



Dear Anna,

Re: Equality Australia 2022 Federal Election Campaign Response

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Equality Australia federal election campaign.

I am proud to support and represent LGBTIQ+ communities across the regional electorate of Indi. As a nurse, I believe in decency, respect, common sense and caring for one another. Since entering parliament, I have sought to bring these values to national policy debates involving LGBTIQ+ communities across Australia which, at times, have been the subject of undue politicisation.

Protecting LGBTIQ+ people from discrimination

LGBTIQ+ Australians deserve to live and participate in our communities free from discrimination and we should have appropriate laws and protections in place to preserve that right, including specific laws relating to vilification and hate-based conduct.

I also believe in freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief as a fundamental human right and supported the broad intent of the recent *Religious Discrimination Bill 2022* which aimed to protect people of faith, or non-faith, in Australia from discrimination on that basis.

I was dismayed, however, to see the government use provisions in that bill to create division and make it more difficult for LGBTIQ+ populations to feel safe and protected in their communities, especially school aged children. I opposed the bill on that basis. Australia is a proud secular society. Over time, we have striven to be as inclusive as possible to diverse faiths and come to celebrate that diversity. I want us to continue in that direction and would support legislation that strikes the right balance.

If returned at the next election, I would support any efforts undertaken by government to understand the unmet legal needs of LGBTIQ+ communities and see great merit in the health justice partnership proposal put forward by Equality Australia. As a former health administrator, I have observed the benefits of community service partnership models in health settings for vulnerable groups and would support federal funding for the Equality Australia proposal.

Health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people

I am committed to supporting and promoting initiatives and reforms to enhance the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people across Australia, particularly in regional areas.

Data from the latest Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy released in February shows LGBTIQ+ Victorians face higher levels of discrimination, stigma, and exclusion. This leads to poorer health, economic, social, and mental health outcomes than other Victorians. LGBTIQ+ people in rural and regional Victoria are more likely to experience lower physical health outcomes, higher rates of psychological distress, and a higher likelihood of attempting suicide when compared to LGBTIQ+ groups living in inner suburban and city areas in Victoria.

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The government should take a more proactive role in funding and backing evidence-based initiatives to address these issues, including specific initiatives related to the health, wellbeing and human rights of trans and gender diverse people, as well as people born with intersex variations. I would also support the decision of any future federal government to develop and fund a whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing strategy. I have also spoken previously in parliament about the trauma caused by change and suppression, or conversion, practices which only serve to harm LGBTIQ+ communities more.

As a former nurse and midwife, I have sat with countless people and their families in clinical contexts who have gone through deeply challenging experiences because of the way others have treated them based on their sexuality or gender identity. I believe Australians are decent people at heart, and when we discuss issues of discrimination, we need to remember that we can cause real harm to our fellow citizens if we do not do so with respect, balance, and care.

Supporting LGBTIQ+ community organisations

I am committed to supporting LGBTIQ+ community organisations, particularly in rural and regional Australia where it can be more difficult for the LGBTIQ+ community to connect in shared and safe places. I would support any initiatives from future governments to establish a LGBTIQ+ community organisation grants program and other reforms to support the work of LGBTIQ+ community groups. More broadly, I believe we need to institute a robust integrity commission as soon as possible to ensure major federal grants programs for community organisations are administered fairly and respond to real community need.

Supporting LGBTIQ+ populations abroad

Since entering parliament, I have been clear I believe Australia is capable of a more compassionate and sensible framework for processing people seeking asylum in Australia. Our country needs strong border protections, but the current detention arrangements are a cruel stopgap that we should have dismantled long ago. I will continue to oppose cruel and unnecessary laws that punish people in detention, and push for an immigration system that is fair, orderly, and humane.

To this end, I would support any initiatives to ensure decision-makers within the Australian Government apply best practice when reviewing LGBTIQ+ asylum claims and that LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers are not placed or resettled in countries that cannot guarantee their safety.

Following the crisis in Afghanistan in August 2021, I called on the federal government to provide the 4,200 Afghans already in Australian on Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas with an immediate pathway to permanent humanitarian protection and Australian citizenship, and to rapidly expand the number of places in our existing humanitarian program for people fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan, including LGBTIQ+ groups. I also welcome the Community Sponsorship Program and encourage its expansion and have advocated in parliament for the government to consider other successful models internationally, including reception programs in Spain and Sweden.

A voice for LGBTIQ+ people in decisions

As an independent, I am not responsible or involve in the appointment of Ministers or public service arrangements and appointments. I would however support any future government that wishes to appoint a dedicated spokesperson for LGBTIQ+ people or establish a dedicated unit within an existing department dedicated to LGBTIQ+ issues and whole-of-government inclusion strategies.

Improving data collection and recognition of LGBTIQ+ populations

It is important that the federal government includes LGBTIQ+ population groups in the national census and other significant datasets, including workplace equality indicators, and encourage specific data collection on LGBTIQ+ communities in rural and regional areas across Australia. I am a strong advocate for evidence-based policy development and review every bill that comes before parliament on this basis. As someone who was a public health academic prior to parliament, I know firsthand how valuable robust population datasets ensure we can plan, measure and evaluate the success of interventions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a response to the campaign.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Haines', written in a cursive style.

Dr Helen Haines MP
Independent Federal Member for Indi

5 May 2022

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