

Media Release

13 September 2016

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE WARNS OF PLEBISCITE RISK

Mind Australia, a leading national mental health service has issued a warning against the proposed marriage equality plebiscite, claiming the risk of significant damage to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community is too high.

According to Mind Chief Executive Dr Gerry Naughtin, the campaigns in the lead up to a plebiscite could have a negative and destructive impact on LGBTI Australians, especially young people and their families, some of whom are already grappling with mental health issues.

“Stigma around sexuality and gender identity and related exclusion are existing drivers for poor mental health.

“We are extremely concerned that this situation will worsen dramatically in the context of the negative public campaigning that is likely to occur if we go down the path of a plebiscite,” Dr Naughtin said.

LGBTI people have the highest rates of suicidality of any population in Australia. An Australian survey of gender variant and sexually diverse young people found that almost two thirds had experienced homophobia or transphobia, and that more than two in five young people interviewed had had thoughts of self-harm (41%) and/or suicide (42%). (Robinson et al., 2014)

There is strong evidence from other countries that legislating for marriage equality following a public decision-making mechanism had a negative effect. In the last few weeks Dr Grainne Healy, who led the ‘yes’ campaign in the Irish plebiscite, wrote to Australian politicians warning them of the mental health risks of this approach.

Dr Naughtin stated, “Mind works with a diverse range of people from the LGBTI community and has a good understanding of the triggers contributing to mental ill-health. Discrimination is a major factor due to the stress and isolation it causes.

“It’s not too late for marriage equality to be legislated and for the significant funds that would be spent on a plebiscite redirected to help underrepresented communities, particularly young people with mental ill-health,” Dr Naughtin said.

Robinson K, Bansel P, Denson N, Owendon G, Davies C (2014) *Growing Up Queer: Issues facing young Australians who are gender variant and sexually diverse*. Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne, Australia.

Further information:

Lisa Trent
0498 555 695

About Mind Australia

Mind is one of the largest and oldest community-managed mental health support agencies in Australia. For 40 years now the organisation has walked alongside tens of thousands of people living with the effects of mental ill-health, and their families and carers, to help them live a better life of their own choosing. This year alone they will provide support to 11,500 people.

Its mental health services are available in over 45 locations across Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and soon in Western Australia.

Mind will be offering services to people with mental health and dual disability support packages in the NDIS, and will continue to provide sub-acute residential care, youth residential rehabilitation services, psychological counselling, information and advice about mental health, and a range of other services, including the award-winning Mind Recovery College™.

Mind is the largest provider of sub-acute residential recovery services in Australia. Provided in partnership with hospitals, these services are built on deep expertise in bringing together clinical and recovery practices for an integrated approach to mental health care.

www.mindaustralia.org.au