

Media Release

The Hon Harriet Shing MP

Minister for Housing

Minister for Water

Minister for Equality



Wednesday, 7 August 2024

SUPPORTING VICTORIANS TO FLOURISH *BEYOND BRICKS AND BARS*

The Allan Labor Government continues to support LGBTIQ+ Victorians through the 'Beyond Bricks and Bars' community program – the only initiative in Australia dedicated to supporting trans and gender diverse people when they leave prison.

Minister for Equality Harriet Shing today announced the launch of Flat Out's inaugural evaluation report that shows the grassroots, peer-led decarceration program delivers successful outcomes for participants.

Beyond Bricks and Bars' program provides culturally appropriate and holistic support to trans and gender diverse people at risk of incarceration and in prison, along with vital post-release support through advocacy and referrals to services including housing, mental health and legal assistance.

The program also helps justice workers improve their understanding of the diverse needs of trans and gender diverse communities.

Evaluation participants shared their overwhelmingly positive experiences engaging with the initiative. They noted key areas of support in assisting them to live the lives they want, avoid incarceration, and improve community connection, highlighting the project's effectiveness and impact.

The report emphasises program benefits on participants' mental health and wellbeing, with the majority crediting it for saving their lives. The continuity of support was a key strength, with 61 per cent of participants staying connected with the program after release, preventing reincarceration for 82 per cent of participants.

The evaluation showed that 26 per cent of participants were First Nations gender diverse people, and 13 per cent were culturally and racially marginalised community members. Many trans and gender diverse individuals persistently face transphobic violence, racism and discrimination, which can raise the risk of social isolation and mental health challenges. These experiences may also contribute to higher rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation.

The Labor Government recently allocated \$75,000 for Flat Out as part of the LGBTIQ+ Sector Strengthening Fund – an initiative increasing organisational capacity to deliver critical supports and services to LGBTIQ+ communities. Flat Out also received \$30,000 this year from the LGBTIQ+ Organisational Development Grants round.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Equality Harriet Shing

"I'm delighted to celebrate the success of Australia's leading organisation providing life-saving support to trans and gender diverse people in our justice system."

"By helping people navigate the challenges they face in and out of prison, Flat Out is helping to foster an inclusive and just society."

Quote attributable to Beyond Bricks and Bars Coordinator and Senior Social Worker Witt Gorrie

"Relationships and community connections are fundamental to the support we provide – these are the things that keep our community alive, safe and out of prison. Everyone deserves to have their community in their corner when they're going through the hardest period of their lives. Trans and gender diverse people behind bars are a part of our community and are fierce advocates for trans rights."

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