



## **Conversion practices in Tasmania: your questions answered**

Contact us at [hello@equalitytasmania.org.au](mailto:hello@equalitytasmania.org.au) for more information

### **What are conversion practices?**

- Conversion practices are any attempt to change, suppress or eradicate 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 based on discredited psychology, about the possibility that change is possible and desirable.

### **Do conversion practices still happen?**

- Yes. 5% of young LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians have been through formal conversion practices in the last few years.<sup>1</sup>
- 97% of LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians have been told that their sexuality or gender identity is the result of trauma or pathology and should be changed, fixed, or healed<sup>2</sup>.
- Launceston Pastor, Rev Wes Bredenhof, has admitted to conducting conversion practices. He has characterised himself as a “medical doctor” which epitomises the problem; he isn't a doctor<sup>3</sup>.

### **What harm do conversion practices inflict?**

- LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians who have been through conversion practices are up to four times more likely to have PTSD and to have attempted suicide

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<sup>1</sup> La Trobe University's 2021 “Writing Themselves In” Australian LGBTIQ+ youth survey, Tasmanian cohort

<sup>2</sup> Telling Us the Story, Tasmanian Government LGBTIQ+ community research conducted by UTas, 2021

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/7407317/no-apologies-for-conversion-therapy-says-church/>

- 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.

### **What are the penalties for conversion practices?**

- In most states, and in the Tasmanian Greens' bill, there are criminal penalties for conversion practices if those practices inflict severe injury, or are against a child.
- It is an offence to take someone out of Tasmania for the purposes of conversion practices.
- Advertising conversion practices can attract a fine.
- Other conversion practices attract civil remedies similar to discrimination under the Anti-Discrimination Act.
- The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner can seek a mediated resolution and/or issue compliance orders that may involve anything from an apology, through fines to compensation.
- Civil penalties such as these are about correction and prevention.

### **Who are key stakeholders?**

- Tasmanian conversion survivors like Glenn Worrell, Bron Larkins and Erenie Hiras have advocated for reform over many years<sup>4</sup>.
- All of Tasmania's LGBTIQ+ organisations including Equality Tasmania and Working It Out support a ban.
- The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute issued a report in 2022 recommending a ban.
- In their submissions to the TLRI, all mainstream health organisations supported a ban including the AMA and the RCAGP.
- Some Christian denominations including the Uniting Church strongly oppose conversion practices and support a ban.
- In the past, a ban has been opposed by the Australian Christian Lobby and the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart.

### **Where are conversion practices banned in Australia?**

- Jurisdictions with some form of ban: Victoria, the ACT, NSW, South Australia, Queensland
- Jurisdictions with no bans: WA, NT, Tasmania
- Tasmania risks being the last jurisdiction if it doesn't act quickly
- This will make our state a haven for conversion practitioners thrown out of the other states
- It will harm our reputation as was the case when we were the last to decriminalise homosexuality in 1997

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-17/conversion-therapy-in-australia-calls-for-ban/101041368>

### **Will a ban violate freedom of speech, freedom of religion or parental rights?**

- No. Conversion practices are not based on religious or traditional values. They are based on discredited, quack pseudo-psychology about gay and transgender identity, for example that it is due to child abuse or bad parenting and can be “healed”.
- The Tasmanian Greens’ bill follows the NSW model by clearly defining what is not a conversion practice.
- This includes any expression of religious belief or teaching, including in prayer, any expression that a religious belief should be followed and any requirement in relation to religious orders or leadership, so long as it is not directly part of a conversion practice.
- It also includes any discussion between parents and their children that is not directly part of a conversion practice.

### **Will a ban change how young people with gender dysphoria are treated?**

- No. Nothing will change.
- The Tasmanian Greens’ bill follows the recommendations of the TLRI by allowing health professionals to do their job.
- A health practitioner does not commit a conversion practice if they act on their reasonable professional judgement and comply with professional guidelines.
- Recent research has shown that young trans people are more likely to attempt suicide when gender dysphoria is met with conversion practices<sup>5</sup>.
- This is why young people might have access to treatments after a strict set of psychological assessments and with parental consent.
- However, if clinical guidelines change the bill is drafted so that it accommodates that change.

### **Shouldn’t people be free to choose conversion practices?**

- It is not possible to give informed consent to conversion practices because they are based on false, misleading and fraudulent claims.
- You cannot consent to a course of mental health treatment if you are diagnosed by someone who isn’t qualified to do that.
- You also cannot consent to treatment for a condition that does not exist.

### **What are the different models for a Tasmanian conversion ban?**

#### *Tasmanian Law Reform Institute model*

- In May 2022 the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute issued a report recommending a ban on conversion practices.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://theconversation.com/trans-youth-are-significantly-more-likely-to-attempt-suicide-when-gender-dysphoria-is-met-with-conversion-therapy-than-with-hormone-treatment-207592>

- The TLRI model spread the responsibility for taking complaints and conducting education across a range of government authorities including the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, the Health Complaints Commissioner and the Chief Psychiatrist.
- Coordination would be through a Conversion Practices Committee. Existing resources would be utilised to implement the ban.

#### *Tasmanian Government bill*

- In December 2023 the Tasmanian Government released a draft conversion ban bill that was condemned as so weak it would encourage conversion practices.
- The bill had a narrow, inaccurate definition of conversion practices, defined conversion practices as “a health service”, exempted conversion practices by anyone who calls themselves a “health care provider”, exempted conversion practices where there has been “consent” and exempted conversion practices that insisted on celibacy for LGBTIQ+ people.
- The bill didn’t make provision for investigation or education, relied entirely on conversion survivors to make complaints and prove harm, and set the bar for prosecution so high it was unlikely anyone will ever be held to account.
- The bill varied very little from the position of the Australian Christian Lobby which opposes conversion bans.

#### *The Tasmanian Greens bill*

- The bill proposed by the Tasmanian Greens builds on the TLRI model but also responds to developments since 2022.
- The bill includes the TLRI’s definition of conversion practices and its recommendations regarding a range of criminal and civil penalties for conversion practices and for advertising them.
- The bill adopts exemptions from the NSW legislation which were supported by NSW MPs from across the political spectrum.
- The bill draws on the experience in other states, especially Victoria, by assigning responsibility for implementing the legislation to a single authority, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.
- This will help ensure the development of expertise and resources, and provide a central point for complaints and investigation.
- By centralising responsibility, the bill also ensures a focus on education and prevention.
- This is essential so that, for example, faith communities are assured their rights will not be infringed and government authorities such as the police are trained in identifying conversion practices.
- The bill provides a framework for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to employ staff and develop education materials so the legislation is not a paper tiger.

#### **How did we get here?**

- Late 1960s: Bob Brown undergoes electric shock therapy in Sydney.
- Mid 1970s: Tasmanian judges offer men convicted of homosexuality a choice of gaol or aversion therapy involving the injection of nausea inducing drugs at the Royal Derwent Hospital.
- 1993: Groups opposed to decriminalising homosexuality organise a public conference promoting conversion practices in Launceston featuring “ex-gays” from the United States
- 2014-16: Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ community advocates learn of young LGBTIQ+ people being sent to Tasmania for conversion practices, and conversion practices for local and interstate young people being undertaken in remote locations in Tasmania.
- Dec 2016: A number of Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ organisations write to the TLRI asking for an inquiry into conversion practices. Lack of funding delays a TLRI inquiry.
- Aug 2021: Rev Wes Bredenhof of the Free Reform Church in Launceston admits to inflicting conversion practices.
- May 2022: The TLRI recommends legislation to prohibit conversion practices. Premier Jeremy Rockliff commits to implementing the TLRI’s recommendations.
- Dec 2023: The Tasmanian Government releases a conversion bill that is condemned as “worse than useless”.
- 2020-2026: Survivor advocates, Bron Larkins, Glenn Worrell and Erenie Hiras, together with Equality Tasmania, advocate and lobby for reform.
- Jun 2026: The Tasmanian Greens’ bill is launched and a public consultation follows.

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