29 June 2020

Australian Capital Territory Government

By email to: conversionpracticesban@act.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Re: Prohibition of conversion therapy

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) ACT Branch welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Government’s consultation on the introduction of a prohibition of conversion therapy. This submission has been prepared on the basis of the ACT Government’s Prohibition of Conversion Therapy in the ACT Factsheet (‘the Factsheet’).

The RANZCP is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Australia and New Zealand and is responsible for training, educating and representing psychiatrists on policy issues. The RANZCP has more than 6900 members, including more than 5100 qualified psychiatrists and is guided on policy matters by a range of expert committees, including the RANZCP ACT Branch Committee. The RANZCP ACT Branch Committee represents over 100 ACT members including over 80 qualified psychiatrists.

Position Statement 60: Sexual orientation change efforts sets out the RANZCP’s clear opposition to the use of sexual orientation change efforts of any kind and canvasses the harm that such efforts can cause to individuals, including to their mental health. In line with the RANZCP view, the RANZCP ACT Branch does not support conversion therapies and considers them to be harmful to the mental health of LGBTIQ+ individuals. The ACT Branch’s position aligns with the position of the RANZCP’s Victorian and Queensland branches, as set out in their submissions to the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety’s consultation in relation to legislative options to ban conversion practices and to the Queensland Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee’s consultation in relation to the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 respectively. We commend the ACT Government for its commitment to prohibiting conversion practices.

The RANZCP ACT Branch notes that conversion practices are not evidence-based and that they may have deleterious effects on the mental health of those who are exposed to them. This is particularly concerning given that the LGBTIQ+ community already experience poorer mental health outcomes than other demographics. [1] Those who have experienced conversion therapy should have access to appropriate mental health care when they need it and that care should be evidence-based, trauma-informed and tailored to the needs of the LGBTIQ+ community. The RANZCP ACT Branch strongly encourages the ACT Government to consider the funding needs of such mental health care services.
The RANZCP ACT Branch generally supports the definition of ‘conversion practices’ as set out in the Factsheet and recognises that it is important to include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in the definition. We also generally support the exclusions to this definition, noting that continued access to assistance and support in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual health is crucial. However, the RANZCP ACT Branch strongly recommends that the list of exclusions should also expressly exclude evidence-based mental health care to allow individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ to access the support they may need to explore or develop their identities. We suggest that the following should be included in the list of exclusions:

- ‘treatments and practices that provide evidence-based care and support for the facilitation of an individual's coping, social support and identity exploration and development’.

This would provide a clear exclusion for medical treatment and, more specifically psychiatric and mental health care. It is crucial that psychiatrists can continue to support individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community, and that any prohibition on conversion therapies does not have the unintended consequence of limiting access to legitimate mental health care.

Should you wish to discuss any matters raised in this submission, please contact Ms Amelia Rhodes, Policy Manager (Branches) on (03) 9601 4921 or at amelia.rhodes@ranzcp.org.

Yours sincerely

Dr Fatma H Lowden
Chair, RANZCP Australian Capital Territory Branch Committee

References