

An Evaluation of ACON's Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Programs for LGBTQ+ Communities

Interactive Report

Authored by Associate Professor Lata Satyen and Joshua Batty.
School of Psychology, Deakin University.

Health promotion programs for LGBTQ+ people affected by sexual, domestic and family violence in New South Wales.

In sexuality and gender diverse communities, gender-based violence often manifests via heterosexism, homophobia, heteronormativity, cisgenderism, biphobia, transphobia, and transmisogyny, which affects this community fundamentally by continuing external paradigms of prejudice, and internally, via internalised stigma (Parker & Loney-Howes, 2023). The historic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the public sphere and by services that are assigned with offering support, leads to sexuality and gender diverse victim-survivors unwilling to report their experiences and seek support (Gillum & DiFulvo, 2012).

In Australia, the largest support service tailored to intimate partner, sexual, domestic and/or family violence in the LGBTQ+ community is ACON. This interactive report shares insights from an evaluation of ACON's sexual, domestic, and family violence programs for LGBTQ+ people.

Key Findings

- All Program users that were surveyed understood the nature of healthy relationships after participating in the programs.
- Programs provide safe spaces with relevant trauma-informed support for victim-survivors to aid their healing journey.
- Programs support the needs of the LGBTQ+ community, which there are few services elsewhere catering to their needs.
- ACON staff up skill organisations in the sector with training and advocacy for improvement of their services.
- ACON staff's deep understanding of the LGBTQ+ community transforms sector-wide responses to support LGBTQ+ people

[Satisfaction with support programs](#)

[Interview/Focus group findings](#)

[Recommendations](#)

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all our lands and waterways. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging as well as the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which we learn, live, and carry out our work. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' calls for self-determination, and a 'Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling' through the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We acknowledge the important contributions of people with a lived experience in all aspects of research, practice, advocacy and policy. We recognise their contribution to further the understanding of our work and that we would not have a thorough understanding of the application of our research to the community.

Satisfaction with ACON's sexual, domestic and family violence support programs

Findings from the pre-existing data (2023-2025) provides insight into the experiences of LGBTQ+ people who have engaged with these services.

Key findings

- Respondents reported increased knowledge around consent and how to navigate it; about relationship abuse; skills in communicating with current or former partners about unsafe behaviours; and setting boundaries in their intimate relationships.
- Respondents in the Zoe Belle Gender Collective reported understanding trans women and trans femme peoples' challenges, the drivers of violence, how to create a safe environment, and having the skills to prevent violence.
- The respondents in the Say It Out Loud Blog project reported that the program made them feel empowered to find more ways to share their story to help others.

- **Healthy Relationships: Pre-existing data:** Upon program completion, most respondents reported being confident in their understanding of healthy relationships, consent, boundary setting, having difficult conversations, and accessing support.
- **Healthy Relationships: Current data:** All respondents agreed that the program was safe, respectful, and provided sense of community and connection. They also agreed the staff were well equipped to deliver the sessions and this increased their skills and knowledge about healthy relationships.

- **Survivor Group: Pre-existing data:** Upon program completion most respondents reported decreased psychological distress levels. They also reported positive self-identity, comfort showing affection publicly, and belongingness with the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Survivor Group: Current data:** Most respondents agreed the program changed their life for the better, they feel less alone, have better coping skills, and improved level of hope and outlook for their future.

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Key Themes from Interviews/Focus Groups with Victim-Survivors, Practitioners and Program Developers, and Stakeholders



Interview/Focus Group findings

Interviews and focus groups data with ACON program users, staff, and stakeholders highlight the efficacy of the ACON suite of health promotion programs. We make recommendations to further strengthen their support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Victim-Survivors

- . The program saved their lives.
- . The space was conducive for learning, sharing stories, and being validated by others with similar experiences.
- . Through program participation, survivors felt more empathy for themselves, enabling their recovery and healing journey.
- . Improved sense of connection to community and self.

Practitioners and Program Developers

- . ACON has a trusted connection with the LGBTQ+ community through their survivor-centred services.
- . They deliver programs to LGBTQ+ people in a trauma-informed way.
- . To sustain program delivery, consistent longer-term funding is required.

Stakeholders

- . Stakeholders recognised ACON as a leader at the state and national level in advocating and championing the causes of the LGBTQ+ community.
- . The unanimous perspective was that ACON's staff deeply understand the LGBTQ+ community, and their expertise is essential in training and upskilling the sector.
- . Collaborating with ACON has benefited their stakeholders' engagement with the LGBTQ+ community.

Recommendations

These 11 recommendations highlight key strategies for further strengthening ACON's trauma-informed, holistic support health promotion programs for the LGBTQ+ community.

1. **Continue delivering SDFV support programs for the LGBTQ+ community.**
2. **Continue collaborations between ACON and other organisations in the sector.**
3. **Consistent, long-term funding required to support ACON to educate the sector, provide support programs, and serve diverse LGBTQ+ communities.**
4. **Extend services into regional areas.**
5. **Increased legal support for the sector.**
6. **Increase the length of the Healthy Relationships program to provide longer term support for program users.**
7. **Increase intake availability of the Survivor Group program to ensure more victim-survivors can be supported.**
8. **Provide resources in other languages.**
9. **Increase support for long-term healing and recovery of the LGBTQ+ community affected by SDFV.**
10. **Publicise the support programs widely to improve information dissemination to the LGBTQ+ community.**
11. **Conduct ongoing evaluations of the ACON SDFV support programs to determine efficacy and enhancement of user experience after any changes to the programs.**

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