

The Hon Malcom Turnbull MP / Hon Bill Shorten MP

Parliament House

Canberra

ACT 2600

20 March, 2016

**Re: Open letter from health professionals in support of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia**

We, the undersigned, are health professionals and students writing in support of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia, a program designed to create inclusive, supportive and safe education spaces for young people who identify as same sex attracted, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTQI+). This important work assists in mitigating the alarming 6 to 14 times higher rate of suicide among Australian LGBTQI+ teens compared to their heterosexual peers (Dyson, et al., 2003; Rosenstreich, 2013).

Programs conducted by Safe Schools Coalition Australia are a direct response to Australian and international research which demonstrates that same-sex attracted, transgender, intersex and questioning youth experience higher levels of isolation, victimization, runaway behaviour, homelessness, domestic violence, depression, anxiety, suicide, violent victimization, substance abuse, pregnancy, and school or job failure than do heterosexual and gender conforming youth (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Smith, et al., 2014).

As health professionals and students, we are aware that these factors can profoundly and negatively affect mental and physical health outcomes and educational attainment for young people. However, these negative outcomes can be considerably ameliorated by caring adults and support at schools (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010).

In 2008, the Fourth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students Sexual Health, found that 9-10% of young people identified as being attracted to people of the same or both sexes (Smith, Agius, Mitchell, Barrett, & Pitts, 2009). A further national survey found 75% of same-sex attracted young people experienced some form of homophobic bullying and in 80% of cases this occurred primarily in schools (Hillier, et al., 2010).

Youth '12, a New Zealand based study, found four out of every hundred students identified as transgender or were unsure of their gender (Clark, et al., 2013). A national Australian

survey of the mental health and wellbeing of transgender and gender diverse young people found 61% had experienced verbal abuse and 21% physical abuse. Of those who had experienced abuse, over 80% thought of self-harm or suicide (Smith, et al., 2014).

Safe Schools Coalition Australia, which has already engaged over 500 schools and 13000 educational professionals in providing psychosocial support to LGBTIQ+ youth, is an invaluable program which has the potential to mitigate some of the negative effects of homophobic and transphobic bullying and vilification.

As health professionals and students, we recognize the emergent need for such programs to not only respond to the specific needs of same sex attracted, gender diverse, intersex and questioning youth but to mitigate against victimization, violence, isolation, which can have a significant and enduring impact upon the health and wellbeing of young people.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr Kirsten Furley, Paediatric Trainee

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Dr Andrew D S Gibson, Occupational Physician

Dr Katherine Brown, Sexual Health & Forensic Physician

Dr Karen Berzins, Sexual Health Physician

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Dr Ken Lambert, General Practitioner  
Dr Danielle Carter, General Practitioner  
Dr Denise Fraser, General Practitioner  
Dr Thanu Shekar, General Practitioner  
Dr Jeff Willcox, General Practitioner  
Dr Emily Farrell, General Practitioner  
Dr Holly Inglis, General Practitioner  
Dr Jenny Bocquet, General Practitioner  
Dr Lucy Fitton, General Practitioner  
Dr Ashlea Broomfield, General Practitioner  
Dr Vicki McCartney, General Practitioner  
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Dr Adrian Castelli, General Practitioner  
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Dr Victoria Edwards, General Practitioner Registrar  
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Dr Maxine Isbel, Registrar  
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Miss Emma Woods, Researcher / Mental Health Practitioner  
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Ms Lucie Abbott, Registered Nurse  
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Ms Tash Wark, Social Worker  
Mr Garth Parkhill, AOD Counsellor, VAC  
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Ms Amity Bradford, Corporate Services Manager (Community Health)  
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Ms Karen Fernandes, Physiotherapist  
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Ms Michelle Pirpinias, Pharmacist  
Mr Peter Siebler, Pharmacist  
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Ms Lucy Wickham, Health Promotion Practitioner  
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