

Love is Love

Other countries have moved toward equality for all LGBTQI people, but Australia is lagging behind. It's time to end discrimination.

LGBTQI in Australia

1994

Australia repeals its last sodomy laws when a landmark human rights complaint is brought before the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

2002

Penny Wong assumes her seat in the Senate and comes out as a lesbian.

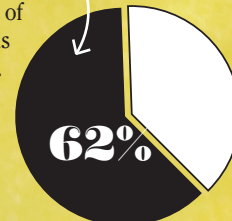


2005

The ban on blood donations from men who have had sex with men is challenged.

2012

62 per cent of Australians support same sex marriage and 81 per cent of 18-24 year olds feel this way*.



It feels like a miracle when the person you like actually likes you back. Finding someone is hard, which is why love is celebrated in such an over-the-top way when a couple gets engaged. But *Puberty Blues* actress Brenna Harding, 19, who is the daughter of a same-sex couple, faced a harsh reality recently when she attended her cousin's engagement ceremony with her two mums.

"I was sitting in the back with my non-biological mum, Jack," she remembers. "It was a beautiful, heartfelt occasion, but for us, there was a sadness to it. We were sitting there and watching this really lovely ceremony and realising that my mum was considered a second-class citizen compared to me. This was something she missed out on, not because she didn't fall in love, but because the government had decided that their love was not worthy."

It's an 'everyone' issue

Though most people in Australia are in favour of marriage equality, it is still illegal for a same-sex couple to get married. Even if you are heterosexual and marriage is the absolute farthest thing from your mind, you should still care. "This is about human rights," says 23-year-old Yen Eriksen, who recently won the Young People's Medal for her LGBTIQ activism work. "When you support marriage equality, you by extension support human rights and that would help a lot of people feel less isolated in their identities and start feeling embraced." It's the first step towards living in a world where love is love, people aren't bullied because of their sexual orientation and 'coming out' is a non-event.

Rodney Croome, the national director at Australian Marriage Equality, an organisation working towards making marriage equality legal, says the legal benefits the law would allow to married same-sex couples – such as being recognised as the next of kin if one passes away – aren't the only reasons why it's important. "There are still many negative stereotypes of same-sex relationships including that they are short-lived and just about sex," he says. "The inclusion of same-sex couples in an institution that represents love, stability and fidelity will do more than anything else to dispel these stereotypes. When straight Australians stand up for marriage equality they are standing up for their gay loved ones."

A step towards self-acceptance

Growing up in a place where LGBTIQ people are less valued than straight people can cause many teens to struggle with self-acceptance. Jahdia Solberg, 17, says she went through a state of depression when she figured out she was bisexual. "Having equality for all would definitely give me a boost of confidence," she says.

Jahdia, whose sister and aunty are also gay, says she has seen firsthand how hurtful it is to be discriminated against over something you have no control over. "Being able to live in a place where everyone can express their feelings would be amazing. It's important to be able to feel free to love who you want to love."

While civil unions are legal in Australia, Jasmin Belikov, 22, who is bisexual, says it isn't enough. "It wasn't until I heard about the marriage equality law in America that I really started thinking about it as a realistic future and started actually wanting it," she says. "I've always wanted a big white wedding and I don't think civil unions are enough. Really, isn't it normal to want to marry someone you love?"

When 19-year-old Madalyn Ellison came out as gay to her friends in high school, most were accepting, but some of her friends told her they didn't support her choice. "One girl told me she didn't support marriage equality because it was just the way she had been brought up," Ellison says. "I discovered some 'friends' were simply putting on a good face rather than actually being supportive."

66

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How much longer will it take?

Rodney says we are getting close to the law changing. "The current government wants a national vote on marriage equality which may not happen until the end of 2016. By this timetable we could have the reform by early 2017," he says.

And you don't have to be of legal voting age to be part of the marriage equality revolution. "Addressing inequality is something you can do right in your own community and school," Yen says. "Run support groups, connect with your peers, create an art project that features certain issues you feel passionate about. These are all really powerful ways to address change."

Brenna says that to her, it all comes down to kindness. "It doesn't matter what your parents identify as or what you yourself identify as. It comes back to being a kind and good person, and that's something that everyone should aspire to."

Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi resigns as Tony Abbott's parliamentary secretary after backlash around his comments linking gay marriage to society accepting sex with animals.



2013

The High Court rules against the ACT's same sex marriage laws – couples who got hitched get to be married for less than a week.

2015



Then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott warns his colleagues they'll have to resign from the frontbench if they vote in favour of same-sex marriage.

Victoria legalises same-sex adoption.

2016

The Coalition Government is to conduct a national plebiscite (referendum) on same-sex marriage some time after this year's federal election.



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