

Australian Council of Human Rights Authorities

Communique - October 2021

The Australian Council of Human Rights Authorities (ACHRA) which comprises the State, Territory and Federal human rights and discrimination authorities, recently met via videoconference on 14 October 2021 to consider a number of issues of common concern and interest. Consideration of the various human rights implications of restrictions implemented to manage the COVID-19 pandemic featured prominently in discussion.

The ACHRA members listed at the bottom of this document endorse the following statements.

COVID-19 human rights and discrimination impacts

ACHRA has established a national COVID-19 Human Rights Working Group to explore the potential of consistent response to the significant human rights and discrimination issues resulting from the pandemic. A national approach to issues including mask mandates and exemptions, vaccine misinformation, vaccine mandates and exemptions and interstate travel restrictions is needed. ACHRA is concerned about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on already marginalised communities, including First Nations peoples, people with disability, people experiencing family violence, children, and those suffering mental health issues.

Wiyi Yani U Thangani (WYUT) project

ACHRA affirms the need to embed First Nations gender justice and equality and is proud to support the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Project through the [attached resolution](#). ACHRA commends Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO, on this work, which marks the first time since 1986 that First Nations women and girls have been consulted as a collective about their rights, needs and aspirations.

Australia's response to the crisis in Afghanistan

The Australian Human Rights Commission together with the Australian Government, and the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions have been actively involved in efforts to evacuate members of the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission and other vulnerable groups since Taliban forces took control of Kabul in August 2021. These efforts continue at a high level to assist Afghanistan citizens, including those who are in immigration detention in Australia.

Sexual harassment and gender equality

ACHRA commends Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins and the Australian Human Rights Commission on their work on the Independent Inquiry into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces and the implementation of the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020) through the Respect@Work Council.

ACHRA plays an important role in supporting the work of the Government's Respect@Work Council by providing feedback and information to assist in implementing the recommendations of the Respect@Work report.

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Census 2021 questions and impact on LGBTIQ+ community

ACHRA is concerned that the 2021 Census omitted questions to collect data on sexual orientation, gender identity and variations in sex characteristics. Noting that LGBTIQ+ populations experience significant health, wellbeing and employment disparities compared to the general population, it is vital to collect accurate data on LGBTIQ+ communities to ensure services and programs meet community needs.

For further information contact the following ACHRA members:

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Julie O'Brien, Interim Chief Executive, Australian Human Rights Commission – 02 9284 9881

The Hon Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC, President, Anti-Discrimination NSW – 02 9268 5514

Sally Sievers, Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commissioner – 08 8999 1469

Scott McDougall, Queensland Human Rights Commissioner – 07 3021 9120

Jodeen Carney, South Australian Equal Opportunity Commissioner – 08 8207 2235

Sarah Bolt, Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner – 03 6165 7515

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