

Background paper

prepared for Maribyrnong City Council

Jason Rostant

Background paper to support consultations for development of the Maribyrnong LGBTIQ+ Strategy and Action Plan 2021-25.

November 2021



Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. About the Maribyrnong community	4
3. About the Maribyrnong LGBTIQA+ community	6
4. LGBTIQA+ community needs and expectations	8
4.1 Health and wellbeing needs	8
4.2 Community-identified priorities	9
4.3 Community expectations of local government	10
4.4 City of Maribyrnong	11
5. Links to legislative requirements and Council strategy.....	13
6. The consultation process	16
Key consultation questions	16



I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I work and live, and pay respect to Elders past and present. I acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the continuing resilience, pride and strength of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

1. Introduction

The Maribyrnong Council Plan 2021 – 2025 outlines Council's vision for the municipality as “an inclusive, flourishing, progressive city that cares for its residents and its environments”.

The Council Plan identifies the priorities and aspirations to strengthen inclusion and cohesion within the community by removing barriers to participation in all aspects of community life.

A key action under the Council Plan is to consider the needs and lived experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning and asexual (LGBTIQA+) communities in Maribyrnong.

Since the emergence of the COVID-19, Council has also received requests from members of the LGBTIQA+ community for culturally safe and inclusive opportunities to address the emerging impacts of COVID-19 on mental health, social isolation and economic inclusion.

The City of Maribyrnong has a proud history and strong commitment to inclusion, equality and pride in the diversity of LGBTIQA+ people, families and communities.

To build on and strengthen this legacy, Council has committed to developing the LGBTIQA+ Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025 (the Plan).

The aim of the Plan is to identify tangible actions to strengthen social and economic inclusion for LGBTIQA+ people, families and communities, and reduce barriers to their participation in the city.

A parallel process has also started to establish a Maribyrnong LGBTIQA+ Community Advisory Group by December 2021. The role of the group will be to advise Council on the needs and lived experience of the LGBTIQA+ communities in Maribyrnong, and work with Council to identify the strategic actions for the proposed Action Plan over the next 4 years.

The Plan, and related activities, will raise the profile of the LGBTIQA+ community in Maribyrnong and promote opportunities for community engagement, support, advocacy and partnerships.

In order to develop the Plan and ensure it meets community aspirations, needs and expectations, Council has engaged an external consultant to undertake a detailed consultation and engagement process (the Project).

The Project will include desktop research, community consultations, focus groups and a survey with community members, local service providers and businesses. These consultation mechanisms are designed to better understand the lived experience of LGBTIQA+ people who live, work and recreate in Maribyrnong.

Findings and insights gathered through the consultations will inform Council's future work delivered through the Plan, as well as how Council partners with LGBTIQA+ people, families and communities to influence policy, strategy and practice.

Following the initial consultation phases being led through this Project over the next six months, a draft Plan will be delivered to Council for consideration around March 2022, before being released for further public consultation and feedback, and adoption by Council by October 2022.

This paper provides brief background context to support Project engagement and consultations with the Maribyrnong community in the initial phase to develop the draft strategy and plan.

The paper has been developed through a rapid desktop review. It is not intended to be a full review of the LGBTIQA+ community in Maribyrnong, its needs and aspirations, or of the service landscape available to support the community.

The paper is intended to support consultations by providing background context only. It includes a high-level summary of the legislative and policy environment, an overview of local data (to the extent its existence allows), key needs identified by LGBTIQA+ communities through earlier research and other consultation mechanisms, and key elements of Council's work to date.

It is hoped the material will trigger thinking to support community inputs into the consultation process to follow.

2. About the Maribyrnong community^{1 2}

This section of the paper provides a very high-level overview of key characteristics of the Maribyrnong community.

It draws from two primary sources – online id.community data profiles and Council's *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Data Book 2020* (except where noted otherwise).

The Data Book is developed by Council to support its delivery of the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and includes extensive analysis of data drawn from a broad range of sources. The current report was released in August 2020 and aims to The Data Book aims to:

- provide an overview of the health and wellbeing status of people in the City of Maribyrnong;
- present data on the wider determinants of health which determine health and wellbeing outcomes in the municipality;
- provide an evidence-based resource for use by Council and community stakeholders to inform decision making, planning, action and investment that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the community; and
- inform recovery planning post COVID-19.

The Data Book provides a detailed demographic overview of the Maribyrnong community and includes further data across a range of health and wellbeing, safety, education and employment, and social inclusion and participation measures.

In 2020, the estimated resident population of the City of Maribyrnong was 94,982 people. The population is growing at around 2.8% annually.

Overall the population is younger than the state average with a median age of 33 compared to 37 for Victoria as a whole. While it has a slightly lower proportion of people in younger age groups compared to Greater Melbourne (under 15s comprise 16% cf. 18.3%) it also has a much lower proportion of people aged over 65 compared to Greater Melbourne (9.7% cf. 14%). The City of Maribyrnong has a larger proportion of people aged 25-39 compared to Greater Melbourne and this is also the fastest growing age group.

With rapid population growth (67% increase expected by 2040), the age profile of the City of Maribyrnong community is forecast to shift between now and 2040. Young people under 17 are forecast to grow by 68.4 percent and older people over 60 expected to increase by 128 percent. The City of Maribyrnong's increasing populations of older residents and younger residents over the next 20 plus years will require age appropriate infrastructure and amenities.³

The City of Maribyrnong is comprised of lower rates of couples with children (26% cf. 33%) although couple households with young children in particular are growing. There is a higher rate of lone person households in some parts of the city (particularly West Footscray, Kingsville and Footscray 26%, 28%, 30% respectively cf. 22% for Greater Melbourne).

City of Maribyrnong households are far more likely to be renting and slightly less likely to own their own homes when compared with Greater Melbourne. Rent prices are about the same as for Melbourne, and mortgages are slightly higher. Affordability is still an issue for many people in the City of Maribyrnong.

The City of Maribyrnong is the second most ethnically diverse community in Victoria. Its residents are more likely to have been born overseas than other Melbournians (40% cf. 34%) and to speak a language other than English at home (42% cf. 32%). The proportion of community speaking languages other than English at home is even higher in particular locations within the City of Maribyrnong – for example Braybrook (69%), Maidstone (53%) and Maribyrnong (48%). Residents come from more than 135 different countries and speak over 80 languages.

Almost 11% of women and 8% of men in the City of Maribyrnong report having low English proficiency compared to 2.8% and 2.2% respectively for Greater Melbourne. The Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in the City of Maribyrnong is the same as for Greater Melbourne (0.5%)

The top five most commonly spoken languages other than English (LOTE) in 2016 were Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Greek and Italian. The largest changes to languages other than English spoken at home between 2011 and 2016 were Vietnamese, Mandarin, Nepali and Telugu.

¹ idcommunity (2021). *City of Maribyrnong community profiles*. (Accessed 14/10/21)

² Maribyrnong City Council (2020). *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Data Book 2020*. (Accessed 14/10/21)

³ Maribyrnong City Council (2020). *Maribyrnong 2040: Growing the future together*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

Maribyrnong is a city divided along socioeconomic lines.

Median weekly incomes are split across the municipality when compared to those of Greater Melbourne, with median incomes being significantly lower in Braybrook, Footscray, Maidstone and West Footscray, and higher in Kingsville, Maribyrnong, Yarraville and Seddon. The same split of suburbs is observed when considering the SEIFA index of disadvantage.

City of Maribyrnong residents are more likely to be attending university or hold university qualifications in all parts of the municipality compared to Greater Melbourne, with the exception of Braybrook.

Unemployment rates in 2016 were lower in Yarraville, Seddon and Kingsville than for other Melbournians and higher in Maribyrnong, Maidstone, West Footscray, Footscray and Braybrook.

Residents of Braybrook, Footscray and West Footscray were also more likely to be receiving the JobSeeker subsidy in March 2020 compared to Greater Melbourne and Victoria, and this proportion grew to September 2021. Residents of other parts of the city were less likely to be receiving JobSeeker when compared to Greater Melbourne.

City of Maribyrnong residents were slightly less likely to be providing unpaid care to a person with a disability, long term illness or old age in 2016 compared to Greater Melbourne and also slightly less likely to identify participation in some form of voluntary work.

According to the Victorian Population Health Survey, feelings of trust were similar in the City of Maribyrnong when compared to Victorian residents generally, however the proportion of residents who feel most people can always be trusted has been declining over recent years.

By contrast the same surveys (2011, 2014, and 2017) show that acceptance of diversity among Maribyrnong residents is higher compared to the Victorian population. A higher proportion of local residents believe multiculturalism definitely makes life better in their area and acceptance of diversity has been increasing.⁴

⁴ Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI). (2020). *Victorian Population Health Survey 2017*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

3. About the Maribyrnong LGBTIQ+ community

Little data exists about the demographic profile of LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities in Maribyrnong, as with other communities in Victoria and across Australia.

Located approximately 8km from the Melbourne CBD, the City of Maribyrnong is an inner west community where anecdotally the local LGBTIQ+ community has been growing and becoming increasingly visible in recent years.

LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities often remain relatively hidden within mainstream community settings. This is particularly common in outer metropolitan, rural and regional areas where research has shown that LGBTIQ+ people living more than 10km from the city experience higher levels of discrimination, social isolation and street-based harassment.⁵

As highlighted above, the Maribyrnong community perceives itself as being accepting of difference and diversity. Local data about perceptions of safety for LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities, or wider community attitudes towards people of different sexual orientations and gender identities is not available.

One proxy might be the results from the 2017 Australian marriage law postal survey in which enrolled voters in the federal seat of Maribyrnong participated at the same rate as national voters but slightly lower rates when compared to Victorian voters (79% cf. 81.7%), and while overwhelmingly supportive of the change, were slightly less so when compared to both Victorian and national voters (59.9% cf. 64.9% and 61.6% respectively).

The greatest single challenge for understanding the makeup and experience of LGBTIQ+ communities in Maribyrnong is the lack of available and reliable population data for Victoria or nationally.

Only very limited data is captured in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) national census, and until recently, disaggregated data was also not available through other key datasets such as the Victorian Population Health Survey. At an organisational level, funded programs are also not required (and do not) collect service utilization and outcome data inclusive of LGBTIQ+ identities.

This global lack of data means it is very difficult to determine a breakdown with any accuracy, of the demographic features of LGBTIQ+ communities in Maribyrnong related to age, ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic status, economic participation, and health and wellbeing.

Generally, it is accepted that people of diverse sexual orientations, sex and gender identity account for around 11% of the population⁶, while in 2020 the ABS estimated that 8.4 percent of the population identify as non-heterosexual. This means that up to 10,450 or more LGBTIQ+ people may be residing in Maribyrnong.

The ABS census has collected data about same-sex couples since 1996. Numbers have more than quadrupled in the two decades since, with same-sex couples accounting for 1.0% of all Victorian couples in 2016. Fifteen percent of same-sex couples reported having children, including one in four female couples.⁷

These numbers are conservative and highly inaccurate because they rely on self-reporting and only count couples that live together.

In the 2016 census 1,004 people identified they were living in a same-sex couple (married or de facto partners) in the City of Maribyrnong (590 male couples, 414 female couples), which was 1.2 percent of the total population.

Based on these figures, there may be *at least* 75-100 same-sex parented families with children residing in the city (an inner west LGBTIQ parenting group on Facebook has 282 members).

Other 2016 census data included that partners in same-sex relationships were far more likely to have no religion, have a university degree, be employed, and have higher personal incomes compared to partners in opposite sex relationships.

These statistics are also problematic because they don't account for variations *within* LGBTIQ+ communities, and relying on self-reporting as they do, are likely to skew results towards those with

⁵ James Morandini (et al), 'Minority Stress and Community Connectedness among Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Australians: A Comparison of Rural and Metropolitan Localities' (2015) 39(3) Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 260.

⁶ Department of Health (2012), *National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy*; State of Victoria (2019), *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System: Interim Report*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

⁷ ABS (2018), *Same sex couples in Australia, 2016*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

greater access to personal resources and agency, and confidence to disclose their personal circumstances.

These limitations appear to be evident for example when considering the age and sex profiles of people reporting same-sex and opposite sex relationships, with rates of same-sex relationship disclosure significantly reducing (to non-existent) in people over 60 years of age for example.

The 2016 census also gathered some data for the first time on sex and gender diversity. Repeated in 2020, this data collection was a pilot which relied on users knowing about, and engaging with, a separate mechanism to record their sex as anything other than 'male' or 'female'. Nationally, the 2016 census only counted 1,260 sex and/or gender diverse people (0.005%) These results reveal little about the number and demographic profile of sex and gender diverse people nationally, let alone at a local government level.⁸

The Victorian Population Health Survey captured information about sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time in 2017.

The survey provides comparative data on many important health measures, including discrimination, social capital, socioeconomic status, mental health, physical health and health screening behaviours for people reporting a range of identities including being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse, queer, pansexual, asexual, having an intersex variation, or 'other'.

The 2017 survey found Maribyrnong had an estimated LGBTIQ+ population of 6.2%, with a further estimate range of between 4.1-9.4 percent of the population.⁹ Survey data and findings confirm results from previous studies that LGBTIQ+ people experience significant health inequalities as outlined in the next section.

⁸ ABS (2018). *Sex and gender diversity in the 2016 census*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

⁹ Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI). (2020). *The health and wellbeing of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer population in Victoria: Findings from the Victorian population health survey 2017*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

4. LGBTIQ+ community needs and expectations

4.1 Health and wellbeing needs

The participation, health and wellbeing needs and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities have been well documented through many years of research.

Overall, LGBTIQ+ people have consistently been found to have poorer health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes than others in the community. Disparities in health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ+ people compared to the broader community include, for example:

- higher than average rates of violence, harassment and discrimination;
- poorer mental health such as anxiety, depression, psychological distress, self-harm and risk of suicide;
- higher rates of isolation and rejection, reduced social participation and engagement;
- poorer life outcomes in terms of drug and alcohol use, homelessness, and early school leaving; and
- avoidance or delay in help seeking behaviours because of real or feared prejudice within service settings.¹⁰

The Victorian Population Health Survey referenced in the previous section found that self-identified LGBTIQ+ people were **more likely** to have been born in Australia or be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, to have never married, to have a total annual household income lower than \$40,000, be unable to raise \$2,000 within two days in an emergency, and to have experience food insecurity in the previous year. The same cohort were **less likely** to have private health insurance or have a total annual household income over \$100,000.¹¹

Across social capital measures, LGBTIQ+ adults were **more likely** to never or not often feel valued by society, but were also more likely to be members of community groups, feel multiculturalism made life in their area better, and be in contact with 1-4 people in the previous day.

They were **less likely** to get help from family or neighbours when needed, get a relative or friend to care for them or their children in an emergency, be members of a sports group, or to have lived for 10 years or more in their current neighbourhood.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System found LGBTIQ+ people experienced a range of poorer mental health outcomes, including higher risk of mental illness, self-harm and suicide compared to heterosexual and cisgender populations.

LGBTIQ+ people were recognised as being among a range of groups facing additional barriers that compound their experience, including for example discrimination and poorer access to services and supports responsive to their needs.

While implicit in many of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission, two in particular make specific reference to LGBTIQ+ people – recommendation 27 which proposes tailored aftercare support for LGBTIQ+ people at risk of suicide and recommendation 35 which focusses on working in partnership with diverse communities to improve service accessibility.¹²

Further research has also recently highlighted some of the unique and disproportionate impacts of COVID 19 on LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities. The impacts of COVID 19 were widely reported as disproportionately impacting (for example) young people, women, culturally diverse communities and people in low paid and precarious employments.

Additionally, impacts were also reported for LGBTIQ+ people within and beyond these communities. Services working with LGBTIQ+ people reported high levels of distress, increases in clients reporting suicidal behaviours and thoughts, concerns about support and safety in their homes, concerns about job loss, anxiety about potential interactions with police enforcing restrictions, and distress due to decreased access to medical affirmation for trans and gender diverse people.¹³

¹⁰ VLGA (2020). *Rainbow resource for Victorian councils: Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer diversity and inclusion in local government* (Accessed 22/10/21)

¹¹ Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI). (2020). *The health and wellbeing of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer population in Victoria: Findings from the Victorian population health survey 2017*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

¹² Royal Commission in Victoria's Mental Health System (2021). *Final report*. (Accessed 27/10/21)

¹³ Jones, J. and Carman, M. (2020). *Inclusive practice matters: Communities of practice responding to the challenges of covid-19*. (Accessed 27/10/21)

Not all LGBTIQ+ people experience the range of issues outlined above equally, with some people being more vulnerable than others to poorer health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes.

Factors influencing LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing may include age (younger and older people), gender, cultural and religious background, living circumstance (city/rural/ regional, homelessness), existence of a disability or coexisting mental health issue, and the presence or absence of supportive and accepting relationships.¹⁴

The Victorian Population Health Survey found statistically significant differences in the experience of discrimination in the 12 months prior to the survey, being reported by 56.1 percent of trans and gender diverse adults, 39.9 percent of gay or lesbian and 31.5 percent of bisexual, queer or pansexual respondents compared with 15.6 percent of non-LGBTIQ+ adults.

Trans and gender diverse adults also had a significantly higher prevalence of food insecurity, psychological distress and diagnoses of anxiety or depression.

A detailed overview of the issues and experiences for diverse LGBTIQ+ people and families is contained in a recent [discussion paper](#) and [infographics](#) developed to support Victoria's first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ Strategy due for release in 2022.^{15 16}

4.2 Community-identified priorities

Through the consultation process for the new statewide strategy, LGBTIQ+ communities and their supporters in Victoria identified a range of improvements to mental health, inclusion in education settings, regional and rural inclusion, inclusion in health services, and reduced discrimination in the workplace and public settings as important community priorities. In particular they highlighted the need for:

- Stronger protection of rights and access to justice;
- Higher quality and more inclusive services;
- Stronger representation and voice, including through an intersectional lens;
- Stronger mainstream community visibility and inclusion;
- Greater connections within LGBTIQ+ communities;
- Improved data, research and evidence to underpin planning and programs;
- Greater accountability for delivering improved health, wellbeing and equality outcomes.

This feedback translated into a vision for the new Victorian strategy, including that:

- all Victorians feel safe, have equal rights and can live wholly and freely;
- LGBTIQ+ Victorians experience the benefits of full participation in economic, educational, community and social areas at all stages of life; and
- Victoria leads the way in LGBTIQ+ equality, celebrating the community and taking sustained, enduring and measurable action.¹⁷

Four [strategic directions](#) are proposed for the new Victorian strategy:

1. Equal rights and freedoms
2. Equitable and accessible service systems
3. Visibility to inform decision making
4. Safe, strong and sustainable communities

¹⁴ National LGBTI Health Alliance (2020). [Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTI people](#). (Accessed 22/10/21)

¹⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2020). [Discussion paper for the Victorian LGBTIQ Strategy](#). (Accessed 13/08/20)

¹⁶ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2020). [Infographics for the Victorian LGBTIQ strategy](#). (Accessed 13/08/20)

¹⁷ State Government of Victoria (2020). [Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy](#). (Accessed 22/10/21)

4.3 Community expectations of local government

These themes also align with community perspectives specifically in relation to the role of local councils.

The VLGA resource referred to in section 3 cites a community survey undertaken by the VLGA and Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby at Midsumma in 2016. The survey outlines a range of expectations that LGBTIQ+ communities have of local councils, including that they advocate for and publicly support LGBTIQ+ residents, provide inclusive health and community services, and consult community members on the issues that affect them.¹⁸

In 2020, the now-named Victorian Pride Lobby announced its local government election priorities which included:

- Rainbow Tick accreditation of council-run services
- Establishment of LGBTIQ+ advisory committees
- Development of LGBTIQ+ action plans
- Recognition of days of significance for LGBTIQ+ communities, including by flying appropriate flags from council buildings; and
- Participation in LGBTIQ+ arts and cultural events such as Midsumma, Pride and Carnival.¹⁹

These strategies are important because they have a direct relationship to the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people and families living in local communities.

VicHealth for example has found that LGBTIQ+ Victorians who feel connected to their community report higher resilience, subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction, but that major disparities remain – only 6 in 10 regional LGB Victorians agree that 'people around here can be trusted' compared to 8 in 10 regional heterosexual Victorians; only two thirds of LGBTIQ+ Victorians agree 'people around here are willing to help their neighbours' compared to three quarters of non-LGBTIQ+ Victorians.²⁰

Between November 2016 and June 2017, the Victorian Government visited 23 rural and regional towns as part of an LGBTI Equality Roadshow. An evaluation found the Roadshow had delivered a number of important community impacts, many of which are also relevant to local councils. These included the value and importance of:

- Physically implementing programs in communities;
- Working in equal partnership with individuals from marginalised groups;
- Selecting safe venues and spaces;
- Identifying and engaging influencers and decision makers;
- Bringing in wider mainstream community groups and individuals; and
- Developing a basic training model that the community can take back and replicate.²¹

The findings of each of these processes establish a need for, and the value in local councils considering how they respond to the rights, needs and aspirations of LGBTIQ+ people and families across the full range of their functions – including as service provider, program partner, community facilitator, advocate, employer, contractor, planner and law maker.²²

¹⁸ VLGA (2020). *Rainbow resource for Victorian councils: Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer diversity and inclusion in local government*, p. 8 (Accessed 22/10/21)

¹⁹ Victorian Pride Lobby (2020). *Rainbow local government: LGBTIQ+ priorities for the 2020 Victorian local council elections*. (Accessed 27/10/21)

²⁰ VicHealth (2015). *VicHealth indicators survey 2015: Supplementary report, sexuality*. (Accessed 22/10/21)

²¹ Besley, M., and Chandler, P. (2018). *LGBTI equality roadshow evaluation report*. Storyscape and Collective Insights for the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet Equality Branch.

²² VLGA (2020). *Rainbow resource for Victorian councils: Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer diversity and inclusion in local government*, p. 12 (Accessed 22/10/21)

4.4 City of Maribyrnong

In recent years, demographic changes have seen a steady increase in residents who identify as LGBTIQ+ moving to the inner west for its housing affordability and close proximity to the CBD. Many new residents to Maribyrnong bring with them expectations for culturally safe and inclusive environments.

Recent consultations with LGBTIQ+ communities in Maribyrnong indicate residents are seeking culturally safe and gender appropriate services, and venues and facilities for LGBTIQ+ community close to where they live and work.

Compliance with COVID19 lockdown restrictions has further amplified the need for easily accessible LGBTIQ+ services and settings within a 5km radius of LGBTIQ+ residents' homes. Additionally, Council has received specific requests for mental health support and social connection from LGBTIQ+ community members to address the emerging impacts and risk factors associated with COVID19 and continuous lockdowns.

Creating safe and inclusive events and spaces remains a commitment of Council.

Celebration of diversity, pride and inclusion is also acknowledged through other calendar events, programs and activities which recognise the LGBTIQ+ community such as through the:

- Victorian Pride March
- International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)
- Intersex Awareness Day
- International Transgender Day of Remembrance

Since 2010 Maribyrnong Council has participated on the LGBTIQ+ Western Regions Councils Working Group to develop a shared agenda and platform for information and action on issues of importance to LGBTIQ+ communities.

Members of the Working Group consist of delegates from each of the seven Western Region Councils of Melbourne namely Hobsons Bay, Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley, Melbourne, Melton and Wyndham.

In June 2015, 120 people participated in the *Out is in* forum, an initiative of the GLBTIQ Western Region Councils Working Group which has included the City of Maribyrnong.

Acknowledging significant progress that had occurred in the five years since the preceding forum, the forum recommended a range of actions across seven key themes:

- **Recognising layers of GLBTIQ identity:** For decision makers, service providers and the broader community to see beyond the traditional view of GLBTIQ people in the West to acknowledge and work with their multiple identities: CALD communities, refugees, religious groups & leaders, disability and older GLBTIQ people.
- **Promoting safe spaces:** For western region councils and service providers to partner with GLBTIQ communities to address homophobic and transphobic harassment and violence, foster specific GLBTIQ safe spaces and community facilities and promote safety in public spaces.
- **Advocating for better access to health care:** For western region councils and service providers to work together to advocate for and provide inclusive, non-judgmental and responsive health care in the West that local GLBTIQ feel safe and able to access.
- **Embedding what's been started:** For western region councils to ensure that GLBTIQ-inclusion is given further resources, embedded within Council's policy and practice. Further there is more inclusive practice, more consultation, training and GLBTIQ- inclusion at "other council events".
- **Fostering GLBTIQ role models and visibility:** For western region councils, service providers and the broader community to foster and promote GLBTIQ community leadership, role models and their visibility. Further, for councils and service providers to work with local GLBTIQ people to foster a strong GLBTIQ identity in the West.
- **Supporting local schools:** For western region councils and service providers to work together to expand on GLBTIQ work done in schools, going beyond just signing up to the Safe Schools Coalition and working with teachers in particular.

- **Encouraging GLBTIQ networking:** To increase opportunities for local government, service providers, GLBTIQ community groups, GLBTIQ people and their allies to spend time with one another, share and learn.²³

Through its services and programs Council has delivered direct support to LGBTIQ+ people, communities and families over time.

These have included most notably through its youth services and support to two LGBTIQ+ support groups within local high schools, maternal and child health programs (including previously the Baby Makes 3 program), library services, and rainbow family playgroups offered through some of its community centres.

Local arts and cultural development programs, galleries, events and settings enable expressions of diversity, gender identity and pride to flourish in the municipality, garnering promotional support from Council and a broad range of local organisations. Activities have included for example participation in the GoWest, Midsumma and Pride festivals, LGBTIQ+ programming as part of Fringe Festival and through the *Together Apart Rapid Relief Fund* for COVID19.

Other local organisations have also delivered LGBTIQ+ arts programming, including for example the Trocadero Arts Space, Snuff Puppets, Women's Circus and Footscray Community Arts which includes its ongoing partnership with the HRAFF and TILDE film festivals.

The onset of COVID19 has disrupted many opportunities to showcase new talent and support local artists and performers. Council continues to demonstrate its commitment to a thriving arts and culture sector by promoting many new opportunities for the LGBTIQ+ community via virtual engagement and connection.

Local communities have also organised their own opportunities for connection, including for example through online social groups for rainbow families, general LGBTIQ+ community forums, and residents interested in promoting LGBTIQ+ equality in Maribyrnong.

Increasingly local businesses are also responding to community need and interest through the establishment of local bars, social venues and LGBTIQ+ inclusive nights and other events.

Council identifies a range of opportunities to promote best practice and increase local economic activity and development for LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities in Maribyrnong. These may include for example by promoting LGBTIQ+ friendly and inclusive businesses through audits and promotion of digital rainbow maps such as one recently developed by [Banyule Council](#).

Council also recognises that safety in public spaces is often a concern for women and gender-diverse people, with significant impacts on health and well-being.

For these reasons, Council recently partnered in the *Your Ground* initiative, a social research project that surveyed women and gender-diverse people to map their perceptions of safety when exercising and recreating for health and wellbeing in Victoria's open spaces. This project identified a range of indicators and strategies to ensure places where women, LGBTIQ+ people and other groups exercise, play and connect play are safe and inclusive.²⁴

The Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre also recently delivered its first trans and gender diverse-targeted swim night prior to COVID19 with plans for further sessions in the future.

The City of Maribyrnong will soon establish a new LGBTIQ+ Community Advisory Group whose role will include to:

- inform Council on the emerging needs, issues and barriers facing LGBTIQ+ people in Maribyrnong.
- consider and provide advice to Council on key initiatives, programs and best practice options on culturally safe and inclusive actions that address the needs of LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities.
- work directly with Council to develop, implement and review the *LGBTIQ+ Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025*.
- support Council's commitment in promoting and advocating for equality, inclusion, diversity and human rights of the LGBTIQ+ people within the wider context of the Maribyrnong community.

²³ Witthaus, D. (2015). *Out is in: A report on the GLBTIQ out is in forum*. National Institute for Challenging Homophobia Education (NICHE).

²⁴ XYX Lab and CrowdSpot (2021). *YourGround Victoria Report*. Melbourne: Monash University XYX Lab. (Accessed 27/10/21)

5. Links to legislative requirements and Council strategy

Development of the LGBTIQ+ Strategy and Action Plan 2021-25 is an important commitment by Maribyrnong Council that will help it meet its legal requirements as well as deliver on a number of its key strategies to promote community health, wellbeing and inclusion.

A number of Victorian and federal laws are relevant to local councils when thinking about the needs of their LGBTIQ+ communities. These are detailed in a [recent publication](#) by the Victorian Local Governance Association²⁵, but in summary they include:

- **Human rights laws:** According to the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, local councils must act compatibly with human rights including by considering human rights when making decisions, and making, interpreting and applying laws;
- **Equal opportunity laws:** Councils have a duty to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex, marital and relationship status, sexual orientation or preference, gender identity and intersex status within various laws including the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, the *Fair Work Act 2009* and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*;
- **Local government laws:** The *Victorian Local Government Act 2020* is the main law outlining the role and function of local councils in Victoria. The Act was recently reviewed to strengthen community voice in local planning processes, and to strengthen councils' requirements to consider the diverse needs of all parts of their communities;
- **Public health laws:** The *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* aims to deliver high standards of public health and wellbeing by preventing disease, promoting healthy conditions and addressing health inequalities by targeting efforts according to greatest need; and
- **Gender equality laws:** The *Gender Equality Act 2020* is a new law that requires local councils to develop and report on gender equality plans that promote gender equality for people of *all genders* in the community, including through an intersectional lens that explicitly recognises gender inequality can be compounded by other forms of discrimination and disadvantage a person may experience.

In addition to the laws outlined above, there have been a number of recent changes to Victorian legislation that specifically relate to and impact LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities.

In May 2020 for example, changes to the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996* came into effect to enable trans and gender diverse and intersex people to alter the record of sex on their Victorian birth registration without having to undergo sex affirmation surgery and be unmarried.²⁶

More recently, in February 2021 the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021* was passed which bans practices which seek to change or hide a person's sexual orientation or gender identity – practices often referred to as 'gay conversion' practices or 'conversion therapy'.²⁷

Due to commence in February 2022, this Act will give new powers to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to investigate conversion practices.

The Commission's role to consider and investigate complaints was also expanded in October 2021 when sex characteristics were added as a protected attribute under the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. This change protects against discrimination and bullying experienced by people born with variations in sex characteristics – people with intersex variations.²⁸

²⁵ VLGA (2020). *Rainbow resource for Victorian councils: Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer diversity and inclusion in local government* (Accessed 14/10/21)

²⁶ See for example State of Victoria (2021). *Change a record of sex*. (Accessed 27/10/21)

²⁷ VEOHRC (2021). *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*. (Accessed 27/10/21). The Act will commence in February 2022.

²⁸ VEOHRC (2021). *Public statement: Sex characteristics now a protected attribute in the Equal Opportunity Act*. (Accessed 27/10/21)

Also in late October 2021, further amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act were introduced in a Bill to better protect LGBTIQ+ Victorians working within religious organisations and schools.²⁹

As discussed in section 6, the Victorian Government is also currently finalising its first whole-of-government LGBTIQ Strategy which is due for release by June 2022.

In addition to supporting Council to meet its legislative obligations to LGBTIQ+ communities, the Project and Plan also support the delivery of key Maribyrnong Council plans and strategies. These include for example:

<p><u>Maribyrnong Council Plan 2021-2025</u></p> <p>(incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)</p>	<p><u>Objective 3. A Place for All</u></p> <p>3.2 Strengthen inclusion and cohesion by removing barriers to participation in all aspects of community life;</p> <p>3.6 Take action to reduce family violence, respond to the needs of victims and promote gender equality.</p> <p><u>Objective 5 Ethical Leadership</u></p> <p>5.1 Uphold our obligations to promote and protect human rights by demonstrating strong social responsibility across Council's operations</p> <p>5.2 Ensure breadth and depth of community engagement and active civic participation</p> <p>5.3 Build and model a safer, healthier, diverse and more equitable organisation.</p> <p><u>Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan outcomes:</u></p> <p><u>Healthy and active</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate and partner to prevent violence against women <p><u>Fair and inclusive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver initiatives, both internally and externally, to promote gender equality • Promote social and economic inclusion • Facilitate opportunities for civic participation and volunteering • Consider the needs of our diverse community in infrastructure, service and program planning
<p><u>Annual Council Action Plan 2021/22</u></p>	<p>Linked to Objective 3.2 of the Council Plan above:</p> <p>3.2.1 Develop and implement the LGBTIQ+ Strategy and Action Plan and establish an LGBTIQ+ advisory committee</p>
<p><u>Maribyrnong Human Rights and Social Justice Framework 2017-2021</u></p>	<p>The Framework states that Council is committed to the key human rights and social justice values of freedom, respect, equity and dignity for all people living in the City of Maribyrnong.</p> <p>The framework applies to all of Council's laws, policies, programs and services.</p> <p>"Our commitment to human rights is outlined in the Human Rights and Social Justice Framework. Implementing social justice and equity – We pursue equal rights and opportunity for all people, ensuring you are not discriminated against because of you age, gender, sexuality, ability, faith, social and economic status, cultural background or beliefs. We promote equitable access to our services and public places".</p>
<p><u>Towards Gender Equity Strategy 2030</u></p>	<p>The Strategy sets out Council's vision, whereby all people in Maribyrnong flourish and live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect, regardless of their gender.</p> <p>The Strategy contains 6 objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Strengthen our response to family violence and violence against women.

²⁹ Premier of Victoria (2021). Stronger protections against discrimination introduced. Media release 27/10/21) (Accessed 27/10/21)

	<p>2) Work alongside the community to prevent violence and normalise gender equality in public and private life.</p> <p>3) Increase women's independence and role in decision making.</p> <p>4) Ensure that the development of policy, programs and services considers the specific impacts of gender inequity on health, wellbeing and safety.</p> <p>5) Increase the number of safe and gender-equitable facilities and public environments.</p> <p>6) Take steps to be a more safe and gender-equitable organisation.</p>
<u>Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families 2030</u>	<p><u>Strategic Objectives:</u></p> <p>To support children and young people to be loved and safe:</p> <p>1.8 Provide inclusive Council services, programs and spaces for children, young people and their families in all their diversity, including cultural and linguistic diversity, diversity of ability, background, socio-economic status and identification as LGBTIQ+</p> <p>To support children, young people and their families to be healthy:</p> <p>3.8 Continue to build the capacity of both Council services and the service sector to be welcoming, inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people and Rainbow Families</p> <p>To support children, young people and their families to have a positive sense of culture and identity:</p> <p>6.4 Continue to support the service sectors in Maribyrnong to build their capacity in responding to the diversity of children, young people and their families including LGBTIQ+, people living with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families</p>
<u>Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-2023</u>	<p>The Strategy applies a genders lens recognising that artistic practice and professional opportunities can be hindered by gender, especially for transgender and gender diverse people. The Strategy is identified as an opportunity for Council to proactively ensure gender is not a barrier to participation and professional opportunities in the arts.</p> <p><u>Theme 2: Access all areas – access, inclusion and equity</u></p> <p>A. Ensure that the community has easy access to all arts and cultural programs and facilities, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity or ability.</p> <p>B. Ensure that all artists have ready access to support and assistance, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity or ability.</p> <p>2.1 Ensure that all arts and cultural programming encourages participation regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability or income.</p>
<u>Festival City</u>	<p>Midsumma Westside 2022 has become a staple core to Maribyrnong's annual festivals program</p>

6. The consultation process

Consultations with a range of key internal and external stakeholders are being planned for delivery across two key phases – the first to be delivered throughout November and December 2021.

First phase consultations will primarily comprise a series of internal and external focus groups and an online survey available to all community members.

Sixteen targeted and open invitation focus groups will be held in total with:

- Maribyrnong staff
- Local service providers
- Established local LGBTIQ+ networks and groups
- First Nations communities
- Younger people
- Older people
- Rainbow families
- Arts, culture and festival interests
- Business and tourism interests
- Sport and recreation interests

More information about open invitation focus groups including dates, times and registrations, as well as access to the online survey is available at [Your City, Your Voice](#).

The second 'testing and refine' phase will be delivered in early 2022. This phase will include a second survey seeking more information on community's role in the delivery of the strategy and action plan, as well as a further series of focus groups to refine development of the Plan.

Key consultation questions

1. What are the most positive things about Maribyrnong for LGBTIQ+ people and their families?
2. What most needs to improve about Maribyrnong for LGBTIQ+ people and their families?
3. What priorities should Council address to positively influence LGBTIQ+ safety, participation and inclusion, and health and wellbeing in Maribyrnong?
4. What should Council do to address these priorities?
5. How should LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities be included in efforts to positively influence life for LGBTIQ+ people, families and communities in Maribyrnong?
6. What should other parts of the community (services, clubs, organisations, businesses) do?