

# Exploring LGBTI Police Liaison Services: Factors influencing their use and effectiveness according to LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers

Angela Dwyer  
Matthew Ball  
Christine Bond  
Murray Lee  
Thomas Crofts

Report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council  
Grant: CRG 31/11-12

**July 2017**

## Executive Summary

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) police liaison programs were established around Australia from the late 1980s onwards to ameliorate the historically discriminatory relationships between LGBTI people and police. Police liaison officers are trained to know about LGBTI issues and are typically available for LGBTI people to seek support from in circumstances where they have been a victim, an offender, or even a witness to a crime. Interestingly, very few LGBTI people seek support from these officers when they need it (Berman and Robinson 2010), even though amongst LGBTI people there is a considerable awareness of these services being available.

This report outlines the results of a research project that explored why LGBTI people seek support from LGBTI police liaison officers across three Australian states (Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia). An internet-based questionnaire was conducted with LGBTI people about how they engage with LGBTI police liaison officers. Follow up interviews were then conducted with LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers to document key issues influencing whether or not LGBTI people choose to seek support from these liaison officers. The data suggests that:

- there are fairly high levels of awareness of liaison officer programs;
- when LGBTI people know about these liaison officers, they report low levels of interaction with them and are still reluctant to seek them out for support;
- for those aware of the programs, the most important functions of the liaison officers are supporting LGBTI victims, building relationships between the communities and the police, and working towards reducing homophobia and transphobia within the policing organisation;
- if an LGBTI police liaison program is not advertised or overtly supported by a police service, LGBTI people do not know it exists and they will not draw on it, and LGBTI police liaison officers feel like the organisation does not care about the program; and
- there are a number of barriers to the access of liaison services, including the organisational structure of the programs, past negative experiences with the police generally, and perceptions that liaison services can only be accessed for LGBTI-related issues.

## **Acknowledgements**

We are indebted to those members of LGBTI communities who were willing to be involved in our project as participants and to the many LGBTI community organisations that provided feedback on the questionnaire. Without their assistance, our understanding of the liaison programs would be limited. We are also grateful to the Queensland Police Service, the New South Wales Police Force, and the Western Australia Police for assisting with the development of this project. In particular, we recognise the valuable contribution of the police liaison officers who gave of their time and experiences. Finally, we acknowledge the research assistance of Natasha Papazian in setting up the online survey.

Funds for this study were provided by a Criminology Research grant (31/11-12).

## 1. Introduction

Equality for sexually and gender diverse people is a goal grounded broadly in the international human rights covenants ratified by Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011), yet this goal is still to be achieved in relation to policing, even though these people have been understood as vulnerable people (Bartwokiak-Theron and Asquith 2012). Historically, relationships between police and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people have been problematic due to the criminalisation of sodomy and discriminatory policing practices (Dwyer 2014). The policing of these communities has been traditionally informed by the notion that sexuality-, gender-, or sex-diversity was immoral and in need of regulation and criminalisation (Willett 2008, Wotherspoon 1991). Sodomy has since been decriminalised around Australia and general attitudes towards diversity of sexuality, gender, and sex have improved to some extent (Flood and Hamilton 2005). Police organisations have also dedicated time and resources to building relationships with LGBTI people (Tomsen 2009), including activities like community consultation committees and appearances at major LGBTI events (like marching in uniform in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras). With police now working through community policing methods (Bartkowiak-Theron and Corbo Crehan 2010), relationships between LGBTI communities and police have improved to some extent when compared to the overtly discriminatory policing practices of the past (Tomsen 2009). However, these relationships are still tenuous (Dwyer 2014), with the recent circumstances surrounding police actions at the 2013 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras suggesting we have some way to go (Callander 2014).

A key strategy adopted by police organisations to build relationships with LGBTI communities, and to support LGBTI victims, is through LGBTI police liaison officer programs.<sup>1</sup> Many police organisations around Australia now have a dedicated liaison program for LGBTI people. These programs comprise police officers who typically volunteer to be trained about LGBTI issues and do this role in addition to other duties associated with their substantive role as a police officer. The officers are usually available when a LGBTI person wants to speak to them, providing a key form of frontline support for LGBTI people. Interestingly though, research indicates that while many LGBTI people *know about* these liaison officers, very few of them actually *access* them, with one Queensland study finding LGBTI people were aware of these liaison services, but only infrequently *accessed* them (Berman and Robinson 2010). This is even more paradoxical given that research highlights how people using these services feel better supported than those accessing mainstream police (Leonard et al. 2008).

This report examines the results of a project exploring LGBTI Police Liaison services across three Australian states (Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia) to investigate the gap between *awareness* and *access* of these services. An online questionnaire was conducted with LGBTI people which asked questions about their perceptions of, and experiences with, police generally and of LGBTI police

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term LGBTI police liaison services generically, recognising that these services may have different names in different jurisdictions.

liaison officers. Follow up interviews were then conducted with LGBTI people to explore in-depth their experiences with LGBTI police liaison officers and the reasons they did or did not report victimisation to these officers. Interviews were also conducted with LGBTI police liaison officers to document their experiences in the liaison role, the operational and training issues this role intersects with, their views on why LGBTI people do or do not seek support from these liaison officers, and ways to improve these programs in future.

This report will first outline the rationale for the project, its aims, and the methodological process followed to generate and analyse the empirical data. Second, the report overviews the key findings from the online questionnaire conducted with LGBTI people. Third, the report examines the major themes emerging from the analysis of the qualitative interviews with LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers. Finally, key implications of our findings for policy and practice development in police and LGBTI community services are discussed.

## **2. Rationale and aims**

Existing research tells us a little about the gap between *awareness* of and *access* to LGBTI police liaison services. Most prior research, although still limited, focuses on the nature and extent of victimisation of LGBTI people and their reporting behaviour to the police generally. For instance, we know the victimisation of LGBTI people is widespread, increasing, and under-reported. Members of LGBTI communities have been verbally, physically, psychologically, sexually, and economically victimised in public, private, and institutional spaces (Cox 1990, 1994; GLAD 1994; Hunter 1990; Sandroussi and Thompson 1995) by strangers, school peers, and family (Berrill 1992). We also know LGBTI victims are reluctant to report because they:

- *fear the outcomes of reporting* such as police homophobia and disclosure of LGBTI status (Berman and Robinson 2010; Leonard et al. 2008); and
- *make assumptions about the reporting process*, such as thinking police will mistreat and further victimise them or judge them at fault (Baird et al 1994; Lilith 2001).

Police responses when victimisation is reported can also be unsupportive when they fail to intervene (either through arrest or other means) to protect LGBTI people (Pattavina et al. 2007). This means LGBTI people mostly seek support from informal networks (Farrell and Somali 2006).

Most importantly, however, as liaison services are set up explicitly to support LGBTI people and encourage reporting, we have no research exploring the role of LGBTI police liaison officers in these contexts. Studies conducted on LGBTI victimisation in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria have included questions about police liaison work, but we have limited detail because no research has gathered data directly from LGBTI police liaison officers. All existing research conducted on these services has been

produced *within* studies of LGBTI victimisation (Berman and Robinson 2010; Leonard et al. 2008). For example, Berman and Robinson (2010) conducted the largest ever study (n = 1094) of homophobic and transphobic victimisation in Queensland and how victims reported to police. They found that only 12% of the 53% of respondents victimised sought assistance from police. Of these, only 4% sought assistance from LGBTI police liaison officers, with most indicating the officers were supportive, although some stated they felt unsupported. These figures are remarkable considering 52% of respondents were aware that liaison officers were available for support. In the same study, LGBTI communities expressed problems with LGBTI police liaison services (such as: high turnover; lack of availability of liaison officers; unrealistically large territories allocated to liaison officers; and lack of effective training). However, interviews were not conducted with LGBTI police liaison officers to explore these concerns. This data is vital as we need to ensure LGBTI victims are not 'receiving reduced support and a less valuable service' (Leonard et al. 2008: 42) than those seeking support from mainstream police, and to increase the confidence of those within LGBTI communities to report to police. As such, this project sought to elaborate these issues to better understand how LGBTI people engage with LGBTI police liaison officers.

Specifically, the aims of the project were:

- To provide detailed victim- and police-oriented analyses of the processes and practices of reporting LGBTI victimisation to police to address the gap between awareness and access of LGBTI police liaison services; and
- To provide evidence that can be used by police organisations to improve LGBTI communities' confidence to report victimisation to police.

### **3. Methodology**

To address these aims, a mixed methods approach was used to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data from LGBTI communities and LGBTI police liaison officers. The project methodology underwent ethical review through the Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, and the University of Sydney. The project methodology was then reviewed and approved by the research committees of the police organisations involved (Queensland Police Service, the New South Wales Police Force, and the Western Australia Police) and some of the community organisations involved (The AIDS Council of New South Wales [ACON] and Twenty10). The methodology comprised two main stages of data collection and analysis.

#### **Stage One**

Data collection for the first stage was an online questionnaire of the views of the end-users of police liaison services in Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia. As internet based methodologies are

widely used in research with LGBTI communities (Riggle, Rostosky and Reedy 2005), this makes such an approach an appropriate technique to gain information on the experiences of members of LGBTI communities with regard to policing.

A preliminary mapping of the activities and strategies of police liaison services (based on police websites and discussions with State Coordinators of the services) was used to guide the design of the questionnaire. In addition, stakeholder consultation contributed significantly to questionnaire development. Key stakeholders were consulted from all participating police organisations and key LGBTI community organisations (in Queensland: Queensland AIDS Council [QAHC], Australian Transgender Support Association of Queensland [ATSAQ], and Open Doors Youth Service; in New South Wales: ACON and Twenty10; and in Western Australia: The Freedom Centre). Key contact people in these organisations reviewed the questionnaire and provided detailed feedback on the questionnaire measures. During these consultation processes, there were concerns raised by the New South Wales Police Force that the questions did not adequately reflect the different service delivery model of their liaison services (particularly the ways in which these officers interacted with LGBTI communities). As this was key to gaining ethical approval from New South Wales Police Force, two versions of the questionnaire were developed and administered. Unfortunately, this has meant that the NSW questionnaire data is not directly comparable with data from the other states.

The questionnaire was open for four months,<sup>2</sup> and administered using Key Survey software. With a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions, the questionnaire covered four main areas:

- assessment of experiences (if any) with the police generally;
- awareness of, and experience (if any), with LGBTI police liaison services;
- suggested improvements to the LGBTI police liaison services; and
- background information (such as socio-demographics).

The questionnaire did not ask respondents about their experiences of victimisation, as many recent Australian studies have recorded this data (Attorney General's Department of NSW 2003; Leonard et al. 2008; Berman and Robinson 2010). At the end of the questionnaire, participants could indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview by recording their contact details on a separate secure survey webpage. In total, there were 80 questions (across the two versions of the survey). However, most participants did not have to answer all questions. Questions that were not applicable based on their reported experiences would be skipped.

Participants were recruited through a targeted online marketing campaign, offering an incentive of entering a competition to win an iPod. Four key recruitment strategies were used. First, the research team created a Facebook site that included a weblink to the questionnaire. The Facebook site was shared across

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<sup>2</sup> Precise dates have been removed to ensure anonymity of people and circumstances mentioned in this report.

the Facebook sites of LGBTI community organisations in Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia. Second, LGBTI community organisations in these three states were also emailed information about the study to be distributed through their mailing lists and Facebook sites. Third, a press release was distributed to online queer media outlets (including Qld Pride and QNews in Queensland, and the Sydney Star Observer and SX News in NSW). Fourth, interviews were conducted with local radio stations about the study, including queer radio (such as Queer Radio and Dykes on Mikes on 4ZZZ in Queensland). In total, 154 *adult*<sup>3</sup> participants across the three states completed the questionnaire, with 40 (26.0%) from New South Wales, 106 (68.8%) from Queensland, and 8 (5.2%) from Western Australia. There were too few participants from Western Australia to allow for statistical analysis. Thus, the analysis of the survey data is restricted to New South Wales and Queensland. Data was exported into SPSS for statistical analysis. Where appropriate, we examine state differences in participants' experience of LGBTI liaison services.

## Stage Two

The second stage of the project involved conducting semi-structured individual interviews with key stakeholders based on the results of the survey. The interviews explored the localised, specific issues related to the context of LGBTI police liaison services and were conducted either in person or by phone by team members following a set script with a range of prompts to be used where necessary. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to one hour in duration and were audio recorded.

Ten (n=10) LGBTI people expressed interest, and interviews were conducted across Queensland (n=7) and New South Wales (n=3). These interviews explored:

- issues influencing reporting victimisation to police;
- perceptions of police support and LGBTI police liaison services; and
- what they thought ideal police support should be in a contemporary context.

Fifteen (n=15) LGBTI police liaison officers expressed interest and interviews were conducted across Queensland (n=8), New South Wales (n=5), and Western Australia (n=2). These interviews examined:

- how LGBTI police liaison officers conceptualise their role as liaison officers;
- how they perceive the effectiveness or otherwise of their services;
- how their role is influenced by organisational factors; and
- ways they believe the service could improve.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and the data was then thematically coded. Transcripts were then uploaded into Leximancer text analysis software to generate key codes in the data. These codes were

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<sup>3</sup> We were also interested in the experiences of young people (14 to 17 years) with the LGBTI police liaison services. Unfortunately, despite our recruitment efforts, only 6 young people across all three states completed the questionnaire. Thus, these participants are not included in our analyses.

then used to structure the analysis using NVivo 10 qualitative data program. Each interview data set was coded by two team members who thematised and coded the data ensuring inter-coder reliability.

#### 4. Seeking support from LGBTI police liaison officers: Results from a survey of LGBTI people in Queensland and New South Wales

The discussion below presents the key findings from our questionnaire of a convenience sample of LGBTI people of their experiences with police generally, and police liaison officers specifically. As already noted, our analysis is restricted to New South Wales and Queensland, as there were insufficient participants in Western Australia for statistical analysis. The results reported below use information from 146 adult participants, with 40 (27.4%) from New South Wales and 106 (72.6%) from Queensland.<sup>4</sup>

##### Who participated?

The majority of participants primarily identified as male (45.9%) or female (42.5%), and as gay (42.5%) or lesbian (25.3%). However, as Table 1 shows, there was considerable diversity among participants' gender and sexual identification. Most participants were born in Australia (84.5%) and employed (68.9%). About 69.3 per cent were aged between 18 to 39 years, with the majority aged between 18 to 29 years (44.7% of the total sample).

**Table 1: Participants' gender and sexual identity**

Gender Identity	%(n)	Sexual Identity	% (n)
Male	45.9% (67)	Gay	42.5% (62)
Female	42.5% (62)	Lesbian	25.3% (37)
Intersex	2.1% (3)	Bisexual	12.3% (18)
MTF	6.8% (10)	Queer	17.1% (11)
FTM	8.2% (12)	Straight	7.5% (11)
Trans-man	6.8% (10)	Pansexual	7.5% (11)
Trans-woman	4.1% (6)	Questioning	2.7% (4)
Genderqueer/gender diverse	8.9% (13)	Occasional sex with same sex person	0.7% (1)
Gender questioning	4.8 (7)		

Notes: The table does not include unsure/unspecified options. The total does not sum to 100% as participants could select more than one.

<sup>4</sup> Participants' state for the purposes of this analysis was based on where they had had most of their contact with LGBTI liaison officers.

## Assessments of the general police

Participants were asked a series of questions about their views of the police overall, in particular in terms of police-LGBTI community interactions. In addition, they were asked about any recent contact that they may have had with general duties officers.

### *How did participants view the police overall?*

Table 2 summarises the attitudes of the participants to the police overall. Participants were asked to select from a list of positive and negative statements about the police generally which described their general opinion of police. As more than one statement could be selected, Table 2 provides the percentage of participants who selected that statement. There was generally some positive assessment of police, with 41.1 per cent of participants indicating that the ‘police are helpful and supportive’. However, there was still an assessment of the police generally as not dealing well with the LGBTI community. For example, 35.6 per cent of participants indicated that the ‘police are still homophobic and transphobic’ and only 14.4 per cent indicated that the ‘police are respectful of LGBTI people’.

Overall, there were less positive assessments of the police generally for Queensland participants, compared to the New South Wales participants, with the differences greatest for the positive-valence statements. However, the differences were statistically significant only for three statements (as indicated by the red boxes in Table 2). Compared to New South Wales participants, Queensland participants were less likely to describe police as ‘working hard to support LGBTI people’ (17.55% vs 7.55%) and as ‘respectful of LGBTI people’ (20.0% vs 12.3%). An interesting exception to this pattern is that Queensland participants were less likely to be distrustful of the police (with only 14.2%, vs 20.0%, indicating that they ‘do not trust anyone in a police uniform’).

**Table 2: Attitudes to the police generally**

Statement	Total	NSW participants	Qld participants
<b><i>Positive</i></b> (% ticked)			
Police are helpful and supportive	41.1%	40.0%	36.8%
Police are working hard to support LGBTI people	10.3%	17.5%	7.55%
Police are respectful of LGBTI people	14.4%	20.0%	12.3%
<b><i>Negative</i></b> (% ticked)			
Police are still homophobic and transphobic	35.6%	35.0%	35.8%
Police do not want to know about crime linked to being LGBTI	21.9%	25.0%	20.8%
I do not trust anyone in a police uniform	15.8%	20.0%	14.2%

<u>Mean</u> agreement that police-public interactions influenced by sexuality/gender diversity	3.68 (1.02)	3.68 (1.19)	3.69 (0.95)
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Notes:

1. The percentages represent the proportion of participants who ticked that statement as describing their general opinion of police.
2. The red boxes show the items on which there was a statistically significant difference between New South Wales and Queensland participants at  $p < 0.05$ , using a z-test for differences between proportions.
3. For mean agreement, responses were reverse coded so that higher values represent more agreement (possible range 1 to 5). Standard deviation is reported in brackets.
4. N=146 (total sample), 40 (NSW), 106 (Queensland).

Participants were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed on a 5-point response scale that police interactions with members of the public are influenced by your sexuality/gender diversity (see Table 2). With higher values indicating stronger agreement, overall participants agreed that sexuality/gender diversity did influence public-police interactions (mean=3.68; SD=1.02). There was a similar level of agreement across New South Wales and Queensland participants.

### ***Have the participants had contact with the general police?***

Most participants (82.4%) reported some lifetime contact with the general police (see Table 3). Just under half (48.3%) the participants reported recent contact (i.e. within the last 12 months). The most common reason reported for the recent contact with police was as a victim of a crime (39.7% of participants with recent contact). This level of reported contact is not surprising given the topic of the questionnaire (about policing) and the participant recruitment process. A lower proportion of Queensland participants than New South Wales participants reported any contact or recent contact with the police (but these differences were not statistically significant in part due to sample size).

**Table 3: Reported contact with the general police**

	Total	NSW participants	Qld participants
<u>Ever</u> had contact with the police	82.4%	90.0%	79.3%
<u>Recent</u> contact with the police (in last 12 mths)	48.3%	50.0%	47.6%
Of those reporting recent contact:			
Quality of interaction reported as good or very good	48.8%	46.7%	50.0%

Notes:

1. The percentages represent the proportion of participants who reported contact with the police.
2. N=146 (total sample), 40 (NSW), 106 (Queensland). For recent contact, N=43 (total), 15 (NSW), 28 (Queensland).

For those with *recent* contact with the general police, participants were asked about the quality of that interaction. Overall, participants were fairly positive about the quality of the contact. Around half of the participants (48.8%) who had had recent contact reported the interaction as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (see Table 3). There was no meaningful difference between states in this assessment.

### **Assessments of LGBTI Police Liaison Services**

Participants were asked a series of questions about their knowledge and awareness of the LGBTI police liaison services. Recall that as these services are delivered differently between New South Wales and Queensland, there were two versions of this section of the questionnaire, depending on the jurisdiction in which the participant had had contact with the liaison services. We present the results for similar questions, but due to the questionnaire differences, we do not use statistical tests. Thus, comparisons between the jurisdictions must be made carefully.

#### ***Were the participants aware of the LGBTI police liaison services?***

Most participants reported that they knew about the LGBTI liaison officers, with 80 per cent of New South Wales participants and 70.6 per cent of Queensland participants indicating that they were aware of the liaison services. For those who knew of the LGBTI liaison services, the most common source of information about the services was from LGBTI events, community groups, or associations (43.8% New South Wales participants; 33.3% Queensland participants).

#### ***What did the participants expect that police liaison officers do?***

Table 4 summarises participants’ views of the expected role of LGBTI liaison officers. Of those participants who were aware of the LGBTI police liaison service, few participants reported having *no* knowledge about what the role of the liaison officers entailed (6.9% New South Wales participants, 6.1% Queensland participants). Participants who reported some knowledge (even if they felt unsure) were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about what was involved in the job of a LGBTI liaison officer.

In general, the reported expectations seem consistent with the liaison role, but there are a few exceptions. As shown in Table 4, there was strong agreement in both jurisdictions that the role should involve activities that:

- support the delivery of policing services to the LGBTI community, such as ‘make me feel comfortable when talking to general police’ (4.50 New South Wales participants, 4.38 Queensland participants), and ‘to support LGBTI people who want to report a crime’ (4.87 New South Wales participants, 4.64 Queensland participants). There was also strong agreement that the role

included taking reports about homophobic/transphobic crime, or general crime from LGBTI victims. This expectation is concerning, as there are organisational constraints on liaison officers in practice around taking reports of crime;

- improve the relationship between LGBTI communities and police, such as ‘to know about LGBTI issues’ (4.69 New South Wales participants, 4.70 Queensland participants), and ‘to build relationships between LGBTI communities and police’ (4.56 New South Wales participants, 4.59 Queensland participants); and
- educate other police about LGBTI issues, such as ‘to provide information to other police about LGBTI issues’ (4.87 New South Wales participants, 4.59 Queensland participants).

There was also some agreement that this role was about changing community attitudes, although such an expectation would be difficult for police to achieve in isolation from other social changes. However, on average, participants in both jurisdictions were neutral or somewhat disagreed that the role should include managing LGBTI people at Pride events (2.56 New South Wales participants, 3.05 Queensland participants).

**Table 4: Expected role of LGBTI liaison officers**

Statement	NSW participants	Qld participants
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
To build relationships between LGBTI communities and police	4.56 (0.88)	4.59 (0.65)
To support LGBTI victims who want to report a crime	4.87 (0.91)	4.64 (0.70)
To provide information to other police about LGBTI issues	4.50 (0.92)	4.54 (0.66)
To manage LGBTI people at Pride events	2.56 (1.31)	3.05 (1.21)
To stop public homophobia at Pride events	3.88 (1.09)	3.80 (1.10)
To protect LGBTI people	4.19 (0.98)	4.07 (1.10)
To change attitudes in the community	4.06 (0.85)	3.79 (1.19)
To know about LGBTI issues	4.69 (0.48)	4.70 (0.57)
To make me feel comfortable when talking to general police	4.50 (0.63)	4.38 (0.86)
To refer me to other support services to get more help	4.50 (0.73)	4.39 (0.87)
To take reports about general crime from LGBTI victims	4.13 (1.02)	4.00 (1.02)
To take reports about homophobic/transphobic crime	4.44 (0.63)	4.48 (0.79)
To provide me with counselling	2.19 (0.91)	2.58 (1.12)

Notes:

1. responses were reverse coded so that higher values represent more agreement (possible range 1 to 5). Standard deviation is reported in brackets.
2. N (some knowledge of LGBTI police liaison role) = 16 (NSW), 56 (Queensland).

Overall, the general expectation for the liaison role was seen by participants as having both external orientation (relationships between police/community) and internal orientation (promoting better understanding within the policing organisation).

***Have the participants had contact with liaison officers?***

Only a small proportion of participants reported having had recent contact with liaison officers within the last 12 months (see Table 5). Just over 9% (n=3) of New South Wales participants, and 16% (n=17) of Queensland participants, reported recent contact with liaison officers. Of those who had recent contact with a liaison officer in Queensland, only 17.6% (n=3) resulted in a report to the general police. (This information was not available for New South Wales participants).

This contrasts starkly with the reported recent contact with general police (45.0% New South Wales participants, 47.6% Queensland participants). These differences in reported recent contact are a strong reminder that most policing services for LGBTI communities remain delivered by general duties officers, thus reinforcing the importance of changing attitudes within the policing organisation more broadly.

Participants with *recent* contact with liaison officers *in Queensland* were asked about the quality of their last interaction with the liaison officer. Overall, Queensland participants were very positive about the quality of contact, with 94.1 per cent reporting that the interaction was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Reported contact with LGBTI liaison officers**

	NSW participants	Qld participants
<u>Recent</u> contact with LGBTI liaison officers (in last 12 months)	9.4% (n=3)	16.0% (n=17)
Of those reporting recent contact:		
Resulted in a report to general police	----	17.6%
More comfortable talking to a liaison officer than general police	----	94.1%
Quality of interaction reported as good or very good.	----	94.1%

Notes:

1. Dashes indicate that the data is unavailable.
2. N (reporting recent contact) = 3 (NSW), 17 (Queensland).

***What are participants’ views of LGBTI liaison officers in Queensland?***

Table 6 summarises the views of liaison officers for participants who had recent contact with these officers in the last 12 months. Participants were asked how they would describe the liaison officer by rating a series of characteristics. We restrict the results to the Queensland sample, as there were insufficient cases of recent contact with liaison officers in the New South Wales sample.

Overall, participants who had recent contact had very positive views of liaison officers, rating officers as respectful, professional, supportive and approachable (see Table 6). There was only one participant who had a negative assessment of the liaison officer.

**Table 6: Views of LGBTI liaison officers in Queensland**

Descriptor of liaison officer	% (n)
<b><i>Positive</i></b>	
Respectful	88.2% (15)
Professional	82.4% (14)
Supportive	82.4% (14)
Approachable	88.2% (15)
<b><i>Negative</i></b>	
Threatening	5.9% (1)
Hostile	5.9% (1)
Homophobic/transphobic	5.9% (1)

Notes:

1. The percentages represent the proportion who rated the characteristics as 'very much' or 'somewhat'.
2. N (reported recent contact) = 17.

### **Suggested Reforms for LGBTI Police Liaison Services**

Participants were also asked about what they saw, in the future, as the role of liaison officers, as well as more general reforms within policing that would improve the support for LGBTI communities. Due to differences in the liaison services, different lists of potential reforms were provided in the questionnaire depending on the jurisdiction. Thus, we cannot directly compare the suggested reforms. Table 7 presents the most common function for liaison officers in the future and the most common reform identified by participants.

The most commonly identified function that participants felt liaison officers should be doing in the future related to homophobia and transphobia (see Table 7). (Note this does not mean that participants do not think that this is currently being done.) For New South Wales participants, the most common response was that officers should be available to support victims of homophobia and transphobia. The most common suggested general policing reform for NSW participants was having more police identify as LGBTI (25.0%).

In the Queensland sample, there were two most common responses for the role of officers in the future. Like in the New South Wales sample, support for victims of homophobia and transphobia was most commonly identified as a role for liaison officers in the future (79.2%). However, participants also identified stopping homophobia and transphobia in the police (79.2%). The most common suggested general policing

reform was having liaison officers talk to school students so that LGBTI youth were aware of the available liaison services (77.4%).

**Table 7: Suggested reforms for LGBTI liaison services**

	NSW participants	Qld participants
<b><i>Top identified function</i></b>		
Available to provide support when I am a victim of homophobia/transphobia	27.5%	79.2%
Working towards stopping homophobia/transphobia in the police		79.2%
<b><i>Top identified reform</i></b>		
Having liaison officers talk to students in schools so LGBTI youth aware of service	---	77.4%
Having more police officers identify as LGBTI	25.0%	---

Notes:

1. Different lists of potential reforms were provided for the different jurisdiction.
2. N = 40 (NSW), 105 (Queensland).

## **5. Reasons for, and barriers to, seeking support from LGBTI police liaison officers: Results from interviews with LGBTI people and LGBTI police liaison officers in Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia**

The discussion below examines the key themes emerging from the interviews in the project. It incorporates interviews with LGBTI people in Queensland and New South Wales (no people from Western Australia replied to the email to take part in interviews), and LGBTI police liaison officers in Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia. Interviewees did not necessarily discuss all themes in the data, so the discussion reports the most common themes. As most themes were raised in both the community and police liaison officer interviews, we do not distinguish between the two samples. On the few occasions when the theme was primarily from a particular group, this is noted in the discussion.

### **Limited seeking of assistance from LGBTI liaison officers**

Both the community and liaison officer interviews indicated that accessing liaison services generally was not common, and this was especially the case in relation to providing support for reporting criminal victimisation. All but one of the LGBTI people interviewed knew about LGBTI police liaison programs, and generally had an accurate understanding of them, but contact was minimal. All LGBTI liaison officers' responses also suggested that it was not typical for someone to directly seek assistance from them. Some

officers stated that it was 'not very often' (ML3NSW<sup>5</sup>), 'very rarely' (ML6QLD), 'once a year' (FL1QLD, ML1QLD) or up to 'half a dozen times a year' (FL2QLD, ML3QLD). As far as the researchers are aware, there are currently no jurisdictions in Australia that record statistics about when, where, or how their LGBTI police liaison officers are deployed in their districts. These responses reflect the pattern found in our online survey as well as existing research (Berman and Robinson 2010), confirming that LGBTI people know about LGBTI police liaison officers, but few access them face-to-face.

However, the police liaison interviews suggest geographical variation in the accessing of liaison services for reporting of crime. For instance, one male liaison officer from Queensland was situated in 'those kind of suburbs with a high gay population in them' and talked about having much more frequent calls for service than most other officers in the study: 'Probably once a week. It varies. I think I had one week where I had seven calls in two weeks. Lately, I think I got one last week and...Probably once a month' (ML4QLD). Other officers noted that being a liaison officer in rural areas means fewer calls for service than in city areas:

Our command is very small, geographically we are about 16 square kilometres so our workload is not huge when you compare it to city areas. So very rarely am I asked to assist with incidents (ML3NSW).

I think that's hard for me because here you could sit back and no one would know to ask for your help. So in the country aspect I would maybe go to one meeting every two months...as a GLLO<sup>6</sup> [Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer] in the city and depending on your work location, you can have a lot more calls for service (FL1NSW).

However, officers in country areas emphasised the need to be more 'proactive' (FL1NSW) as liaison officers so that LGBTI people know they are available if they do need support with reporting crime. They suggested that being a liaison in city areas meant that LGBTI people were more likely to access support because people know about the service more readily. In contrast, in country areas people may be more reticent to seek support or report crime because they do not know the service exists or fear potential homophobia from police.

### ***Types of support for crime victim provided by LGBTI police liaison officers***

Regardless of where the liaison officers were located, the forms of support they provided to community members during the process of reporting crime varied considerably. Liaison officers could experience these interactions as either productive or problematic, and sometimes both. There were a diverse range of

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<sup>5</sup> The letters and numbers following quotes from liaison officers indicate the gender of the participant, the fact that they are a liaison officer, the number of the participant, and the state in which they work. Thus, ML3NSW is the third male liaison officer from New South Wales interviewed. FL1QLD is the first female liaison officer from Queensland interviewed, and so on.

<sup>6</sup> GLLO is an acronym of Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer, a phrase used to describe LGBTI police liaison officers in some policing organisations in Australia (New South Wales Force, Federal Police).

circumstances noted by officers that they identified as resulting in productive interactions with LGBTI people, such as providing assistance:

- with harassment/assault/discrimination from members of the public (ML4QLD, FL1NSW, FL2WA, ML1QLD, FL1QLD);
- by taking a statement because the person did not want to disclose details of a sexual nature to a general officer (ML2NSW, ML2QLD);
- with same sex intimate partner violence calls for service (ML3NSW, FL1NSW, FL1QLD, FL2QLD, ML1QLD, ML2QLD, ML3QLD, ML4QLD, ML6QLD);
- with personal issues: neighbour harassment, property disputes, family disputes, stalking, mental illness, sex work, blackmail, workplace discrimination (FL1QLD, FL2QLD, ML3QLD, ML4QLD, ML3NSW, FL1WA);
- involving 'beat' (public toilet spaces where men meet other men to have anonymous sex) activity (FL1NSW, FL1QLD, ML1QLD);
- with complaints about police brutality (FL1QLD);
- with thefts, frauds by ex-partner (FL1QLD);
- to other police officers with cases they believed involved LGBTI issues and where they have specifically requested support (FL1NSW); and
- with reporting a HIV positive person who was knowingly infecting others (FL2WA).

### **Features of effective LGBTI police liaison programs**

Interviews with LGBTI police liaison officers and LGBTI people highlighted a range of different factors that made liaison programs effective, particularly in encouraging LGBTI people to seek support from these programs, and improving LGBTI community attitudes towards policing more generally. These factors could be grouped into two key program features, namely liaison officers:

- showing an ethic of care; and
- demonstrating good policing practice with LGBTI people.

### ***Importance of showing attention and care for LGBTI issues***

Interview comments highlighted the importance of how police liaison programs with LGBTI people helped to increase confidence in reporting by attending appropriately to LGBTI people. This was frequently emphasised as a necessary feature of liaison programs to be effective in the officer interviews. First, many officers suggested that the very existence of LGBTI police officers (and the liaison program) was an important demonstration of care. For example, one officer noted their liaison program shows care simply by virtue of the fact that it exists:

It's confirmation that you are being looked after...that we are here for the whole community. We are not leaving anybody out and we are providing as many services that we can to make reporting crime easier, to make the journey through the criminal justice system easier' (ML3NSW).

Overall, the liaison officers recognised the importance of police showing they are attending to peoples' issues by making available officers 'that would understand, probably a bit better than your run-of-the-mill copper' (FL1QLD). Interestingly, they pointed out that this can be an issue for all police officers: if LGBTI people 'don't feel comfortable talking to the police, you are not going to get anywhere gay or otherwise' (ML2NSW):

It's nothing worse, and you see it with general duties officers, these young police who are just flogged all day from job to job to job. They walk in and 'here is another one'. The official break and enters. These people's houses keep getting ransacked and all their valuables, their mother's jewellery stolen, deceased, a whole range of things and police, they struggle to hide their boredom and it's really bad. So yeah, I think that is the important thing...you can't do this and just say and be a bit blasé about it, 'Yeah I'm a LGBTI officer, do you have a problem?' You can't be like that (ML1QLD).

According to the officer interviewees, the attitude and approach of police interacting with LGBTI people was particularly important. Liaison officers needed to employ an attitude focused on respecting LGBTI people and one which revolved around 'rapport building and time...a bit of understanding and a bit of empathy and being nice to someone in their situation' (ML2NSW). Officer interview participants noted how if police demonstrated 'that passion and that care' (ML2QLD) for LGBTI people, then those people would be more likely to approach police when they needed to report a crime:

I think it is an important role in giving them the confidence to come forward and report crime. If crime is not reported then there is a whole group of people in society who are suffering who don't need to. And I think it is important in policing throughout the world that you police *with* rather than *police* them. They got to have confidence to report the crime and even though often they will realise there is not a lot you can do with it, but if they know a police officer cares and is interested in their problems and tried their best to solve their problem, that is a huge step (ML1QLD).

Evidenced here is a focus on an ethic of care, but also the need to move away from more authoritarian forms of policing work. As exemplified in the above quote, many officers clearly saw the importance of community policing approaches – where officers police *with* LGBTI people instead of *policing* them using a hierarchical, top-down approach. Even so, it is clear that the success of this always depends in the first instance on whether or not LGBTI people are willing to approach police.

The comments of LGBTI interviewees who had direct contact, and those who heard about direct contact, also reflected the importance of care and understanding. LGBTI participants shared multiple examples of how LGBTI police liaison officers demonstrated care and attention in their interactions with them or with their friends:

A friend of mine in Ipswich had really bad harassment from their neighbours and were really fearful, and I said talk to the liaison officers and they did and they had really good support and like the biggest thing and they said they got really good validation and empathy (GM2QLD<sup>7</sup>).

Yeah, a more understanding ear of what was happening to us. Like I said one of the things that was a struggle for the both of us during this whole process was getting past our own doubts about could this really be happening (GM1NSW).

Firstly, he understood and that was a big thing. He totally got where I was coming from. He understood why I was fearful and why I was scared. That was the biggest thing. He had empathy. He also got it that as a gay person fearing that this was targeted because I was gay gives it more complexity that a straight person might not have. And that comes back to the LGBT training. He totally got that I was more fearful than perhaps a straight person. He was excellent (GM2QLD).

These are the types of officers that existing research demonstrates are important for ensuring quality policing interactions with LGBTI people (Miles-Johnson 2014).

Interestingly, perspectives of LGBTI people who had *not* had direct contact with police liaison officers also reiterated the importance of notions of care. Their comments demonstrated that LGBTI people expect that police liaison officers would be able to provide care and understanding that general police may not. They talked about how it was useful just knowing they were there if they needed them and knowing that they would be 'just a little bit more sympathetic' (GM2NSW):

Knowing that if you can go to an officer they understand yeah, so look like someone who has an insight and I think it would be important to, have someone from that background obviously because they'd understand (LEF1QLD).

I think if it was about my sexuality then that would definitely be it, would feel good to know you could go to someone who has some understanding or some training in the issue and that's yeah that would be hugely important (LEF2QLD).

These comments clearly suggest that, even if they did not access this service, it was useful to know that the service existed and could be accessed if needed. Ultimately, though, this only worked if people actually knew about the services and if police organisations marketed the programs effectively:

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<sup>7</sup> The quotes from LGBTI people interviewed are referenced in a similar way to those from liaison officers above; the first letters refer to the participants' sexuality and/or gender identification, the numbers to the number of the interview, and the final letters to the state of the participant. However, to distinguish between liaison and lesbian, the letters 'LE' are used to identify lesbian women.

I mean I wouldn't be able to tell you what they do or what services they could offer me...would I go to one if I've got a crime to report because a crime could be random not just because I'm a lesbian. That's the difference: knowing what services they could provide specifically to me, that's different to the like general population (LEF1QLD).

It is clear that having knowledge of what LGBTI police liaison services offer is important for these interviewees, and that the marketing of these services to LGBTI communities is of vital importance if these communities are going to feel supported even when they do not need to access them. This will be discussed further below.

### ***Importance of demonstrating positive examples of policing***

Many comments made by the officer interviewees focused on how police liaison officers could enhance relationships with LGBTI people by demonstrating positive examples of policing and thereby managing LGBTI peoples' perceptions of policing more broadly. The emphasis on positive policing practices also has clear links to a community policing approach for policing LGBTI communities. These themes emerged primarily in the officer interviews with reference to historical police-LGBTI interactions and to historical understandings of policing as a masculine occupation more broadly:

I think it enhances - I hope it does - greatly. If it's done correctly...Purely because what I was saying before about the history, you know. We need positive examples going forward if we're ever going to be able to get rid of that idea of what, you know, police used to be like 30-40 years ago...Having said that, we need to manage their expectations as well. The community can't think 'Oh, we've got our own little private police service who is going to do everything for us - 24 hour on call.' So as long as we manage those expectations, both from the community and from the police, I think there's a lot of room to make some really positive impressions (FL2QLD).

That's one of my main aims, and stop the whole 'we're all a bunch of homophobic assholes' thing. Like I had that the other day from a guy coming out of [a local queer-friendly nightclub] who'd been hit by a lesbian and was going 'You don't know what it's like in there, they're all homophobic security'...Yeah, he was like 'You don't know what it's like to be gay!' I'm like 'Well I do actually. I've been going to [LGBTI nightclub] while you were still at Kindergarten.' That shut him up pretty quickly (ML4QLD).

I think it is important that the community understands that we do have officers here that have received the training and that there actually are gay, lesbian, and transgender officers within the NSW Police Force. I think a lot of people assume that it is a boy's club or you know, very military when that really is not the case. So I think that it adds diversity to our organisation as well and I think the public do see that and recognise it (ML3NSW).

Public expectations are at the forefront of these examples and particularly expectations around the perceptions of policing organisations. Officers suggest that what they do can change how LGBTI people

think about policing. They also show the fine balancing act of demonstrating support, and therefore supporting confidence to report, whilst still being realistic and ensuring they are not sending the message that they are 'on call'. According to liaison officers, making an example of good policing with LGBTI people is one way that public expectations of policing can be managed to ensure that LGBTI people report to police in future:

I think leading by example but [NAME REMOVED] and myself, [NAME REMOVED] was the one that turned up to all the meetings on time and all the locations. But leading by example is very important and it brings together all those different individuals and it makes it easier to deal with and to report and develop with (ML2QLD).

Participants particularly emphasised the importance of ensuring that LGBTI people see how police are exemplifying positive practice with these communities. They specifically talked about community engagement activities:

I think it's mainly the proactive stuff, probably knowing we do. I know some people previously said that they haven't reported things to us like people driving past them and yelling 'poofter' and things like that (ML4QLD).

I think it's important to kind of...especially at events like PRIDE and Mardi Gras and stuff, to show that we're supportive of the gay community and having liaison officers within the QPS is obviously important in itself. So I think showing a presence and participating in as many issues and events is very important (ML5QLD).

Community engagement is foregrounded as an important way that police can exemplify good police practice with LGBTI people and is situated as central to instilling LGBTI people with the confidence they need in order to seek support from police when they are victimised. Making an example of this positive engagement at community events speaks to the importance of the visibility of LGBTI police liaison programs overall.

### **Barriers to seeking support from LGBTI liaison officers**

A key aim of the interviews was to identify major barriers encountered by LGBTI people to broader access to the liaison services. Some of the barriers to seeking support identified by interviewees are already well-documented in existing research, including: past negative policing experiences; being perceived as a nuisance; anonymity complicating reporting processes; and historical policing of LGBTI people. However, other issues were raised which have not been documented in past research, including: conflicting expectations and assumptions about the liaison role the role of police organisational structures in complicating the provision of support; and the lack of support from high-level police management for

liaison programs undermines program success. The issues identified in the interviews can be grouped into three types of barriers:

- Individual
- Program-related
- Organisational

### ***Individual-level barriers***

The interviewees identified a range of individual-level factors that impact on members of the LGBTI community accessing liaison services. Some of these factors are similar to the reasons why the public do not access policing services generally. However, concerns about homophobia and transphobia in the general community amplify the impact of these factors.

#### *LGBTI people do not seek support from LGBTI police liaison officers because they do not want it*

Interestingly, a key issue that emerged in both the LGBTI and officer interviews was that sometimes assistance is not wanted, even in cases where support from liaison officers was initially sought. For example, in relation to what one officer suspected was an assault during Mardi Gras, the officer noted how he had ‘tried a number of times to get involved but at the end of the day if they don’t want to talk to you, you can’t force them to’ (ML3NSW), with the officer noting that ‘I got the response that “don’t worry about it, you are not going to be able to do anything about it” and was basically brushed away’. Others noted instances where people contacted them about a particular issue and decided not to push ahead with the process because of the nature of the complaint and ‘because they can’t – they don’t want to deal with the court process for male-on-male rape’ (FL1QLD).

These comments suggest that the nature of the complaint and the characteristics of the criminal justice process influence whether or not people are willing to seek support and report crimes to LGBTI police liaison officers. Further to this, officers’ discussions also highlighted how some types of crimes did not need to be dealt with by LGBTI police liaison officers. As some officers recognised, certain crimes or concerns are being effectively dealt with by general police officers, so there was no need for them to specifically seek out a liaison officer (ML4NSW): ‘I don’t need an LGBTI officer to report that my wallet was stolen’ (ML2QLD).

#### *LGBTI people are concerned they might be perceived as a nuisance if they access LGBTI liaison services*

For some LGBTI interviewees, feeling like they were a nuisance was reason enough not to report to LGBTI police liaison officers, an issue also highlighted by existing research. The interviewee below talks particularly about what he calls ‘filtering’: a process where he and his partner made decisions about what

would be, and what would not be, reported to police, as they felt that taking every incident of harassment to police would reflect badly on them:

I can't remember which point in that list of events, but at some point we decided to report everything that happened. But even then we filtered. So we can't report the mouth abuse at the shopping centre. You can't do that. He called me a poofter, well yes. And then you have to go into this long discussion of why it is offensive to be called a poofter. Yes we did filter, and we said we don't want to be a nuisance. A piece of advice that I got from [NAME REMOVED] that was really interesting was, she said 'I don't think you should go make a formal complaint because then you will just get everybody offside. You will enter a complaints process and everyone will be offside' (GM1NSW).

The process of 'filtering' described in this comment shows that, even though there were many incidents experienced by this gay male and his partner, many of these incidents were not reported to police for fear of police perceiving them to be a nuisance.

#### *Requests for anonymity impact how much LGBTI police liaison officers can support LGBTI people*

The LGBTI police liaison officers interviewed felt that the ability to remain anonymous may shape the reporting of crime by LGBTI people. Although there were mixed views about how often victims requested to remain anonymous, there was some recognition that this was a factor in victims' decision to report. For example, ML3QLD noted that in some cases, victims feel uncomfortable about providing their full name or other personal details when reporting these incidents and are often simply looking for advice – again limiting the officer's ability to help them. In some instances, people did request anonymity up front (ML4QLD), but in others 'it's just that I don't push them' (ML3QLD). One of the key tensions in the discussion about this issue was between not providing information and needing that information to proceed with a report/complaint. Liaison officers talked about carefully balancing this tension when talking to LGBTI people about a particular situation they wanted support with. Typically, the degree of confidentiality allowed was dictated by the type of situation it was:

You know if you do know the identity of your victim it does take some coercion to turn their mind set around and make them to bat on so to speak, because if you push the barrel and you don't have a victim, you can't do anything about it. But if it is an incident where someone said on Oxford street between 10-2 in the morning there is a large group of men frequenting souped up cars and they come and give the guys a bad time as they are walking down the street to their cars, well sure that can be anonymous and you don't need to push it because some information is better than none (FL1NSW).

In contrast, others suggested that police trustworthiness with confidential information was a key factor in LGBTI people making decisions about remaining anonymous in reports: 'Not everybody is trustworthy in the police and what happens with the information' (ML1NSW). While maintaining anonymity

was not a problem for the officers, comments made by officers on this topic suggested that LGBTI people sometimes demonstrated frustration because they expect liaison officers to do something whilst at the same time maintaining their anonymity in the process: 'You know anonymous information, it is very hard. Someone comes into a police station and says "I've been bashed up but I'm not going to tell you my name". That's not really going to work or go very far' (ML3NSW). Overall, the discussion about anonymity in reporting suggests that, according to the liaison officers interviewed, anonymity may be a key concern for LGBTI people, but the officers struggle to balance this concern with the need for information if they are going to be able to take a report.

*Negative experiences with the police generally shape the willingness of LGBTI people to seek support from LGBTI police liaison officers*

The cohort of LGBTI people interviewed had had a wide variety of experiences with police. Importantly, how they experienced these police interactions as positive or negative significantly shaped their current opinions of police, and their willingness to approach any police, including police liaison officers. For instance, one participant talked about how her mother was a police officer so she had 'always seen them in a good way', but then goes on to say that 'more recently they're starting to lose that edge just a little bit'. Later in the interview, she talks about how recent political changes that expanded police powers in certain contexts had heavily influenced what police can and cannot do: 'I guess with new laws that they've implemented are starting to just I guess it's not them implementing the laws...I'm feeling a bit sorry for them really' (LE1QLD).

While many LGBTI interviewees had positive perceptions and experiences, around a third of our participants talked about extremely negative experiences of abuse, police misconduct, and discrimination. This included physical assault and corrupt behaviour (in two cases) and verbal abuse (in two cases). In addition to this, there were suggestions police did not believe their complaints, did not take their complaints seriously, or focused on irrelevant issues – such as their visible sex toys in one case. For example, one respondent noted how 'they didn't believe me. They started with this position of doubt that this is harassment' (GM1NSW). Here the participant suggested while they took a complaint of a neighbour harassing him and his partner to police, they were continually treated like they were over-reacting or told there was no evidence regarding the threats being made to them:

So I made a complaint about the way we were being treated, and the basis of my complaints was essentially that every time one of those events took place we went into a police station and the police wanted to regard it as a new event. I understand that this is what they are required to do. If our car had been spray painted pink, which happened three to four times, the police would say that is just an instance of vandalism. And I would have to go through all the events over and over again to establish a history and explain to them why it wasn't just

vandalism, why it was personally threatening and why I did need their intervention (GM1NSW).

At least two respondents had such negative perceptions of police that the existence of the LGBTI police liaison program was unlikely to change their way of thinking, no matter what was undertaken:

Well honest opinion of the New South Wales police? If I saw one being bashed, why, I would join in or hold the person's jacket so they don't get blood on themselves. I hate them (GM3NSW).

These are evidently negative experiences with police that have understandably heavily impacted on how participants perceive police broadly, and liaison officers specifically.

#### *Impact of the historically adversarial policing of LGBTI people on attitudes to police*

An important—and related— issue that has been raised in previous research and which is supported here, is that the historical mistrust of police by LGBTI people was a key factor that stopped them from reporting to police liaison officers: 'Well, I think historical stuff is one. I don't think that applies to everyone, but historical interactions is one' (FL2QLD). Officers noted some people, particularly people who were older, 'still having the belief that we're all a bunch of assholes' (ML4QLD). They noted how they thought this meant that LGBTI people 'don't want to talk to coppers anyway' (ML3QLD). As one officer noted, 'perhaps there is still that stigma that police still don't understand, or they won't understand what I'm going through like transgender issues, so why would I pick up the phone and have a conversation?' (ML3NSW).

These attitudinal issues were highlighted elsewhere in the data where officers would note how LGBTI people would react strongly to their presence at Pride events or nightclub walkthroughs – they assumed officers were there to beat them up, not just to say hello (ML4QLD). Some officers said that this particularly impacted older LGBTI people because of their own personal treatment by police in the past:

[A] lot of the issues that I was dealing with were older men and women who all had, if I can use the word, 'hang ups' from their treatment of police in the past or their perceptions of the police. Whereas it's not such an issue for younger people (ML2QLD).

Others talked about how these attitudes emerged again after specific moments of negative policing, such as the policing of Mardi Gras in 2013, where an officer violently arrested a partygoer:

[A]fter Mardi Gras last year, you know, that was terrible and I know a lot of police have been working for many, many years to try to break down all those bad images and build up trust and the perception whether or not it occurred or not is that that trust was, you know, taken away very quickly. And personally, like I said, I work very closely for years with the same type of people from different organisations, government and non-government councils and things like

that and you go to meetings after that happened and they treat you differently all of a sudden and you think, 'well you have known me for years.' You know, so things like that are very hard (FL2NSW).

It is clear, then, that according to liaison officers, the historical policing of LGBTI people still informs decision-making by LGBTI people about whether or not to report crime to LGBTI police liaison officers, thus constituting a significant barrier in access to these services.

### ***Program-related barriers***

A number of program-related barriers can be identified from the interviews. These are related to incorrect expectations about the liaison program, the quality of interactions with liaison officers, as well as program rules that impact on the ability of LGBTI people to access the liaison services.

#### *LGBTI people expect LGBTI police liaison officers to be on their side at all times*

LGBTI police liaison officers talked at length about a core concern being how LGBTI people expected liaison officers to support them regardless of whether or not they were actually at fault. Liaison officers discussed how 'when someone from the gay and lesbian community did utilise the service, they assumed you were always going to be on their side' (FL1NSW). Numerous examples of this problem were provided by officers:

Sometimes it's not about being gay, straight, bi, it's about you got the wrong idea or you're in the wrong or it's got nothing to do with your sexuality...let's say a nightclub scene where someone is highly intoxicated has been thrown out of a night club or a licensed premises and they are trying to convince you...that the only reason they have been kicked out is because they are gay...when in fact it is because they are highly intoxicated, it has nothing to do with discrimination (FL1NSW).

Two gay boys allege, well this Aboriginal guy punched them. He did punch them. There's no doubt about that. We talked to this guy though, and he said he called them 'fag' and something else. We talked to these people and he had his elderly mother with him, they said that these guys started using Aboriginal slang language to them, calling them, you know, and he was sober. These guys were drunk...He said, 'Look, I'm very sorry. Yes I did punch him, but I put up with it and he kept abusing me and my mother...This is our country and blah, blah, blah'. Then he said 'And then he spat at me so I punched him' (FL2QLD).

One was a neighbourhood dispute from [SURBURB NAME REMOVED], some weird place that was way away. Basically, the officer there wasn't doing what he thought he should be doing but then you look at the occurrences there and there's like years worth of false complaints between both neighbours and that sort of crap...Basically, he wasn't happy with the response and he thought he'd ring me... I've had friends that have had people saying 'I want the LGBTI liaison officer' and I said, 'Well that's me.' 'Well you're not treating me the way you should...' I'm like 'You're still breaking the law...' So it doesn't mean because I'm gay, you're then going to get off (ML4QLD).

It's interesting to work through some of the complaints. You know, 'It took the police three hours to take this complaint'. Well, it's not because you are gay, it's because we are busy you know (ML2QLD).

It is clear there are times when LGBTI people can misconstrue the role of liaison officers as an advocate, rather than a police officer with a specialised role. This created significant tensions for the liaison officers who were mindful of the need to support LGBTI people, but also mindful of their role as a police officer and being required to impartially uphold the law: 'I've often said that I get more support from the police for being gay than I do from the community for being in the police' (ML2NSW).

*Issue needs to be LGBTI-related to seek support from LGBTI police liaison officers*

For LGBTI people, making decisions about seeking support from LGBTI police liaison officers was influenced by the actual situation they needed support for, and the degree to which LGBTI issues were linked to this situation. At least three LGBTI people across Queensland and New South Wales who had not had experiences with LGBTI police liaison officers in the past talked about how they would weigh up whether or not to seek support based on how relevant the crime or issue was to their sexuality (LE1QLD) or their gender identity (GQ1QLD). Their major point of consideration was whether or not liaison officers had the necessary understanding of these issues to support them appropriately:

I think I would go there if I knew they existed, like I mean my cousin's transgender so she's, I would imagine if she had any problems or she got bashed up because of her life, I think she would definitely feel more comfortable going there, you know, especially when people knew her in high school as a guy, so like that's something more of a tense situation like that I think she would go, whereas I don't know depending on what happened why I would need to report something or go there (LE1QLD).

I would have to know that they understood trans-gender and gender queer and let's say that I had been raped. I'd been vaginally raped; right now I don't think I would report that because I look like a dude. If I said that happened there are a whole bunch of reasons I wouldn't report that. If that happened to me, but I looked like a dude but had both body parts I would worry they would continue to treat me a certain way and continue to use 'she' and see me as a woman. I would need to know that they understand transgender and that you can have X body parts but still be Y person and stuff like that (GQ1QLD<sup>8</sup>).

These examples suggest that LGBTI people are thinking carefully about whether or not to report or seek support, and are weighing up different factors that would indicate whether police might be a safe place to report to (such as their knowledge of transgender issues). These issues are also reflected in comments from LGBTI police liaison officers:

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<sup>8</sup> GQ1QLD refers to the first genderqueer person interviewed for this project from Queensland.

It depends on the age of the person. The person I'm thinking of is in his 30s and he was quite shy...going up to the front counter and stating domestic violence or assault. Or you have this young 20 year old who didn't blink an eyelid, and he didn't care what they thought whether he was gay or whatever. Again this is depending on your culture and where you're at (ML2QLD).

This suggests strongly that it is important for LGBTI police liaison officers, indeed all police, to have a developed understanding of these issues and to tell LGBTI people about this so they then feel safe to seek support from, or report crime to, police.

Interestingly, when asked about whether or not they would want LGBTI police liaison officers to ask about their sexuality and/or gender identity as a standard question to facilitate this kind of sensitivity, LGBTI people had mixed views. Some noted this was really important: 'Absolutely they should' (GM2QLD), but others suggested 'they should not be allowed', then adding 'If it is relevant, yes, absolutely yes' (GM2NSW). Others noted that their sexuality would be obvious and it would not be necessary for police liaison officers or police generally to ask those questions: 'I don't care...it's pretty obvious' (GM1NSW) and 'I wouldn't mind if they did because I am an openly gay person. But then I think why do people have to come out as gay?' (GM2QLD). Overall, interviewees' responses tended to vacillate as though they were undecided about it being a useful strategy:

Respondent: It really depends on the context, and how it is relevant to what I was talking with the officer about.

Interviewer: So if there was a situation where you had been victimised and it was valid then, would you feel uncomfortable with an officer asking then?

Respondent: Depends on how they phrased it. If it was relevant it was highly unlikely I would have offered the information. I'm perfectly capable of advocating for myself and giving the information by myself (GQ1QLD).

Of course, not all LGBTI people were as comfortable as this interviewee when it came to volunteering such information. Unsurprisingly, though, there was much stronger agreement about this issue when a hate crime was involved. For example:

Absolutely they should. There should be, and I don't know because I've read reports about this, the need for this and I don't know if the police are currently keeping records on LGBT hate crimes but it needs to be recorded and it needs to be recorded how bad this problem is. This reminds me of another time where I was a victim down at Lismore, I had a Tropical Fruits stand<sup>9</sup> and I was attacked quite badly and had to go to hospital for treatment and I asked for the police to attend and report it as - like the people were saying 'you're a fucking poofter', to report it as a deliberate anti-gay attack...It needs to be recorded, there needs to be stats to say that this community is being attacked (GM2QLD).

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<sup>9</sup> Tropical Fruits is a pride event convened annually in Queensland. They are referring here to having a stall at this event.

Interviews with LGBTI police liaison officers supported this contention, saying that people will not come forward to report a crime that does not technically exist *as a crime* – such as hate crime – even if there are other things that the offenders might be charged with. As FL1WA noted, '[w]e had a guy that had the living bejesus beat out of him at a beat and he was with another guy and they [police organisation] still didn't see it as a homophobic hate crime'. These comments particularly highlight the importance of police asking difficult questions around sexuality and/or gender diversity so that these crimes may be recorded officially, something which would perhaps encourage LGBTI people to report to police more often. These issues have been raised previously (Dwyer 2008), suggesting that the discomfort surrounding asking and answering questions about sexuality and gender identity needs to be confronted by both LGBTI liaison officers and LGBTI people to ensure more equitable outcomes for LGBTI people in interactions with police. It remains to be discussed, though, how these questions may be raised in an ethical and sensitive manner.

*LGBTI people perceive LGBTI police liaison officers to be no different from general police*

A small group of LGBTI participants that had direct contact with police liaison officers suggested that, while generally these interactions were positive, the LGBTI police liaison experience was little different to dealing with general police. For one interviewee, their experiences were not negative or positive, as they found all the officers were equally as helpful:

I: Was it a negative experience when you spoke to the GLLO?

R: No, they were fine.

I: Was it positive?

R: Not especially. There were other police officers who were just as helpful.

I: So was there any difference between the times you dealt with a GLLO and you didn't?

R: No I don't think so. I don't know how they could have made it different (GM1NSW).

For this participant, there was no significant difference between general police officers and LGBTI police liaison officers. These responses perhaps reflect a theme across many participants, suggesting that all police should be skilled up in LGBTI appropriate training, something highlighted in discussions around reporting to police in general.

Other interviewees had actually contacted LGBTI police liaison officers and had unsatisfactory experiences with this process. For example, one LGBTI participant who had difficulties getting the police to recognise that they were experiencing ongoing harassment and not just a series of separate incidents (discussed above) noted that such a response fell seriously short of their expectations of the police. As they mentioned, they had to convince the police that the events were related by repeating the whole story every time they experienced a new incident:

I: Even though you were going to the same station?

R: Yeah, even though I was going to the same station every time. And the disposition of the police is to not believe a victim when a victim says this is harassment and that goes for the GLOs and every other police officer. That is where they let us down (GM1NSW).

Importantly, this interviewee spoke about his experiences with police generally and LGBTI police liaison officers in the same way. Two other participants also suggested that LGBTI police liaison officers were no better than general police: 'They're just wallopers with a different name' (GM3NSW). One participant stated police liaison officers might even be worse than general police. They drew on the experiences of their friend in relation to seeking support and reporting to police liaison officers, and noted these officers might even be worse than general police to report to:

I don't think it would make any difference. In fact I've heard from this friend of mine that in fact they are worse. Those who are gay, treat gay people harder especially if they are closeted. It can be worse. If they are, it's like the reverse of them trying to show favouritism. Instead it can be worse (GM2NSW).

Although this interviewee had not had direct contact with these liaison officers and did not elaborate on what led to this view, he was unconvinced he would be any more advantaged by interacting directly with them over interacting directly with general police.

*Rules about LGBTI police liaison officers not investigating reports from LGBTI people complicate how they support these people*

A central policing expectation of police liaison roles is that they are a support role and not an investigative role. Even so, police liaison officers made it clear that they do take reports from LGBTI people depending on how much flexibility is provided by their supervising manager. Officers held mixed views about their ability to directly investigate the crimes reported to them, and these viewpoints were informed by a whole range of factors related to policing work generally and policing LGBTI people in particular. Comments suggested that some found this restriction to be problematic in their role as liaison officers, while others felt that it was actually quite a practical consideration. Some were strictly against any suggestion that they ought to be able to take on an investigatory role.

Some police liaison officers wanted to be able to investigate reports made to them by LGBTI people and found this restriction frustrating, particularly because of the rapport that they build with the community member, and the trust that that community member may have placed in the officer. In one situation, an officer had taken an initial statement and photographed injuries of an assault victim who was eager to have the liaison officer investigate the assault themselves. The officer, however, had to send the report elsewhere, and take more time to help manage the different expectations that the community member had and what the officer could practically achieve. They felt that not having ownership of an

investigation into a matter may hinder the effectiveness of the program, because it means that ‘you are just relying on other officers who you don’t even know to continue doing the right thing with the investigation’:

Despite all the initial positive stuff I might be able to do for that person and the good feelings for the police, it just takes one officer to say the wrong thing or obviously not be interested or go through the motions and all that good work can be undone in a matter of seconds (ML1QLD).

Other officers agreed with this, saying that once the initial complaint is made and is identified as LGBTI-related, then ‘I see benefit in forwarding the file to a LGBTI liaison officer for any follow-up and enforcement action of finalisation’ (FL1QLD). As they noted, ‘[t]here’s no reason why a manager can’t be a little flexible’ (FL1QLD). Another officer said that she took this restriction ‘with a grain of salt’ because ‘obviously you’ve got the right tools to do an investigation and at other times someone else is more suited to investigate’ (FL1NSW).

Suggesting a different point of view, one officer felt that this restriction was a little problematic because investigating crime is central to the task of policing. As she states, ‘we provide a policing service. Not a social worker service’ (FL2QLD). While this can make it difficult to act as a liaison officer, as often the officer may be the first person that someone has told about their relationship, this officer suggests that it is important to get the person to remember what that officer can actually help them with, by reminding them by saying “‘I’m here to help you as a police officer’” (FL2QLD). We can see here that the management of expectations of LGBTI people is at the forefront of balancing the support side of the liaison role with the policing side.

In contrast with these issues, some police liaison officers did not want to investigate reports made to them by LGBTI people as they did not consider this practical. They noted that these restrictions are in place for a reason and that any other way of dealing with these matters would be difficult to manage. One officer pointed out that ‘[t]he main reason for that is you can’t cut through the QPS police or constraints or procedures, just because someone is an LGBTI officer’, and that it is more practical for officers in the location that the offence occurred to investigate it (ML3QLD). Another officer was not concerned that they could not investigate the crimes, as, if they had that responsibility, they would ‘be snowed under’ (ML4QLD). A number of officers pointed out that for minor crimes, it might be alright to investigate and finalise the matter, but for more serious offences, it is better to have a detective than a general duties officer on board (ML4QLD). As one officer pointed out, ‘if it was a serious matter, so like a bodily harm or attempted murder or something like that, it’d be like me getting a motor mechanic to fix your refrigerator’ (ML3QLD). Some of these officers also suggested that most police responding to LGBTI-related incidents, or taking reports from members of these communities, would know how to deal with these matters

appropriately (ML4NSW). As one officer stated, the raft of accountability measures that police experience mean that '[i]t's not worth them losing their job or getting in trouble and [not] investigate it just because they might be homophobic or whatever...[W]e're that accountable that they don't really have the choice to do a crap job' (ML4QLD). Regardless of the circumstances, then, these liaison officers agreed that the priority must be the type of policing job, and who is best qualified to do that type of policing work, rather than whether or not the person is going to get a more supportive experience with a police liaison officer.

There were a few officers who were not enthusiastic about having an investigatory role. As one officer noted, '[t]he majority of the situations that would put us in is that it would be repetitively investigating domestic violence relationships, which doesn't put us in a liaison role. What it then puts us into is an investigative role' (ML6QLD). This officer was cautious of the way in which this changes the dynamic of the interaction with the community member to the point where the officer would be attempting to find somebody at fault or as guilty, and '[w]hen you do that, you lose that capacity to actually interact' (ML6QLD). As they continue, this would mean that 'those relationships that would have been established, have instantly been burned or getting burned because you no longer have that liaison capability' (ML6QLD). Another officer pointed out that not having the investigatory responsibility means that they can focus on being that person's advocate or on supporting them, by making sure that proper processes are followed, and that issues are followed up and responded to appropriately (ML2QLD). The familiarity with the person that may develop in such a role would prevent any investigation occurring in an unbiased way (ML2QLD). Again, these comments reflect the importance of effective police work and that investigating crimes can take officers away from the liaison role as one of support.

#### *Invisibility of LGBTI police liaison programs*

Liaison officers in Queensland and Western Australia raised broader issues around the visibility of liaison programs as a key barrier that stopped LGBTI people from seeking support from these programs. This issue was not raised at all in interviews with liaison officers from New South Wales, reflecting important differences in the ways these barriers might be addressed between states. Officers in Queensland and Western Australia suggested that LGBTI people would rarely walk into a station and ask for a LGBTI liaison officer because they may not even know that the liaison programs existed. This perception by liaison officers is noteworthy, as both data in this project as well as past research shows that there is considerable awareness of liaison programs within the LGBTI community (Berman and Robinson 2010), even if specific knowledge of services and strategies is limited.

Officers were quite frank in their discussions about the lack of marketing of LGBTI police liaison programs in their state and suggested, for this reason, that these programs were invisible to the public. In Queensland, for example, one officer noted, 'I don't think it's marketed at all' (FL1QLD). Later, the same

officer, along with another officer from Queensland, suggested that this means that other police officers, in addition to LGBTI communities, have no knowledge of the program and the liaison officers involved:

It's not marketed, neither internally or externally. I've had police say to me 'Oh, I didn't even know liaison officers existed, what do you do?' I thought, 'Well, not very much because no one calls us because no one knows about us!' (FL1QLD).

[W]e don't even have brochures anymore...not being able to find us in other things... Not being on the internet anymore and that sort of thing. I can pretty much guarantee that if I ring Police Link now and ask for a liaison officer, they wouldn't have a clue where to put me (ML4QLD).

These comments aligned with those made by liaison officers in Western Australia who stated that in the community, '[t]here's been no promotion of them [the liaison program] whatsoever. There certainly hasn't been any formal promotion of my role, which is kind of the equivalent of a GLLD' (FL1WA). Some officers suggested 'I'm sure there is some young gay people who don't even know we exist. And they have a hard time, or get beat up at a party and they wouldn't even know this' (ML1QLD). Others mentioned how 'the public may not be aware that every station should have a liaison officer' (ML5QLD). However, the lack of visibility may be particularly an issue in regional areas: 'Not so much in Brisbane, but places like Cairns, Mackay, regional areas. If someone was to be assaulted or something like that, they might not even know that the program existed' (ML5QLD). It is notable that these themes about public invisibility are specific to data from Queensland and Western Australia – liaison officers in New South Wales stated that LGBTI people did know about their liaison programs and where they could find support.

Interestingly, visibility was a double-edged sword according to the LGBTI police liaison officers. A lot of the comments reflected broader concerns about public homophobia and the potential reactions of members of the public to demonstrations of public LGBTI visibility. When discussing a hypothetical way of marketing LGBTI police liaison programs (by having liaison officers wear rainbow armbands), nearly all participants were unconvinced because they thought it would likely risk homophobia from members of the public. Notably, these comments came from police liaison officers from across all three jurisdictions:

I can see merit in it. I'm not an armband type of person maybe a badge with LGBTI on it that would mean something to the community if one of the people in the community saw it and said oh yeah, you are one of the liaison officers. I have the concern with the bracelet and homophobic people saying 'oh he's gay'. Something that means something to the community member but the general community member wouldn't really know what that means (ML1QLD).

I can see circumstances where that could work in a Pride Day or something like that, but I can also see it being quite divisive. In the community, if people are identifying that way they could be misunderstood. Because we have to be a police officer to all, and I think for example the police liaison officers basically deal with their community and assist on the side. The LGBTI

police officers are police officers first and they do the engagement with the community [second] (ML2QLD).

To do that big rainbow on my arm, I don't think so...It'd be good for the gay community to see you there but at the same time, you'd just cop flack from every other dickhead under the sun, like drunken bogan going 'Oh it's a gay policeman' and all that sort of crap...It wouldn't really be worth it (ML4QLD).

If somebody has got a GLLO badge on all the time, it could lead them to getting persecuted themselves. Maybe if they put it on when they're going to a job that they know is a same-sex thing – I don't know. There's just...There are lots of potential risks involved with it (FL1WA).

I think it can make you a target too. Not everybody out there is a prospective gay victim looking to report crime and that could work in some areas and not necessarily in others...there are some not very nice people out there who are not going to like that and may very well give that officer a hard time for wearing that (ML2NSW).

#### *Lack of formality and coherency in the liaison program*

Many interviewed officers assessed the liaison programs as lacking structure and formality. They noted the idea that people only become a LGBTI police liaison officer on an 'as needed' basis may cause problems in the future if there is a serious incident involving a member of LGBTI communities:

I think things will really hit that fan if, say, a gay person was to be seriously injured or killed, whether that be from an assault or from a DV matter and then of course, they're going to look at everything. They're going to identify that we should really put more resources into the...It's a very reactive approach (ML5QLD).

Another officer echoed these points by noting that the effectiveness of the program varies a lot depending on where one is based, and this is exacerbated by the lack of a coherent approach to the program:

In areas like Surrey Hills, Newtown, Sydney CBD they have a number of GLLOs per station and they get together and they are really passionate about the role and, because they have the community, there is always something to do, whereas somewhere out towards the suburbs or even country towns – I'm not too sure what their workload is like (ML4NSW).

These officers are questioning the effectiveness of liaison programs in terms of what it means when liaison officers are drawn upon only when they're needed, and when liaison officers can determine the degree of their engagement with LGBTI communities. The second officer in New South Wales is generally positive about the fact that those in liaison roles are working effectively, although mostly in metropolitan areas, but the first officer in Queensland raises considerable concerns about what will happen in the future if the liaison program is not managed differently.

### ***Organisational barriers***

The last group of barriers identified from the interviews related to broader organisational structures and managerial support. Both police liaison officers and LGBTI people raised a range of issues they believed denied LGBTI people access to these services, including the lack of support from higher-level police management.

#### *Organisational structures of police services deny access to LGBTI police liaison officers*

In their interviews, liaison officers noted a number of key concerns around the structure of police organisations that they thought presented barriers to LGBTI people accessing liaison services for support. The most commonly cited barrier was community members ‘being fobbed around’ because ‘accessibility is dismal’ (FL1NSW). Liaison officers talked about this happening when an LGBTI person rang or attended a station and they were not able to contact a liaison officer immediately: ‘community people will come out and ask for a GLLO and a GLLO won’t be on so they will walk out of the station’ (ML2NSW).

The accessibility of liaison officers was also identified as a problem in the interviews with LGBTI people. This was a concern raised particularly in Queensland, but also for at least one New South Wales respondent. Participants who had tried unsuccessfully to access LGBTI police liaison officers talked about their frustration when these officers were not available. The respondent below, for instance, recounted calling to report domestic violence but not being able to speak to a LGBTI police liaison officer in Queensland:

At [SUBURB NAME REMOVED] I did not succeed at getting through or they didn’t call me back, but I did not get hold of a liaison officer, who I would be more comfortable talking to especially around these matters, especially when there were some shenanigans going on, I really wanted to be able to be dealing with the liaison officer, and I just, they never returned my phone call so I never got a hold of them, so I ended up having to deal with this general duties [officer] (LE3QLD).

Interestingly, this respondent goes on to say later in the interview that she was not sure if police reception ‘didn’t take me very seriously because I wasn’t in, because I wasn’t about to get thumped’ (LE3QLD). Similarly, frustration with access was also expressed by at least one New South Wales respondent below:

Well in my experience there was very rarely one around, when I actually rang up and said, ‘Can I speak to your GLLO?’, they would say ‘She is not in today she will be in next Thursday’. And so I would leave a message to call me back and I wouldn’t get much (GM1NSW).

This issue is not uncommon in policing services where the structural and operational organisation of the service means that officers are not available all of the time. Police liaison officers also acknowledged that

general rostering and shift systems were a significant barrier to the accessibility of the liaison service to LGBTI people:

They ring back two days later and with our shifts particularly in the city they work two on, two off. So two 12-hour day shifts and then two 12-hour night shifts and then they go off for six. So if you are someone trying to contact a GLLO and they only have one at the command and you ring three times and each time I'm not there you might think that you're being fobbed (FL1NSW).

'I would like to speak to a GLLO' and 'Sorry they are not here'. Now good customer service is, 'Now can I help you'. Now they have either left the station already, or if they get asked that next questions which they should, 'Ah yes I want to report whatever, a domestic assault or whatever but I'm not comfortable talking to just anybody, can I see a GLLO?' 'Oh now I understand', find out who it is, when they are on, find out if it is urgent. 'Yes it is urgent'. 'We don't have a GLLO on but there is senior detective out the back or there is a supervisor'...we are here 24 hours a day we are dealing with stuff, everybody is trained to do things that's why sometimes the GLLO things can get in the way (ML3NSW).

These examples from both community members and liaison officers demonstrate clearly the need to further examine how operational managerial processes may be limiting the effectiveness of liaison programs.

LGBTI people also raised concerns about the lack of knowledge that general police had about LGBTI police liaison programs, and the impact that this had on accessing the liaison service. If police did not know about them, they did not refer LGBTI people to them. More importantly, though, some LGBTI people had unsuccessfully tried to report to or seek support from police liaison officers as specific requests for LGBTI police liaison officers were expressly ignored by general police. It is important to note that operational issues like these were only highlighted in discussions with participants from New South Wales:

There is no need for them at all because they don't seem to make a difference when you ask to see a GLLO they ignore you (GM3NSW).

It is a load of PR. I don't know why the gay community actually needs specific LG liaison officers. When I was arrested for a so-called breach of an AVO against this drug dealer, I asked for a LG liaison officer [and] they ignored me (GM2NSW).

It would appear that the knowledge and willingness of general police to link LGBTI people with police liaison officers is a key factor in LGBTI people not being able to access them for support. This is again a factor shaped by operational processes within police organisations.

*Lack of support from high-level police management for LGBTI police liaison programs*

A fundamental issue, particularly for liaison officers in Queensland and Western Australia, was ‘the lack of support from the bosses’ (ML5QLD). Officers talked about how they were doing more work than they should have been as a liaison officer because there was no interest in engagement from high-level police management: ‘I’m doing it because no one else will do it and I don’t want those relationships to slip away, basically’ (ML4QLD). These comments strongly support the previous suggestion that police services could better market their LGBTI police liaison programs. Most importantly, it shows that police officers within these organisations are aware of this and are ‘[v]ery pissed off’ (FL1QLD), clearly noting that ‘the frustration is with the organisation’ (FL2QLD).

Liaison officers noted frustration with the lack of time and resources was a key outcome of the lack of support for the program from high-level management, and that this prevented them from fulfilling the role of liaison officer in the way that they would hope to. This meant that the ideas of enthusiastic officers remained unrealised in their fullest capacity (FL1NSW; ML3QLD; FL1QLD). It is notable that Queensland LGBTI police liaison officers predominantly expressed these difficulties. Relatedly, some officers were critical of the management of the program, particularly at the higher levels – that is the lack of a proactive coordinator, and the flow-on effects that this has for no funding or resources, and no time (ML4QLD; ML5QLD; FL1QLD; FL2QLD). This lack of resources has extended even to a lack of brochures with which to advertise, meaning that those who seek to increase advertising must use resources from a district budget, which is again dependant on individuals and can lead to inconsistencies of approach across districts (ML4QLD). While this has led the officer to collate resources with a colleague on their own time, the lack of consistency and support for this remains a problem for other officers (FL1QLD).

Frustration with senior management did not only relate to a lack of resources. One officer felt that the lack of permission given to liaison officers to march in the Mardi Gras sent a message of non-support that made their job difficult (ML5QLD). Others felt that the lack of support for additional training hindered their effectiveness (ML4NSW; ML5QLD), and also meant that officers were left to make their own connections with LGBTI communities (ML4NSW). There was also criticism about what they felt was a reactive as opposed to proactive approach taken by senior level managers, particularly to the issues discussed above, noting that this contributed to the difficulties associated with the role (ML2QLD). Finally, one officer pointed out that the inconsistent approaches at that senior level meant the shape and success of the program very much depends on the individual leading the program. As this officer says, when they and another key figure were leading the program, they ‘were able to “be” the organisation, so to speak...we picked up the bat and ball. I don’t see that now’, as ‘the role has changed and I’m not sure if it has the support of the services as it used to have when it first occurred’ (ML2QLD). According to LGBTI

police liaison officers, these are all key issues with these programs that, if ameliorated, they felt would improve their overall effectiveness.

## **6. Reforms suggested by LGBTI police liaison officers and LGBTI people**

The LGBTI police liaison officers and LGBTI people interviewed had a range of views about what could be done to make LGBTI police liaison programs more successful, and encourage more LGBTI people to utilise the service. The main reforms identified by respondents included changing the structure of these programs, reconsidering the marketing of these programs, developing the training of liaison officers, and considering the overall need for program renewal and reinvigoration.

### ***Structure of the program***

FL1WA said that their view of an ideal structure of a police liaison program would be:

Somebody in each district that's just a GLLO. Simple as that. Coordinated by a senior officer, I think they should all be sworn officers...[and t]hey should all have to apply for the positions, not just be put in them [or] transferred to them (FL1WA).

A GLLO unit would then provide training to other police if they wish to become GLLOS, but 'the primary point of contact would be one of the CPDOs'<sup>10</sup> (FL1WA). Given some of the comments highlighted above about management and resources, it is not surprising that a number of officers suggested that these matters ought to be the focus of reforms (ML3QLD). As ML5QLD states, time is important: 'allowing time for us to do our duties in police time because it is to the QPS's benefit. We shouldn't have to do anything in our own time' (ML5QLD). Additionally, a higher level coordinator heading the program would be important to be able to liaise with the senior management and ensure the program continues to operate effectively (ML5QLD). Some LGBTI people agreed with this, noting how they would like to see 'older police liaison people that maybe have one or two stripes...being able to identify with someone who's a bit older or whatever even going up the rank...I'm not just a constable who's been dragged into this' (LE3QLD).

Some officers suggested that there needed to be 'someone specifically tasked...with coordinating the activities of the other GLLOs' (ML1NSW), as well as ensuring regular engagement with these officers in order to keep them active. This would also involve a raft of support activities: '[s]o really bedding down, having conferences, training, those ongoing engagements to keep their skills up but also so that you can get information back to people coordinating about what contemporary issues are for them to address' (ML1NSW). This was supported by ML3NSW, who suggested that they would like to see a coordinator in

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<sup>10</sup> CPDO is an acronym used by the Western Australia Police for Crime Prevention Diversity Officers. These officers have knowledge about a range of diversity issues, including LGBTI issues.

the role full time. This 'GLLO-ordinator', as they termed it, would be 'a uniform officer who monitors all the GLLOs in the state, what they are doing, what is happening in their commands, what the crime figures are, what the details are, what is going on' (ML3NSW). Such a role would be useful because, as ML3NSW says, it would give a reason to research important issues in their region, keep up to date with the community, and pass that on to the coordinator, as well as receive feedback about what else is happening through the state and whether there are any trends occurring. Without this, 'it is just this presumption that we fly the flag and we are...throwing out the pink welcome mat – and we are – but that is basically it. We don't offer anything after that' (ML3NSW). As ML4NSW reiterates, it is important to have a key champion of the program to ensure its success, as the program is fragile without them: '[w]ithout that spokesperson there, I don't think we would have a GLLO program' (ML4NSW). These comments reflect the central importance of support and resource provision from higher management in police organisations to ensure these programs have an adequately trained senior police officer in the role of coordinator. Without this type of person heading up the program, and acting as a champion for the work of that program, the effectiveness of the program will be limited. More importantly, liaison officers suggest the importance of further deepening the involvement of liaison officers, and focusing on their further development, to ensure the program benefits the liaison officers involved just as much as it benefits LGBTI communities.

Relatedly, one officer suggested that the program needed its own portfolio and its own structure and chain of command like others, and should not remain part of Community Crime Prevention (FL1QLD). This officer suggests that this change will provide the appropriate support for the position as well as the resources and time for the role (FL1QLD). In addition, FL2QLD suggested that there needs to be proper procedures in place in order to pass on corporate knowledge central to the program in the event that people leave their roles, particularly at senior levels. This point has actually been raised in a previous research project focusing on the policing experiences of LGBTI young people in Brisbane, Queensland. Service providers in that study clearly noted their discomfort with the placement of the police liaison program within the section of the police dedicated to community safety rather than having LGBTI needs recognised within the police service in a similar way to those of a cultural group like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Dwyer and Hotten 2009).

LGBTI people focused on the importance of visibility in this regard, particularly in relation to the uniforms the police liaison officers wore (LE2QLD). They suggested that 'I know the police that have the yellow, Indigenous liaison officers are distinguishable. I don't know of anything distinguishing a LGBT liaison officer but I would love to see it' (GM2QLD). Others suggested these forms of visibility would make no difference whatsoever, and when asked about what an ideal police liaison service would look like, they suggested it would have to be 'seen as being human. I don't think a different uniform would make any difference, I really mean that' (GM3NSW).

### ***Marketing of the program***

Some officers pointed out that the program could really benefit from some better promotion and marketing, as a proactive strategy of engagement. Engaging through media (ML2QLD), attendance at events, and better promotional activities and campaigns, particularly in rural areas or districts with small LGBTI communities (FL2QLD; ML4NSW; ML1QLD), would all benefit the programs. One suggestion was for a targeted marketing campaign, 'like we'd do with any of the other multicultural type organisations' (FL2QLD). Another would be for a return to the approach that has previously been taken where an officer would deliver a presentation on a matter of importance to the community if asked by that community to do so. This would ensure that the service was both reactive and proactive (FL2WA). Discussion around media and marketing as a key way of improving the programs was also the focus of comments made by liaison officers when discussing the importance of the visibility of these programs.

A lot of LGBTI people also talked about the importance of marketing these programs (GM1QLD, GM2QLD, GM3QLD, LE1QLD, LE2QLD, LE3QLD, GQ1QLD). The views on this were mixed though. Some noted that general public visibility is important: 'being out there in public, I mean I wouldn't be able to tell you what they do or what services they could offer me' (LE1QLD). Others suggested specific things to make the programs more visible within police stations particularly: 'a sign in the police station so that you're not having to go in and go and you know being laughed at in the face' (LE2QLD). Some participants had seen liaison officers at Pride and other LGBTI community events but were still ambivalent about whether their presence was about liaison with LGBTI people or about recruiting to police services: 'I wasn't quite sure whether they were there for recruiting as much as liaising' (LE3QLD).

### ***Training of liaison officers***

A number of police liaison officers and LGBTI people suggested that the training associated with the programs needed some reform (LE2QLD, GQ1QLD, GM3QLD), including greater use of refresher courses (FL1QLD; ML1QLD). Officers stressed that it was particularly important to ensure a greater number of officers are trained in LGBTI issues, so as to avoid overworking LGBTI police liaison officers in other areas: 'I go back to Surrey Hills where there are a number of them and they are flat out. So, like I said, every police should be able to deal with everyone in the community' (ML4NSW). One particular model for such refresher training that was suggested by participants was to host regular, compulsory conferences for liaison officers. This would serve the purposes of updating one's knowledge, understanding changes to legislation, ensuring everyone was on the same page, ensuring all liaison officers had the chance to plan ahead for how to take the role forward, and it would also make them more accountable in their roles (FL1NSW; ML2NSW; ML4NSW). This, one officer suggests, would make the program a lot more effective:

You would get a lot more activity and a lot more positive... actions from a GLLO. I think it is easy for a GLLO to be in a station year in, year out, and not do anything. Whereas, if they were held accountable and had to go once every quarter or once every six months and actually say [what they had been] doing in [their] command, [this would improve the program] (ML2NSW).

Another officer suggested that such training ought to now move 'to the next level', beyond simply raising awareness towards a more training-focused, supervisory level, ensuring that those who want to devote themselves to these roles have the ability to do so and engage more deeply (ML6QLD). However, for this to occur, a shift at the higher levels of management regarding the program is necessary. As the officer states:

You know, the senior management really don't give a damn about it. They're not really interested in how you're doing those roles or whether you're even doing those roles at all. If you were taking it to the training level and saying we want this level of management, and for those that are in the senior management to take on these responsibilities...In each district they'd be responsible for motivating their junior staff who are taking on these roles instead of it all coming out of Brisbane and a few individuals trying to do it all from Brisbane (ML6QLD).

These themes were echoed in the interviews with LGBTI people:

I've read about the training of the officers and it's just about awareness basically, not taking gay people seriously. So I mean, why aren't they all reminded to treat everyone with equal respect and compassion (GM3NSW)?

Others suggested training should come from LGBTI police liaison officers themselves (GM1QLD), noting that 'peer to peer education is very effective and I think might be better received with its co-presented with one of their own' (GM3QLD). Others also suggested that it was not necessarily about further training for the liaison officers but how 'I'd rather have all the officers go through the training so that anyone could help you if you need it' (GM1QLD). It is clear that supporting quality introductory training, and offering ongoing training to deepen and specialise their knowledge of LGBTI issues, was a key focus for liaison officers in terms of reform and improvement of these programs. In some ways, LGBTI people's thoughts aligned with this, but with more focus on having liaison officers train other officers about the issues. Regardless of the focus, however, it is evident liaison officers and LGBTI people agree that all police officers should have specialist knowledge about LGBTI issues.

### ***Review and renewal of the program***

A lot of discussion focused on how liaison programs needed to ensure they were meeting community expectations by reviewing and renewing these programs (ML1NSW, ML3NSW, FL1QLD, FL2QLD, ML2QLD,

ML3QLD). While there may not be a need for liaison officers, one officer felt that it is still important to get the community's views. This officer also suggested that a review of the program might be timely, given the political situation surrounding it at present: 'I don't think the LGBTI liaison role has the political oomph that PLOs have...It's politically...I think they will play the Vietnamese, Indigenous liaison officers but you get very few who will be talking about LGBTI officers' (ML2QLD). One of the gaps that such a review needs to deal with is the way in which police engage with transgender people (ML2QLD). Interestingly, this concern was reflected in interviews with LGBTI people too, with multiple respondents noting how they considered this to be a central area of concern for LGBTI police liaison officers (LE1QLD, GM3QLD, GQ1QLD).

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

LGBTI police liaison programs were established around Australia from the late 1980s onwards to ameliorate the historically discriminatory relationships between LGBTI people and police. As a key strategy developed to strengthen relationships between police and LGBTI communities, it is timely to take stock of these programs: how are they used by LGBTI communities, and what are the key barriers to their use by these communities? This report has explored these issues through an online survey of members of LGBTI communities, as well as interviews with LGBTI police liaison officers and LGBTI people.

Despite the limitations of the type of sampling and the sample sizes used in this project, we can identify some key patterns in LGBTI people's access to, and assessment of, LGBTI police liaison services. In particular:

- Overall, there are low levels of direct contact with liaison officers, yet fairly high levels of awareness of the services. This pattern mirrors the finding of past research (Berman and Robinson 2010). However, levels of contact are dependent on location, with urban areas unsurprisingly providing environments in which members of LGBTI communities may feel safer in accessing liaison services. This also suggests that liaison officers need to be more proactive in providing support in rural areas.
- Compared to Queensland participants, there was lower reported contact with liaison officers by New South Wales participants, which, in part, reflects the differences in the delivery of the programs (although it does make it difficult to assess the quality or issues facing the liaison program in New South Wales). The circumstances of contact with liaison officers were diverse, but was generally perceived by officers as resulting in productive interactions with LGBTI communities.
- Generally, the assessment of LGBTI liaison program was positive, although the interviews suggested some concerns with the quality of interactions with liaison officers. Two factors were identified as key features of a successful liaison program: an ethic of care among liaison officers, and exemplifying good policing practices for LGBTI people.

- Barriers to the access of the liaison services primarily related to three key areas. These are: organisational issues (such as: awareness within the organisation of the program; higher level management support); program-related factors (community expectations of the role; quality of liaison interactions; rules around the liaison role; marketing of the program); and individual-level factors (past negative experiences (either through historical legacy or individual experience; issues not seen as important enough).

While assessments were generally positive, a range of reforms were suggested by participants to improve the service delivery of the LGBTI police liaison programs specifically, and the relationship between LGBTI communities and the police generally. These included:

- maintaining liaison programs because of their symbolic roles in driving change internally and externally, but placing them in their own portfolio (in line with other cultural groups) and not as parts of larger departments to ensure that they can do this;
- ensuring senior management is committed to the program, and that those directing the programs are strong, proactive champions of the program;
- providing dedicated resources to the programs, including funding and staff rostering, to ensure that they can operate to their fullest and respond when LGBTI people seek to access them;
- addressing operational barriers, such as the limits around being able to investigate crimes, to ensure that the expectations of LGBTI people are met and the service can operate in more supportive ways;
- promoting the program to ensure greater awareness both among LGBTI people and police more generally; and
- developing effective, regular, and ongoing training for liaison services, perhaps with a view to embedding such training more extensively for all officers, as well as deepening training for liaison officers and offering them more focused opportunities to do this through targeting networking (such as dedicated LGBTI police liaison conferences).

### **So what does this all mean?**

First, clearly, the members of LGBTI communities were aware of the liaison services (even if there were misconceptions about the role of the liaison officer). However, generally these services were not being used for reporting and support. This does not mean that these services have no value for the police or communities, though. As suggested by some liaison officers interviewed, the *existence* of these services may be as important as their use. The presence of liaison services is a significant sign to LGBTI communities that policing organisations recognise diversity in the community and among the police. These programs also provide a meaningful way in which good policing practice towards LGBTI communities can be

exemplified, both externally and internally. Most importantly, it is clear that the liaison services we examined have not yet been fully realised within police organisations because different police organisations invest in their programs in different ways. These programs have the potential to be more effective when they have had time to become established and when they are fully invested in, and supported by, the police organisations they are established within. Only then will we be able to better, and more fully, understand the utility and effectiveness of compartmentalised police service enhancements like LGBTI police liaison services.

Second, many of the barriers identified are not necessarily new for police officers (e.g. issues of resources, anonymity in reporting, matter not important enough). These issues exist when providing policing services generally across *all* communities. However, these dynamics are particularly heightened in the liaison role for LGBTI communities, and are complicated by attitudes both within and outside the police organisation toward queer issues. It is clear that further research is needed on LGBTI peoples' attitudes about police and police attitudes towards LGBTI people. It would also be useful to further examine the role of police attitudes more broadly towards service enhancements (like liaison services) that seek to support vulnerable communities.

Third, the role of the liaison services in reducing homophobia and transphobia within the policing environment was clearly emphasized, and in particular liaison officers appear to be having an impact in how they work with and educate other officers about these issues. However, the external impact of this role could be enhanced by clearer communication to communities about what the role can and cannot do, as well as clearer internal communication (and managerial support) within police organisations about the availability and value of the role. Importantly, these considerations were greatly influenced by what LGBTI people felt they could and could not report to police (for instance, verbal abuse was not reported because they did not want to be considered a nuisance). This suggests the significance of exploring enhancements to police reporting systems so that multiple and ongoing incidents, like verbal abuse, might be recorded with police to demonstrate a prolonged pattern of abusive behaviour towards LGBTI people. This would also mean that LGBTI people would no longer have to repeatedly retell the histories of patterned behaviours with each new officer they encounter, a potentially traumatising process, and they may potentially feel more supported by police because all incidents were being recorded in police databases. Moreover, it points to the potential utility of introducing third party reporting mechanisms for these incidents where information is recorded anonymously by a third party, and the information is forwarded to police for analysis in terms of potentially patterned behaviours around particular geographic locations.

Finally, it is evident that liaison services encounter a certain degree of precariousness, which is felt by officers and likely also by LGBTI communities. Most LGBTI people continue to have policing services delivered primarily by general duties officers which suggests the central importance of all police officers

having specialist knowledge of these issues. Even when structural issues impacting on access to liaison officers are addressed, general duties officers will continue to be the main point of contact for policing services. Thus, it is clear the relationship between LGBTI communities and police is heavily defined by their contact with general police. The compartmentalization of the delivery of policing services to specialised liaison programs is problematic, and can only have a limited impact. However, the research documented in this report clearly emphasises that LGBTI police liaison services need further investment and further time to become fully established, and their potential utility in building relationships with LGBTI people to be fully realised. There is no doubt that a critical influence of liaison programs is *internal* by promoting more appropriate and sensitive policing to vulnerable communities. However, both liaison officers and LGBTI people agree that the existence of these programs is vital for supporting LGBTI communities when they are victims, offenders, or witnesses of crime. The analysis of data in this report sufficiently demonstrates that until LGBTI police liaison services are provided with sufficient investment, resourcing, and support by the police organisations they are established within, we will not be able to fully understand their potential to build relationships with LGBTI people, and encourage crime reporting from LGBTI people.

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