

CAPITAL OF EQUALITY STRATEGY

2024 – 29



ACT
Government



Acknowledgement

The ACT Government acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Note on language and intersectionality

In this strategy, the term “LGBTIQA+” is used as a respectful way to represent a wide range of identities, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, aromantic, agender, non-binary, and pansexual individuals. However, it’s crucial to recognise that there is no single experience or narrative that captures what it means to be part of the LGBTIQA+ community. The terms we use provide a common language, but they cannot encompass the full breadth and complexity of individual identities and experiences.

Furthermore, the experience of sexual, gender, and bodily diversity is deeply influenced by intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, culture, religion, and socio-economic background. Each person’s journey is shaped by these intersections, and any work must consider the unique challenges and contributions that arise from these diverse contexts. As we work towards inclusion and equity, we must honour and respect the multifaceted identities within the LGBTIQA+ community.

Graphic design and illustration

The design and illustration for this report was produced by Jacq Moon - a proudly queer designer. The concept for this important resource was to create a publication that embraces the stories of LGBTIQA+ people that are resilient, proud and embedded in all aspects of ACT community life. The design intends to portray the growing LGBTIQA+ community in the ACT, the challenges that may be faced, and the vision that Canberra will be the most proudly diverse and inclusive city in Australia.

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Contact

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Chief Minister foreword

In 2019, the Australian Capital Territory embarked on a remarkable journey with the launch of the inaugural Capital of Equality Strategy. Our aim was clear: to make Canberra the leading city in Australia for LGBTIQ+ equality, inclusion, and belonging. Over the past five years, we've made significant progress, with nation leading initiatives that have transformed our vision into reality.

The ACT Government's commitment to the LGBTIQ+ community remains unwavering. Our comprehensive approach has brought about a range of positive changes that have improved the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ individuals, their families, and their communities. From legislative reforms to innovative support systems, we've made remarkable progress in our efforts to create a more equitable society.

However, our journey is far from over. Despite the progress, our LGBTIQ+ community still faces persistent challenges. There remains an evident need for better healthcare, more robust protections against discrimination and continued support for our LGBTIQ+ community.

As we launch the new Capital of Equality Strategy for 2024-29, we renew our commitment to an intersectional approach, recognising that the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals are diverse and multi-faceted. The new Strategy aligns with other key ACT Government initiatives, emphasising a collaborative and integrated approach to achieving our vision of a truly inclusive city.

We commit to implementing the outlined commitment through a series of Action Plans and ongoing monitoring of our progress.

The new Strategy has been developed thanks to robust community engagement. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this work so far. The LGBTIQ+ Ministerial Advisory Council has been an invaluable source of expertise, and I am grateful for their dedication and hard work. I wish to acknowledge all our LGBTIQ+ community members who shared their experiences and expertise via the community survey and roundtables. Finally, I want to thank the LGBTIQ+ peer led organisations in Canberra who are working tirelessly to support the community.

This new strategy reflects our ongoing commitment to making Canberra the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia. Together, let's continue to build a city where everyone feels valued, celebrated, and respected.

Welcome to the new era of equality.

Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister



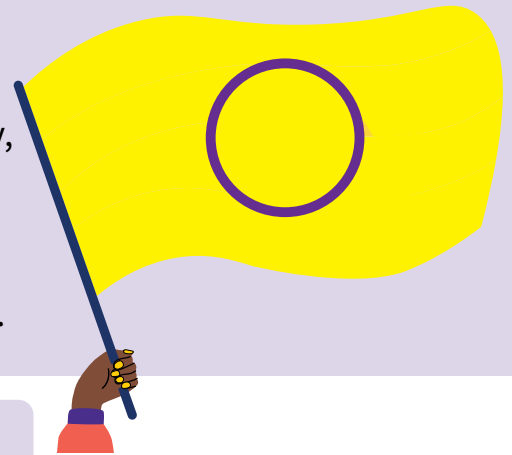
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Progress towards LGBTIQ+ equality in the ACT

In 2019, Canberra set an ambitious mission with the launch of the inaugural Capital of Equality Strategy, envisioning a city that would lead on LGBTIQ+ equality, inclusion and belonging in Australia. Over the past five years, this vision has materialised into a tangible reality, marked by groundbreaking initiatives that have reshaped the narrative and reality of equality in our city.



During the last five years the ACT Government has invested in a range of initiatives aimed at improving the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people, their families and communities in a range of settings from schools to hospitals, and in a range of ways from services to more equitable laws.

Some of our remarkable achievements include:

- We banned harmful sexuality and gender identity conversion practices. The *Sexuality and Gender Identity Conversion Practices Act 2020* came into effect on 4 March 2021.
- We amended the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1997* to improve processes for changing birth registration and birth certificates for trans and gender diverse young people.
- We prohibited deferrable medical interventions on intersex people. The *Variation in Sex Characteristics (Restricted Medical Treatment) Act 2023* came into effect on 23 June 2023.

→ We passed the *Discrimination Amendment Act 2023* that made a range of reforms to the exceptions in the Act to better protect equality rights.

→ We invested in LGBTIQ+ support systems for Canberra's schools including the Safe and Inclusive Schools initiative.

→ We funded specialist, peer-led and community-controlled services to provide life-saving psychosocial and peer supports to LGBTIQ+ Canberrans.

→ Through the [Capital of Equality Grants Program](#), we supported over 80 innovative initiatives that gave LGBTIQ+ Canberrans opportunities for connection, belonging and community.

→ We funded research to better understand the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ Canberrans and barriers to equality. The ACT Health Directorate completed [a scoping study](#) to identify the barriers to accessing health services for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans. As a result, an adult gender-focused health service has been established and more work is underway to improve health outcomes for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans.

→ We invested in [the ACT component of the Writing Themselves In 4](#) study conducted by researchers at La Trobe University. We now have comprehensive information about the health and wellbeing of 300 young sexuality and gender diverse Canberrans.

→ We established ACT's own whole of government Data Collection framework for Sex, Gender, Sexual Orientation and Sex Characteristics to ensure standardised, comprehensive and inclusive data that can better inform our decision making.

These achievements underscore our commitment to making Canberra the most inclusive city. They exemplify our dedication to transforming ideals into tangible actions. By valuing LGBTIQ+ people as integral members of our diverse communities, we affirm their significance and contributions.

Why we need to continue our path towards LGBTIQ+ equality?

Commencing this endeavour in 2019, we recognised that the journey toward equality is perpetual and demands sustained effort and dedication. In 2023 we ran an LGBTIQ+ communities survey in the ACT to better understand the demographic makeup of LGBTIQ+ communities, measure the impact of our work and identify future priorities.

Celebrating sexual, gender and bodily diversity of Canberra

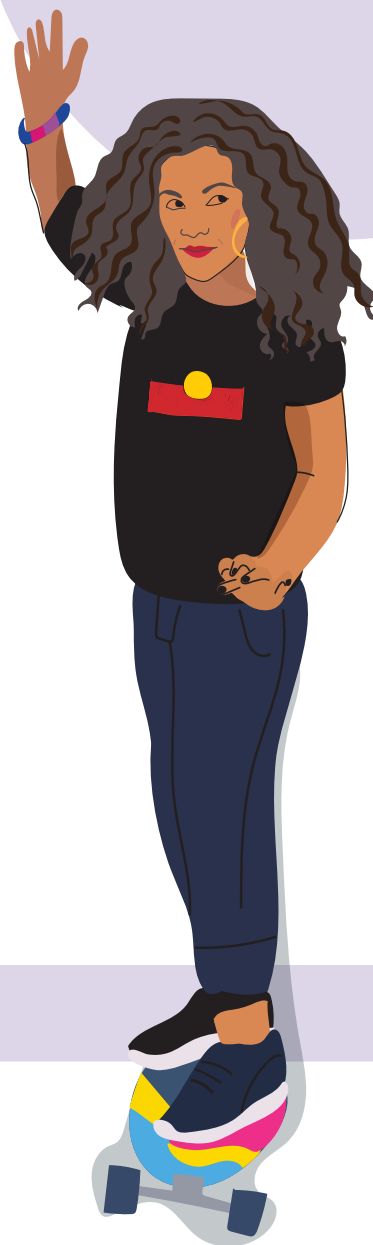
With 427 individuals bravely sharing their unique stories and identities, our survey paints a vivid portrait of our community's richness. Among them, cis- and trans women stand as the majority at 49%, while cis and trans men add their voice at 30%, and nonbinary individuals represented 15% of the respondents.

What's truly remarkable is the diversity of identities woven into our community's fabric. A proud 28% of respondents boldly embrace their trans or gender diverse history or identity. People born with variations in sex characteristics are represented by the 2% of respondents.

Moreover, our community shines as a mosaic of backgrounds, with 22% proudly identifying as people of colour and 18% carrying migration or displacement backgrounds. Among us, 3% proudly represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

Age is but a number in this community, with representation across all age groups: 18-25-year-olds make up 21%, while 25-39-year-olds account for 49%, and 40-59-year-olds comprise 24%, with those over 60 making up 5%.

Sexualities are also well represented with the majority of people being queer or gay (33% each), bisexual (27%) or pansexual (13%). Asexual people make up 8% of the community.



“What’s truly remarkable is the diversity of identities woven into our community’s fabric.”

Understanding the barriers to equality

Reflecting on the progress achieved since 2019, LGBTIQ+ communities recognised and celebrated the achievements. They reported a sense of increased equality, were pleased with recent legal protections, and had noticed increased LGBTIQ+ representation.

However, LGBTIQ+ communities also reflected on the persistent inequities in particular for trans people, and LGBTIQ+ people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or with disability.

- Over one-third of respondents felt like they could not participate in things they enjoyed because they were LGBTIQ+, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people most likely to face barriers to participation and accessing services.
- Respondents most frequently reported they require improved medicine and healthcare, mental health supports, and trans and gender diverse care.
- Half of respondents had faced other forms of discrimination in a range of forms and settings. This was most common amongst people of colour, people born with variations in sex characteristics and people with disability.
- About one third of respondents did not have access to services they required with this number increasing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (41%) and people of colour (53%).

The data shows that despite many achievements and laid foundations, the work needs to continue. To bring about lasting change, we must pursue more systemic and intersectional efforts. Sustaining the momentum of the whole-of-government approach is imperative so that our efforts lead to effective and enduring impact.

The new Capital of Equality Strategy is a testament to our past achievements and a resounding call to action for a Canberra that stands as a true Capital of Equality.



Directions for the Capital of Equality Strategy (2024-29)

Our vision

We remain committed to our long-term vision, for Canberra to be the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia.

This means that we want LGBTIQ+ people, their families, and communities to feel a sense of belonging to Canberra, to be visible, valued, celebrated and respected in the ACT.

We envision the work under the Strategy to be led in an intersectional way. The Action Plans under the Strategy must maintain the focus on meeting the needs of groups experiencing challenges related to intersectional needs including but not limited to culturally and linguistically diverse people including those on temporary visas or without access to Medicare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including brotherboys and sistergirls, people with disability or chronic conditions, young people and seniors.

In its vision, the Capital of Equality Strategy is aligned with other work of the ACT Government such as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, the ACT Disability Strategy, the Age Friendly City Plan 2020 - 2024, the ACT Women's Plan Third Action Plan 2023 -2026 and the Healthy Canberra ACT Preventive Health Plan 2020 – 2025.

As part of our ongoing commitment to inclusivity and diversity, we are officially transitioning from using the acronym LGBTIQ+ to using LGBTIQA+. This decision reflects our recognition of the importance of inclusivity and the need to ensure that all members of the community are represented and respected.

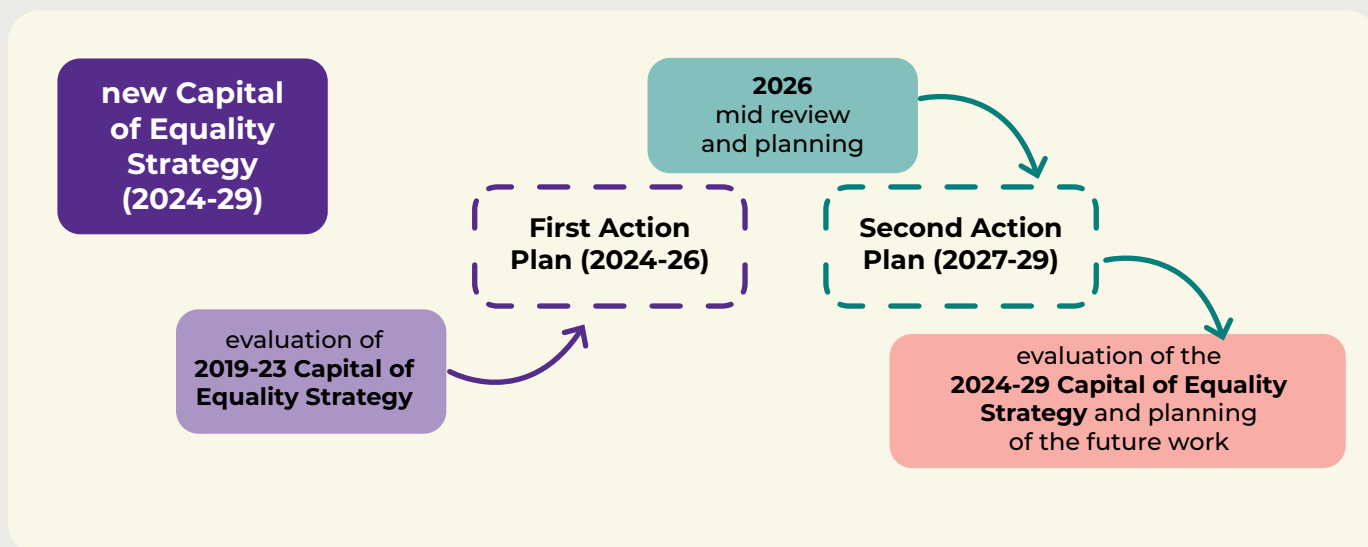
The addition of the “A” in LGBTIQA+ acknowledges and affirms the identities of asexual, aromantic and agender individuals within the broader LGBTIQA+ community. It is essential to recognise and include asexual, aromantic and agender people in discussions and initiatives related to LGBTIQA+ rights and equality. It gives the asexual, aromantic and agender communities confidence that they are welcome and wanted. By adopting the LGBTIQA+ acronym, we strive to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for individuals belonging to the LGBTIQA+ communities.

This change aligns with our values of equality, respect, and dignity for all members of society. We believe that by embracing the LGBTIQA+ acronym, we can better reflect the richness and diversity of human experiences within our community and create a more inclusive society for everyone.



Our objectives and focus areas

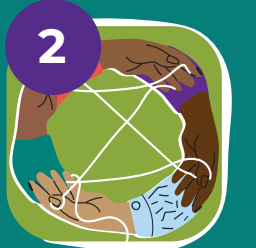
The Capital of Equality Strategy intends to create an authorising environment for implementation of a range of actions for the next five years from 2024 until 2029. The Strategy will be implemented via two-year action plans and allow ample time for evaluation and planning.



The Strategy sets out 4 objectives that will guide all work:



1 Promote awareness and understanding to eliminate barriers to equality



2 Enhance systems and service availability and their competencies



3 Advance legal and policy reforms to ensure equal rights



4 Empower safe, resilient, and sustainable LGBTIQ+ communities

Each of these objectives will cover several focus areas. Future actions in action plans will be arranged accordingly

Strategy objectives	Strategy focus areas				
 Promote awareness and understanding to eliminate barriers to equality for LGBTIQ+ communities	1.1. Strengthening ACT Government's engagement with LGBTIQ+ communities	1.2. Diverse and inclusive representation of LGBTIQ+ communities	1.3. Promoting LGBTIQ+ inclusion across all areas of life	1.4. Data and evidence building	1.5. Upholding rights to equality and non-discrimination
 Enhance systems and services availability and their competencies	2.1. Enhancing service access and competencies	2.2. Enhancing systems for better support of LGBTIQ+ communities	2.3. Enhancing health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ+ communities		
 Advance legal and policy reforms to ensure equal rights	3.1. Implementing legal reforms for LGBTIQ+ equality	3.2. Strengthening pathways to justice for LGBTIQ+ victims/survivors of discrimination and violence			
 Empower safe, resilient, and sustainable LGBTIQ+ communities	4.1. Resourcing for LGBTIQ+ peer-led organisations	4.2. Fostering community building and community connections	4.3. Celebration of LGBTIQ+ communities	4.4. Knowledge building for LGBTIQ+ communities	

Here is an overview of our aspirations for the next 5 years



We recognise the importance of fostering greater awareness and understanding of LGBTIQ+ identities, experiences, and challenges, aiming to address systemic barriers to equality and inclusion. The goal is to create an environment where LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, age, racial or cultural heritage, migration status and disability. We will work towards achieving this objective delivering actions under the following focus areas:

1.1. Strengthening ACT Government's engagement with LGBTIQ+ communities

We will facilitate meaningful dialogue and collaboration between government agencies, community organisations, and LGBTIQ+ individuals to ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

We will continue fostering partnerships and networks that promote mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation between stakeholders, enabling more effective advocacy and support for LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion.

1.2. Diverse and inclusive representation of LGBTIQ+ communities

It is essential that the rich diversity within LGBTIQ+ communities is visible across various spheres of society. This includes not only media, education, healthcare, but also such areas as urban planning. We will continue working on diverse and inclusive representation.

1.3. Promoting LGBTIQ+ inclusion across all areas of life

Beyond representation, inclusion is necessary across all areas of policy. It is essential that we provide guidance and training to ACT public service employees to ensure inclusive policy making.

1.4. Data and evidence building

Throughout implementation of the Strategy, we will collect and analyse data on LGBTIQ+ demographics, experiences of discrimination, and access to services to inform evidence-based policy development and program planning. We will also work to increase our knowledge about LGBTIQ+ community needs and priorities in particular when they intersect with race, cultural background, migration status, age and disability.

1.5. Upholding rights to equality and non-discrimination

We will also focus on activities that lead to elimination of homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism and other harmful experiences.

Through these efforts, we aim to create a more inclusive and equitable society where LGBTIQ+ individuals are respected, valued, and able to fully participate in all aspects of life without fear of discrimination or prejudice. By promoting awareness and understanding, we can break down barriers to equality and build a more inclusive future for everyone.

2

Enhance systems and service availability and their competencies

We recognise the ongoing need for improving systems and services to better meet the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities. By enhancing access to services, building competencies among service providers, and strengthening support systems, we aim to promote the health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life for LGBTIQ+ communities.

To achieve this objective, our strategy focuses on the following key areas:

2.1. Enhancing service access and competencies

We will focus on improving access to essential services for LGBTIQ+ individuals, ensuring they can easily access healthcare, social services, housing, education, and other critical resources. This involves addressing barriers to access, such as discrimination, stigma, and lack of cultural competency among service providers. This also includes focus on providing training and support to service providers to enhance their competencies in serving LGBTIQ+ clients effectively, sensitively, and respectfully.

2.2. Enhancing systems for better support of LGBTIQ+ communities

Alongside services, we will work to ensure that policy making across systems and institutions is inclusive of and responsive to the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people and their families.

2.3. Enhancing health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ+ communities

We will focus on improving health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ+ communities by addressing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. This involves implementing targeted interventions to address health issues disproportionately affecting LGBTIQ+ individuals and work to create inclusive and affirming healthcare environments where LGBTIQ+ individuals feel comfortable seeking care and support.

Through these efforts, we aim to create a more inclusive and supportive system of services that meets the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities. By enhancing access, competencies, and support systems, we can improve health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life for LGBTIQ+ communities across the board.



3



Advance legal and policy reforms to ensure equal rights

We need to continue driving legal and policy reforms to uphold the rights and protections of LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities. By advocating for legislative changes, improving access to justice, and combating discrimination and violence, we aim to create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

To achieve this objective, our strategy prioritises the following focus areas:

3.1. Implementing legal reforms for LGBTIQ+ equality

We will consider and enact legislative reforms that promote equality and protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This includes measures to recognise and address discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or variations in sex characteristics across all areas of life.

3.2. Strengthening pathways to justice for LGBTIQ+ victims/survivors of discrimination and violence

We will work to enhance access to justice for LGBTIQ+ individuals who experience discrimination, harassment, or violence based on their LGBTIQ+ identity.

Through these efforts, we aim to create a legal and policy framework that protects and promotes the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals and ensures their equal treatment under the law. By advocating for reforms and improving access to justice, we can work towards a more just, inclusive, and equitable society where all individuals are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness, regardless of their backgrounds.





We recognise the need to continue strengthening LGBTIQ+ communities and fostering their resilience, sustainability, and safety. By providing resources, support, and opportunities for community-building, we aim to create spaces where LGBTIQ+ individuals feel empowered, connected, and celebrated.

To achieve this objective, our strategy focuses on the following key areas:

4.1. Resourcing for LGBTIQ+ peer-led organisations

We recognise the need to allocate resources and funding to support peer-led organisations and initiatives within the LGBTIQ+ community. These organisations play a crucial role in providing support, advocacy, and services tailored to the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals. By investing in these organisations and community groups, we can empower them to continue their vital work and amplify the voices of LGBTIQ+ communities.

4.2. Fostering community building and connections

We will enable community building and social connections among LGBTIQ+ individuals through various initiatives and programs. By fostering a strong sense of community, we can provide vital support networks and resources for LGBTIQ+ individuals to thrive.

4.3. Celebration of LGBTIQ+ communities

We will recognise and celebrate the diversity, contributions, and achievements of LGBTIQ+ communities through various events, initiatives, and campaigns. By celebrating LGBTIQ+ communities, we can promote visibility, acceptance, and pride within the community and society at large.

4.4. Knowledge building for LGBTIQ+ communities

We will provide access to education, resources, and information to empower LGBTIQ+ individuals with knowledge and skills to navigate challenges and advocate for their rights. By building knowledge and capacity within LGBTIQ+ communities, we can empower individuals to lead change and create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Through these efforts, we aim to empower LGBTIQ+ communities to thrive, overcome challenges, and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all individuals. By providing resources, fostering connections, celebrating diversity, and building knowledge, we can create a stronger, safer, and more resilient community where all LGBTIQ+ individuals feel valued, respected, and supported.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will play a pivotal role in the ongoing pursuit of equality and inclusion for the LGBTIQ+ community. By systematically tracking our initiatives and assessing their impact, we gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of our efforts. This data-driven approach enables us to make informed decisions, allocate resources strategically, and refine our strategies for maximum impact.

Monitoring and evaluation will help us adapt to the evolving needs and challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community. By staying attuned to the dynamic landscape, we can fine-tune our approaches, address emerging issues, and proactively shape policies that reflect the community's diverse experiences.

Monitoring and evaluation will be embedded in each of the action plans.

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Website: act.gov.au/lgbtiqa

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