

Disability Caucus Report

2023 Sydney World Pride

02/03/2023

Convener:

Ruby Mountford, Melbourne Bisexual Network

Attendance:

Gemma Gray, Australia
Kate Wood, Australia
Cat Londos, Australia
Molly Asmus, Thailand
Kale, Australia
Lizzi Price, Australia
Ashley Berg Australia
Bruce Pachter, USA
Shane Bhatta, Thailand
Rev Rowley, Australia

Introduction:

Sydney World Pride went to considerable lengths to make events such as the Human Rights Conference accessible to people with disabilities. That effort was the result of decades of work and awareness raising by LGBTIQ+ PWD and their allies.

The vast majority of delegates who attended were based in Australia, which led to discussion of barriers to overseas travel for LGBTIQ+ PWD.

The discussion focused on:

- Improving accessibility in LGBTIQ+ spaces including conferences, organising and decision making through PWD lived experience and expertise
- The human rights and social models of disability
- Barriers to LGBTIQ+ affirmative healthcare and health information including education about consent and safe sex.
- PWD experience of religious and medical anti-LGBTQA conversion practices
- LGBTIQ+ PWD Connecting and organising internationally
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All delegates identified as having a disability, and the majority of delegates identified as neurodivergent. Reasons for attending the caucus included:

- professional networking with other LGBTIQ+ PWD
- education and hearing experiences of other LGBTIQ+ PWD
- wanting a space to “un-mask”, a term used to describe the relaxing of efforts to hide signs of fatigue, pain and discomfort, to overcome communication

barriers in neurotypical social interaction (the '[double empathy problem](#)'), and to endure sensory overwhelm.

CONTEXT:

LGBTIQA+ People with disabilities (PWD) face unique issues and barriers in LGBTIQA and Disability communities, as well as broader society. The sexuality of PWD has long been erased due to societal discomfort, and the intersection of LGBTIQA+ identity and disability is often treated as deviant or ignored entirely.

Research suggests that LGBTIQA+ people are more likely to live with disability, and are more likely to face familial violence, sexual violence, intimate partner violence and violence from strangers than non-disabled LGBTIQA+ people.

LGBTIQA+ PWD are particularly vulnerable to religious and medical anti-LGBTQA conversion practices due to social isolation. This is particularly apparent with Autistic people, people with acquired brain injury and people with intellectual and/or cognitive disabilities, and with PWD experiencing institutionalisation, who are under guardianships, or are dependent on families of origin.

Medical establishments continue to view the existence of a disability as a reason to gatekeep access to gender affirmative care, as well as access to both contraception and reproductive health information.

This attitude has also contributed to the targeting of autistic people by Anti-Gender or Anti-Trans movements. Research suggests at least 30% of the TGD population meet the criteria for autism. This has led to claims that autistic people are being groomed, and that their autism renders them unable to make decisions about their gender. The rise of new anti-trans conversion psychotherapy, often called 'gender exploratory therapy' seeks to delegitimise trans identities by claiming they are the result of autism, or trauma, implying autistic people's sense of gender is invalid.

Disability advocates were successful in securing the right to sexual and gender expression in general comment seven in the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2017, but despite LGBTIQA+ PWD making significant progress in advocacy and organising, awareness within the broader LGBTIQA+ communities often results in tokenistic inclusion at best.

LGBTIQA+ PWD are still critically underrepresented in LGBTIQA+ advocacy efforts and public forums, and face significant attitudinal barriers within LGBTIQA+, Disability and mainstream communities, as well as environmental and financial barriers.

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We recognise that there is significant overlap in the experiences of disability in the experiences of sexual and gender diversity in both pathologization and challenging relationships with religious institutions.

Key Priorities identified from Caucus Discussion

Improved outreach to LGBTIQ+ disability organisations and activists to actively seek out and build relationships with PWD. LGBTIQ+ Disability activists exist in every country, and are the best source of expertise on the issues they face. Greater connection with LGBTIQ+ PWD will also improve accessibility of communications, education material, event planning and strategic development.

Ensure Autistic Trans and Gender Diverse advocates and grass roots organisations are supported and included in efforts to combat the anti-trans/anti-gender movement's misinformation.

Support lobbying efforts on visa access and LGBTIQ+ mobility. Countries including Australia have numerous restrictions that prevent PWD from resettlement. This impacts on refugees and asylum seekers particularly.

Work with LGBTIQ+ disability advocates to reach isolated LGBTIQ+ PWD as well as amplify the human rights abuses faced by LGBTIQ+ PWD at the UN and other international forums.

All efforts to decriminalise, monitor and prevent conversion practices must consider this in strategy and actively seek the participation of PWD as well as review data and research to better understand this experience and develop prevention strategies.

Support to create international networks through channels that have been established with existing LGBTIQ+ global advocacy. This can be done through targeted recruitment and identified positions within existing organisations and support advocates in creating spaces for LGBTIQ+ PWD movement building.

Compassion involves the willingness to become personally invested, pity does not. PWD participation must move beyond tokenistic sharing of individual experiences of struggle with disability (sometimes referred to as 'tragedy porn' or 'inspiration porn'). Instead, seek expertise of PWD beyond stories of othering and on topics other than disability. PWD participation and contribution at conferences, performances and events should be prioritised and tracked for transparency.

Improve PWD representation in organising committees, boards and other key decision making bodies in LGBTIQ+ human rights efforts by identifying positions and improving accessibility to ensure PWD can fully participate.

Additional Resources and Websites:

<https://www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/employableq>

<https://thorneharbour.org/services/disability/disability-resources/>

<https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/largest-study-to-date-confirms-overlap-between-autism-and-gender-diversity/>

<https://www.queerspace.org.au/advocacy-intersections/>