



LGBTIQ+ conversion practices: a Tasmanian response

The problem

What are conversion practices?

- Conversion practices are any sustained attempt to suppress or change an individual's sexual orientation if they are same-sex attracted, or their gender identity if they are transgender or gender diverse.
- The ideology behind these practices is a set of false and misleading claims, often drawing on a mix of discredited psychology, out-dated sociology and some religious doctrine, about the possibility that change is possible and desirable.
- Aversion therapy based on behaviourism – for example, electric shock treatment – is no longer practiced. Conversion practices are more likely to take the form of pseudo-counselling, formal courses, prayer or exorcism.
- Most conversion practices occur in informal, religious settings with some in formal health settings.

What harm do conversion practices inflict?

- LGBTIQ+ people continue to experience harm through conversion practices and the ideology behind these practices.
- This harm arises from absorbing the ideology that they are broken and should be fixed, as well as the failure of attempts to change them which lead in turn to blame, self-recrimination and despair.

- According to the most recent research (La Trobe University's 2021 "Writing Themselves In" national LGBTIQ+ youth survey), 5% of young LGBTIQ+ Australians have been through formal conversion practices.
- These young people are up to four times more likely to have PTSD and to have attempted suicide (see accompanying document).
- The same figures apply to the Tasmanian cohort of the "Writing Themselves In" study.
- They are also consistent with the results of the Tasmanian Government's own LGBTIQ+ community survey conducted in 2021.
- More information about the harms inflicted by conversion practices can be found in the attached study, "Healing Spiritual Harms" by La Trobe University

The solution

Legislation

- The solution to the problem must include legislation that prohibits conversion practices with an appropriate mix of civil and criminal penalties.
- This legislation must not just cover formal health settings, but also informal religious settings where most conversion practices take place.
- It should also include the power to investigate allegations of conversion practices, a redress scheme and a statement affirming LGBTIQ+ people.
- The Victorian model has all these things and has been hailed as the best in the world.
- The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute is currently considering what legislation is best for Tasmania.

Education

- Education of faith communities about the damage inflicted by conversion practices and the need for legislation must also be part

of an effective solution to the problem. Again, Victoria is the leader in this field.

Responding to the critics

There are a number of objections to legislation prohibiting conversion practices.

It doesn't happen any more

Aversion practices like electric shock treatment don't occur any more. But conversion practices continue to be inflicted, as shown by recent local and national research.

It's participants' own choice

Conversion practices are based on false and misleading claims about the nature of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is not possible to make an informed choice based on these claims.

It violates religious freedom

Legislation against conversion practices does not prevent a religious leader making general theological or doctrinal claims regarding sexual orientation or gender identity. It prohibits attempts to target an individual in a sustained way to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Parents and pastors will be gaoled

In Victoria's legislation criminal penalties only apply to conversion practices if they cause serious injury and are grounded in intent, violate a duty of care, involve advertising, or involve taking a person from the state for the purposes of conversion practices. Civil penalties apply to systemic or persistent practices without injury.

It stops professionals treating trans youth

Victoria's legislation allows an exemption for health professionals if they act according to the existing code of ethics regarding trans patients.