

POSITION STATEMENT EQUITY FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

DEFINITION

The term LGBTQ+ is commonly used to describe diversity attributes related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The term is a function of the abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning, with the plus symbol used to signify inclusivity of other gender and sexually diverse groups.

CONTEXT

Equality is a fundamental human right for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals call on governments and organisations to work in partnership to reduce inequalities for marginalised people, including the LGBTQ+ community.

The most pronounced inequalities for LGBTQ+ people come in the form of higher levels of mental illness due to the emotional toll of self-discovery, bullying and harassment in the workplace and social exclusion - with these adverse mental health impacts translating to higher levels of suicide.

There is also a potential for LGBTQ+ people to have lower earnings and less financial security than the broader community due to higher rates of homelessness, higher levels of absenteeism and fewer career progression opportunities - with only a handful of CEOs across the Australian retail sector having self-identified as LGBTQ+.

As Australia's largest private sector employer, it is essential that the retail sector plays a leading role in highlighting and addressing these inequities that exist for their LGBTQ+ employees in their work and personal lives.

According to Pride in Diversity's Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey, the number of people who self-identify as LGBTQ+ has increased in recent years, with a high concentration of LGBTQ+ people in the workforce aged between 18-24 years of age. ARA members confirm these trends in their own businesses.

The size of the broader LGBTQ+ community in Australia is not known because of a failure to accurately capture relevant information in the Australian Census. However, the Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that "up to 11% of the Australian population may have a diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity."

POSITION

The Australian Retailers Association (ARA) is committed to working with its members to address these inequities, so that LGBTQ+ people working in the retail sector can live according to their authentic gender identity and sexual orientation in all aspects of their lives.

ROLES

The ARA's role is to outline the steps that we believe the sector needs to take to reduce inequalities for LGBTQ+ people. The ARA will also use its reach and influence to:

- Showcase how leading retail employers are creating safer and more inclusive workplaces for LGBTQ+ people;
- Ensure that retail executives who identify as LGBTQ+ are profiled as visible role models for the community; and
- Facilitate collaboration and information-sharing between members to drive collective impact across the sector.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To meet these commitments, we need to recognise:

1. That there is not one homogenous LGBTQ+ community;
2. That each LGBTQ+ person has a unique experience;
3. That by focusing on LGBTQ+ inclusion, we will not disenfranchise any other group in the process; and
4. That different members may require different solutions because they have different challenges and experiences.

ACTIONS

To reduce inequalities for LGBTQ+ people, the ARA believes that Australian retailers will need to focus on creating visibly safe, diverse and inclusive workplaces for their employees, by:

1. Securing executive level sponsorship to embed LGBTQ+ Inclusion into corporate culture, strategy and structures.
2. Building capability of leaders to secure active support for LGBTQ+ Inclusion and ensure positive role modelling.
3. Ensuring that policies that reference gender and/or sexuality are explicitly inclusive of LGBTQ+ employees.
4. Ensuring that the use of pronouns is well understood and accepted across the business, enabled by systems that allow for the voluntary use of pronouns by employees.
5. Capturing data about the number of LGBTQ+ employees.
6. Investing in education and employee assistance programs for LGBTQ+ people and their support networks, preferably with unique service offerings for mental health.
7. Establishing pathways for employees to become allies.
8. Establishing networks for LGBTQ+ people and allies to connect with like-minded people and/or raise concerns about the treatment of LGBTQ+ employees.
9. Embedding and activating LGBTQ+ days of significance and events into broader engagement calendars.
10. Engaging customers through products, brands and campaigns about LGBTQ+ Inclusion; and using more inclusive representations of Australia's diverse community in advertising, signage and visual displays.