”; “I feel safe and secure and can face whatever is ahead”; “I feel strong and full of energy to do what is needed”; and “I feel skilful and able to do things that are important”: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A final “Inner Peace” score for each participant was created by averaging responses across each question<sup>1</sup>. Across participants, the average level of Inner Peace was 3.65 (Median = 3.67, S.D. = 1.06). These findings suggest that levels of wellbeing were moderate, although not high, among the sample.

**Figure 3: Participant GEM Wellbeing measure of Inner Peace**



<sup>1</sup> The internal reliability of the Inner Peace scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .946$ ).

## **Connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community**

A majority of ‘Breaking the Silence’ participants feared some form of in-group discrimination from their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who also identify as LGBTIQ+ may experience multiple forms of discrimination or exclusion, including homophobia from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

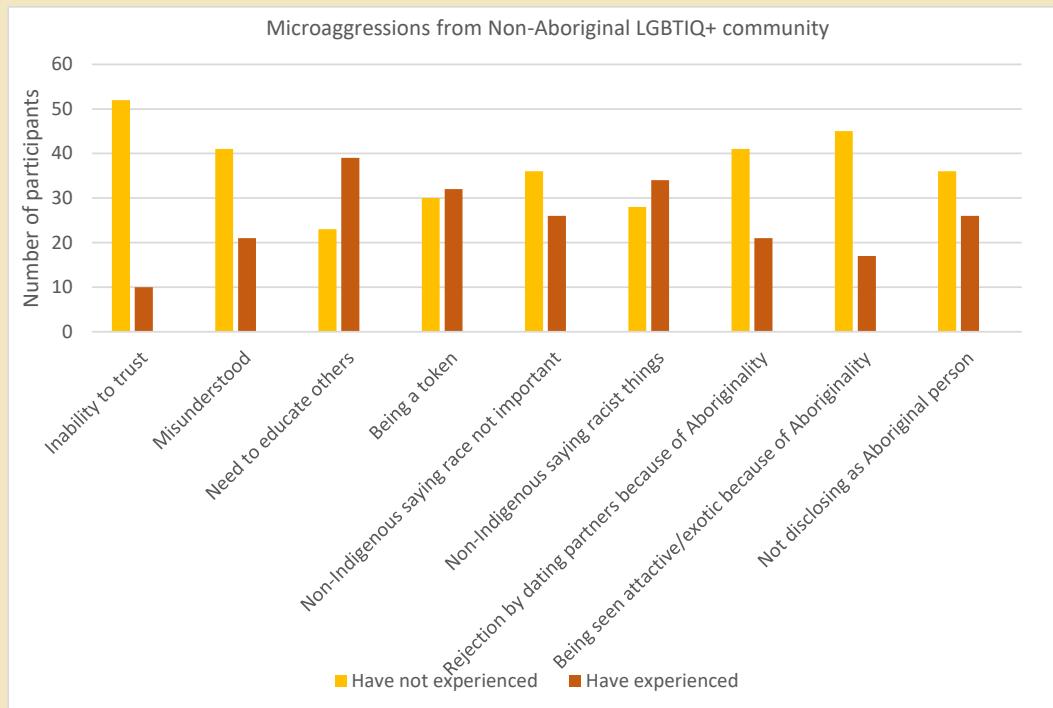
- A third of participants stated they felt ‘invisible’ within their community because of their sexual and/or gender identity
- 21% of participants did not feel accepted by their community
- 36% of participants stated they do not disclose their sexual or gender identity to community members
- 37% of participants said they had difficulty making friends who were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+
- 22.6% of participants stated they did not feel accepted by Elders or community leaders from the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

## **Connectedness and Experiences within LGBTIQ+ community**

Feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness to identified communities may be a source of support particularly for those people who are part of one or more ‘minority’ groups. The survey explored participants’ sense of belonging to or acceptance by the wider LGBTIQ+ community in a diversity of settings as shown in Figure 4 below.

- Less than half (45.2%) of participants selected that they either somewhat or strongly agreed they felt a sense of belonging to a wider LGBTIQ+ community.
- 40% of participants experienced some form of microaggression\* from within the LGBTIQ+ community. (\*Discrimination that takes the form of daily and brief occurrences which nonetheless may result in anxiety and other mental health and health consequences to those who are subjected to them over time (Balsam, et. al., 2011)).
- 62.9% of participants felt burdened with the need to educate non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ people about Indigenous or cultural issues.
- 51.6% of participants had experienced being the ‘token’ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in groups or organisations.

**Figure 4: Participants' experiences of microaggressions from LGBTIQ+ community**



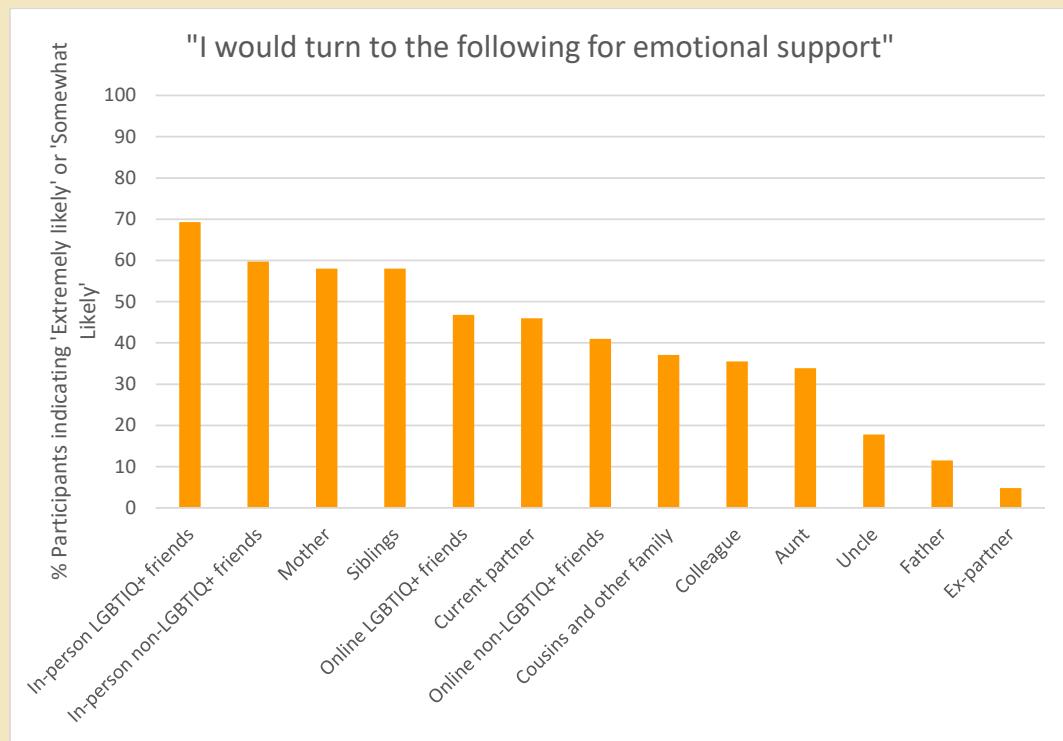
Taken together, these findings highlight that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians may not necessarily feel accepted or a sense of belonging within the wider LGBTIQ+ community. Part of this may be due to the relatively high level of microaggressions experienced when they interact with non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ community members or groups.

## Informal support

Participants were asked how likely it was they would turn to the following people for emotional support; current partner(s), mother, father, aunt, uncle, siblings, cousins and other family members, ex-partner(s), colleagues, online LGBTIQ+ friends, LGBTIQ+ friends in-person, online non-LGBTIQ+ friends and non-LGBTIQ+ friends in-person as shown in Figure 5 below.

- Over 69% of participants identified that their in-person LGBTIQ+ friends were people they were either extremely or somewhat likely to turn to for emotional support.
- Participants also said that friends who *did not* identify as LGBTIQ+ were also important sources of emotional support. 59.7% of participants identified in-person non-LGBTIQ+ friends as people they were either extremely or somewhat likely to turn to for emotional support.
- Just over 58% of participants identified mothers as people they would be most likely to turn to in their family for support and an equal proportion also identified siblings.

**Figure 5: Who participants turn to for Informal support**



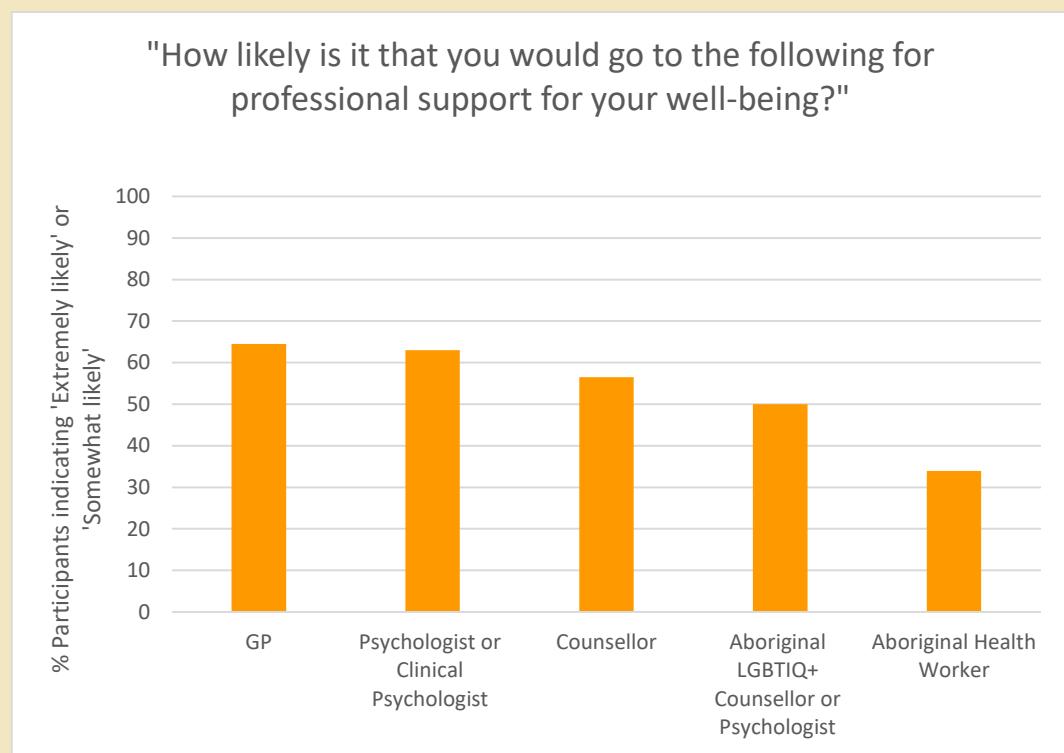
## Formal support

A key question explored by the ‘Breaking the Silence’ research partners and research team was identifying the formal organisations, professional and support staff Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians relied on when seeking professional support. There is a range of professional supports available in Western Australia including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), non-Aboriginal specific or general health, education, advocacy and social and emotional well-being support services, as well as LGBTIQ+ specific health services.

- GPs and Psychologists/Clinical Psychologists were identified as major supports by over 60% of participants

Figure 6 below shows the professional services that participants rated as most likely to access, should they need professional support.

**Figure 6: Likelihood of accessing professional supports**



Interestingly, participants showed a higher likelihood of accessing a GP or Psychologist/Clinical Psychologist compared to an Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ specific counsellor or psychologist. This finding may reflect that there are relatively few Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ practitioners available in WA compared to GPs and

Psychologists/Clinical Psychologists. The relatively high likelihood of accessing a GP could also reflect the structure of the current health system where patients are instructed to access their GP as a first option when seeking support.

The 'Breaking the Silence' team were also particularly interested in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Western Australians' use of online supports given the relative ease, flexibility, and anonymity in using these services. In response to a series of questions that asked participants about their experiences with on-line support services, findings show that access to on-line support services provided by a range of organisations was high with 66% of participants using these, as shown in the Table 4 below:

**Table 4: Participants used online supports**

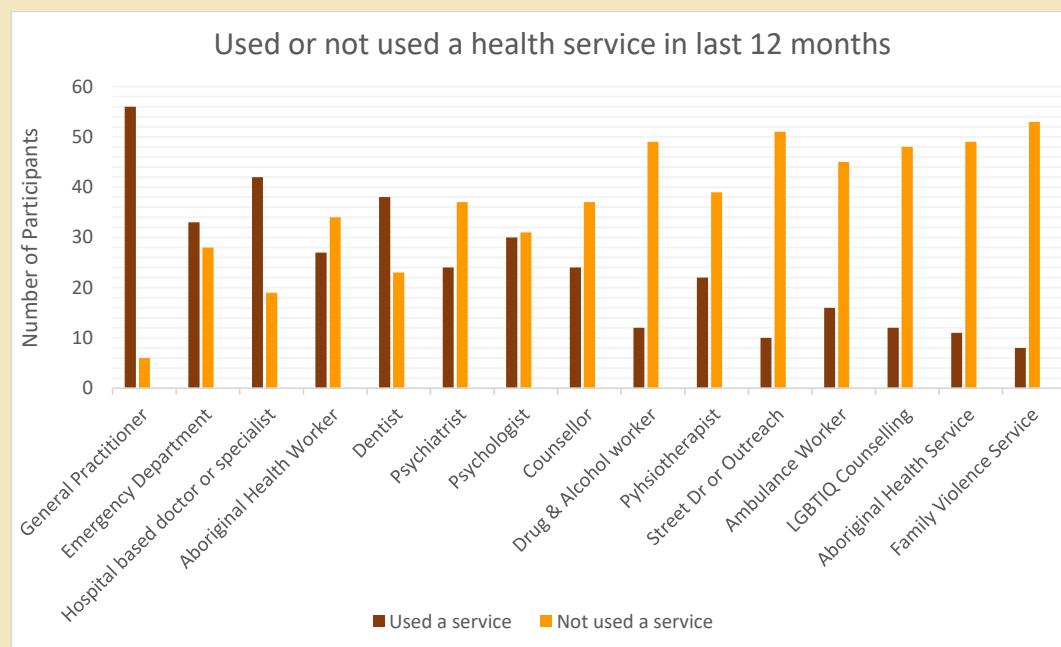
|  | <b>Number of people</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| Had not used any online services for emotional support or information about LGBTIQ+ issues     | 21                      | 33.9           |
| Had used at least one online service for emotional support or information about LGBTIQ+ issues | 41                      | 66.1           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>62</b>               | <b>100.0</b>   |

Satisfaction with most of these online services, however, was low. The one exception was satisfaction with Beyond Blue online services (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites>). A higher proportion of participants were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with their Beyond Blue on-line experience compared with the other on-line sites canvassed in the survey. 21 or just over 67% of participants stated they were extremely satisfied or satisfied with this service. This finding needs to be qualified with the acknowledgement that some on-line services (such as Black Rainbow for example) are not funded to provide service delivery which may have been why satisfaction scores for these sites were lower. Interestingly, the majority of participants (64.5%) had not accessed online services specific to Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people. Of some concern, 20% of participants used Crisis lines. Although satisfaction with Crisis lines was high, these findings suggests a high level of acute distress had been experienced by a significant proportion of the sample.

## Professional Services: Access and Experiences

When participants were asked the kinds of professionals they visited when seeking more general health and social support services, a high proportion of participants accessed GPs (n=56), hospital-based specialists (n=42) and Dentists (n=38). The range of services participants accessed is shown in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7: Seeking professional help: Health and Social Support Services**



N=62

Other key findings from the survey show that in the last 12 months:

- Over 50% of the 62 participants (n=33) had presented at Emergency Departments
- 12 participants used LGBTIQ+ services
- 11 participants used Aboriginal specific services
- 11% of participants reported fear of discrimination because of their LGBTIQ+ identity when accessing Aboriginal specific services.

When asked an additional question about confidentiality provided by Aboriginal specific services, 90% of participants who stated that they would consider using Aboriginal specific services were confident that their personal information would be treated with confidentiality.

# **Navigating and negotiating identities: Being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and identifying LGBTIQ+**

## **Qualitative comments in response to questions about identity/ies**

The Community Survey distributed for the Breaking the Silence project included three qualitative questions at the end of the survey that enabled participants to reflect on their experiences as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who also identified as LGBTIQ+. Participants were invited to write down their thoughts and views in response to questions asking about:

- Participant experience of discrimination as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or people who identified as LGBTIQ+ from the wider community
- The extent to which participants felt included and accepted by their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community/ies
- The positive aspects of being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+.

## **Participant experience of discrimination as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or LGBTIQ+ people**

Over half of survey participants responded to the three qualitative questions embedded in the survey (n=42-52).

In response to the first reflective question about how participants experienced discrimination as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or people who identified as LGBTIQ+ (n=42) of participants stated it *was as Aboriginal people* that they experienced the most discrimination (n=18). This was more so for Aboriginal people who had darker skin and therefore were more visible. Several participants stated it was easier to hide their LGBTIQ+ identity to avoid discrimination as the following examples show:



“ More as an Aboriginal person, it is easier to hide my sexual identity, or just not talk about it! It’s harder to hide my skin. ”

“ Discrimination in my life has mostly come from being Aboriginal, I can hide the fact that I’m queer, but I can’t change the colour of my skin. ”

*Survey participants,  
Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

“ It depends on who I’m with and where I am. On the whole from the wider public it’s because I’m Aboriginal, from my family it’s because I’m a Lesbian ”

*Participant,  
Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

Ten of the participants described their experience of being discriminated against because they were both Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+. The ways in which participants experienced this discrimination depended on who they were with and the extent to which they disclosed both identities. One participant for example, experienced discrimination as an Aboriginal person from the wider community and discrimination as person who identified as LGBTIQ+ from their family.

For one participant, experiences of discrimination were multifactorial and multilayered and contributed to a sense of feeling ‘invisible’ and ‘isolated,’ despite the participant’s successes and accomplishments otherwise. Discrimination was experienced by this participant from the wider non-Aboriginal community, the non-Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ community and Aboriginal community/ies. The quote also shows that an important source of strength for this participant was the support they experienced from their own community and family. An extract from their response provides some insight into this:



“ Discrimination exists in both groups. I feel my personal identity is precarious in both groups and at times I am persona non grata or invisible. There are high levels of rejection and non-acceptance in the LGBTIQ+ community; particularly with on-line dating sites and being different to the norm. At times the rejection had the effect of making me feel invisible, ugly and incomplete when I am successful and accomplished in other aspects of my personal and professional life. I've often felt isolated and wondered what is wrong with me.

And there are levels of rejection and lateral violence from the Indigenous community in regards to challenging one's other identities – that I/we are not good enough to be one of the mob mostly from other nations or cultural groups that are not my own. I am accepted by my own clan and family. Their support is such a great source of confidence and strength... ”

Participant,  
Breaking the Silence Community Survey

The feeling of ‘invisibility’ was also experienced by other participants who had identified being discriminated because of ‘both’ identities. With several stating the need to either hide their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity and/or LGBTIQ+ identity to avoid discrimination. This was particularly for those participants who described themselves as ‘looking white’ – resulting in the description of themselves as being ‘invisible.’

“ As bi-sexual and white-passing, my experience is less about discrimination and more about invisibility. I feel like I have to constantly declare and prove my identity, and sometimes I don't want to because I expect discrimination if I do. ”

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

For another participant the experience of being discriminated against had changed over their life time, describing how they had experienced discrimination as a multi-racial person when younger, but as a person who was too complex for others to categorise (racially and gender orientation) when they were older.

*“ I think when I was growing up it was due to being Aboriginal, especially being multi-racial (3 cultural backgrounds). As an adult I think it’s because I’m not identifiable as any one race. Also, I think people can be intimidated by my personal fashion sense, “tomboy” “butch” and my lack of feminine traits. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

Of the participants who responded to the question about discrimination (n=4) stated they had been discriminated against because they identified as LGBTIQ+.

*“ I’ve only been bullied in high school for being a queer black person by other black people. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

For other participants (n=4) their experience of discrimination was described as complex because if they were able to ‘pass’ as white they would be more likely to experience this as a person who identified as LGBTIQ+ rather than because of their Aboriginality.

*“ This is complex. More so as an LGBTIQ+ person, as I can “pass” being white. Though this is exclusionary in itself. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

While for another participant being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and identifying as LGBTIQ+ would contribute to more discrimination than if they were a non-Aboriginal person who was LGBTIQ+.

**“ I think being one of the LGBTQ’s and Indigenous makes people want to hurt me more than if I was a white fella and just a gay. ”**

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

Of the remaining participants who responded to the question about identity, only three stated they experienced no discrimination, one was unsure, and one participant described ‘invisibility.’

**“ I have experienced very little discrimination in general. ”**

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

**“ Discrimination in my life has mostly come from being Aboriginal. I can hide the fact that I’m queer but can’t hide the colour of my skin. ”**

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*



**“ Due to my lighter skin I definitely think I get more discrimination for being gay. Although when I disclose, I am Aboriginal that is another thing they can harass me about. ”**

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

Responses to the question about whether participants experienced discrimination either as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person or as a person who identified as LGBTIQ+ were qualified by some participants (n= 8).

Participants avoided discrimination by hiding that part of their identity that was least obvious to outsiders. For example, they either hid their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (passing as white) or hid their LGBTIQ+ identity because they looked visibly darker and therefore more obviously Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander to non-Aboriginal people.

### **Aboriginal communities and sex and gender orientation inclusion**

*Breaking the Silence* survey participants were asked to comment on the extent to which they felt included and accepted within their Aboriginal community/ies and the reasons they thought this was so.

Of the 52 participants who responded to the question (n=15) stated they did not feel viewed positively by their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community/ies, while (n=8) stated yes they did. Other participants (n=10) would state either yes, or no, but then qualify these answers with comments such as “*most of the time*” or that it depended on whether they were with their own families, in their own community, or did not disclose to older people and those with strong religious views. Two participants stated the issue of being an LGBTIQ+ person was never discussed, two were unsure, while one participant stated that their light skin colour was more of an issue for them than their sexuality. The sense of LGBTIQ+ identity either not being acknowledged or being invisible in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities was described by several participants.

“ Growing up in Aboriginal culture the possibility of being gay wasn’t discussed. It was always based on hetero relationships. When referencing culture usually the first concept considered is the hunter/gatherer male/female roles. ”

Participant, *Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

For other participants the answer was not a straightforward one, with LGBTIQ+ identity being acknowledged and accepted by their own families and Aboriginal community but not by others.

“ The stigma is starting to be old-fashioned in my community. But if my family go on country then it is hidden. It's not something I can change so I get on with my life. ”

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

“ I feel like my sexuality is more accepted by younger people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly from cousins. Older generations are also more accepting but have more traditional views on sexuality. ”



Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

Of the participants who stated they did not feel their LGBTIQ+ identity was viewed positively by their community and who provided reasons (n=9), the influence of traditional views about Aboriginal culture, religious influences and people being older were associated with more negative views. One participant detailed the diverse communities that they interacted with including online and local communities.

“ There is a very large Aboriginal presence online that is very positive. I feel that local communities are very different and very hidden most of the time. People who are out and usually shamed into moving away by family who don't understand. ”

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

“ I still adopt a don't ask don't tell approach with extended relatives in my home community. Torres Strait Islander are fervent believers and generally being LGBTIQ+ is at odds with their religious and cultural beliefs. ”

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

A few participants were more positive about how accepted they felt as LGBTIQ+ people by their Aboriginal community/ies.

*“ I do have a feeling my sexual orientation is greatly accepted by my Aboriginal community around the country, except for those who are religious and don’t accept it. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

*“ Yes, because there is more education now and people are becoming more accepting. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

*“ Yes, because there is acceptance of Brotherboys and Sistergirls (Trans) in my community. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*



As with the other reflective questions about identity the participants who responded to this question described a kind of invisibility or lack of acknowledgment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people identifying as LGBTIQ+. Levels of positive views and acceptance of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people identifying as LGBTIQ+ were also highly contingent on whether individuals from communities, were younger, religious or more traditional in their cultural beliefs and the extent to which those who identified as LGBTIQ+ were ‘out’ in their communities.

## The best things about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQ+

Of the 47 participants who responded to a question about what they thought were the best things about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and identifying as LGBTQ+ (n=33) of participants provided a range of reasons why this was so. These included: their sense of uniqueness and pride and how being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander disrupted the usual understandings of what being LGBTQ+ means. Several participants felt instrumental in changing family views and the views of wider society about Aboriginal and LGBTQ+ issues while others were positive about supporting other young people who were coming to terms with an LGBTQ+ identity.

*“ Changing view of others that I meet about what it is to be Aboriginal. For example, a lot people assume we are all one community, and all think alike. They meet me and ask questions a lot of the time and are surprised to learn that there are a lot of different Aboriginal cultures and communities. ”*

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

*“ I personally think the best thing is that Aboriginal culture is very family and community based. So, when we find other people from the LGBTQ+ community we bring that with us and create an accepting and welcoming family of our own. ”*

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey

*“ The great on-line community. And also, that I can support youth who may also identify as LGBTQ+ to feel safe, supported and loved. ”*

Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey



Several other participants were either unsure about what was the best thing about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+ or disagreed that there was anything positive about it. This was for one participant because they had not come 'out' to their family:

*“ I don't see anything positive about it at the moment because I'm not fully out to my family though I want to be. I also don't want to let them down especially my grandparents. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

The influence of Aboriginal culture for these participants emphasised similar themes to the other reflective questions in the sense in that it could be viewed as both a positive contribution (pride, uniqueness, alternative to Western and colonialist mindset) and a negative (traditional views about sex and gender roles).

The quote below sums up a kind of balancing act that is performed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people – where there is pride, agency and capacity in spite of, or because of, the multiple hurdles that need to be negotiated on a daily basis.

*“ Our ability to walk in different worlds. I was going to say, 'our resilience' but the high rates of suicide among LGBTIQ+ and Indigenous peoples would suggest otherwise. ”*

*Participant, Breaking the Silence Community Survey*

While the purpose of the reflective questions in the survey was to elicit and present the strengths and capabilities of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people and there is evidence of these presented in the findings, there are also major areas for concern. The responses to the reflective questions presented in the Community Survey show that participants experience discrimination on many levels, including as LGBTIQ+ people from within their own families and communities and as both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

and LGBTIQ+ from the wider non-Aboriginal community/ies. Furthermore, they show that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people need to carefully consider and work out how they present their dual identities when navigating a path through their everyday lives with different people and in diverse situations that may result in multiple stressors being experienced.

Major themes relate to ‘hiding’ either Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or LGBTIQ+ identities at different times and for different reasons show how these contribute to the additional mental and emotional weighing up that participants need to undertake so as to feel safe. The emotional costs that are experienced by participants is evident in their descriptions of feeling ‘invisible,’ ‘isolated’ and as being unacknowledged either as LGBTIQ+ and/or as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in their own Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and the broader (including the non-Aboriginal LGBTIQ+) community.

## **Community and Organisational Findings: How they interrelate**

This research study was designed in response to the requirements of our original Ethics Committees in two distinct phases of research activities. Our research activities were focussed in the first instance on organisations and the staff that worked in them. These in turn, informed the development and dissemination of a survey to community participants across Western Australia (See: Breaking the Silence: Insights from WA Services Working with Aboriginal/LGBTIQ+ People, Organisations Summary Report). The organisational survey was wide -ranging and comprehensive resulting in much needed (and previously uncollected) data on the experiences of a range of workers in organisations across health, education and social support sectors and how they responded to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people living in Western Australia.

There are several findings that resulted from the research activity with community that are directly pertinent to how organisations deliver services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+. These support the observations and reflections of organisational participants including:

- **the need for an increased emphasis on inclusive language**
- **awareness and education for organisational staff, community and families about LGBTIQ+ issues, particularly about not ‘outing’ or making assumptions about sexual and/or gender identity/ies**
- **the need for greater awareness of LGBTIQ+ issues by workers in services**
- **for organisations to be culturally safe for participants as *both* Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+ people.**

The community findings also show the extent to which Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ experience discrimination, ‘outing’, bullying and violence as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or being LGBTIQ+. This discrimination was experienced from the wider non-Aboriginal community as well as within community participants own families, from work colleagues and from Aboriginal communities and on social media and dating apps.

The findings also show that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are also LGBTIQ+ are often negotiating when, where and how they will reveal their identity/ies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or LGBTIQ+ people.

The findings from the community survey also show that participants have relatively high levels of trust of their GPs, psychologists and counsellors and demonstrated a significant degree of agency in seeking out these health services. A concerning finding was the relatively high number of participants who had presented at an Emergency Department in the past 12 months. Further research is needed to explore the reasons for this high level of presentations specific to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are also LGBTIQ+.

The research activities from both the organisational and community phases of this study and the resulting findings have been analysed to identify common findings across the two cohorts as well as those findings that were unique to either organisational or community participants. These have informed the overall recommendations from the study as a whole and are presented with a key to identify whether they are based on both organisation and community findings and where they are either organisational or community findings. (See Recommendations)



*Breaking the Silence Elders Yarning Group*

## Elders Yarning Group

Throughout our research, a common concern from participants has been the idea that community elders would have a negative view of those who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community. We presented this and other findings to 18 Elders across two meetings in May 2021. These elders came from a range of communities in Western Australia, but were mostly from Noongar country. After a short presentation of the key findings of the research, Elders were invited to discuss and comment on the perception that Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ experience racism and homophobia from the wider and Aboriginal communities. In response there was broad and positive support from the Elders for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are also LGBTIQ+. The commentary from this group show that Elders are knowledgeable about the issues and are supportive of Aboriginal LGBTQ+ people. The Elders insights are instructive for those who work in government strategy and policy areas as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal specific organisations.

The research leaders invited Elders to specifically reflect on two reflective questions about Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people. Firstly, what was the ‘one thing’ they would like to say to Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals and secondly, what could *all* of the Aboriginal community say and do so that Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals felt acknowledged and accepted. In response to the two reflective questions that Elders were asked to comment on, typically responses used phrases such as Aboriginal LGBTQ+ people should be “*strong and proud*” and furthermore for their families and the broader Aboriginal community to be “*non-judgmental*” and embrace, acknowledge and accept Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are also LGBTIQ+.

Elders also strongly stated that Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people are “Moort” (family in the Noongar language) and should always be included and embraced as such.

In the words of the Elders:

*“Don’t be judgmental, be there to support them.”*

*“Be yourself (as an Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ person) Feel good about yourself.”*

Some Elders referred to the changing attitudes that are becoming more prevalent in communities about Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals:

*“Just be yourself, most Aboriginal people have changed their thinking, behaviours and acceptance.”*

*Elders suggested that Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people ‘Find someone your trust and talk about the issues’*

A key message from the Elders was the importance of education. They were deeply interested in learning more to advocate for greater LGBTIQ+ inclusion in their families and communities. This supports the findings in the research that shows organisations and communities need to work together to develop and provide this kind of information and education for workers in organisations, Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals and their families and the broader Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.

*“There needs to be education with the wider [community] and within the Aboriginal community.”*

The yarning group stated often that ‘moort’ or family is important and that Aboriginal people who are also LGBTIQ+ are an integral part of this.

*“Life is a revolving door, life changes. So why do my community stay behind the door (and) not change with our young community? Do not condemn our LGBTIQ+ they are our Moort. Community needs to change, change their views, change their ways, to help overcome the hate and racism against our Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ community. Support and assist.”*

*“All Noongar families should accept ALL children in our community.”*

*“Their families need to accept the children who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community and remember they ARE family.”*

The findings from the Elders yarning group show that there is much potential and promise for workers from organisations to advocate and work in support of Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people. Their comments reinforce our findings that show that leaders from health, education and social support organisations need to be more pro-active in their responses to the advocacy, social support, education and information needs of Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people. The Elders insights also demonstrate that there is momentum in this area and that the leaders of organisations and communities should take steps to invite respectful collaboration with Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ individuals, Noongar Elders and other senior Aboriginal leaders in working toward providing inclusive and safe community and organisational support for Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people.

## Conclusion

The ‘Breaking the Silence’ community survey findings reveal the diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ communities in Western Australia. Consistent with previous qualitative reports completed in other parts of Australia (Bonson, 2017; McGlynn, et. al., 2019; Waling, et. al., 2019; Spurway, et. al., 2019), there is evidence of discrimination, racism and homophobia experienced by a majority of participants. The findings show this discrimination occurs within families, communities, workplaces, on social media and in participants’ daily lives when engaging with non-Indigenous people (including those from the LGBTIQ+ community) in the broader society. Interpersonal Violence (IPV) also emerged as a significant harm among participants.

In a more positive light, the findings also highlight where participants find effective emotional and professional support and that many of the participants demonstrate a high degree of agency, accessing and using a range of well-being, health and social services in Western Australia. The qualitative comments provided by participants also show that there is a sense of uniqueness and pride about being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+. There are also suggestions from some community participants that the emphasis on ‘family’ and ‘culture’ associated with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities has the potential to be inclusive of people from those communities who are also LGBTIQ+.

Findings from both community and organisations reveal the diversity within the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ communities and the need for the development of responsive, inclusive, culturally and LGBTIQ+ safe services that move beyond reliance on a few ‘stand-alone’ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ workers. The need to instead enable system wide, cultural change across all levels of organisations and service delivery in support of sustainable and embedded policies, service models and processes to effectively meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients who are LGBTIQ+.

## **Recommendations**

The “Breaking the Silence” research team have developed the following recommendations based on the survey results with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community living in Western Australia and focus group, interview and survey results with a range of service providers from the Aboriginal health, mainstream health, legal, social support and education sectors in Western Australia.

Where recommendations are based on either ‘organisational’ and/or ‘community’ findings this will be indicated through the Key below.

Key: C = Community Finding      O = Organisational Finding

## **Government Policy and Funding**

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics to include data collection of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ individuals (including Trans and Intersex) in all National, State and Territory Population, Health and Social Census Statistics, through the use of consistent and common definitions and increasing the use of data linkage with different government and non-government agencies. (C;O)
2. Commonwealth, State and Local Governments to collect and share data on proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people who are represented as victims of crime, violence and in homelessness statistics. (C;O)
3. Commonwealth, State and Local Government to develop tender documents that require health, mental health, ACCHO and the range of not for profit community social support organisations applying for funding to include key performance indicators and evaluations that reflect how they have met the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people including those who identify as LGBTIQ+ Trans or Intersex. (C).
4. Commonwealth and State Government research grant bodies (including NHMRC, ARC and Healthway) allocate appropriate funding and resources through research and community project grants to enable researchers to properly resource community engagement when conducting research to ensure that the diverse views, experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+, including

Trans and Intersex and those who live in rural and remote areas are captured and reflected in research data and findings. (C).

5. Commonwealth, State and Local Governments resource and fund community-based, local, mental health support organisations that are managed and led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people to the same extent as those better known national bodies such as Beyond Blue and Life Line and encourage funding applications that require collaboration with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people rather than competition between different services. (C).

## **Organisational Policy**

6. Health, mental health, ACCHO's, education, social support, legal community and housing organisations collect data on client base that includes Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+ including Trans\* and Intersex people and use this information to inform funding and grant applications for the delivery and design of services and programs. (C; O).
7. Health, mental health, ACCHO's, education, social support, legal, community and housing organisations to develop policies that not only emphasise and enable cultural safety but also acknowledge and respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ safety. (C;O).
8. Human Resource policy is developed to ensure that attraction and retention policies include strategies for increasing the representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ employees and that these employees are supported by the broader organisation through peer support networks and mentorships to avoid individuals becoming 'token' Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ workers in isolation. (O; C)

## **Discrimination and Microaggression**

9. Organisational Boards, CEO's and Executive staff to advocate, lead and strategically plan services that respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who also identify as LGBTIQ+, such as developing anti-racism campaigns with a focus on LGBTIQ+ people and that are informed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community. (C).
10. Organisations who employ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff to visibly facilitate and support those workers who also identify as LGBTIQ+ and ensure that all staff are responsible for responding appropriately and effectively to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ clients. (O; C).
11. Organisations resource and enable LGBTIQ+ peer support and mentorship opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ staff. (C).
12. Organisations to encourage all staff including non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and those who do not identify as LGBTIQ+ to take responsibility for educating themselves through providing resources such as on-line information and appropriate training modules about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+. (C).

## **Community**

13. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community bodies such as NAIDOC and those organising state based and national celebrations such as Pride events, showcase and have as major themes events about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people. (C).
14. Commonwealth, State and Local governments to fund community projects and programs that identify and enable community advocates about how to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parents of LGBTIQ+ children. (C).
15. Peak Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+ organisations develop information and education about the importance of not 'outing' people who are LGBTIQ+ for organisational staff and community. (C).

16. Peak Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+ organisations develop information brochures and guides that includes answers to Frequently Asked Questions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are LGBTIQ+ (O).

## **Education, Training and Information**

17. Education and Information resources, including social media campaigns about the experiences, issues and needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ is supported by Commonwealth and State funding and developed by the appropriate Aboriginal led peak organisations. That resources are developed to meet the information needs of organisations, families and the broader community (including information appropriate for children. (O; C).
18. Education and Information resources are designed and distributed to ensure they reflect the diversity of services that may be accessed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ clients. That the design, development and distribution of these is led by Aboriginal led and managed peak organisations including The Lowitja Institute, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Aboriginal Legal Services, and the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia as well as Children and Family Commissioner, Parenting support organisations, Family and Domestic Violence organisations and Sexual Assault Referral Centres, in consultation with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community/ies. (C).
19. Organisations to ensure that the completion of Professional Development and training about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people is mandatory and completed by staff across all levels of organisations including front-line staff. That the training is offered in multiple formats including webinars, manuals, check-lists, brochures, videos and on-line platforms and include content such as: “Basic do’s and don’ts and how to start a conversation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ including Trans\* and Intersex people.” (C; O).

20. Community members including Elders and Senior community leaders are supported through education and respectful discussion led by the CEO's, Executives and other professionals in ACCHO's to consider and advocate for the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people. (C;O).
21. Indigenous Centres in Universities to be openly LGBTIQ+ friendly as well as culturally safe, through programs such as "Follow the Dream" linking into universities. (C).
22. Information resources including social media are designed and developed for the community by State Health Government bodies such as Child and Adolescent Health WA and Department of Communities about how family members and friends who are not LGBTIQ+ can support parents who are LGBTIQ+ and/or children who identify as LGBTIQ+. (C).
23. State government bodies such as Child and Adolescent Services, Maternity hospitals and Child Health nurses develop parenting information and education resources that are inclusive and use language and terminology that includes the experiences and expectations of parents who are LGBTIQ+ in collaboration with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people. (C).
24. Educational Guides are developed for those staff who are more knowledgeable and confident about responding to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients who identify as LGBTIQ+ and that this includes ideas for marketing, promotion and advocacy of LGBTIQ+ issues and concerns in collaboration with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community members.

## **Organisational Service Models**

25. State government bodies such as Child and Adolescent Services, Maternity hospitals and Child Health nurses develop parenting support services that are inclusive and use language and terminology that includes the experiences and expectations of parents who are LGBTIQ+. (C).
26. Organisations, mental health professionals and general practitioners adopt ‘affirming’ care models in their practice that recognise and respond to the diversity of gender and sexual orientations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people seeking support and who are LGBTIQ+. (C).
27. Organisations are proactive in seeking representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ on Boards and Management Committees. (C).
28. Organisations such as the Aboriginal Doctor’s Association and the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Associations include representatives on their Boards who identify as LGBTIQ+. (C).
29. Boards of management, CEO’s and executive levels of organisations sign up to programs such as “Pride in Diversity,” and complete the accreditation for Australian Workplace Equality Index. (O; C).
30. Criminal Justice and Legal Organisations such as the Aboriginal Legal Services, Youth Justice, Legal Aid, Aboriginal Women’s Legal Service, Women’s Legal Services, SARC and DJINDA (Relationships WA) to recognise and respond to the specific homophobic crimes experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ through the development and implementation of appropriate victim support services and programs. (C).

## **Professional Development for Organisations**

31. Organisations develop a range of professional development resources and opportunities for staff about how to respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ with content that includes:

- The use of inclusive language and terminology
- Basic information about sexually and gender diverse people
- Information about the diversity within the category of LGBTIQ+ including Trans\* and Intersex
- Information about how Interpersonal Violence may be experienced by LGBTIQ+
- The importance of ensuring safe referral pathways particularly for those who identify as Trans\* or Intersex
- The importance of not ‘outing’ LGBTIQ+ colleagues or clients. (O; C).

## **Signs, Symbols and Visibility**

32. Services across health, education, legal, housing and social support sectors ensure they have visible signs and symbols such as Pride flags, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, posters and art work that display they are welcoming, safe and inclusive services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to access. (O; C).

33. LGBTIQ+ organisations invite the participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people for participation in specific, highly visible, celebratory events that showcase Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and allocate funding for these. (C).

34. Organisations such as NACCHO and Close the Gap Committee members to develop and promote “Statements of Inclusion” about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people. (C).

## **Social media and dating apps**

35. Education to be designed and developed by Peak Aboriginal institutions for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people using social media and dating apps about how to safely engage with other users and when, if and how to ‘disclose’ Aboriginality and/or LGBTIQ+ status. (C).
36. Peak Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+ organisations to take the lead in the development of anti-racism strategies and awareness about the racism that is experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people from the wider non-Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ community. (C).
37. Educating young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people about homophobia on social media platforms and dating apps through peer to peer education strategies, including education about the issues in schools through inclusive education and programs such as “Follow the Dream.” (C).

## **Further Research**

This research has resulted in findings from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people living in urban settings. There is a need for Commonwealth and State Funding and Grant bodies to adequately fund and resource research project teams so as to enable them to capture the views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people LGBTIQ+ people living in rural and remote areas across the State and for those who identify as Trans and/or Intersex. (C).

Targeted research into the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are LGBTIQ+ when using social media, on-line dating apps and other on-line resources is needed. Specifically around both affirming experiences and those that may involve racism, homophobia, bullying and microaggressions (C).

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