



**Jesuit**  
**Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

# **Response to the inquiry into Anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in Victoria**

May 2026

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.*

For further information, contact:



# Jesuit Social Services:

## Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. For almost 50 years we have been delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve a just society where all people can thrive. We are a national organisation with a significant footprint in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, where we work with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities.

We began in 1977 supporting people in contact with the criminal justice system, and offer a range of programs which aim to reduce criminal offending. Over time, we have expanded our services to include programs across a range of other areas including prevention of men's violence, and mental health and suicide prevention.

In 2017, we established The Men's Project to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to keep families and communities safe and to improve the wellbeing of men and boys themselves.

We have been a Rainbow Tick accredited organisation since 2023, and are committed to safe, inclusive and affirming practice for LGBTIQ+ staff and program participants.

## Submission overview

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes in Victoria.

Our submission is informed by the experience of our staff and participants, and brings together Jesuit Social Services' practice and research expertise from our gender justice and criminal justice work, in particular:

- our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research exploring the association between adherence to masculine stereotypes (the 'Man Box rules') and the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys;
- our practice experience designing and delivering prevention and early intervention programs to reduce men's violence;
- our research and practice expertise in the use of online platforms to prevent and respond to harmful behaviours (in particular violence and abuse), drawing on our early intervention work to stop child sexual abuse and our partnership with the University of Tasmania to deliver the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre; and
- the practice experience of our justice program staff in working with young people involved in the criminal justice system, including the use of restorative justice

processes with young people charged with offences related to anti-LGBTIQA+ attacks.

Our submission argues that, to end hate-motivated crimes and all forms of violence against LGBTIQA+ communities, we must address the underlying drivers of this violence – including anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice (including homophobia and transphobia) and rigid masculine norms – as well as addressing the factors driving some of the contemporary manifestations of this violence, such as the ways in which online platforms can be used to engage in hate speech and facilitate hate-motivated offline attacks.

Through our recommendations, we argue that:

- Violence prevention and early intervention programs must explicitly challenge anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice and rigid gender norms, and must be scaled up to reach more people, especially boys and young men.
- Governments must take stronger action to ensure young people are protected from harmful online content. This involves both equipping parents, schools and young people with the information and tools necessary to safely navigate online spaces and, importantly, requiring technology companies to take greater responsibility for preventing, detecting and disrupting online harms that occur on or are facilitated by their platforms.
- Young people who cause harm and victim-survivors should have ongoing access to restorative justice processes, which have been shown to promote accountability and reduce recidivism among young people who have caused harm and to promote healing and reduce post-traumatic stress for victim-survivors.
- The Victorian Government must invest in LGBTIQA+ organisations, who are best placed both to lead efforts to prevent anti-LGBTIQA+ violence and to support victim-survivors and their communities.

**Should this be of assistance, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss our submission and recommendations and/or give evidence at the inquiry.**

# Summary of recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The Victorian Government should support organisations delivering violence prevention and early intervention programs targeting boys and young men (including Respectful Relationships Education) to collaborate with LGBTIQ+ organisations to integrate content that addresses anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice, homophobia and transphobia into their programs.

**Recommendation 2:** The Victorian Government should fund LGBTIQ+ organisations to increase the reach of their education, violence prevention and workforce capacity- building activities.

**Recommendation 3:** The Victorian Government should invest in the expansion of gender-based violence prevention and early intervention programs, including in schools and workplaces, including by investing in high quality program evaluations, workforce-capability building and digital tools.

**Recommendation 4:** Governments should invest in well-designed, targeted public campaigns that celebrate and normalise diverse masculinities, supported by resources to enable audiences to continue their learning and access support, and assets to enable integration with prevention and early intervention programs delivered “on the ground”.

**Recommendation 5:** Governments should provide information and practical resources to equip parents and carers to engage with young people on sensitive topics such as digital safety, harmful pornography use, image-based

abuse, digital surveillance, masculinities, sexuality and safely navigating digital spaces, including via school-based programs and digital resources/tools targeting parents and carers.

**Recommendation 6:** The Victorian Government should ensure school-based programs and initiatives – as well as other prevention and early intervention programs delivered outside school – support young people to build their critical media literacy skills and safely navigate online spaces.

**Recommendation 7:** The Victorian Government should advocate to the Federal Government for a clear focus on hate speech in the design of the digital duty of care, ensuring it addresses the ways algorithmic recommender systems contribute to the spread of hate speech, and online platforms can be used to engage in hate speech and facilitate hate-motivated offline attacks.

**Recommendation 8:** The Victorian Government should advocate to the Federal Government to legislate to require mandatory compliance with the Online Dating Safety Code and empower the eSafety Commissioner to assess and enforce compliance.

**Recommendation 9:** Governments should provide funding to trial and evaluate online deterrence initiatives that seek to address online hate directed at LGBTIQ+ people and other groups (in line with the model of the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre established by Jesuit Social Services and the University of Tasmania), as well as technological tools

to identify and support people experiencing online abuse.

**Recommendation 10:** The Victorian Government should ensure that restorative justice processes continue to be accessible for children and young people, including those “uplifted” to the County Court under “Adult time for violent crime” laws.

**Recommendation 11:** The Victorian Government should ensure youth justice rehabilitation and reintegration programs incorporate a focus on countering anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice, homophobia, transphobia and rigid masculine norms, as well as best practice approaches to countering radicalisation into harmful ideologies.

**Recommendation 12:** The Victorian Government should fund LGBTIQA+ organisations to deliver support services for victim-survivors and communities impacted by anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes, including those from culturally and racially marginalised communities.

**Recommendation 13:** Victoria Police should systematically collect data on hate crimes against LGBTIQA+ people and share this with community organisations and researchers to support better understanding of the nature and impact of these crimes, including pathways to perpetration, and build the evidence base for effective approaches to prevention, early intervention and response.

# Response to the Terms of Reference

## The drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ people

We acknowledge that this inquiry was prompted by the recent spike in anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks in Victoria and NSW and share the Committee's strong concern about this increase in anti-LGBTIQ+ hate and violence.

Sadly, homophobic and transphobic violence is not a new phenomenon, though the context in which these attacks have occurred is distinctive. Research shows LGBTIQ+ people have historically experienced and continue to experience high levels of harassment, abuse and violence.<sup>1</sup> The recent attacks are a specific contemporary manifestation of this violence, enabled and magnified by new technologies.

Hostile political rhetoric globally and in Australia, coupled with discriminatory policies (such as the rollback or attempted rollback of gender-affirming care, for example in Queensland) and institutional discrimination against LGBTIQ+ communities (for example, within police forces), has likely emboldened potential perpetrators. Online platforms have both amplified anti-LGBTIQ+ hate and enabled violence via new mechanisms (for example, dating apps). However, the underlying drivers of anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, including homophobia, transphobia and adherence to rigid gender norms, are unfortunately longstanding.

While hate crime laws such as those recently introduced in NSW<sup>2</sup> may have a role to play in responding to the recent escalation in violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, they do not necessarily target anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice.<sup>3</sup> If we are to end violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, criminal penalties cannot be the sole solution; we must also focus on addressing the underlying drivers of violence, including anti-LGBTIQ+

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2021-22 Personal Safety Survey*. [\[Weblink\]](#); Hill AO et al (2020). *Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia*. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. [\[Weblink\]](#); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025). *Family, sexual and domestic violence: LGBTIQ+ people*. [\[Weblink\]](#). Recent research has found that physical and sexual violence against trans and gender diverse people is increasing and is more prevalent amongst this group than their cisgender peers: Trans Justice Project and Victorian Pride Lobby (2023). *Fuelling hate: Abuse, harassment, vilification and violence against trans people in Australia*. [\[Weblink\]](#); Australian Human Rights Commission (2026). *Equal Identities: A human rights review of the experiences of trans and gender diverse people in Australia*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> NSW government to introduce new laws to combat LGBTQIA+ hate crimes, ABC Online, 17 March 2026. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> Pascal-Saardi J (2026). *Homophobic violence and the limits of legislation*, ABC Online, 27 March 2026. [\[Weblink\]](#)

attitudes and adherence to rigid ideas about masculinity,<sup>4</sup> as well the proliferation of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate in online spaces.<sup>5</sup>

## Prevalence of anti-LGBTIQA+ attitudes and behaviours among men and boys

Research over recent decades has shown that homophobia and transphobia play a significant role in policing masculinity, ensuring that men – and young men in particular – conform to masculine ideals.<sup>6</sup> It is notable that the main perpetrators of the spate of anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in NSW and Victoria have been adolescent boys and young men.<sup>7</sup> Victoria Police have advised that all those charged for anti-LGBTIQA+ attacks in Victoria have been under 30 years old, and mostly aged 13–24 years.<sup>8</sup>

Jesuit Social Services' Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research shows that homophobia and transphobia are embedded in dominant masculine norms. Our research shows homophobic and transphobic attitudes are prevalent among men and adolescent boys, and that these attitudes are – for a significant proportion of men and adolescent boys – central to their ideas about what it means to be a “real man”.

The Man Box and Adolescent Man Box studies examine the degree to which men and adolescent boys subscribe to a set of stereotypical masculine norms (the Man Box and Adolescent Man Box rules), including homophobia and transphobia. They also show that men and boys who adhere most strongly to rigid rules about masculinity – including rules related to homophobia and transphobia – are more likely to condone and use violence against people of all genders.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See also, in the context of family violence, Carman M et al (2020). *Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities*, Rainbow Health Australia, la Trobe University. This evidence guide identifies rigid gender norms, cisnormativity and heteronormativity as societal drivers of family violence against LGBTIQA+ people. The evidence guide also identifies a range of system and institutional drivers; organisational and community drivers; and individual and relationship drivers.

<sup>5</sup> For example, research by the Trans Justice Project and Victorian Pride Lobby in 2023 found that 9 in 10 participants had witnessed online anti-trans and gender diverse hate; 1 in 2 trans and gender diverse participants had experienced anti-trans and gender diverse hate; 1 in 10 trans and gender diverse participants had experienced anti-trans and gender divers violence, including physical and sexual assault; and 8 in 10 participants reported witnessing an increase in anti-trans and gender diverse sentiment since 2020: *Fuelling hate*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Plummer D (1999). *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*, Routledge: New York.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis A and Rubinsztein–Dunlop S (2026). *Teenage boys drive homophobic anti-LGBTIQA+ attacks, NSW Police data shows*, ABC Online, 27 February 2026. [[Weblink](#)]

<sup>8</sup> *Tech-facilitated abuse against Victorian gay and bisexual/bi+ men: Paper prepared by the Office of the Commissioner for LGBTIQA+ Communities and Thorne Harbour Health for Victoria's Family Violence Reform Advisory Group*, April 2026.

<sup>9</sup> The Men's Project & Flood, M (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a*

In our 2024 Man Box study – conducted with Australian adult men aged 18 to 45 – respondents expressed significant levels of personal agreement with homophobic and transphobic views. For example:

- 25% of 18–30 year olds and 19% of 31–45 year olds agreed that “a gay guy is not a ‘real man’”
- 39% of 18–30 year olds and 43% of 31–45 year olds agreed that “a transgender man is not a ‘real man’”
- 23% of 18–30 year olds and 17% of 31–45 year olds agreed that “it’s not ok for straight guys to be friends with gay guys”
- 22% of 18–30 year olds and 17% of 31–45 year olds agreed that “it’s not ok for straight guys to be friends with trans or gender diverse people”.

Notably, a smaller proportion of older men (aged 31 to 45 years) demonstrated homophobic attitudes than younger men (aged 18 to 30 years), with the older cohort less likely to endorse the two homophobic Man Box rules.

Compared with men who least strongly endorsed the Man Box rules, men who most strongly endorsed the rules, including homophobia and transphobia, were:

- 17 time more likely to agree with violence-supportive attitudes
- 11 times more likely to report frequently perpetrating verbal, online or physical bullying.

In our 2025 Adolescent Man Box study – undertaken with Australian adolescents aged 14 to 18 of all genders – a concerning proportion of boys expressed homophobic or transphobic views. Boys were significantly more likely to endorse these views than girls. For example:

- 53% of boys agreed that a teenage boy who wears nail polish is hard to take seriously (compared with 24% of girls)
- 48% of boys agreed being thought of as gay makes a teenage boy seem like less of a man (compared with 26% of girls)
- 47% of boys agreed that a good way to seem manly is to not act gay (compared with 30% of girls)
- 33% of boys agreed it’s embarrassing to have a lot of gay friends (compared with 12% of girls).

It is notable that there were higher levels of endorsement of rules related to homophobia and transphobia among adolescent boys than of other Adolescent Man Box rules such as emotional restriction. For example, while almost half of boys (48%) believed that being thought of as gay makes them seem like less of a man, only 14% believed it’s hard to respect a teenage boy who shows his feelings. This suggests that agreement with

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*man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. [[Weblink](#)]; The Men’s Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [[Weblink](#)]

homophobic and transphobic attitudes plays a significant role in many adolescent boys' conceptions of masculinity.

In general, endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box rules, including rules related to homophobia and transphobia, was higher among younger adolescent boys (aged 14–15 years) than among older adolescent boys (aged 16–18), suggesting “a window of critical vulnerability in the early teenage years when identity pressures peak”.<sup>10</sup>

As in the Man Box research, boys who most strongly hold rigid views about masculinity are more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes and to use violence. Nearly two in five boys (39%) with the highest level of endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box rules reported that they had used bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month, compared with 7% of boys with the lowest level of support for the rules.<sup>11</sup>

Adolescent boys are less likely to be bothered when they witness harassment of a transgender person (22% not bothered) than when they witness harassment of a woman or girl (5% not bothered). In both scenarios, the majority do not intervene. This highlights both the need to address transphobia and an opportunity to help boys be active bystanders.<sup>12</sup> Boys who most strongly endorse restrictive masculine norms are less likely to intervene in all scenarios of harassment than those who least endorse masculine norms, and are also less likely to be bothered by such behaviours.<sup>13</sup>

When comparing results of the Adolescent Man Box survey (2025), and the adult Man Box survey (2024), it appears that transphobic and homophobic attitudes are persisting at similar rates among adult men and adolescent boys. Meanwhile, other attitudes about masculinity are shifting (for example, the younger generation seems more accepting of boys expressing emotions than the older generation).<sup>14</sup>

## Practice insights from our work with young men charged for anti-LGBTIQA+ attacks

Jesuit Social Services delivers a range of programs that work with young people and adults in contact with the criminal justice system. This includes community-led diversion, restorative group conferencing and intensive support for young people on community orders. We have worked with some of the young people charged with offences related to recent anti-LGBTIQA+ violence and can share anecdotal insights into their behaviour.

Our Community Justice team has conducted a small number of restorative conferences with young people charged with offences related to anti-LGBTIQA+ violence. The young people involved have been aged 14 to 17 years and have mostly been Anglo-Australian. The offences have been motivated by YouTube content related to “paedophile hunters” and victims were lured through dating apps. The young people involved were generally

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<sup>10</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit, p 11.

<sup>11</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit, p 19.

<sup>12</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit, p 24.

<sup>13</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit., p 24.

<sup>14</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit., p 59.

influenced by other young people (usually one main influencer in a group) and felt their actions were justified due to the assumption the victims were “paedophiles”.

These anecdotal findings underscore the importance of action to challenge homophobic and transphobic attitudes and behaviours (including the false link between homosexuality/ bisexuality/ transgender identity and sexual offending against children).

## Prevention and early intervention with men and boys

### Challenging rigid gender norms

If we are to reduce the incidence of anti-LGBTIQA+ and other forms of gender-based violence, it is not sufficient to work with young people after they have offended. The findings from the Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research underscore the importance of scaling up prevention and early intervention efforts with boys and men (particularly young men) to support them to detach from harmful masculine norms.

In our practice experience working with boys and men, this is a three-stage process:

1. Support boys and men to understand the harms caused by adherence to rigid masculine norms, including homophobia and transphobia
2. Support boys and men to detach from rigid masculine norms, for example, through strengths-based reflection on their values
3. Promote diverse and healthy alternatives to harmful masculine norms, including by platforming and celebrating diverse forms of masculinity, including the masculinities of gay and trans men.

Jesuit Social Services delivers a range of programs in different settings (such as schools, workplaces and sports clubs) that seek to build the capability of those who work with men and boys (such as teachers and coaches) to challenge harmful gender norms that drive gender-based violence. These include [Modelling Respect and Equality \(MoRE\)](#), [Active Respect](#) and work with male-dominated industries such as construction.

We also deliver evidence-based early intervention programs for young people who have used or are at higher risk of using violence or other harmful behaviours, such as Change Makers, that seek to increase protective factors for healthy relationships and reduce risk factors for harmful behaviours, including adherence to rigid gender norms.

#### **Case study 1: Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)**

Our practice expertise and research suggest that engaging role models to demonstrate healthy and positive alternatives to rigid and outdated masculine norms is a crucial strategy to reduce violence, improve outcomes for men and boys and promote cultural and attitudinal change.

Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) supports role models who regularly interact with boys and men to challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women. The program supports participants to develop greater awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces,

and leaders in faith communities. An [evaluation of MoRE](#) found significant change in participants' knowledge, confidence and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys they worked with.

Jesuit Social Services is currently funded by the Victorian Government to deliver MoRE in 240 schools across Victoria from 2025 to 2028.

### **Case study 2: Change Makers**

Funded by the Victorian Government, Jesuit Social Services is piloting an early intervention program, 'Change Makers', which aims to empower at-risk boys and young men with the knowledge, skills and confidence to live safer, fuller lives, free from violence and other harmful behaviours.

Change Makers focuses on increasing protective factors like attendance at school, healthy relationships, association with pro-social peers, connection to a caring adult (including help-seeking), and non-violent problem-solving skills. It also aims to decrease risk factors for violence like antisocial beliefs and attitudes, with a focus on harmful gendered beliefs and involvement in gangs.

The program includes group work with young people aged 12-25, as well as capacity-building for partner organisation staff, who are already engaged with the young people and will continue to work with them after the program ends.

We co-deliver Change Makers in collaboration with community partners, including specialist schools, mainstream secondary schools, and community organisations – often with cultural brokers who can support the relationship between facilitators and the young people in their cultural context.

Interim evaluation findings show improvements in participants' emotional literacy, empathy for others, non-violent problem-solving skills, help-seeking behaviours, and understanding of gender norms and societal pressures related to masculinities.

Program impacts also include stronger social connections and behavioural changes for participants, such as improved attendance and behaviour at school.

Workplaces are another important setting for violence prevention efforts targeting men and boys. Through The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services currently delivers a range of evidence-based programs for workplaces, including in male-dominated industries such as the construction sector. These programs aim to equip men in leadership roles with the tools to challenge outdated ideas of masculinity, promote wellbeing, and create safer, more inclusive environments for women, girls and people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

In order to ensure an effective response to hate-motivated attacks against LGBTIQ+ communities, it will be particularly important that any organisation working with LGBTIQ+ communities which has an acknowledged history of discrimination against

LGBTIQA+ people, such as Victoria Police,<sup>15</sup> continues to make active efforts to address discriminatory attitudes and cultures within their workplaces and in their service responses.

### **Promoting respect for LGBTIQA+ people through violence prevention programs**

A key recommendation arising from our Adolescent Man Box research was that gender-based violence prevention and early intervention programs should promote empathy, inclusion, and respect for sexual and gender diversity, and address the impact of exclusionary, discriminatory and violent behaviours.<sup>16</sup>

Jesuit Social Services is currently in the process of integrating the findings from the Adolescent Man Box research, including those related to homophobia and transphobia into our programs. We are also exploring opportunities to integrate a more explicit focus on preventing gendered violence against the transfemme community into our programs, building on work with Zoe Belle Gender Collective. Where possible, we are collaborating with LGBTIQA+ organisations in this work, and call on the Victorian Government to resource these organisations to enable them to expand the critical work they do to build the capability of “mainstream” organisations.

An explicit focus on addressing the drivers of violence against LGBTIQA+ people should be incorporated into all gender-based violence prevention and early intervention programs, including Respectful Relationships Education and workplace-based programs.

**Recommendation 1:** The Victorian Government should support organisations delivering violence prevention and early intervention programs targeting boys and young men (including Respectful Relationships Education) to collaborate with LGBTIQA+ organisations to integrate content that addresses anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice, homophobia and transphobia into their programs.

**Recommendation 2:** The Victorian Government should fund LGBTIQA+ organisations to increase the reach of their education, violence prevention and workforce capacity-building activities.

### **Expanding prevention and early intervention efforts targeting boys and young men**

In addition to integrating explicit efforts to address homophobia and transphobia into existing programs that aim to prevent and intervene early in gender-based violence, we also need greater investment to expand these programs to reach more boys and young men.

This includes investing in rigorous program evaluations (including experimental evaluations such as randomised controlled trials) and longitudinal studies capable of demonstrating causal impact and sustained behavioural change, and identifying

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<sup>15</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission (2019). *Proud, Visible, Safe: Responding to Workplace Harm Experienced by LGBTI Employees in Victoria Police*. [[Weblink](#)]; Victorian Pride Lobby (2021). *Upholding our rights: LGBTIQA+ attitudes towards and experiences of policing in Victoria*. [[Weblink](#)]

<sup>16</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit, p 108.

effective practice so we can build the evidence base and target resources to interventions and approaches that achieve meaningful change.

Scaling up effective programs also requires a skilled workforce. There is a need to build the capability of workforces across sectors (including child and family services, health promotion, gender-based violence prevention, mental health, substance use and justice services) to ensure people who work with men and boys – especially men and boys at higher risk of using violence or other harmful behaviours – adopt evidence-based strategies for engaging men and boys and addressing harmful gender norms.

Acknowledging that in-person interventions can never achieve the reach and scale required, governments should also invest in digital tools to support the capacity of critical workforces (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches, workplace leaders) to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences.

**Recommendation 3:** The Victorian Government should invest in the expansion of gender-based violence prevention and early intervention programs, including in schools and workplaces, including by investing in high quality program evaluations, workforce-capability building and digital tools.

#### Public campaigns to normalise diverse masculinities

In 2025, Jesuit Social Services collaborated with Respect Victoria on their campaign challenging rigid masculine norms and promoting healthier masculinities, “What kind of man do you want to be?” This campaign resonated strongly with its target audience of men aged 18 to 44, with high levels of reach, engagement and positive sentiment across social media. Video content was viewed more than 16 million times and the campaign sparked conversations and reflection with its target audience.

We recommend further investment in public campaigns that celebrate and normalise diverse masculinities, including the masculinities of gay, bisexual and transgender men. Any campaign must be in well-designed and targeted to minimise resistance and backlash and deliver a net positive impact.

To maximise their effectiveness, public campaigns should incorporate a clear link to resources that enable audiences to take action, continue to build their knowledge and skills, and access support. They should also be supported by a variety of campaign assets to provide options for integration with prevention and early intervention programs delivered “on the ground”.

**Recommendation 4:** Governments should invest in well-designed, targeted public campaigns that celebrate and normalise diverse masculinities, supported by resources to enable audiences to continue their learning and access support, and assets to enable integration with prevention and early intervention programs delivered “on the ground”.

#### Supporting young people to safely navigate online environments

While *The Adolescent Man Box* survey found that young men’s ideas of masculinity are still most influenced by their parents, it also found that online platforms and influencers play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of boys and young men.

Boys are exposed to a wide range of harmful content online, including misogynistic and anti-LGBTIQA+ influencers, that can be associated with harms to themselves and others.

Notably, boys who most strongly endorse rigid masculine norms were more likely than other boys to report that online media has a big impact on their ideas and that their online social life is more rewarding than their offline interactions.<sup>17</sup> They were also more likely than other boys to have seen pornography depicting harmful acts (such as non-consensual acts, choking or other forms of physical violence) against gender diverse people.<sup>18</sup>

Parents are often under-supported in identifying behaviours of concern and navigating conversations about sensitive topics such as digital safety, harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, digital surveillance, masculinities and sexuality. There is also a need to support young people to build their critical media literacy skills, for example, to increase their understanding of the role of algorithms and recommender systems in shaping their online experience and exposing them to harmful content, as well as strategies to build safer and more positive online experiences.

**Recommendation 5:** Governments should provide information and practical resources to equip parents and carers to engage with young people on sensitive topics such as digital safety, harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, digital surveillance, masculinities, sexuality and safely navigating digital spaces, including via school-based programs and digital resources/tools targeting parents and carers.

**Recommendation 6:** The Victorian Government should ensure school-based programs and initiatives – as well as other prevention and early intervention programs delivered outside school – support young people to build their critical media literacy skills and safely navigate online spaces.

## Addressing the role of online platforms in anti-LGBTIQA+ hate

While parents, schools and other services working with parents and young people have an important role to play in supporting young people to safely navigate digital spaces and in combating the influence of online hate, they should not shoulder this responsibility alone. It is critical that technology companies take greater responsibility for preventing, detecting and disrupting online harms that occur on or are facilitated by their platforms.

### Designing an effective digital duty of care to curb online hate

Algorithmic systems on social media platforms actively amplify anti-LGBTIQA+ content, driving radicalisation pathways for young people. However, the eSafety Commissioner's

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<sup>17</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit., p 15. The Adolescent Man Box research found that over half (52%) of those who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box rules believe that media has a big influence on their ideas about how to be a boy in the world (compared with 34–37% for other boys). This group is also more likely than other boys to say that (47% compared with 32% for those who least endorse the rules).

<sup>18</sup> The Adolescent Man Box, op. cit., p 27.

existing powers under the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) do not extend to proactive obligations on platforms to detect and disrupt algorithmic harm.

The 2024 statutory review of the Online Safety Act (the review) recognised that “online hate has the potential to cause significant harm to individuals and impact community safety more broadly,” and that further regulatory intervention is needed to address the harms arising from online hate. The review made a range of recommendations to address online hate, including defining online hate material, making improvements to the complaint schemes and enhancing online service providers’ obligations in relation to systems or processes through an overarching duty of care and due diligence.<sup>19</sup>

The Federal Government’s response to the review, released in April 2026, reiterated the Government’s commitment to legislate a digital duty of care, but concerningly only “noted” the recommendations specifically aimed at strengthening the online safety framework’s ability to address hate speech. The Government response further noted the goal is “finding the balance between the future focus of harms prevention through a systemic duty of care and reforms to the Act to strengthen reactive powers”.<sup>20</sup>

**Recommendation 7:** The Victorian Government should advocate to the Federal Government for a clear focus on hate speech in the design of the digital duty of care, ensuring it addresses the ways algorithmic recommender systems contribute to the spread of hate speech, and online platforms can be used to engage in hate speech and facilitate hate-motivated offline attacks.

### **Strengthening the Online Dating Industry Code of Conduct**

Looking specifically at dating apps – in particular the LGBTIQ+ app Grindr which Victoria Police state has been used to target victims<sup>21</sup> – more must be done to require these platforms to detect, report and respond to coordinated misuse patterns on their platforms.

Following a Government roundtable on online dating safety in 2023, the Federal Government required the dating app industry to develop an online dating industry code to protect users from harm and abuse.<sup>22</sup> However, the code is voluntary and does not fall under any Australian law or regulatory framework. This means that there is no statutory basis for the Australian Government to take action against non-compliant dating services. Further, Grindr is only a “tier 2 signatory”, having assessed that they comply with the Code but are only “substantially aligned” rather than fully aligned with the Safety by Design principles.

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<sup>19</sup> Rickard D (2024). Report of the statutory review of the *Online Safety Act 2021*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>20</sup> Australian Government (2026). Government Response to the Independent Review of the *Online Safety Act 2021*. [\[Weblink\]](#), p 6.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis A (2025), Criminals used fake profiles on gay dating apps to lure robbery victims, police allege, ABC News Online, 9 May 2025. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>22</sup> Australia Online Dating Code of Conduct (2024). [\[Weblink\]](#)

The attacks on members of the LGBTIQ+ community facilitated via Grindr clearly demonstrate that a voluntary industry code is not sufficient to drive the improvements in safety that are required to keep users safe.

**Recommendation 8:** The Victorian Government should advocate to the Federal Government to legislate to require mandatory compliance with the Online Dating Safety Code and empower the eSafety Commissioner to assess and enforce compliance.

### **Disrupting and deterring online hate and supporting victims online**

While online platforms can be used to amplify hate and facilitate harm, they also offer opportunities to disrupt and deter people from engaging in harmful behaviour, and to provide support to victims of harm and abuse.

Jesuit Social Services is collaborating with the University of Tasmania on the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre, which involves partnering with technology companies and other organisations with a digital footprint (e.g. hotels, free wifi providers) to design effective deterrence messaging and other strategic interventions aimed at deterring online sexual offending against children and raising awareness of support services. Evidence shows warning messages are an effective deterrent that can disrupt online child sexual abuse offending and reduce the volume of attempts to access child abuse material.

While the use of deterrence messaging to disrupt other forms of harmful online behaviour is not widely used, there is an opportunity to work with platforms to trial deterrence messaging in the context of preventing online hate speech directed at members of the LGBTIQ+ community (or towards other cohorts who may be targeted, such as migrants or First Nations people). This could involve using social norming messaging or other behaviour change tactics to reduce the acceptance of hate speech and willingness to share or spread online hate. (To be clear, we are not equating hate speech with child sexual abuse offending, but rather pointing to an opportunity to explore whether deterrence messaging could be effective in disrupting other forms of harmful online behaviour.) Technological tools could also be used to identify people experiencing online hate and abuse, and direct them to supports (or make a report to the platform itself or to the eSafety Commissioner).

**Recommendation 9:** Governments should provide funding to trial and evaluate online deterrence initiatives that seek to address online hate directed at LGBTIQ+ people and other groups (in line with the model of the CSAM Deterrence Centre established by Jesuit Social Services and the University of Tasmania), as well as technological tools to identify and support people experiencing online abuse.

## **Strengthening responses to anti-LGBTIQ+ violence**

### **Ensuring access to restorative justice processes for young people**

The experience of our Youth Justice programs (see pages 10–11 of this submission) also highlights the importance of access to restorative processes for young people charged with this type of offending. From our experience, it appears that some young people

charged with anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes do not understand the impact and harm caused by their offending.

Restorative processes like Youth Justice Group Conferencing hold the young person who has caused harm accountable for their behaviour, help them to understand the harm caused by their offending, and reduce recidivism.<sup>23</sup> In 2024–25, of the 249 young people who participated in Jesuit Social Services' Youth Justice Group Conferencing programs in Victoria and the Northern Territory, 94% demonstrated increased empathy for the person or people harmed by their actions. At the same time, restorative justice processes promote healing and enhanced wellbeing for victim-survivors, including reductions in post-traumatic stress.<sup>24</sup>

While victims do not have to participate in group conferencing, our experience shows it can be very beneficial. For example:

- a person who had been harmed during a home invasion said to the young person who had harmed them during a group conference, "You helped me today... I'm really surprised, you are not who I thought you would be."
- a person who had been harmed said, "Thank you for giving myself and my family the opportunity to participate in this conference. It was a very empowering experience not only for myself but for my son."
- a person who had been harmed during a home invasion and assault said to the young person, "To know that you are now determined to turn your life around is a great comfort to me – it turns something bad into something good. I do forgive you, I really do... I wish you well and pray every day that you will go forward, stick to your resolve and become an asset instead of a liability to our community."

Youth Justice Group Conferencing and Diversion Conference processes are available as an option for young people charged with offences who appear in the Children's Court.

Under the new "Adult time for violent crime" laws, young people charged with certain offences now appear in the County Court and are sentenced "as adults". It is unclear whether young people uplifted to the County Court can still be considered for Youth Justice Group Conferencing under the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic). Judges in this court are

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<sup>23</sup> Bonett R (2022). 'Group Conferencing Effects on Youth Recidivism and Elements of Effective Conferences', Swinburne University of Technology; Bonett R et al. (2025). Group Conferencing is Associated with Lower Rates of Repeated Recidivism Among Higher Risk Youth and There are Enhanced Effects Based on Who Attended the Conference. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 23(1), 72–93; Strang et al. (2013). *Restorative Justice Conferencing Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review*; Sherman & Strang et al. (2015). Twelve experiments in restorative justice: the Jerry Lee Program of randomized trials of restorative justice conferences. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 11(4), 501–540.

<sup>24</sup> Strang et al. (2013). *Restorative Justice Conferencing Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review*; Sherman & Strang et al. (2015). Twelve experiments in restorative justice: the Jerry Lee Program of randomized trials of restorative justice conferences. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 11(4), 501–540.

also likely to be less familiar with these options, and access may rely on advocacy from the young person's lawyer and youth justice case manager.

Given the clear benefits of restorative processes for both victims and offenders, it is essential that they continue to be accessible as an option for young people appearing in the County Court, including those charged with offences related to anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks.

**Recommendation 10:** The Victorian Government should ensure that restorative justice processes continue to be accessible for children and young people, including those “uplifted” to the County Court under “Adult time for violent crime” laws.

#### **Addressing anti-LGBTIQ+ and other forms of prejudice within youth justice programs**

Victoria's youth justice system has no framework for identifying – or programs for responding to – misogynist, anti-LGBTIQ+, religious, racist and other forms of prejudice and/or radicalisation among young offenders.

Prevention work targeting anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice, homophobia, transphobia and harmful gender norms, as well as initiatives aimed at addressing other forms of prejudice, should not be limited to initiatives delivered through universal platforms such as schools, but must also extend to young people who have offended or are at higher risk of offending.

Youth justice rehabilitation and reintegration programs should incorporate evidence-based approaches to addressing the drivers of gendered violence, including rigid masculine norms and anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice, and to addressing the radicalisation of young people into anti-LGBTIQ+ and other harmful ideologies, including misogynist and racist ideologies.

Little is currently known about best practice approaches for responding to youth radicalisation,<sup>25</sup> especially outside the context of violent religious extremism, and further research into effective approaches is needed.

**Recommendation 11:** The Victorian Government should ensure youth justice rehabilitation and reintegration programs incorporate a focus on countering anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice, homophobia, transphobia and rigid masculine norms, as well as best practice approaches to countering radicalisation into harmful ideologies.

#### **Supporting victim-survivors and communities**

LGBTIQ+ service organisations are often the only trusted source of assistance for people impacted by anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes, but they receive no dedicated funding to provide therapeutic services or community safety work for victim-survivors and

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Barracosa S and March J (2022). Dealing with radicalised youth offenders: The development and implementation of a youth-specific framework, *Front Psychiatry*, 2022 Jan 13; 12:773545. [[Weblink](#)]

communities.<sup>26</sup> Greater investment is needed in LGBTIQ+ organisations to deliver support services for victim-survivors and communities impacted by anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes, including legal support.

Ensuring that support and resources are available in languages other than English is also important. LGBTIQ+ young people from culturally and racially marginalised communities are often more isolated as they may not be able safely come out to friends and family.

**Recommendation 12:** The Victorian Government should fund LGBTIQ+ organisations to deliver support services for victim-survivors and communities impacted by anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes, including those from culturally and racially marginalised communities.

### **Strengthening the evidence base**

We cannot continue to rely on anecdotal data about anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice and violence. Victoria Police should systematically collect data on hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people and share this with community organisations and researchers to support better understanding of the nature and impact of these crimes, including pathways to perpetration, and build the evidence base for effective approaches to prevention, early intervention and response.

A history of institutionalised homophobia within police forces has created lingering sense of mistrust within the LGBTIQ+ community,<sup>27</sup> which means that violence is likely to be under-reported. It is therefore essential that other research into LGBTIQ+ communities' experiences of violence, such as the *Private Lives* research series led by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University (currently funded by the federal Department of Health), also continues to be funded.

**Recommendation 13:** Victoria Police should systematically collect data on hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people and share this with community organisations and researchers to support better understanding of the nature and impact of these crimes, including pathways to perpetration, and build the evidence base for effective approaches to prevention, early intervention and response.

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<sup>26</sup> *Tech-facilitated abuse against Victorian gay and bisexual/bi+ men: Paper prepared by the Office of the Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities and Thorne Harbour Health for Victoria's Family Violence Reform Advisory Group, April 2026, p 3.*

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Victorian Pride Lobby (2021). *Upholding our rights: LGBTIQ+ attitudes towards and experiences of policing in Victoria.* [[Weblink](#)]