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Out at Work

**The experience of LGBT+
people at work in 2021**



About Pride Professionals



Pride Professionals is a local Western Australian business that facilitates LGBT+ mentoring programs to empower, support, and promote LGBT+ identifying professionals to reach their career aspirations and goals.

We aim to provide visibility for, and recognise the contributions and achievements of, LGBT+ professionals across a diverse range of industries in Western Australia.

Our programs provide a structured and sustainable mentoring process that supports LGBT+ identifying mentees in their career guidance, direction, and personal growth. This is accomplished through shared mentor/mentee experiences, formal goal development, and supporting the formation of exceptional, long-term, mentoring relationships which last beyond the program duration.



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Executive Summary



Pride Professionals objective in publishing this report is to encourage discussions in order to better understand the experience of LGBT+ professionals in Western Australia.

Tanya Brisbane

Co-Founder
Director



¹Department of Health, Australian Government, National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy (2012), p 4.

²Sears, B, Mallory C, Flores A, & Conron K, LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment, William Institute, School of Law, UCLA (2021).

Up to 11 in 100 Australians may have a diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity.¹ In a 2021 US study, one in 10 LGBT+ workers experienced discrimination within the workplace, with 46% of respondents reporting having experienced unfair treatment in the workplace at some point in their career.²

Whilst our survey focuses on the workplace in Western Australia, the information it conveys will assist us to develop and grow what we do, how we do it and where we should focus.

Some of the results are confronting, however there seems to be positive

undercurrent in changes within the workplace. Even though more than one-third of LGBT+ people are not out at work, 75% would recommend their workplace and 80% have seen inclusion improve over their working lives.

This does not mean we should be complacent in our approach to inclusion. Now, more than ever, with incidences of mental health issues on the rise, it is important that we continue to encourage discussions in order to understand and support the LGBT+ community.

Tanya Brisbane

Note: Some of the content presented in this report may be confronting or triggering for some people. It is intended to highlight the challenges that face LGBT+ people in the workplace and recognise the pathways to more inclusive workplaces.

Key Outtakes



More than
1-in-3

LGBT+ people aren't out at work

1-in-3

LGBT+ people either don't have or don't know LGBT+ peers at work

More than
1-in-3

LGBT+ people don't have senior LGBT+ in their workplace

LGBT+ people tend to think their workplaces are more inclusive than not

75 per cent

of LGBT+ people would recommend their workplace to other LGBT+ people

80 per cent

of LGBT+ people have seen workplace inclusion improve over their working lives

More than
1-in-5

LGBT+ people believe being LGBT+ has negatively impacted their career

More than
1-in-5

people believe their careers will be negatively impacted going forward for being LGBT+

More than
50 per cent

of LGBT+ people do not have LGBT+ mentors or role models

Demographics

Sexuality

Bi	6.12%
Gay	32.65%
Lesbian	19.39%
Non-Binary	3.06%
Pansexual	4.08%
Queer	8.16%
Straight	1.02%
Trans	7.14%
Unreported	18.37%

Age

19 or younger	2.02%
20–29	29.29%
30–39	42.42%
40–49	19.19%
50–59	5.05%
60–69	2.02%

Note: n=106

Industry

Government	13.13%
Finance	5.05%
Admin	1.01%
Health	9.09%
Creative industries	5.05%
Community services	8.08%
Construction	1.01%
Professional services	15.15%
Resources	33.33%
Consumer industries	6.06%
Technology	3.03%

Staffed managed

12 average

Details

LGBT+ people working in Western Australia are reporting a mix of negative experiences and optimism of where things are heading.

While the results highlight that there is still a long way to go, LGBT+ people working in Western Australia are riding a progressive wave of inclusion.

The results provide insight into the experiences of the cohort, not of their organisations, though some of that is extracted through the data. The qualitative data errs to highlight negative experiences, as they are grounded in what is happening day-to-day and historical events. Many of these stories are being shared for the first time. The quantitative data tends to be more positive and encouraging. This is because survey participants were asked more about longer-term trends.

Together, the information presents a rich picture of what it means to be LGBT+ at work in WA in 2021.



On-the-ground today

LGBT+ people in WA are reporting a complex working environment which sees them having to hide or defend who they are. Though not all is negative, this can be a burdensome challenge on top of their existing work.

More than one-in-three LGBT+ people are not out at work. Many people report comments in passing that are derogatory, and while these are considered just part of their life they do have the potential to develop into something more sinister.

One respondent said:

Being LGBT+ resulted in me missing out on opportunities within roles as I was considered to be "not masculine enough for the job".

Leaders refused to offer me training in certain roles as they were worried I couldn't handle getting 'dirty'.

Some issues are not intentional or unintentional, however targeted workplace bullying and derogatory acts are not an uncommon experience. Some respondents said that they felt they had been fired for being gay, trans or HIV+. Another advised they "had a client cease talking to me because he found out I was LGBT+".

Additionally, people who are trans or non-binary face a more complex situation, including the following respondent:

In the past 12 months, I have been intentionally misgendered on a daily basis, mocked for how I look, been told by a colleague that if I were their child they would disown me.

LGBT+ people report being advised by colleagues and managers about whether or not to be open about their identity at work. 36 per cent of people surveyed are either not out at all or do not feel comfortable being out to everyone at work.

Reporting up

Productive and engaging relationships with managers are an essential part of the workplace. They are central to how people do their work and complete their tasks.

These issues are exacerbated when the respondents advise that more than one-in-seven LGBT+ people don't have senior LGBT+ people in their workplaces. Additionally, more than 50 per cent of LGBT+ people do not have LGBT+ mentors or role models, either at or out of work, to help them navigate issues that may arise due to their identity.

LGBT+ people can face a complex bigotry that sometimes is overt and others done in a way that could be seen to be protective of the individual, but instead limits their careers.

For example, one respondent said they were seen as "not ready" for a change in a role to a male-dominated blue-collar area of the business. While they felt comfortable in their experience and skills, they were advised they needed to develop their "stakeholder skills", suggesting that being LGBT+ may be too difficult for some colleagues to handle. Experiences like these, which go to the use of the term "cultural fit", were common responses for people who were looked over for work or roles because, they believe, they are LGBT+.

Aspersions and unfounded stereotypes like these are not uncommon.

Respondents advised of comments that included being told to "prove you are a real man" and that "I just don't like gay people".

72 per cent of respondents advised that they either did not have or did not know any LGBT+ superiors in their workplace.

One respondent said of one manager:

I have also had a manager openly disparage gay people using slurs in front of me and when I confronted him, he refused to apologise and reiterate that "gay people should not get to ruin marriage for the rest of us".



At the water cooler

Dealing with colleagues can be a similarly difficult experience, with one-third of LGBT+ people not having or not knowing any LGBT+ peers at work.

One respondent said of their experience on site:

Colleagues outwardly discuss my sexuality and providing their own feedback on it, without pause or thought.

When people aren't out, they are exposed to homophobia in an indirect way. One respondent said that they were told to stop acting gay and that they were a "fag" for wearing a tie. People not open about their identity at work reported hearing comments about "getting AIDS" from touching an LGBT+ colleague and that while an organisation publicly supports LGBT+ people some colleagues would say they don't.

At a more extreme end, one respondent was propositioned for sex with a colleagues' partner.





Inclusive prospects

Bad experiences can leave scarring on an individuals' working life. These can stick in the minds of individuals' at a greater level than the positive ones.

With this in mind, it is encouraging to note that LGBT+ people are reporting progress at work. 75 per cent of LGBT+ people would recommend their workplace to other LGBT+ people, highlighting that not all hope should be lost.

LGBT+ people tend to think their workplaces are more inclusive than not. On a scale of 1-5 (one being "very unsafe" and five being "very inclusive"), respondents advise they felt their workplaces were an average of 3.8.

80 per cent LGBT+ people have seen workplace inclusion improve over their working lives.

Recommendations

Policy

Organisations explicitly embed LGBT+ issues in their HR and diversity operations

Forum

Larger organisations should provide a forum for LGBT+ people to provide clear feedback on their experiences in the workplaces

Leadership

More senior LGBT+ become more visible role models for emerging LGBT+ people



Methodology and disclosure

The results of this survey were gathered through an online survey conducted in Western Australia in September and October 2021. Analysis occurred in November 2021. There is both qualitative and quantitative data.

No identifying information was gathered, and none has been used on any of the participants. Any demographic information is presented only in the macro.



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