

**Submission Text:** 1st of May 2026

To the Committee Members,

Parliamentary Inquiry into Violent Crimes Against LGBTIQ+ Communities

Parliament of Victoria.

Re: Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Violent Crimes Against LGBTIQ+ Communities

Dear Committee Members,

I write to you as an Aboriginal person and a member of the LGBTIQ+ community to offer my personal perspective on the impact of violent crimes targeting our community. Whilst this is a personal submission, it is worth mentioning that I am employed at Rainbow Health Australia as the First Nations How2 program coordinator where my role has been to work with Rainbow Mob communities to better understand their needs and challenges in accessing health and community organisations and having their identity affirmed in their communities. I support health and community organisations to increase their capacity to support the LGBTIQ+ community and service users which provides me with a good understanding of community needs and trends and what strategies are effective to implement to address resistance to inclusion. Further to this, I am a member of the state departments LGBTIQ+ Task Force and was the NAIDOC pride awardee in 2025. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and to be heard on matters that are of profound importance to so many of us. My submission is offered from the position of someone who holds two distinct but deeply interconnected identities, and I ask the Committee to consider how the experience of living at this intersection shapes the impact of these crimes.

The Value of Queer Identity and Community

Being queer is something I value deeply. My identity is not incidental to who I am — it is central to it. Alongside this identity comes a sense of belonging to a community that is generous, resilient, and profoundly supportive. The LGBTIQ+ community has offered me connection, solidarity, and the understanding that comes from shared experience. This community is a source of genuine strength and joy in my life, and it is one I am proud to be part of.

I am also a proud Aboriginal person. My Aboriginal identity carries its own deep meaning — a connection to Country, to culture, to community, and to a history of survival and strength that spans generations. These two identities are not separate parts of me that I move between; they exist together, shaping how I understand myself and how I move through the world. I am fortunate to have found community in both spaces, though I am also aware that not all Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people have experienced that same sense of acceptance and belonging, and that navigating both identities can involve its own particular challenges.

What is often not understood from the outside is how much of oneself goes into arriving at that pride. Coming to understand and accept a queer identity is rarely a simple or linear process. For many of us, it involves years of self-reflection, navigating a world that has not always affirmed who we are, and working through layers of internalised doubt. For Aboriginal people, there is often an additional layer to this journey — one that involves reconciling identity within the context of cultural expectations, community dynamics, and the ongoing effects of colonisation on how identity and belonging are understood. Research by Carlson and Farrelly confirms that the combined impacts of colonialism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia result in compounded and poorer health and mental health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people. The journey toward self-acceptance is meaningful and hard-won. It represents genuine emotional labour — and it is work that should be honoured, not undermined.

### The Impact of Violent Crime on Sense of Safety

Whilst I have not personally been a victim-survivor of violent crime, I want the Committee to understand that this does not render me unaffected. Violent crimes targeting LGBTIQ+ people send a message that extends far beyond the individuals directly harmed. They create a climate of fear that is felt across the community. Australia's largest national survey of LGBTIQ health and wellbeing, Private Lives 3, found that over 57% of LGBTIQ participants reported being treated unfairly due to their sexual orientation in the prior year, and that significant proportions had experienced verbal abuse, harassment, and threats of violence. A more recent intersectional analysis of this data found that anti-queer violence remains pervasive, with certain forms occurring at exceptionally high rates and distributed unevenly across subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community.

I am aware of incidents in spaces and contexts familiar to me — places I visit and the apps that I use to date and connect with community. The knowledge that people have been

targeted simply for being who they are changes how safe I feel in those environments. It changes how I present myself, who I hold hands with in public, and how alert I am to those around me. The erosion of this sense of safety is real and ongoing, even for those of us fortunate enough not to have experienced direct violence. I ask the Committee to consider that the harm caused by these crimes ripples outward through the entire community.

### The Risk to Emotional Wellbeing and Identity

I have spoken above about the effort involved in understanding and accepting a queer identity. I raise this here because violent crime against LGBTIQ+ people poses a specific and serious threat to that process. When a person who is in the early stages of understanding their identity witnesses or hears about violence directed at people like them, the message received is deeply damaging. It communicates that visibility is dangerous, that pride comes at a cost, and that the world is not safe for who they truly are.

For those already established in their identity, these incidents can reactivate old fears and reverse hard-won progress toward self-acceptance. The psychological toll is not abstract. Private Lives 3 recorded high or very high levels of psychological stress among 57% of LGBTIQ participants — four times the rate recorded in the general population. I ask the Committee to recognise that addressing violent crimes against our community is not only a matter of physical safety — it is a matter of protecting the emotional wellbeing and identity of individuals who have already worked incredibly hard simply to be themselves.

### The Compounded Impact of Intersecting Identities

I want to speak directly to the way my experience as an Aboriginal person compounds the impact of these crimes. Marginalisation does not operate in isolation. When a person holds multiple identities that are each subject to discrimination and harm, the effects do not simply add together — they interact and amplify one another. As an Aboriginal queer person, I navigate a world where my safety can be threatened on more than one front simultaneously, and where the systems designed to protect me have not always been ones I could trust. Research has highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQIASB+ people are disproportionately impacted by discrimination and disadvantage arising from these intersecting forces.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have endured generations of institutionalised harm, including through policing and government systems. This history is not distant — it is present in the lived experience of many Aboriginal people today and

shapes the degree to which we feel able to seek help or report harm. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has noted that the high rates of suicide-related behaviour among First Nations people, combined with similar evidence for LGBTIQ+ people, point to a compounded risk that remains critically under-researched and under-addressed. When I hear of violent crimes against LGBTIQ+ people, I do not only respond as a queer person who fears for their safety; I also respond as an Aboriginal person who knows that the pathways to justice and support are not equally accessible to all of us.

I ask the Committee to ensure that this inquiry does not treat the LGBTIQ+ community as a monolithic group. Within our community there is significant diversity of experience, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people face particular vulnerabilities that deserve specific recognition and targeted response. Research into First Nations LGBTIQSB+ young people's experiences with health services found that this group frequently felt invisible within both Indigenous and LGBTIQ+ service systems — falling through the gaps of each. Any recommendations arising from this inquiry should reflect an intersectional understanding of identity and explicitly address the needs of those who face compounded discrimination.

#### The Need for Improved Relationships with Police and Support Services

There is a well-documented and historically grounded mistrust between the LGBTIQ+ community and policing institutions. For many within our community, particularly those who are older, those who are transgender or gender diverse, and those from marginalised backgrounds, interactions with police have historically been marked by discrimination, dismissal, and harm. Research into LGBTI police liaison services in Australia found that more than half of LGBTIQ people surveyed would not report a hate crime to police, fearing a homophobic or transphobic response. For Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people, this mistrust is further deepened by the long and painful history of Aboriginal communities' relationship with police and the justice system in this country. This is not simply a matter of perception — it reflects real and ongoing patterns that must be acknowledged if genuine reform is to be achieved. This history cannot be set aside, and any meaningful reform must reckon with it honestly.

At the same time, our community exists in a moment of genuine threat, and we need protective institutions to be ones we can turn to. Improving the relationship between the LGBTIQ+ community and police must be a priority for this inquiry. This means not only policy-level commitments, but tangible changes in how officers are trained, how complaints are handled, and how trust is built at the local level. The NSW Special

Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes (2023) recommended mandatory and ongoing training for police officers on LGBTIQ bias crime and unconscious bias in investigations — a model that Victoria should seriously consider. This is especially important should the Committee recommend a centralised hate crime unit, which I believe would be a solid and necessary action in response to these violent crimes.

Equally important is the need for support services that are genuinely affirming and accessible to LGBTIQ+ people. Private Lives 3 found that less than half of LGBTIQ participants felt accepted when accessing health or support services, and that more than 75% said they would be more likely to use a service accredited as LGBTIQ-inclusive. For Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people, this must also mean services that are culturally safe and that understand the specific context of Aboriginal identity, community, and history. A person who has experienced a hate crime should never have to fear that seeking help will expose them to further harm or judgment — and for Aboriginal queer people, that bar must be met across both dimensions of their identity.

My recommendations to support the LGBTIQ+ community

To address the impact these violent crimes are having on communities, I make the following recommendations:

#### 1. Online Platform Accountability

Dating apps and social media platforms must be held to stronger safety standards, given the pattern of perpetrators using fake profiles to lure victims into real-world violence. The inquiry should recommend:

- Mandatory real-identity verification options on dating and social apps operating in Victoria.
- Faster and more effective in-app reporting and blocking mechanisms for suspicious behaviour.
- Legal obligations on platforms to cooperate promptly and fully with police investigations.
- Dating app companies to be called before the inquiry to account for their safety practices.

## 2. Addressing Online Radicalisation and Hate Networks

The inquiry must examine how young people are being radicalised into anti-LGBTIQA+ violence through online content — including through platforms like TikTok, where one convicted offender admitted to drawing inspiration for attacks. Recommendations should include:

- Duty-of-care obligations on platforms to detect, remove, and report content inciting hate-motivated violence.
- A dedicated examination of far-right, 'alpha-male', and misogynistic online ecosystems as radicalisation pipelines.
- Referral of relevant cases to the eSafety Commissioner and federal regulators where platform failures are identified.

## 3. Historical Truth-Telling Process

Community roundtables and expert testimony have consistently emphasised that contemporary hate cannot be understood in isolation from Victoria's history of state-sanctioned discrimination — including the Tasty nightclub raid and the Black Rock arrests. The inquiry should recommend:

- A formal, structured truth-telling process to document historical harms enabled by law and public authority.
- Recognition that past apologies, while welcome, do not constitute full accountability.
- Examination of how historical criminalisation and police harassment continue to shape community trust in institutions today.
- International best-practice review of truth-telling models and their role in strengthening democratic resilience.

#### 4. Improve Hate Crime Reporting and Police Engagement

Victoria Police has acknowledged that formally reported hate crimes represent only a fraction of actual incidents, with many community members unwilling to report for a range of reasons. The inquiry should recommend:

- Expansion of the LGBTIQ+ Police Liaison Officer program, with increased resourcing and community visibility.
- Anonymous and community-based reporting pathways, including via trusted LGBTIQ+ health organisations.
- Regular public reporting on the scale and nature of anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes in Victoria.
- Clear communication that people can speak to police about options without necessarily making a formal report.

#### 5. Mandatory Police and Justice Department Training

Drawing on the recommendations of the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes, Victoria should implement:

- Mandatory, comprehensive training for all Victoria Police officers on hate crime indicators, LGBTIQ cultural awareness, and trauma-informed practice.
- Training on conscious and unconscious bias, developed in genuine collaboration with LGBTIQ+ community experts and organisations.
- Dedicated upskilling for prosecutors, court staff, and corrections personnel on the specific impacts of hate-motivated crime.

#### 6. Stronger Sentencing and 'Post and Boast' Laws

Victoria has introduced laws providing extra jail time for offenders who share crimes on social media. The inquiry should build on this by recommending:

- Consistent application of bias-motivated aggravating factors in sentencing for hate crimes.
- Review of the effectiveness of the 'post and boast' legislation and identification of any gaps.
- Consideration of whether specific hate crime offences should be introduced, rather than relying solely on aggravating factors.

## 7. Intersectional Approaches

The LGBTIQ+ community is diverse. Hate crimes intersect with racism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. The inquiry should recommend:

- Specific examination of how hate crimes affect First Nations LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability, and those from multicultural and multifaith communities.
- Co-designed responses with affected communities, rather than top-down policy interventions.
- Data collection that captures intersecting identities in hate crime reporting.

## 8. Funding for Community Safety and Support

Anti-LGBTIQ+ hate is a systemic issue requiring coordinated legal, social, and institutional responses — not policing alone. The inquiry should recommend:

- Sustained, multi-year funding for community health organisations providing support to hate crime survivors (e.g. Thorne Harbour Health).
- Physical security upgrades at LGBTIQ+ venues, building on the government's existing

\$250,000 annual commitment to the Victorian Pride Centre.

- Dedicated crisis support pathways for victim-survivors of hate crime.
- Funding for community-led safety programs and awareness campaigns.

## 9. Youth-Focused Prevention Programs

Given that alleged offenders have been as young as 13, with many aged between 13 and 20, early intervention is critical. The inquiry should recommend:

- School-based programs addressing toxic masculinity, online radicalisation, and respectful relationships.
- Training for teachers and school counsellors to identify and respond to early signs of radicalisation.
- Engagement with youth-focused platforms and influencers to counter harmful content with positive messaging.
- Investment in diversion programs for young people at risk of involvement in hate-motivated offending.

## 10. Survivor-Centred Process and Ongoing Community Voice

The inquiry process itself should model the principles it seeks to embed in policy. Recommendations should include:

- Confidential and accessible processes for survivors to share their experiences, supported by community organisations.
- Institutionalisation of survivor and community voices in ongoing policy design — not just as a one-off inquiry consultation.

- A formal implementation monitoring mechanism with public reporting on progress against recommendations.
- Regular community feedback loops to evaluate the effectiveness of measures adopted.

I thank the Committee sincerely for undertaking this inquiry and for creating space for community voices to be heard. The issues raised here are urgent. As an Aboriginal queer person, I carry both a deep love for my communities and a deep awareness of how far we still have to go in being truly seen and protected. Our community deserves to live with safety, dignity, and freedom — not only in principle, but in practice. I hope that this submission contributes, in some small way, to outcomes that protect and affirm LGBTIQ+ lives in all their diversity.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Powell

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