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Applying an Intersectional Lens:
LGBTQASB+ First Nations workplace inclusion

LGBTQASB+ Mob & Work

pridein
diversity

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their experiences, cultures, languages and practices, and the richness of their contributions to the places where we work, live and play.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country across Australia and their continuing connection to lands, waters, skies and communities.

We pay respect to Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in creating this publication.

Made on Aboriginal land — always was, always will be.

Sponsorship

Pride in Diversity and Jumbunna Institute would like to thank the Woolworths Group and the UTS Centre for Social Justice for sponsoring this initiative and enabling an invaluable spotlight to be shone on rainbow mob inclusion in the workplace.

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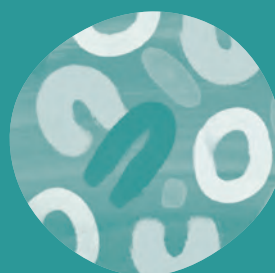
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As rainbow mob rise,
everyone rises with them.



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The bulk of the work in this project was done on the lands of the Gadigal people. We acknowledge Gadigal Elders and ancestors. We acknowledge Gadigal sovereignty.

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We also thank Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt and Professor Lindon Coombes, our UTS Jumbunna leadership, for always supporting us.

Professor Nareen Young and Alison Whittaker
Jumbunna Institute



The UTS Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion is delighted to support this cutting edge research into the workplace experiences of First Nations LGBTQA+ people, sistergirls and brotherboys.

At UTS we understand that our diversity as an organisation is one of our key strengths. Different life experiences, insights and perspectives, lead to the innovation that we need to meet our goal of being a global higher education leader. But to really harness the benefits of our diversity we need to focus on an intersectional approach that seeks to understand and improve the experiences of all our people.

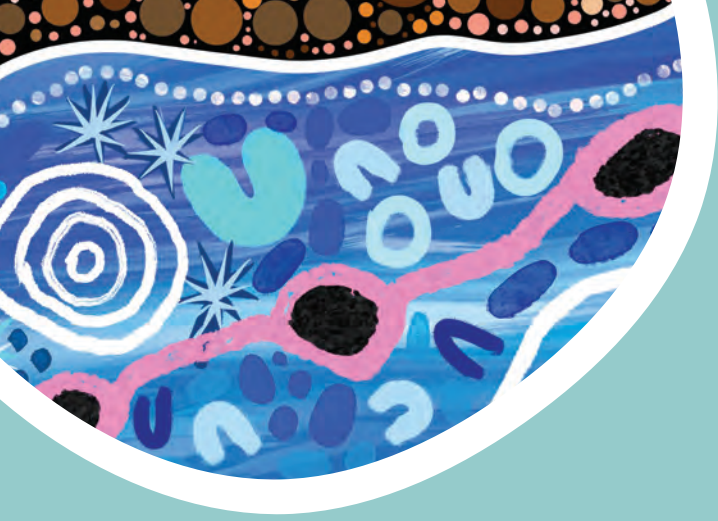
This means listening to people about their experiences at work, but also understanding that paid work is just part of people's lives. We are all members of communities and families, and for First Nations people the responsibilities that come with community and culture are significant. Our gender, sexual orientation, disability, class, cultural background and more are central to our identities and the way we show up at work. This diversity should be celebrated and supported by workplaces.

Our colleagues at Jumbunna have a proud history of supporting First Nations people at work. And the Centre is thrilled to be able to lend our experience working with LGBTQA+ people to this important project.

Putting in place workplace systems that support First Nations LGBTQA+ people, sistergirls and brotherboys, will support not just these individuals, but people across organisations. I encourage employers to engage with the experiences that research participants have so generously shared and reflect on how they can draw on these insights to improve their workplaces for everyone.

Thanks to everyone involved in this project!

Jo Tilly
Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
University of Technology Sydney



2. Background

First Nations LGBTQA+ people, sistergirls and brotherboys, are critical parts of our community at large. Their contribution to social justice, culture, social and family life is undeniable and significant. All of this is work.

There has, however, been limited research attention given to LGBTQASB+ mob's contribution to and experience within the formal paid workforce. Building this knowledge is critical. Access to safe and just workplaces contributes directly to how LGBTQSB+¹ mob survive and sustain themselves, their families and their communities.

Two large surveys have measured equity in workplaces for LGBTQA+ and Indigenous communities – the Jumbunna Institute and Diversity Council of Australia's Gari Yala survey (of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at work)² and Pride in Diversity's Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey.³

The gap in the data risks misunderstandings and inattention to how First Nations LGBTQASB+ people experience the formal paid workforce. It also risks how the employment community approaches them – from union campaigns and bargaining, to workplace supports, to initiatives promoting diversity, equity and justice within the formal paid workforce.

It is not enough that workplaces understand the experiences of LGBTQA+ people and First Nations people *separately*.

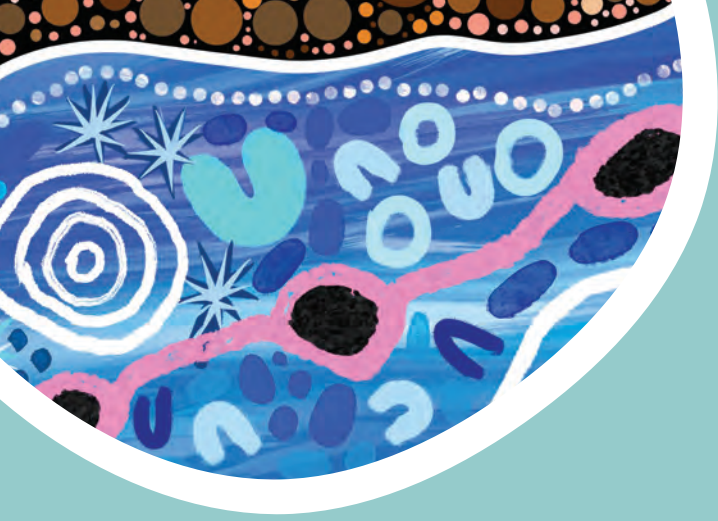
This project came from discussions between ACON's Pride in Diversity and the Indigenous People and Work Hub at the UTS Jumbunna Institute (Research), led by Professor Nareen Young and was then lead and executed by First Nations LGBTQASB+ mob. We note that it addresses long-held discussions within our community about the safety of workplaces and the material living conditions of LGBTQASB+ mob.

1 In this report, we use many acronyms to refer to First Nations LGBTIQ+ communities.

- We use LGBTQASB+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer First Nations people, and sistergirls and brotherboys. This is an acronym we use only for First Nations people. Where a statement about LGBTQA+ people doesn't specify First Nations people, we will use only LGBTQA+. This is because Sistergirl and Brotherboy are community-specific terms. Not all trans First Nations people use these terms and there is no universal term that describes all trans and gender diverse First Nations people.
- Where intersex people are not explicitly mentioned or accounted for in what we say, we omit the 'I'. This is in line with guidance from Intersex Human Rights Australia. We note that many intersex people are heterosexual and identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and may not therefore see themselves as part of the LGBTQA+ community. Where intersex people are mentioned or accounted for, we include the 'I' (e.g., LGBTIQ+).
- We use 'mob' to refer to First Nations people. We also use Indigenous to refer to First Nations people. Some studies explicitly refer to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, and we will use that specific language when describing their findings.
- As a general term we may, from time to time, describe First Nations LGBTQASB+ people as 'rainbow mob'.

2 dca.org.au/research/project/gari-yala-speak-truth-centring-experiences-aboriginal-and-or-torres-strait-islander

3 Pride in Diversity (2024). Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs.



3.

Methodology

This project had four phases. There were initial plans for the project to be larger in scope. Unfortunately, these plans were thwarted by COVID-19, lockdowns, and the systems shock that followed.

We encourage researchers and communities to continue to build on and expand this research, especially alongside those First Nations LGBTQASB+ communities we couldn't speak with in depth.⁴

Firstly, we gathered a group of expert First Nations LGBTQASB+ people to guide the research and hold it accountable. Those experts met over the life of the project. We sought a diversity of our mob's standpoints, across genders, Nations, locations and work histories. Those members include:

- Professor Sandy O'Sullivan (Wiradjuri; formerly Sunshine Coast University, now at Macquarie University)
- Dominic Guerrera (Kurna and Ngarrindjeri; arts practitioner, podcaster and community health practitioner, currently at Country Arts SA)
- Robyn Newitt (Yorta Yorta and Tharawal; Monash University and formerly at Western Sydney University)
- Other members of the Advisory Group had to leave this work for health reasons.

Secondly, we conducted a literature review on existing knowledge of LGBTQASB+ First Nations experiences of the formal workplace. This review was conducted across the life of the project, from 2019 to early 2023.

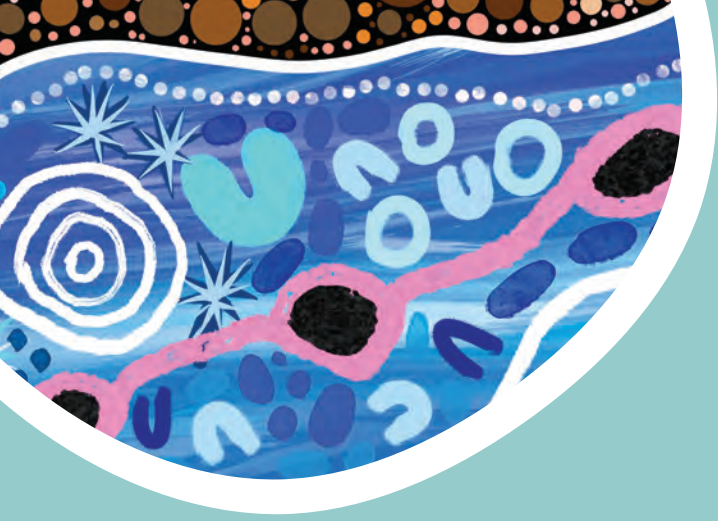
Thirdly, we designed (with the Advisory Group) and sent out a survey to First Nations LGBTQASB+ people. It measured demographic and workplace data, and asked participants about their workplace experiences as rainbow mob, LGBTQASB+ discrimination and racism at work, and their resilience and positive workplace experiences.

Finally, in partnership with BlaQ⁵ we held two yarning circles. The original vision was that multiple yarning circles would be held across the continent, but unfortunately in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns and financial constraints, this was no longer possible. The yarning circles were contained to NSW. One was held in person over dinner at the NCIE and one was held online.

⁴ This includes mob outside of metropolitan areas, mob with limited online connectivity, and for the more in-depth insights shared in yarning circles, mob outside of NSW. There is also reason, given the limits of who we reached, to focus future research on LGBTQASB+ mob in lower-paid roles and those employed in the community sector.

⁵ blaq.org.au





4.

The Literature Review

Despite growing public attention to the intersecting experiences of Indigenous LGBTQASB+ people, there is not much literature on their experiences in the paid formal workforce.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Indigenous LGBTQSB+ people are caught between diversity programs centred around Indigeneity and those centred around sexual and gender diversity in various professional settings.⁶ This follows some of the existing evidence around ‘culturally diverse’ LGBTQA+ workers on this continent.⁷

First Nations queer and trans people, non-binary mob, brotherboys and sistergirls, asexual and intersex mob deserve a stronger body of knowledge – one where they don’t fall through the cracks.

There is a general sparsity in the scholarly and industry literature on First Nations peoples and work as a whole. At the same time, the relative abundance of literature on LGBTQA+ peoples’ experience of the formal paid workplace may not adequately cover the experience of LGBTQASB+ First Nations people.

First Nations LGBTQASB+ identity and experiences are, as Monaghan describes, more than the sum of Indigeneity and queerness. They require two modes of diversity and justice work to be effective: decolonising queerness and queering decolonial work.⁸ Alizzi suggests that Western frameworks of gender and sexuality might not begin to describe what queerness or transness looks like from the perspective of Indigenous peoples.⁹ This means that First Nations people might not be served by LGBTQA+ diversity measures, even when they are part of that community too.

The pressure on this intersection, and the lack of support for LGBTQSB+ mob in the workplace was recently outlined by Shane Sturgiss, CEO of BlaQ, on Radio National.

‘You had to choose your identity to get services provided to you. [...] A] cultural identity to get Aboriginal services or [...] your queer identity to get your LGBTIQ services. And when you’re bringing that into the workplace you need to be very mindful because of the discrimination on both counts of culture and queerness. [...] The level of data for that cohort of people is just non-existent. [...] Our communities need to feel safe in every aspect of their life and in everything they do.’¹⁰


6 Corrinne Sullivan and Madi Day (2019), Queer(y)ing Indigenous Australian higher education student spaces, 10(4) Australian Journal of Indigenous Education.

7 Diversity Council of Australia and Pride in Diversity (2020), Intersections at work: Understanding the experiences of culturally diverse LGBTQ talent. DCA, Sydney. Available at: <https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/intersections_at_work_dca_pid_2020.pdf>

8 Osca Monaghan (2016), Dual Imperatives: Decolonising the queer and queering the decolonial, in Hodge D (ed) Colouring the Rainbow, Blak queer and trans perspectives (Wakefield Press).

9 Arlie Alizzi (2015), Indigenous Subjectivity in Australia: Are we Queer? 1(1) Journal of Global Indigeneity.

10 Shane Sturgiss, quoted in This Working Life (2023), 17 February ABC Radio National. Available at: <abc.net.au/radionational/programs/this-working-life/this-working-life-lgbtq-workplace-inclusion/101948156>

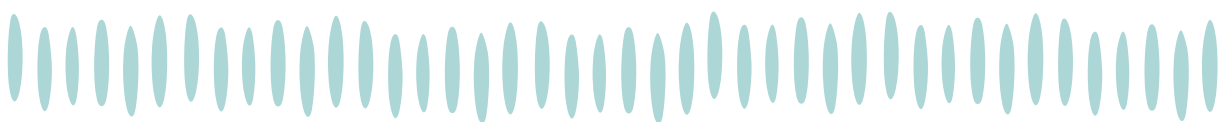


Because of this reality at the intersection, and because of the cultural specificity of Indigenous LGBTQA+ ways of thinking about identity and experience, the existing LGBTQA+ workplace literature may not be broadly applicable. The existing Indigenous peoples and work literature may provide a closer, if incomplete, account from which this research can build.

In doing this research, we herald the cautions of Indigenous queer research articulated by Professor Sandy O’Sullivan, particularly against ‘the colonial desire to observe, contain, and categorize Indigenous people’¹¹ and identities. They urge against the construction of knowledge that ‘manage[s] those who are not within the acceptable containment through both failing to recognise and searching for reasons that justify that difference.’¹²

We also know, from research in WA by Braden Hill, Jennifer Dodd, Bep Uink, Dameyon Bonson and Sian Bennett, that LGBTQA+ mob navigate various levels of disclosure and engagement of their identities. They ‘manage their strategic outness as individuals’. While this impacts visibility in the workplace and also impacts this research, it also ‘provides clues for organisations [...] about how to envision what new [...] communities that are safer and more inclusive might look like.’ The authors suggest that the burden of managing discrimination should shift to ‘apply in a collective sense to organisational cultures’¹³ rather than requiring a model of discrimination about individuals, or requiring rainbow mob to be out and self-advocate. This applies to workplaces.

As part of this research, we freely concede that there is much university researchers will not know or publish or have shared with us (even when we are part of these communities). These ‘known unknowns’ still inform rainbow mob’s struggle for justice, joy and freedom – including in the paid workforce.



11 Sandy O’Sullivan (2022), No Cession, 7 Pipe Wrench Mag. Available at: <<https://pipewrenchmag.com/binary-gender-is-a-colonial-construct>>

12 Sandy O’Sullivan (2022), Challenging the Colonialities of Symbolic Annihilation, 79(3) Southerly. Available at: <southerlylitmag.com.au/sandy-osullivan-challenging-the-colonialities-of-symbolic-annihilation>

13 Braden Hill, Jennifer Dodd, Bep Uink, Dameyon Bonson, and Sian Bennett (2022), Pride, belonging and community: What does this mean if you are Aboriginal and LGBT+ and living in Western Australia?, Journal of Sociology.

4.1

A growing body of knowledge

Even though the knowledge base on Indigenous queer and trans people and work is small, LGBTQASB+ mob are developing their own bodies of knowledge, theories and frameworks.

The Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia and the Lowitja Institute coordinated the first *Aboriginal Gender Study* of its kind —

‘examining gender concepts and experiences from Aboriginal points of view, to understand how gender equity could be advanced within a strong cultural framework.’¹⁴

The project included significant workshopping and systematic reviews into understandings of gender among First Nations people¹⁵, and the potential impact of those understandings on gender equity. They hosted thirteen groups of men and women for separate yarning circles. The groups were clustered around an area of similarity: comparable age, occupation, shared status as mothers, grandmothers or as LGBTQ.’

In their final report, project authors Dominic Guerrero, Gabriella Zizzo and Courtney Hammond identified that —

‘Work ethic was described as a significant component of both female and male participants’ gendered identity, strongly influenced by their parents’ work ethic. In most instances this was discussed as the contribution of income to the family, although some groups discussed provisions that are not financial (e.g. role modelling, guidance).’

What’s clear from the study is that, because of the centrality of work and paid employment to gendered identity, workplaces became hubs of connections and support (both within and outside their financial contribution) for gendered communities within Indigenous communities — including First Nations LGBTQSB+ communities.

However, while that is a site for opportunity for growth for communities through workplaces, it also means that mistreatment, discrimination or malpractice become embedded in how the community lives within and outside of work. For example, the project heard that Indigenous GBTIQ men would avoid working in service sectors that led them to have contact with children ‘to avoid being labelled as a paedophile or opportunist’ because of intersecting stereotypes about Aboriginal men and queer men.

¹⁴ Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Ltd. (2019), *The Aboriginal Gender Study: Final Report*. AHCSA, Adelaide. Available at: <https://aboriginalgenderstudy.ahcsa.org.au/app/uploads/2019/06/AHC4831_Gender_Study_online.pdf>

¹⁵ Including First Nations LGBTQ people.

The study highlighted the need for future research on —

‘the unique experiences of Aboriginal transgender and gender diverse peoples[. ...]
Future projects should draw attention to the specific needs of Aboriginal LGBTQ, and
identify ways to support them to further participate in and shape culture.’

In Canada, research on their experiences of relationship violence and internal migration documented how some Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTIQ+ people were discriminated against in seeking employment.¹⁶ This presents precarity and danger for Indigenous LGBTIQ+ people already experiencing violence and displacement. It’s a reminder of the material impact of discrimination in the workplace.

The impact of COVID-19 was also felt by First Nations LGBTQASB+ workers on this continent. A survey between Macquarie University and Black Rainbow revealed that 74% of rainbow mob had their finances impacted by the pandemic and lockdowns, with 33% reporting they had lost work hours and 9% reporting lost jobs.¹⁷



16 Janice Ristock, Art Zoccole, Lisa Passante and Jonathon Potskin (2017), Impacts of colonisation on Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Canadians’ experiences of migration, mobility and relationship violence, 22(6) Sexualities.

17 Madi Day, Dameyon Bonson, Andrew Farrell and Tetei Bakic (2021), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQISB+ People and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A survey of impacts experienced as at mid-2021. *Black Rainbow and Macquarie University*. Available at: <https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/207290353/MQU_BlackRainbowCOVIDImpactReport_220808_FA_online.pdf>

4.2

Intersections within intersections

It is also worth noting that, in focussing on the intersection of Indigenous LGBTQA+ experiences at work, the community has a range of other intersecting identities and experiences — including womanhood and disability.

These will not be covered at depth in this report, but it is worth noting that Indigenous women are marginalised as a subgroup in the Australian workforce — including in the payment gap, employment parity, career advancement, superannuation and access to justice for gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment.¹⁸ There are ongoing projects investigating Indigenous women's experiences in particular workplaces and sectors and we encourage readers to stay abreast of them.¹⁹ It is also worth noting that non-binary people are not included in the majority of these studies, and so the true extent of impact is unknown and, at the moment, unknowable.

Indigenous peoples with a disability or mental illness, and neurodivergent mob, are a large part of our communities, and their experience should be accounted for in future research.

Anecdotal evidence from research undertaken by the First People's Disability Network outlines that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability felt that this was compounded by the discrimination they felt already as Indigenous peoples. Many reported negative experiences in securing and maintaining employment and received feedback from potential employers that they did not 'fit' their brand.²⁰ This is profoundly concerning.

18 Bronwyn Fredericks, 'Getting A Job: Aboriginal Women's Issues and experiences in the health sector, (2009) 2(1) *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 27.

19 See, e.g., *Make Us Count: Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences in Victorian public sector workplaces*. This is a project run by Dr Debbie Bargallie, Professor Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day. Recruitment sheet here: <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c04c321f93fd4b5529e0d5b/t/63314dc7bfc7a9500356114e/1664175561502Make+Us+Count+Call+for+participants+%281%29.pdf>>

20 Scott Avery (2018), *Culture is Inclusion: A narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability*. *First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)*. Sydney, Australia.

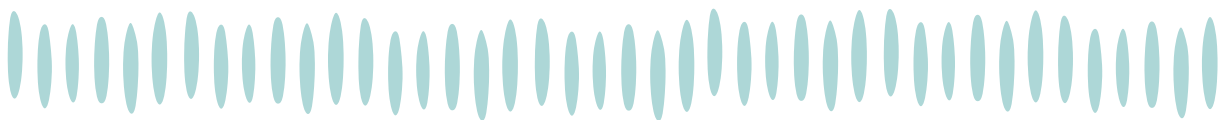


Dameyon Bronson shared an example of a person caught in this compounding discrimination, this time within the social support system:

'Where does a 40-year-old Aboriginal Trans Man with a physical disability and suffering from depression go for help? There is no one door. Behind one there can be racism, behind another trans*phobia, behind another stigma associated with mental health. It goes on and on.'*²¹

The history of Indigenous workforce participation in the colony is one of exploitation and abuse. Indigenous workers were commonly stripped of their wages by both corporate and state actors, and forced into low-paying, menial labour off their Country and homelands, and away from their families.²²

Part of the impact of this labour history is the destruction of community relationships, including relationships and ways of thinking about family, love and care that the West might categorise as queer or transgender. Aside from its social and cultural implications, historians have categorised some of this isolation, containment and wage theft as economic segregation, excluding entire generations from the labour market in a way that is still felt by their descendants.



21 Dameyon Bonson (2016), Indigenous suicide, sexuality and gender diverse populations. 15 March, IndigenousX. Available at <indigenousx.com.au/indigenous-suicide-sexuality-and-gender-diverse-populations>

22 Hellene Demosthenous, Boni Robertson and Catherine Demosthenous (2010), Indigenous Women's Experiences of Work: Key Issues in Urban Queensland. *Security for Women*. Available at: <security4women.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous-Women%C2%B9s-Experiences-of-Work.pdf>

4.3

Policy and legal frameworks

Improving the rates of employment amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been a key priority under the COAG Close the Gap framework since 2008. This set the target to ‘halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.’²³ There is no existing data to indicate Indigenous LGBTQA+ employment rates, and very little data on Indigenous LGBTQA+ populations generally.

Collectively, these frameworks form part of Australia’s human rights obligations to ensure the right of all people to work, which is principally addressed by the *International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). This instrument outlines that all States will take steps to safeguard this right, including rights to trade union activity and to just and favourable conditions of work.²⁴

Whilst it needs to be acknowledged that there have been improvements in Indigenous employment, particularly for those with higher educational attainment, much remains to be done. A look at the employment outcomes, particularly for Indigenous LGBTQASB+ people at the intersections, such as those marginalised by gender, and those with disabilities, and in prisons, suggest that their needs are not adequately addressed by broad statements aimed at ‘capacity building,’ entrepreneurship and gap-closing. In Indigenous LGBTQASB+ policy spheres outside of employment, initiatives have focussed on the base level needs of the population to receive services for physical, social and mental illness, as well as to be free of direct interpersonal discrimination and violence.

More attention must shift away from the ‘capacity’ of Indigenous peoples in the workforce or seeking to enter it — while understanding that these basic needs will continue to need to be served because of the dynamics of a colonial context. That attention must shift to the capacity and deficiencies of employers and governments.

23 Commonwealth of Australia (2018), Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2018. Available at: <closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/ctg-report-2018.pdf>

24 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, articles 6, 7, 8.

4.4

The Statistics

The employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is 24.2 percentage points, with 48.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in work compared with 72.6% of non-Aboriginal Australians of working age.²⁵

Census data from 2011 tells us that 76.8% of Indigenous people that are employed are in the private sector, compared with 23.2% in the public sector.²⁶

Discrimination and mistreatment in the workplace remains an ongoing barrier for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, even in those organisations with Indigenous specific policies. A recent survey indicated that between 12-15% of these employers agreed that Indigenous people would have trouble fitting in their workplace.²⁷ So, whilst organisations may have moved beyond the stereotypes expressed in the report of Aboriginal peoples as 'dirty, lazy and unreliable',²⁸ data from 2014 reveals that at least 35% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who were employed experienced some form of unfair treatment in the previous 12 months.²⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are highly concentrated in Indigenous organisations or the community sector. This remains the case despite the growth of the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the private sector.³⁰ There is also a high rate of movement between employment in the Indigenous community.³¹

Whilst many people might prefer work in a public or community organisation, it is important to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQASB+ people, as with all Indigenous peoples, also have opportunities in the broader workforce, including the private sector.

A statistical framework or base for Indigenous LGBTQASB+ people in any space has been lacking — a central complaint of the community.

25 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018), Closing the Gap targets: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Cat. no. IHW 193. AIHW.

26 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2016*, 9.6.

27 Above n1.

28 Phyllis Daylight and Mary Johnstone (1986), *Women's Business: Report of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force*, Australian Government Publishing Service.

29 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015), *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-15*, Table 14.3.

30 Matthew Gray, Boyd Hunter and Shaun Lohar (2012), *Increasing Indigenous employment rates*, Issues paper no.3, *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse*. Available at: <aihw.gov.au/getmedia/71bb346a-1b83-4038-a2f7-647e65a21445/ctg-ip03.pdf>

31 Matthew Gray and Boyd Hunter (2005), The labour market dynamics of Indigenous Australians, 41(1) *Journal of Sociology*.



44% **Heard racial slurs**

38% **Treated unfairly**

at work because of their Indigeneity

Only **1 in 3**

had the required support in place when they

experienced racism

While it did not measure more than two genders and did not specifically consider LGBTQASB+ mob, the *Gari Yala* survey was the first of its kind to snapshot some Indigenous experiences of the formal workforce. It found that 38% of respondents were treated unfairly at work because of their Indigeneity and 44% heard racial slurs. Indigenous people who experienced racism at work were 2.5 times less likely to be always satisfied with their job, compared to those who had not. Only 1 in 3 had the required workplace support in place when they experienced racism.³²

AWEI data

As far as we currently know, the only statistical base so far for First Nations LGBTQASB+ peoples and work is the Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey, which records both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, and membership of LGBTQ+ communities.

Data for the AWEI Employee Survey are collected by Pride in Diversity, through a voluntary online questionnaire issued to employees within organisations that are either members of the Pride in Diversity program or choose to participate. The aim of this annual, repeated, cross-sectional survey is to gauge the overall impact of inclusion initiatives on organisational culture as well as on LGBTQ+ identifying and non-identifying employees.

This analysis leverages Australian data from the 2024 AWEI Employee Survey, offering both a large sample overall (n=42,220), as well as a substantial subsample of LGBTQ+ employees (n=10,405), First Nations employees (n=1,127), and First Nations LGBTQ+ employees (n=418)³³.

'I feel fortunate to be in a great team that makes me feel comfortable to talk about my sexuality and diverse background at work. I have never experienced any adverse treatment by [another] employee in relation to [that]. However as an Indigenous person, I am disappointed that [my organisation] does not have a RAP or prioritise Indigenous inclusivity...'

32 Jumbunna Institute and Diversity Council of Australia (2020), *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians*. Available at: <dca.org.au/research/project/gari-yala-speak-truth-centring-experiences-aboriginal-and-or-torres-strait-islander>

33 Pride in Diversity (2024). Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs



Demographics

Of the First Nations LGBTQ+ respondents, sexual orientations were described as:

- Gay, lesbian (n=145)
- Bisexual (n=119)
- Pansexual (n=64)
- Queer (n=32)
- Asexual (n=26)
- A different term (n=37)

Using self-identified gender and sex assigned at birth, and the 'two-step method'³⁴, gender identity & experiences were:

- Cisgender women (n=188)
- Cisgender men (n=125)
- Transgender women (n=12)
- Transgender men (n=7)
- Non-binary people (n=83)

While not indicative of our sample, over three quarters (76.5%) of the LGBTQ+ First Nations AWEI participants were aged under 45 (vs 50.0% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

Most (but significantly fewer than non-First Nations respondents) lived in a capital city centre and suburbs (68.7% vs. 84.6% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

Most (and significantly more than non-First Nations respondents) worked in the public sector (57.4% vs. 36.0% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

Workplace role

Related to the age of the cohort, 3.4% of LGBTIQASB+ First Nations people hold Leadership/ Executive Team positions (vs. 4.2% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

19.9% are senior staff reporting to the leadership team (vs. 30.0%), 62.6% are seasoned individual contributors (vs. 60.9%), and 14.2% are new workforce entrants (vs. 4.9%).

32.2% of LGBTIQASB+ First Nations respondents manage others (vs. 42.5% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

21.5% have worked for their organisation for less than 1 year (vs. 14.7%), and 23.1% for over 10 years (vs. 30.9%).

34 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release>.

'Being a lesbian/bisexual Aboriginal woman I have always felt welcomed in [my organisation] I have changed teams a lot throughout the past few years and every time I have introduced myself [as a] lesbian/bisexual Aboriginal woman I never once have felt judgement for speaking up about this. If anything I have more people intrigued in understanding how I present myself. [It] is a nice feeling knowing the [organisation] will learn and continually adapt to the cultures and understand how to support persons such as myself.'

Support for LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion

AWEI Survey data shows little difference between LGBTQ+ First Nations and non-LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents in their support for LGBTQ+ inclusion activities, but levels of support are lower than from non-First Nations respondents.

81.1% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents think it is important that employers be active in this area of diversity & inclusion, vs. 80.2% of non-LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents. However, higher numbers of non-First Nations respondents think the work is important (92.9% of LGBTQ+, 85.4% of non-LGBTQ+).

76.0% LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents personally support the work of their organisation (vs. 76.6% non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 87.2% of LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 83.2% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents agree that inclusion initiatives have been regularly communicated at lowest levels (66.3% vs. 73.9% for non-LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents, 72.9% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents, 81.5% non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

57.3% of LGBTQ+ First Nations AWEI Survey respondents believed their organisation should put more effort into LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion (vs. 58.6% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 42.7% non-LGBTQ+ First Nations, and 36.5% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents)

Mandatory LGBTQ+ inclusion training for people managers receives strong support across the board. 79.2% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents supported this, higher than non-LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents (73.9%). However, LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents (88.1%) had the highest levels of support of all.

80.3% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents agreed that LGBTQ+ inclusion work has had a positive influence on organisational culture, marginally higher than for non-LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents (78.3%), but lower than all non-First Nations respondents (LGBTQ+: 93.2%, non-LGBTQ+: 85.3%).

Workplace wellbeing

A major contributor to workplace employee wellbeing is the presence of active, visible allies. 66.2% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents knew of active allies within their immediate work area (vs. 72.1% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 59.3% non-LGBTQ+ First Nations, and 64.5%).

Overall, LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents have poorer workplace wellbeing outcomes;

78.3% felt safe and included within their organisation (vs. 88.3% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 85.1% non-LGBTQ+ First Nations, and 92.0% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents), and 68.8% feel engaged with the organisation and their role (vs. 76.1% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 72.4% non-LGBTQ+ First Nations, and 81.5% of non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

'I have been in the work force for a long time. I have now been at [this organisation] for 11 years, but I have faced discrimination and hostility in every workplace up until this one. To be LGBTQ+ [here] is to have a safe haven.'

Using a workplace wellbeing metric to measure overall feelings of being safe and included, mentally well, ability to be themselves, belongingness, productivity and engagement (1= poor, 5= excellent), LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents have the poorest wellbeing (3.83 vs. 4.07 for LGBTQ+ non-First Nations, 3.98 for non-LGBTQ+ First Nations, and 4.19 for non-LGBTQ+ non-First Nations respondents).

Workplace incivility

LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents both witness and experience negative behaviours at significantly higher rates than LGBTQ+ non-First Nations employees.

30.2% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents had witnessed workplace incivility targeting LGBTQ+ employees, and 12.0% had witnessed serious bullying behaviours. This is notably higher than non-LGBTQ+ First Nations participants (17.4%, 8.1%) or LGBTQ+ non-First Nations participants (22.5%, 6.7%).

24.5% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents have experienced discrimination in their workplace due to their diverse sexuality or gender (vs. 18.0% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations participants).

17.5% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents have been the target of workplace incivility behaviours targeting their diverse sexuality (vs. 8.3% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations participants), and 7.7% have been the target of serious bullying (vs. 2.3%).

29.8% of LGBTQ+ First Nations respondents have been the target of workplace incivility behaviours targeting their diverse gender (vs. 14.7% LGBTQ+ non-First Nations participants), and 8.5% have been the target of serious bullying (vs. 3.5%).

24.5% experienced discrimination

at work due to being LGBTQ+

17.5% / 29.8%

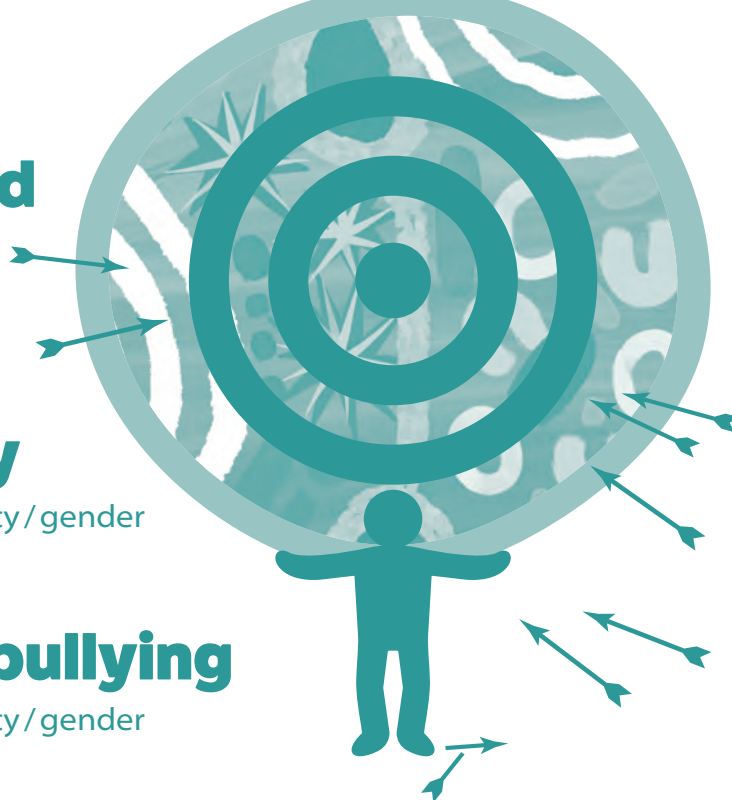
target of incivility

at work due to their diverse sexuality / gender

7.7% / 8.5%

target of serious bullying

at work due to their diverse sexuality / gender



'Outness' / 'Openness' about sexuality and gender diversity

First Nations LGBTQ+ respondents were more likely to be 'out' about their sexuality than non-First Nations LGBTQ+ employees. 40.0% of people of First Nations people of diverse sexuality were 'out' to everyone at work (vs. 38.4%), and 61.5% 'out' to all or most of their colleagues (vs. 59.5%).

However, they are less likely to be 'open' about their gender diversity; 29.4% of people of First Nations people of diverse gender were 'open' to everyone (vs. 33.1%), and 44.1% were 'open' to all or most of their colleagues (vs. 52.5%)

First Nations LGBTQ+ respondents were more likely to feel like their overall performance was positively impacted by being out (62.9% vs. 58.4%). However, less likely to feel like their performance was positively impacted by being open (40.0% vs. 59.9%).

First Nations employees who were not 'out' about their diverse sexuality were more likely to fear being the target of discrimination than non-First Nations respondents (34.1% vs. 23.9%), whereas those not 'open' about their diverse gender were less likely to fear being the target of discrimination than non-First Nations respondents (41.7% vs. 46.0%).

35.6% of First Nations LGBTQ+ employees spend time editing conversations or hiding who they are (vs. 30.5%).

'I am a trans feminine non-binary person. I am an indigenous person. I am a Queer person. Working in a place that recognises that has made a major life change for me personally, being mostly correctly gendered and seen as the person I am is really healing.'

4.5

What does this mean for our study?



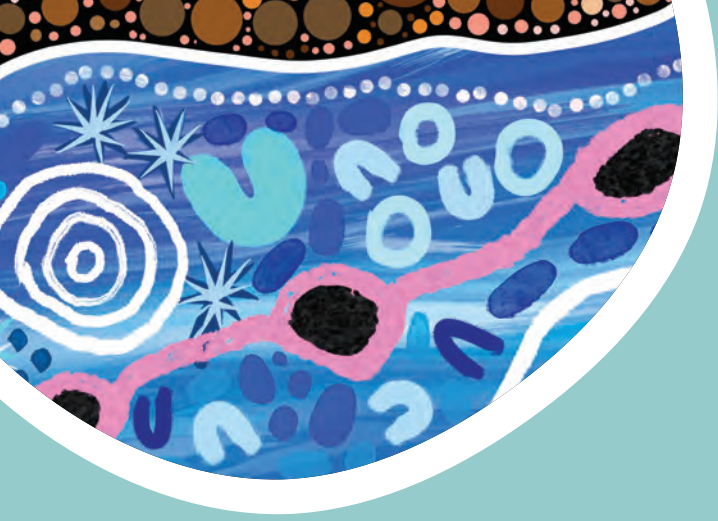
The literature review has identified gaps within the existing body of knowledge.

These knowledge gaps are —

- The experiences of Indigenous queer and trans people in non-metropolitan areas
- Underserved Indigenous trans community members in work and work-related research
- Distinctions in experiences based on gender and gender presentation
- Rainbow mob's lived experiences at work, and their desire (or otherwise) for diversity within Indigenous and LGBTQA+ streams.

We will seek to address these, along with areas of interest flagged by our Advisory Group, in the following survey and yarning circles.





5. **The Survey**

Alongside the Advisory Group for this project, we created a 22-item survey for distribution to First Nations LGBTQASB+ organisations, First Nations individuals, and workplaces who had previously participated in ACON Pride in Diversity's Australian Workplace Equality Index.

It was only open to First Nations LGBTIQASB+ respondents.

We received 84 responses from LGBTIQASB+ First Nations people.

5.1

Survey profile – who filled it out?

.....

This is only preliminary research and cannot make conclusive demographic findings about LGBTIQSB+ mob — but below we share a profile of those who took the time to share their workplace experiences.

5.1.1 Gender

This survey used an open text box to invite answers on gender identity (Q: 'What is your gender?'). Here's the self-described gender of participants:

- 29 are women,
- 30 are men,
- five are non-binary,
- two are transmasculine,³⁵
- one is transfeminine,³⁶
- two are agender,
- 18 participants declined to answer.

One person had a more specific name for their gender which we have chosen not to publish because it is highly identifiable.

5.1.2 Their place in the LGBTIQASB+ community

Here is where respondents stood within the LGBTIQASB+ community. Participants were encouraged to select all that applied to them.

5.1.2.1 Sexuality

- 25 are gay
- 12 are lesbians,
- 11 are bisexual,
- eight are pansexual,
- four are asexual.

35 Transmasculine is an umbrella term used by some trans people whose gender identity and expression are masculine.

36 Transfeminine is an umbrella term used by some trans people whose gender identity and expression are feminine.

5.1.2.2 Intersex status

One participant was intersex.

5.1.2.3 Membership of the trans, sistergirl and brotherboy community

- two are trans,
- one is a Brotherboy,
- one is a Sistergirl,
- eight are non-binary.

5.1.2.4 Other parts of our community

18 participants described themselves as queer.

While still being part of our community in other ways, nine participants were straight, and eight were cisgender.

Of those who elected to tell us more about who they were —

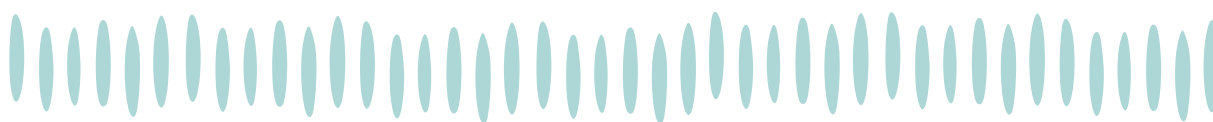
- one described themselves as gender non-conforming,
- one as femme,
- and one as Two Spirit.

5.1.3 States/territories

Most participants were in NSW (39.39%) or Queensland (24.24%). All other states and territories had fewer than seven participants. There were no respondents from Tasmania.

5.1.4 Metropolitan, rural and remote

Most respondents (65.15%) lived in a capital city. 18% lived in a regional city, 13% in a rural town and two lived remotely.



5.2

Their jobs

Most (80.33%) First Nations LGBTQASB+ people surveyed worked with other First Nations people in their jobs.

Most (84.21%) worked with other LGBTQA+ people in their jobs.

5.2.1 Industry

The key industries for LGBTQASB+ mob in this survey were (rounded to the nearest whole number):

- Public service (excluding education delivery) (30%)
- Education delivery and research (including higher education) (23%)
- Professional services (including consulting, HR and legal) (19%)
- Retail and hospitality (12%)
- Community organisations (7%)
- Construction (5%)

5.2.2 Work mode

Most mob in this survey worked in full time ongoing positions (66.67%), 12.7% in part time ongoing positions, 11% on fixed term full time contracts, and 4.76% on part time fixed term contracts. Just 4.76% worked casually.³⁷

5.2.3 Income

Most respondents were bringing home annual incomes above \$70 000 a year. Of those earning below \$70 000, most were earning above \$50 000.³⁸

37 Given the statistical profile of key industries for mob in the ABS Census, we know that this is not necessarily a representative sample, but it does accord with the AWEI data also collected about First Nations LGBTQ+ workers, which had a similar industry profile. For First Nations workers, we would ordinarily expect a higher proportion of workers in the community sector and in retail/hospitality — as well as a higher number of insecure workers. This may be attributable to the email lists we used to collate data, rather than offering the implication that First Nations LGBTQ+ people work in different industries.

38 We know that this is not a representative sample, given the high distribution of incomes and the significantly lower mean Indigenous household income in the ABS Census. This means many of the concerns respondents may cover in their insights are not necessarily insights of those in lower-paid, less-stable work mode industries — and may not represent those who have the most to lose from discrimination in the workplace

5.3

What happens at work?

5.3.1 Racism

The most common forms of **racism** that LGBTQASB+ mob experienced in their jobs, the responses indicated, were:

- Being stereotyped
- Being tokenised
- Hearing racist remarks from co-workers
- Seeing racist conduct from co-workers
- Hearing racist remarks from clients or customers
- Being patronised, spoken to slowly or talked down on
- Being made to feel unwelcome and
- Being subject to jokes on their race

When asked **what happened in response**, LGBTQA+ mob said:

- They had to self-initiate complaints by approaching those who had the racist conduct directly
- They had to challenge racist systems by submitting complaints — but those who had the complaints made against them were moved around or promoted in response
- They were afraid of complaining because of fears of reprisal
- They themselves were stood down
- They left that workplace and had to seek workers' compensation for their workplace injuries
- They left and sought another job
- They were told to 'get used to it' because it was normal in their industry
- They sought mediation and disciplinary action.

One respondent said — 'Nothing, I like being able to pay the bills.'

4% said they didn't experience any of the racially discriminatory behaviours we listed.



5.3.2 Discrimination against LGBTQASB+ people

The most common forms of **LGBTQASB+ discrimination** that mob experienced in their jobs were:

- Being stereotyped
- Being subject to jokes on their sexuality and gender
- Hearing discriminatory remarks from co-workers
- Hearing discriminatory remarks from customers and clients
- Being made to feel unwelcome
- Being excluded from social circles

When asked **what happened in response**, LGBTQA+ mob said:

- Nothing
- They had to self-initiate complaints by approaching those who had the LGBTQASB+ discrimination conduct directly
- They intervened in the moment as it was happening to put an end to it
- They were stood down
- They were frightened of repercussions, so did nothing
- They approached their manager, who is currently addressing the complaint
- They complained, but were 'isolated more...given tasks that don't match your skills.'
- They reported it, but no one faced any consequences
- They left their job
- They limited who they were 'out' to at work

One respondent said: 'I internalised a lot of it and didn't really celebrate who I was.'

7% said they didn't experience any of the LGBTQA+ discriminatory behaviours we listed.

5.3.3 Compounded discrimination and other forms

Mob also reported **disability discrimination, Audism** (discrimination against Deaf people), **ageism and sexism**.

Respondents were split equally on **whether discrimination happens because they are both Indigenous and LGBTQA+**, or whether it happens to them separately.

Those who thought it was a compounding or intersecting Indigenous and LGBTQ+ discrimination, offered the following examples.

5.3.3.1 Unique slurs

'Not only is he black, he's gay. Don't sit on the toilet seat after he's been, you may catch AIDS. Look at him talking to that customer, I bet he fancies him.'

5.3.3.2 Compounding discrimination in each community

'Depending on the situation, I have over heard that the only reason I got a job was Indigenous. And I have been discriminated against in the LGBTIQ+ community for being Indigenous as well.'

5.3.3.3 Being forced to 'pick' one or the other, or risk invalidation

'I felt for a long time pressure to occupy a solely First Nations identity void of my queerness because identity for some people is sadly synonymous with oppression. Hence, I felt I was being seen as someone playing 'more of' a victim than anything else/ trying to stand out and be different. I felt like if I wasn't caring about Blak rights first above any other group, then I wasn't being as loyal. I've overcome this but feel it's still very present.'

'Being told I must be "not a real Aborigine" due to my sexuality.'

5.3.3.4 Tokenisation or being exotified

'Unique tokenisation, org always wanting me to be on promo/diversity materials, etc.'

'A really clear (almost embarrassingly clear) example was me participating in a meeting that focused on equity (race and gender), where I was the only trans or Aboriginal person there, and not only did the chair of the Committee (an executive in the uni) tell me that I was 'a twofer', he made the exact same joke two months later. I told him it wasn't funny.'

5.3.3.5 Invisibility and lack of awareness

'I think I feel this less because I am not out in most circles. However, part of the reason I am not out is because there is not a lot of understanding and awareness of being Asexual and non-binary in First Nations communities. When I mention these topics to First Nations peers I am usually met with laughter, as if I am making a joke, or as if I am a joke.'

5.3.3.6 Gender constructs limiting expression

'Social constructs on black masculinity.'

5.3.4 What else happens at work?

We asked respondents about their broader treatment at work, not just when they felt discriminated against. The clearest experiences were they:

- Were paid fairly³⁹
- Were given suitable hours at work
- Were given leave when asked for
- Had their Indigenous identity respected
- Were able to wear the clothes or uniform that fit with their expression
- Could talk freely about their relationships and family
- Could be seen as a full person, not just their race, gender or sexuality
- Were tokenised

A slim majority of respondents said they:

- Were respected
- Were treated as if they could do their job properly
- Were valued
- Were taken seriously
- Were given leave for their family or partner
- Had their caring responsibilities respected
- Could talk about their gender⁴⁰
- Had their name and pronouns respected
- Had their knowledge and contribution to the job respected
- Could be supported in gender affirmation by their workplace
- Could expect their gender affirmation to be respected by colleagues
- Could have appropriate work accommodations for their gender affirmation
- Could be out about their sexuality or gender

Most participants were not:

- Offered mentoring or career progression
- Given cultural leave
- Able to anticipate being offered gender affirmation leave

Most did not:

- Feel like they could talk to someone at work about racial or LGBTQSB+ discrimination and have it be dealt with

39 We expect this is because of the relatively higher pay brackets covered in the survey.

40 We expect this is because of the relatively low response we received from trans, non-binary, agender and gender non-confirming people.

5.4

What now?

When asked if their current or previous workplace has done anything positive for LGBTQASB+ mob, or members from either group, participants responded that workplaces were:

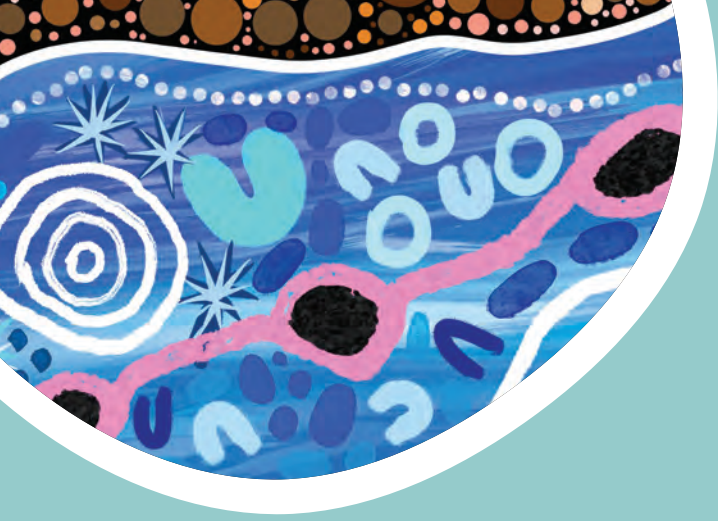
- Getting involved in Pride celebrations and NAIDOC celebrations
- Starting targeted First Nations LGBTQASB+ HR working groups
- Taking up Indigenous LGBTQASB+ advocacy internationally
- Setting up recognised special measures in job descriptions
- Ally networks and Rainbow Tick accreditation

However, participants warned, some of these measures:

- Just relied on LGBTQA+/Indigenous people to shoulder the burden of these initiatives, especially in starting them up
- Have ineffective enforcement mechanisms
- Are overtly focussed on public relations and the appearance of inclusivity, rather than the messy work of doing inclusivity
- Are not adequately inclusive of trans or asexual people

When asked what workplaces should do to show respect to LGBTQASB+ mob, participants suggested the following measures:

- Discrimination audits
- Recognition of Indigenous LGBTQASB+ employees, without tokenisation
- Incentives for recruitment, promotion and retention of Indigenous LGBTQASB+ mob
- Education and training around LGBTQASB+ and Indigenous issues, and how they intersect
- Events, networking, celebrations and awareness-raising activities
- Formal listening, truth-telling and complaints mechanisms in the workplace for Indigenous LGBTQASB+ people, and their broader communities
- Mob-led education in our own communities and Indigenous initiatives in workplaces about Indigenous LGBTQASB+ people
- Specialised Indigenous trans and gender diverse training (including on the use of pronouns), & specialised training on asexuality — across the workforce but especially at managerial level
- Transparency about support structures — including transparency on access to gender affirmation, cultural and personal leave, complaints mechanisms, rights to gender presentation, and family and parenting policies, and finally
- Ensuring policies are available for Indigenous people and LGBTQA+ people



6. Yarning Circles

We held two yarning circles. One was held on 23 November 2021 in person over a shared meal at the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence, Redfern. The other was held on 31 May 2022 online for LGBTQA+ mob across NSW, using the same recruitment base.

Both were held in conjunction with facilitators from BlaQ. We thank Jinny-Jane Smith for her expert facilitation and organising.

The yarn facilitator asked a few key questions, with participants answering in the order of their position in the yarning circle. She asked about —

- experiences at work, positive and negative;
- what an ideal and safe workforce would look like for LGBTQA+ mob, sistergirls and brotherboys; and
- what we need to do to get there

We checked our notes both times with mob who were present, and invited feedback on their accuracy. We ask that any direct insights from yarning circle participants be referenced as 'LGBTQASB+ First Nations yarning circle participant, quoted in ____,' rather than crediting this report's institutional authors.

6.1

Who was there?

We were joined by esteemed Elders who have carried our First Nations LGBTQA+, sistergirl and brotherboy community through to where we are today. It is because of their work that our gathering was even possible.

Those who joined us at the yarns represented a strong cross-section of our community. Mob from First Nations across the continent were present, including mob who had recently arrived in Sydney as well as those who have spent their whole lives as part of the Sydney Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

While those present were not expected to speak on behalf of everyone who shares their identity and were able to speak to their own personal experiences, we heard from fifteen mob who are —

- Sistergirls
- Non-binary mob
- Lesbians
- Bisexuals
- Mob who identify as queer⁴¹
- Gay men

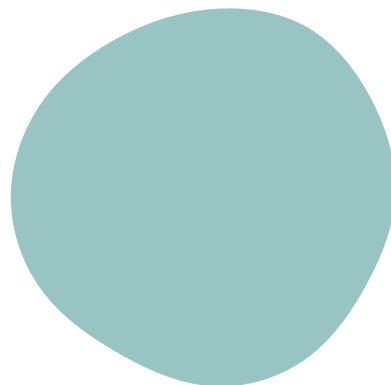
Many belonged to more than one of these groups.

⁴¹ We note that for some members of our community, 'queer' is a sensitive word. We respect this sensitivity and the right of mob to reclaim that word if it fits for them.

As one participant observed, the yarn was carried mostly by women and non-binary people. It is, as they said, the 'matriarchs' and the they-triarchs that have done much of this work for our community.

Mob who were present had long and varied work histories, and represented a diverse workforce. We spoke with mob who had worked in —

- Trades and apprenticeships
- Retail
- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations
- Sex work
- Universities
- Schools and youth-focussed education organisations
- Government agencies
- Not-for-profits
- Logistics



6.2

What was discussed?

6.2.1 Discrimination and other experiences at work

Mob volunteered some stories of interpersonal and structural discrimination that they had faced in their workplaces because they belonged to our community.

6.2.1.1 Interpersonal discrimination:

Interpersonal discrimination, where discrimination takes place in interactions between people, was a common experience among those we yarned with. These experiences varied across industry and identity, but generally shared a theme of mistrust, disrespect and harassment. This interpersonal discrimination was both racist and queerphobic.

Some mob were accused of inappropriate sexual or romantic relationships in the office, where cisgender and heterosexual co-workers were not put under the same scrutiny. For some under scrutiny, their relationships were appropriate and fit in workplace policy. Others accused were of inappropriate relationships that simply did not exist. At the same time, some rainbow mob experienced sexual harassment that either fetishised them or sought to 'convert' them.

Many mob we spoke to reported feeling hypervisible at work, on the basis of race, gender, gender presentation, and sexuality. For some, this happened through being pointed at and spoken about at work. Other experiences of hypervisibility included being under disproportionate surveillance at work from supervisors and other staff, and being monitored by customers and clients.

Participants told us that they were accused of getting their job or particular benefits because of their Indigenous or LGBTQASB+ identity. They were also not defended or supported when they faced aggression or harassment from customers or clients.

Non-binary mob, trans mob and sistergirls were accused of being 'deceptive' for not disclosing being transgender, or for beginning a process of social and medical gender affirmation at work. They also routinely experienced being misgendered by customers, clients and colleagues.

6.2.1.2 Explicitly at the intersection of being First Nations and LGBTQA+:

There are unique experiences at the intersection of being Indigenous and being LGBTQASB+. A few of these diverse experiences were shared with us in these yarning circles.

Some experienced a generalised pattern of discrimination specifically against rainbow mob:

- They were tokenised, reduced to their identity rather than being considered as a full person – with even allied workplaces patronising or tokenising LGBTQASB+ Indigenous people. This was harder for those mob to address because of its subtlety.
- Being looked over for jobs on the basis of being trans and/or Indigenous ('not being right for the role'; receiving no feedback but consistent rejections for work)
- Customers, clients and other staff acting in 'standoffish' ways, or subtly marginalising LGBTQASB+ mob based on perceived and actual social differences in race, gender & sexuality
- Being sexually harassed by older, white straight-identified members of the workplace
- Being in Aboriginal spaces and hearing homophobic and transphobic remarks, or related comments on sexual or romantic activities or behaviours
- Working in spaces dominated by white cisgender heterosexual men

Some experienced isolated but powerful incidents of discrimination unique to rainbow mob:

- An Aboriginal lesbian was denied financial support from a workplace's mutual aid fund to escape an abusive relationship. Her workplace and co-workers did not see the abuse as posing a threat to her wellbeing as both an Aboriginal woman and a lesbian.
- A worker was told that the rainbow and trans flags could not be displayed at work, only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- A participant said that male relatives were told to notify them of a job offer, but no offer was made directly to them

6.2.1.3 Structural discrimination:

Mob present reported the following kinds of structural discrimination, which is discrimination that is part of policy, procedure and practice in a workplace, and within workplace culture.

They were often the only First Nations person in the room (even in LGBTQA+ organisations). They were then required to self-advocate, advocate for community, and educate non-Indigenous people. Participants told us they sometimes had to adopt or adapt to particular mannerisms or ways of holding themselves in order to be accepted at work. This included:

- Performing gender in a particular way, including modifying their appearance to fit a mandated gender expression or suppressing their gender identity
- Performing Aboriginality in a particular way (or being expected to not act Aboriginal)
- Suppressing other mannerisms or ways of being that would reveal they were part of the LGBTQ+ community

As visibility of rainbow mob grows, there also appeared to be an expectation in the workplace that First Nations LGBTQASB+ people will be from the middle class and from city areas. That set a particular expectation that was difficult for many rainbow mob to break.

Workplace supports were often not accessible to rainbow mob. Their cultural needs were not met through existing leave structures, so they had to self-advocate to have leave eligibility (for parental, compassionate and personal leave) extended to family and kin networks. Mob did not have access to leave or other workplace supports for gender affirmation care. Workplace disputes were also difficult to articulate as discrimination because they were unclearly designated as being related to being queer, trans or Indigenous.

Many mob were unable to bring their partners to work or work events, mention them, or be around them in the workplace. They felt that they had to stay in the closet or stealth to prioritise their safety and employment. They described a sense that they were made to be complicit in homophobia, transphobia and racism against customers, clients and communities.

6.2.2 Impact of discrimination

The impact of this discrimination is significant. Some mob present described it as having a whole other job to mitigate the pressures of homophobia, transphobia, colonialism and racism. It is debilitating, degrading, dehumanising.

Some mob navigated this by not identifying themselves as queer or trans or First Nations at work. One participant pointed out to us that this was only available to those who can 'pass' as cisgender, heterosexual or non-Indigenous. Visibility is not always a choice.

As one Aunty and sistergirl said:

'I'm visible...I have never hid to be palatable to an employer.'

Others have had to repeatedly identify themselves in the workplace, either because their identity was being ignored (especially for trans and non-binary mob) or because coming out to new people at work is part of the process of identifying themselves. Others preferred to not disclose their gender or sexuality, because they never felt it necessary to discuss personal identity or relationships with their colleagues or others in their workplace.





6.2.3 Resilience and responses

We also, however, heard of stories of resilience in the face of discrimination, including where LGBTQ+ mob, especially Sistergirls and trans women, have made workplaces safe, secure and fair places for other LGBTQASB+ people.

These are examples of how, in focussing on the marginalisation of our community, we can secure better working conditions for all people in the workplace. Importantly, this was only possible because of the deliberate and innovative work of LGBTQASB+ mob to make their workplaces safer. The impact of this was not only felt by fellow workers and community, but also by clients and customers and their own communities.

There was a general theme in the discussion that some behaviour from other First Nations people who are cisgender and heterosexual could be brought into a gentle accountability in the right kinds of workplaces with proper relationality – correcting behaviour through education, relationships and discussion. This, the group observed, is usually only possible with other First Nations people because of those relations, shared protocols, and safety.

6.2.4 Making change

We heard also about other strengths that LGBTQASB+ mob should be able to draw from in the workplace to make them fairer, safer places.

They said that mob should be able to expect the following things from their jobs —

- A workplace culture of connection and human-centred practice, taking everyone as they come rather than as reductions of their identity
- First Nations people and people of colour in positions of power
- Obvious symbols in the workplace of pride, both in mob and in the LGBTQSB+ community (e.g. flags)
- Being supported in engaging clients and customers to change attitudes, microaggressions and practices, to the extent that it becomes a naturalised assumption rather than a deliberate intervention
- Feeling safe and supported with needs and life events relevant to their work, leave or workplace accommodations. This includes their responsibilities in wider kin networks, any process of gender affirmation, and relevant parts of their personal relationships.
- Reliable supervisors and colleagues who could be approached for advice and spoken to safely if they made mistakes relating to race, gender and sexuality
- Being given some space to safely make mistakes and grow without being disproportionately scrutinised
- Not being pressured to validate gender or sexuality

When asked what we needed to get to a place where LGBTQSB+ mob could rely on these things for fairer, safer workplaces, mob present had many models of change. They urged a growing and living model of change based on relationships, rather than just policies and structures.

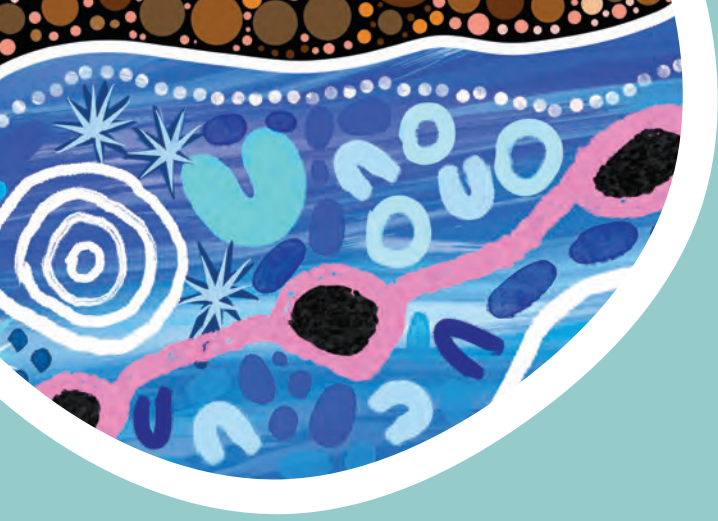
Workplaces should –

- Develop internal resources for cultural change and conversation starters
- Work in partnership with First Nations organisations already doing this work
- Work to make cisgenderedness, whiteness and heterosexuality visible instead of working to make LGBTQSB+ mob, sistergirls and brotherboys hypervisible
- A buddy system linking up LGBTQSB+ people at work
- Building autonomous First Nations and LGBTQSB+ spaces in large workplaces, and networks in smaller workplaces
- Greater awareness of and policies to explicitly protect First Nations LGBTQSB+ people in abusive relationships or in circumstances of family violence. This must include material support and explicit inclusion in family violence leave policies.

They also suggested that the larger community, not just employers, had a role to play in making safer workplaces for LGBTQSB+ mob. These should be driven by small circles of change, rather than major organisations or institutional silos.

That included:

- Education, from early ages, on LGBTQSB+ mob identities, worlds and experiences
 - Cultural awareness and capability, which informs LGBTQSB+ competence education
 - Including LGBTQSB+ mob in general cultural awareness training
- An LGBTQSB+ mob job network, to help counter discrimination in the hiring process and support trans mob especially seeking work
- Speaking groups to give educational talks at institutions, workplaces and community events — with a focus on peer to peer education
- Resource lists for community and workplaces, including organisational referrals
- Databases accessible to LGBTQSB+ mob where they can review former and current workplaces and learn more about others' experiences at potential workplaces
- Funding streams for First Nations organisations to address queer and trans competence



7. Conclusions

There are a few larger insights to draw from this data, but it is also critical to highlight that there should be further research in this space. That research must continue to be led by rainbow mob.

We note that our survey and our yarning circles were not representative of a full cross-section of the community (with a dominant response from east coast mob with relatively secure jobs, of whom few worked in the community sector). Further research is needed to ensure more representative insight.

Our key observations are that:

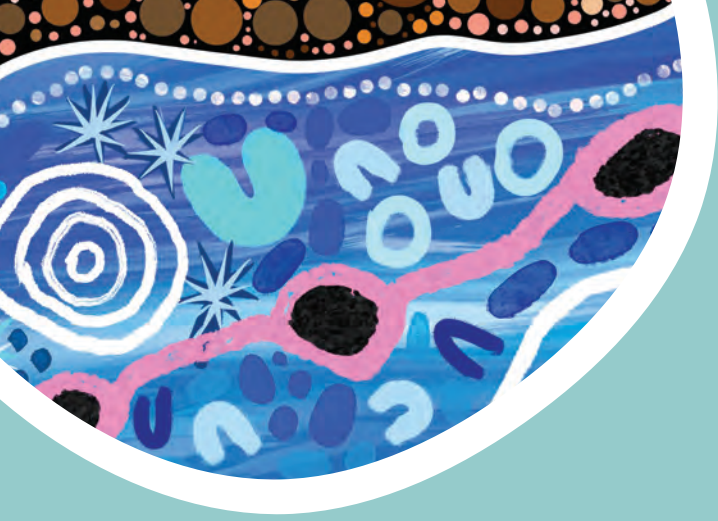
- LGBTQASB+ mob are experiencing discrimination in their workplaces. The discrimination is dual, but mob surveyed and mob we spoke to disagreed on whether it was happening because they were both LGBTQASB+ and mob or that they were experiencing separate racism and queer/transphobia. Some of this discrimination was directly experienced by workers, but workers also observed discrimination against others and more structural discrimination.
- This discrimination is impacting rainbow mob significantly in their workplaces. How that impact is felt varies by type and magnitude. Some mob feel hypervisible and tokenised, others feel invisible and devalued. Others feel unsafe, withdraw from work, and disguise who they are. The consequences of this could be that LGBTQASB+ mob find themselves in a precarious position in their workplaces, which has a direct impact on the quality of their life including their access to income and other supports that jobs may offer.
- Discrimination against LGBTQASB+ mob is not being adequately addressed by their workplaces, and in some cases those workplaces actively contributed to the experience of racism and queer/transphobia. Despite this, mob are resilient and carving out their own resistance. There is strength in our communities that we bring to all our work, and the strengths of living at this intersection are no exception.
- LGBTQASB+ mob hold powerful insight on what needs to change. They should lead workplace change, but be supported by the entirety of a workplace and its culture. Part of this work includes workplaces understanding the complexity, needs and aspirations of First Nations LGBTQASB+ people, rather than reducing them to statistics, metrics or outputs.

We are all responsible for ensuring that workplaces and the world at large are safe for LGBTQSB+ mob, especially as our visibility increases. This is an ongoing task with no easy resolution, namely because LGBTQASB+ mob are not problems to be solved, but a community to have a living and accountable relationship with – including in the workplace. The following recommendations provide a way to get started.

This is worth doing for the sake of safety and justice for rainbow mob. But it is also worth doing because safe and just workplaces make space for LGBTQASB+ mob to shine, excel and build.

As rainbow mob rise, everyone rises with them.





8.

Recommendations



We issue these recommendations seriously and expect that those reading this report will take relevant action on them. To hold institutions and groups accountable to this change, we first recommend:

1. An annual process led by rainbow mob that monitors progress, with these recommendations as benchmarks.

8.1

To employers

Recommendations from yarning circles and the survey

2. Conduct discrimination audits in the workplace
3. Build formal complaint and truth-telling pathways specifically for Indigenous LGBTQA+ mob
4. Establish buddy system linking up LGBTQASB+ First Nations people at work
5. Build autonomous First Nations and LGBTQASB+ spaces in large workplaces, and networks in smaller workplaces. These spaces may hold events, do awareness-raising, facilitate networking and be sites of celebration.
6. Cultivate greater awareness of and policies to explicitly protect First Nations LGBTQASB+ people in abusive relationships, experiencing sexual harassment, or in circumstances of family violence. This must include material support and explicit inclusion in family violence leave policies.
7. Distribute workplace education resources for cultural change
8. Put LGBTQASB+ Indigenous people in leadership positions and incentivise LGBTQASB+ mob recruitment

Our recommendations

9. Platform LGBTQASB+ First Nations people in your workplace, not just during Pride events or NAIDOC
10. Offer cultural leave and be flexible about the range of activities it covers
11. Offer significant gender affirmation leave
12. Offer family and parenting leave and be explicit that it covers LGBTQASB+ relationships and extended Indigenous kin networks
13. Ensure domestic and family violence leave policies are being applied to everyone and all relationships (including LGBTQASB+ relationships and Indigenous community/kin networks)



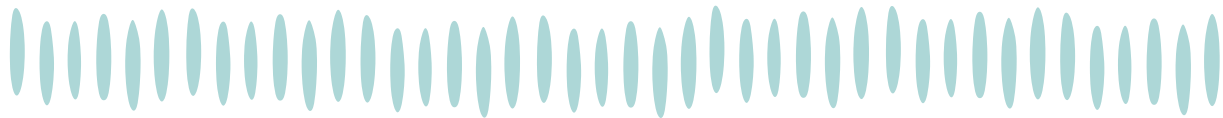
8.2

To governments

Recommendations from yarning circles and the survey

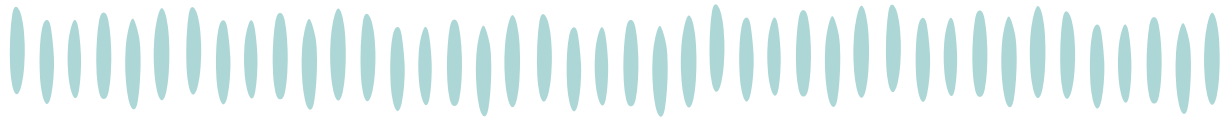
14. Greater awareness of and policies to explicitly protect First Nations LGBTIQSB+ people in abusive relationships or in circumstances of family violence. This must include material support and explicit inclusion in family violence leave policies.

Our recommendations

15. Commission further research and systematic data collection on First Nations LGBTQASB+ experiences of the workplace
 16. Conduct an audit of anti-discrimination measures and their appropriateness for LGBTQASB+ First Nations people
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8.3

To unions

17. Where applicable, action these recommendations by placing these demands in bargaining logs and subsequently employment law
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8.4

To training organisations and education institutions

Recommendations from yarning circles

18. Training on privilege, especially on recognising and mitigating white privilege, as well as cultural awareness and LGBTQASB+ awareness training
19. Education, from early ages, on LGBTQSB+ mob identities, worlds and experiences
 - Cultural awareness and capability, which informs LGBTQASB+ competence education
 - including LGBTQASB+ mob in general cultural awareness training

Our recommendations

20. Develop and deliver training on basic understanding of our community of LGBTQA+ mob, sistergirls and brotherboys and other trans people who do not identify with these terms, and what they can experience in the workplace. This should be done by or in close collaboration with these communities.
21. Develop and deliver training on cultural competency, including training on racism, queerphobia and transphobia. This should also be done by or closely working with impacted communities



8.5

To community and community organisations, and to specialist employment networks

Recommendations from yarning circles

Develop:

22. An LGBTQASB+ mob job network, to help counter discrimination in the hiring process and support trans mob especially seeking work
23. Speaking groups to give educational talks at institutions, workplaces and community events — with a focus on peer to peer education
24. Resource lists for community and workplaces, including organisational referrals
25. Databases accessible to LGBTQASB+ mob where they can review former and current workplaces and learn more about others' experiences at potential workplaces
26. Funding streams for First Nations organisations to address queer and trans cultural and social competence

In future norms-changing work:

27. Focus on small circles of change, rather than on major organisations or institutional silos
28. Work to make cisgenderedness, whiteness and heterosexuality visible, instead of working to make LGBTQASB+ mob hypervisible

Our recommendations

29. Commission further research on LGBTQASB+ mob and work
30. Campaign for better quality provision of greater clarity around the application of cultural, family, domestic and family violence and gender affirmation leave to LGBTQASB+ mob
31. Open up physical spaces within community-controlled organisations and services for LGBTQASB+ mob to gather and organise safely on their own terms.

In all of these recommendations, the yarning circles recommended working in partnership with mob-led organisations that are already doing this work



PRIDE INCLUSION PROGRAMS

ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs is a social initiative of ACON. The four programs — Pride in Diversity, Pride in Sport, Pride in Health + Wellbeing, and Pride Training — help to make the places where LGBTQ+ community members live, work and play more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. This is achieved by working with a range of organisations to help ensure that LGBTQ+ people feel welcome and supported. To find out more visit: **www.prideinclusionprograms.com.au**