

Marriage equality plebiscite

This statement reflects the view of the federation of Relationships Australia organisations, and our collective position on marriage equality.

Relationships Australia is committed to social justice and inclusion, and respects the rights of all people – regardless of sexual orientation, religious belief, age, gender, ability, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances to live with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships in all their diversity.

We also believe that healthy, safe and respectful relationships are essential for the wellbeing of children, young people, adults, families and communities.

These beliefs and commitments underpin our work.

Our position on same-sex marriage

Relationships Australia firmly believes in the right of all people to observe their relationships fully and without discrimination. On this basis we support marriage equality - the right of all Australians to access marriage, as a civil institution, with their partner of choice, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation.

Relationships Australia:

- believes that every Australian should have the same rights under law, including the same right to make the choice to marry;
- supports the removal of legislative discrimination of people on the basis of their sex, sexuality or gender identity;
- recognises that freedom of sexuality and choice of partner are fundamental human rights;
- recognises that marriage equality is important to the physical and mental wellbeing of same-sex attracted people, their children, friends and extended families; and
- supports policy and action that promotes the acceptance and the celebration of healthy, safe and respectful relationships in all their diversity.

This statement is based on the experience and skills of Relationships Australia in delivering relationship support services to Australians for more than 70 years.

The impact of the plebiscite on vulnerable Australians

Relationships Australia believes that the most appropriate way to make a decision on the issue of marriage equality is for Parliament to decide. We believe a majority of Australians support marriage equality with a similar majority among Parliamentarians. We do not support a plebiscite.

We are concerned that the ongoing community discussion and communication from the 'Yes' and 'No' committees funded by Government may lead to the voicing of inflammatory opinion that will cause additional distress for, and increase the vulnerability of, people who are directly targeted or affected.

Such public debate is likely to have significant mental health implications for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer Australians, and their children and extended families. With the high incidence of mental health issues and suicide among this vulnerable group, the public discourse is likely to place them at particular risk of harm. We believe a plebiscite will further increase the need for social support to assist people who are negatively affected.

This could be avoided by a timely and straightforward vote in Parliament.

Should the Government decide to proceed with the plebiscite, we support open and respectful dialogue in the period leading up to and following the vote. Relationships Australia wishes to encourage all Australians, whatever their opinion, to act with civility, respect and kindness.

We encourage the Australian community to value difference and diversity, to challenge their thinking, and not to give in to the fear of the unknown, or be negatively influenced by inflammatory, divisive or untruthful commentary.

We believe that building and maintaining relationships with people who are different to us or have different opinions is possible if we are civil and value respectful relationships. This is particularly important to remember when dealing with someone whose views may offend, or are discriminatory or stigmatising.

If you are feeling distressed or are concerned about your relationships with family and friends, please contact one of the services below:

- Counselling and support services are available from Relationships Australia www.relationships.org.au or call 1300 364 277
- Family Relationships Advice Line www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRAL or call 1800 050 321
- A 24 hour, free crisis telephone counselling service is available from Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au or call 13 11 14
- A counselling service and resources for men in family crisis are provided by Mensline www.mensline.org.au or call 1300 78 99 78
- If you feel anxious or depressed, information and resources are available from beyondblue www.beyondblue.org.au or call 1300 224 636
- If you are a young person, or the parent or carer of a young person with mental health problems, support is available from headspace www.headspace.org.au or call 1800 650 890
- If you, or someone you know, is experiencing family violence, support is available at 1800Respect www.1800respect.org.au or call 1800 737 732