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MARRIAGE EQUALITY DEBATE

Much has been made of the upcoming postal survey and its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ youth. There is considerable justification for this concern as research has shown that rates of self-harm, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts amongst the LGBTIQ community are substantially higher than for their heterosexual counterparts.¹

What appears to have been forgotten in the current debate is the impact it is having on older LGBTI Australians. As outlined in previous work by NARI and colleagues for *beyondblue*, many suffered years of oppression, discrimination and violence, as well as persecution and subsequent imprisonment because of past laws and community attitudes.^{2,3}

The ongoing effects of this historical treatment has meant that many older LGBTIQ Australians experience depression and anxiety and are fearful of accessing health and aged care services due to the belief they will be further stigmatised and discriminated against – with good reason. Research has consistently shown that many older LGBTI people around the world have been denied care or provided with inferior care, and have had their sexuality ignored, dismissed or marginalised by health and aged care providers.³

Failure to access the services and care they need means that older LGBTI Australians miss out on vital interventions and suffer adverse health outcomes as a result.

Despite the fact that discrimination against LGBTIQ people is no longer lawful in Australia, the ongoing debate about marriage equality and the impending postal vote serve to expose older LGBTIQ people to a resurgence of negative discourse.

The discourse dredges up past issues of marginalisation and discrimination, placing their mental health and well-being at further risk. As already outlined by Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, the negative consequences of this debates means *there is every likelihood that rises in both rates of ill-health and suicide risk will occur as a result.*¹

Such discourse also provides a further assault on their right to be who they are and love and marry who they want. It serves as a constant reminder and reinforcement that older LGBTIQ Australians *still* do not have equal rights in our society.

NARI calls on the Federal Government to ensure there are additional safeguards and programs in place to help and support older Australians identifying as LGBTIQ.

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¹ *Position statement in support of marriage equality*, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health 2017, available at: <https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy-Advocacy/Policy-Reports/Position-Statement-Marriage-Equality/Position-statement-marriage-equality>

² Joosten et al. 2015 *Improving mental health for older LGBTI Australians: A resource kit targeting depression and anxiety among older gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex Australians*. Final Report, July. Available at:

³ Tinney et al. 2015 Mental health issues and discrimination among older LGBTI people, *International Psychogeriatrics*, 27 (9): 1411-1416.