

The  
**MAKE LOVE LOUDER**  
Report

With Dr Shirleene Robinson,  
for the

**ABSOLUT  
LOVE LETTERS**

Project

# LOVE IS LOVE

but do we show our love enough?

The majority of Australians support the LGBTIQ+ community. But because most of us consider ourselves 'silent supporters', the loudest voices often come from the negative minority.

This report looks at how we can change that.

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Absolut have been a supporter of the LGBTIQ+ community around the world for over 40 years. Last year, we celebrated marriage equality in Australia, with a campaign that featured 141 same-sex couples who had tied the knot. This year, we undertook intensive research and consulted with leaders in the LGBTIQ+ community to understand how we could provide even more meaningful support and impact.

So we partnered with Dr Shirleene Robinson, a leading researcher, author and LGBTIQ+ advocate to conduct a study of 1000+ LGBTIQ+ Australians and 904 heterosexual allies, friends and supporters (allies & friends) of the community across Australia, to understand the importance of being a vocal supporter for the LGBTIQ+ community. This study Make Love Louder, underpins the Absolut Love Letters project. You can find out more about this project on page 19.

Leading advocacy and research organisation just.equal were a critical partner in working with the LGBTIQ+ community to gain their valuable insights for this study, and we are very grateful for their support.

“Understanding the needs of LGBTIQ+ Australians is critical to effective representation and advocacy. This is why research underpins everything the just.equal volunteer advocates do. We continue the tradition with this recent research piece with Absolut, expanding on our own research in 2019 which showed the LGBTIQ+ community are hurting right now. This new research explores the power of allies and champions finding their voice and joining us in the work in progressing equality and elevating the dignity of all.”

**Ivan Hinton-Teoh, co-founder, just.equal**



Research reference: The Make Love Louder report, with Dr Shirleene Robinson for the Absolut Love Letters Project, January 2020

# FOREWORD



**Dr Shirleene  
Robinson**

**Australia's  
LGBTIQ+  
community have  
fought long and**

**hard for equality. However, the  
struggle is far from over and  
the LGBTIQ+ community should  
not carry the burden alone.**

The Make Love Louder report highlights the power of support from people outside the LGBTIQ+ community, as friends and allies. For most, that support is silent, and this research explores why vocal support could make a huge difference to LGBTIQ+ people at a time when they most need it. It supplements research that found the postal survey period of 2017 was an intensely traumatic time for many LGBTIQ+ people. It also shows current debates around the religious freedom bill is taking a heavy toll.

This toll is particularly intense because an overwhelming majority of LGBTIQ+ people believe that the government is the institution with the greatest capacity to reduce LGBTIQ+ discrimination. Rather than debating a Religious Freedom Bill that would introduce new forms of discrimination, LGBTIQ+ people want the government to lead efforts against prejudice.

While the LGBTIQ+ population is undergoing a particularly difficult time with discrimination and scrutiny, people who support the rights of this community are often not fully aware of this. Supporters of the LGBTIQ+ community are people who believe in equal rights for LGBTIQ+ Australians, referred to as 'allies & friends' in this study.

Allies and friends are also not fully alert to the important role they can play in opposing discrimination and prejudice.

The overwhelming majority of LGBTIQ+ Australians feel that it is 'extremely' or 'very' important that they hear and see allies and friends publicly showing their support when they see the LGBTIQ+ community experiencing negativity and discrimination.

Encouragingly, there are allies and friends ready to be more fully engaged and show their support. A significant amount of allies and friends described themselves as 'silent supporters'. However, over half agreed that they would be more likely to speak up and show their support for the LGBTIQ+ community publicly if they knew how much of a positive impact it had on this group.

**This study shows that this  
support matters deeply.**

We are stronger together. Now more than ever, it is important that LGBTIQ+ allies speak up to make Australia a fairer place for everyone.

# THE PROBLEM

**3 IN 4**

LGBTIQ+ Australians have personally experienced negativity or discrimination relating to their LGBTIQ+ status

**1 IN 4**

sees or hears negativity or discrimination on a daily basis

For transgender Australians this is

**4 IN 5**

While

**2 IN 5**

sees or hears negativity or discrimination on a daily basis

Yet only

**1 IN 4**

allies and friends voice their support for the community. The rest are 'silent supporters'

---

So while we quietly **think** love,  
what's **heard** is hate

# HATE HURTS

**67%**

of LGBTI\* Australians say fear of prejudice or discrimination has caused them to sometimes modify their daily activities<sup>1</sup>

**37%**

of LGBT^ Australians aged 16+ have been diagnosed or treated for a mental disorder in the past three years<sup>2</sup>  
**2x more than the general population**

“LGBTIQ+ people can experience a number of other intersecting types of prejudice too—such as racial prejudice or prejudice against people with disabilities.

**3X**

LGBT^ Australians aged 16+ are more than three times as likely to be diagnosed with depression in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>

**5X**

Transgender and gender diverse people aged 18 and over are nearly five times as likely to be diagnosed with depression in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>

These statistics show that rates of abuse and discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ people in Australia are **endemic**. They are deeply concerning and they need to be addressed as an **immediate priority**.”

**Dr Shirleene Robinson**

**10%**

of LGBTI\* Australians believe they have been refused employment or promotion as a result of their sexuality<sup>1</sup>

\*Study surveyed LGBTI people  
^Study surveyed LGBT people

# PUBLIC DEBATE BRINGS NEGATIVE VOICES TO THE FOREFRONT

The 2017 YES vote for same-sex marriage was a major step towards equality for the LGBTIQ+ community in Australia

**YES 62%**

**NO 38%**

While the postal survey provoked an outpouring of love, it also amplified negative voices

---

“Fighting for equal rights in a public forum **caused significant trauma and distress** to an already vulnerable population, where an unnecessary postal survey asked all Australians whether same-sex couples should have the right to marry.”

**Dr Shirleene Robinson**

# NEGATIVE VOICES ARE DAMAGING

Increased exposure to negative messages about same-sex marriage was found to be associated with **higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress** for LGBTIQ+ Australians during the postal survey period.<sup>3</sup>

More than

# 70%

of LGBTIQ+ people reported feeling negative or very negative during the postal survey period before marriage equality was passed<sup>4</sup>

just.equal research

“There was a ‘secret’ Whatsapp group created by a member of my partner’s very Pentecostal family during the plebiscite. A nephew said the both of us were “going to hell”. It meant a lot to the both of us that the other nephews and nieces stood up for us.”

**Adrian, Fitzroy, Victoria**

“People are so toxic. Sometimes it physically hurts to be on social media”

**Alana, South Coast, New South Wales**

# TODAY, THE PUBLIC DEBATE IS ABOUT THE RIGHT TO DISCRIMINATE

When Australia voted for marriage equality, it voted decisively for fairness and against discrimination. Yet now, despite the fact just

**1%** of Australians say religious freedom is a priority issue<sup>5</sup>

there's currently a debate raging on new legislation that would introduce new forms of lawful discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people.

More than

**80%**

of LGBTIQ+ people report feeling worse during the current debate than when marriage equality was won

More than

**43%**

of LGBTIQ+ people feel Australia is not accepting of their community<sup>4</sup>

just.equal research

---

“This is particularly significant because this report shows that an overwhelming majority of LGBTIQ+ people (93%) believe that the government is the institution with the greatest capacity to reduce LGBTIQ+ discrimination.”

**Dr Shirleene Robinson**

# THERE'S POWER IN POSITIVITY

While these debates cause significant harm, the same research also found **personal and public support could provide degrees of protection against the negativity that raged during the same-sex marriage debate.**<sup>3</sup>

“The family and friends of same-sex attracted people appear to play an important role—and seem to even **offset some of the harm done** by the negative side of these debates—**by openly supporting LGBT rights.**<sup>1</sup>

“LGBT rights and mental-health organisations also have an important role to play by continuing their public support of minority issues. **Their public messages of support appear to improve the psychological well-being of same-sex attracted people who require it most.**”

**Stefano Verrelli, report author,  
University of Sydney**

# AND ALLIES HELP SHARE THE LOAD

These findings support wider research which has consistently found that the broader community matters, particularly for LGBTI\* people who may be alienated from their family of origin.<sup>1</sup>

“It is exhausting when it feels like I’m defending my place in society all the time. When allies activate in defence of my right to be me, I feel less isolated. I feel validated and, significantly, liberated from defending who I am. It’s a lifting of a weight, a burden I am conscious of. I can get on with my life, knowing someone else sees me, my humanity and, importantly, is fighting to affirm my dignity and right to a fair and equal space in the community.”

**Ivan Hinton-Teoh, OAM,  
co-founder, just.equal**

\*Study surveyed LGBTI people

“When I came out my best friend said it was fine & said I had nothing to worry about. That took away a lot of my shame & fear... feeling accepted by someone important to me.”

**Abby, survey respondent**

# THE LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY HAS LOTS OF SUPPORTERS

63%

of Australians are allies, friends or supporters of the LGBTIQ+ community

Yet

73%

consider themselves to be 'silent supporters'

93%

of LGBTIQ+ Australians have at least one personal ally in their lives

---

"It is extremely encouraging to know that there are supporters of the LGBTIQ+ community all across this country. **Now, more than ever, we need those voices to be active and to speak up and support their LGBTIQ+ family members and friends.** This study shows that Australians overwhelmingly believe in decency. They want to play a positive role in shaping a fairer and more equal country. **There is a real opportunity here to make a difference at a time when it is really needed."**

**Dr Shirleene Robinson**

# SUPPORTERS HEAR THE NEGATIVITY TOO

**60%**

of allies & friends report seeing or hearing negativity or discrimination to an individual or the community

**79%**

For those aged 25-34 this is much higher

But neither is as high as the community themselves

**95%**

of LGBTIQ+ Australians have seen or heard negativity or discrimination about their community

---

“Public discussion about LGBTIQI people that doesn’t actually involve us is particularly corrosive. We have to hear ourselves spoken about by people who don’t even know us.”

**Genevieve, Bowral, New South Wales**

# BUT DON'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND THE IMPACTS

**1 IN 5**

allies & friends believe this debate has no detrimental effects at all.

Though most allies & friends (59%) acknowledge the negative impacts of the current public debate could cause harm

Of these

**32%**

recognise that negativity in the public debate can trigger stress, depression or anxiety...

...or contribute to feelings of isolation

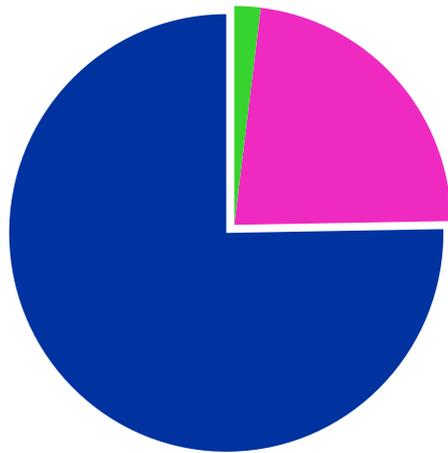
**28%**

---

“While most allies and friends acknowledge the potential impact on the LGBTIQ community, they don't fully appreciate just how damaging such debates could be. By broadening their awareness and increasing levels of support shown publicly, we have an opportunity to protect the health and well-being of a vulnerable community.”

**Dr Shirleene Robinson**

# MAYBE THAT'S WHY, TOO OFTEN, ALLIES & FRIENDS REMAIN SILENT



**73%**

are 'silent supporters'

**22%** are vocal  
**2%** of allies & friends consider themselves to be 'activists'

Why?

**82%**

The majority of allies & friends have questions and concerns about their support

Of which

**45%**

are not sure what is really helpful

**29%**

are not sure it's their place to speak up

**29%**

are afraid they will say the wrong thing and offend someone

# MAYBE IT'S TIME TO ASK

Only

**1 IN 4**

Allies & friends have ever asked LGBTIQ+ people in their circle how they would like to be supported

After all, the community wants to hear more positive voices

**92%**

of LGBTIQ+ Australians feel that it is extremely or very important that they hear and see allies, friends, and supporters speaking up publicly against negativity and discrimination

Foremost from friends and family

LGBTIQ+ Australians say having public support from these categories is extremely or very important:

**94%**

friends and family

**93%**

government

**89%**

media

**88%**

community organisations

**85%**

general public

**61%**

brands and corporations

# SO WHAT ARE THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS TO VOICE SUPPORT?



Jordan & Lavrence, brothers

**#1**

Standing up against anti-LGBTIQ+ speech (84%)

**#2**

Using respectful language about the LGBTIQ+ community (81%)

**#3**

Being accepting and considering your own prejudices (78%)

**#4**

Helping LGBTIQ+ people and perspectives to be seen and heard (74%)

**#5**

Listening to LGBTIQ+ people (73%)

**#6**

Expressing support for LGBTIQ+ people on social media (73%)

# MOST KNOW THERE'S STILL A WAY TO GO

## 3 IN 4

Allies & friends believe there's still a long way to go beyond marriage equality to achieve equal rights for LGBTIQ+ Australians.

Speaking up is one important way to show your support, and show love really is louder than hate.

Check out ACON's Count Me In Mini Ally Guide for some other ways to get behind our incredibly talented, diverse, extraordinary and much loved LGBTIQ+ community in Australia.

It's just \$2.20 to download, and helps to fund their amazing work.



# ABSOLUT LOVE LETTERS

This report underpins Absolut Love Letters, a project which aims to gather one of the largest collections of positive messages Australia has ever seen for the LGBTIQ+ community.

These messages will be shared publicly around the country.

To get involved, share your message of love, support and positivity for the community with us on social and help us **make love louder**

   #AbsolutLoveLetters

 [absolut.com/loveletters](https://absolut.com/loveletters)

'There will be resistance to every step we take, but love will overcome hate.

We will engage in everyday acts of resistance, we will not go away, or be quiet. Thanks for your support.'

**Mark, Carlton, Victoria**

# REFERENCES

1. Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A. and Patel, S. (2006). PRIVATE LIVES A report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians. [online] Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. Available at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2006/03/apo-nid4050-1164326.pdf>
2. Leonard, W., Lyons, A. and Bariola, E. (2015) A Closer Look at Private Lives 2: Addressing the mental health and wellbeing of LGBT Australians Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne accessed LGBT health alliance website [https://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/#\\_ednref22](https://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/#_ednref22)
3. Verrelli, S., White, F., Harvey, L. and Pulciani, M. (2019). Minority stress, social support, and the mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Australians during the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. *Australian Psychologist*, 54(4).
4. Just.Equal (2019). Religious Freedom and Transgender Debates: Survey for LGBTIQ+ Australians and Their Allies. Sydney: Just.Equal
5. ABC News. (2020). Environment trumps economy as voters' top concern ahead of election. [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-17/vote-compass-election-most-important-issues/11003192> [Accessed 31 Jan. 2020].



Khanyisa and Eloise, Allies



Khanyisa and Eloise, friends

If reflecting on your treatment as an LGBTIQ+ person reading this report caused you any distress, please contact the following organisations:

**Beyond Blue 1300 224 636**  
(available 24/7)

**QLife 1800 184 527**  
(3pm-midnight 7 days a week)