



26th January 2021

To the Panel

Please find enclosed a submission regarding Conversion Practice which is a term that suggests, its a treatment that can change the sexual and gender identity of LGBTIQ+ people to heterosexual by prayer and various techniques.

As a mother of a gay male, an ally and advocate of LGBTIQ+ people's rights for 22 years and representative of Australian parents for the last 14 years I am strongly urging decision-makers to outlaw this misguided practice, which is just straight out abuse, ineffective, increases mental health issues and suicidal ideation.

Some believe this emotional and physical abuse should be considered part of their religious freedom. However, in reality, its maltreatment and discrimination against the victim who doesn't have the freedom to say NO.

Finally, please don't make the same mistake Queensland did, by continuing to allow people in informal settings (which means any amatuer or charlatan, wherever suits them) to carry on with this cruelty.

Consider the victim's wellbeing and rights. The perpetrators of this practise aren't the ones who suicide, who struggle mentally and have shattered lives. The perpetrators create this hardship for the victims and then tells them it's their fault because they didn't try hard enough. And then they just walk away.

Yours Sincerely
Shelley Argent OAM

Submission to Inquiry for Conversion Practice Therapy Tasmania

Submitted by
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PFLAG is a 100% voluntary, non-funded, secular peer support group for parents whose children identify as LGBTIQ+. We offer individual support when necessary and bi monthly group meetings plus written resources to families to hasten their understanding. Additionally, we provide community education in a variety of ways and advocate for the rights of our LGBTIQ+ loved ones both State and federally.

As a leader of PFLAG+ in this country for the last twenty-two years, I am appalled that conversion practices are once again gaining momentum to supposedly “cure” sexual and gender diversity under the guise of religious freedom. Conversion practices have only come to the forefront of religious rights since the marriage equality debate which was considered a huge loss for many religious groups and now the proposed legislation regarding people’s right to religious freedom.

Sexuality and Gender Diversity are not a Choice:

Sexual and gender diversity are like eye colour, we cannot choose or change either, they are a given when we are born. Forbes magazine, reported on August, 30 2019 that a study done by Andrea Ganna from the Molecular Biology Laboratory in Finland showed research done reinforces the understanding that same sex, sexual behaviour is simply “a natural part of our diversity as a species” The study involved taking DNA from 470,000 people. Additionally, being homosexual or transgender is now considered a natural human variant.

Conversion Practice is part of Religious Freedom:

If this practice is considered justified for reasons of religious freedom, what will be next? Conversion Practice is not a freedom; it's a form of control over the victim. This therapy has been around for nearly 100 years in all forms of cruel methods. The whole experience can be emotionally traumatic and should be seen as a form of abuse, against individuals, who just don't fit particular criteria or expectations, of some Christians or Christian groups. The American Psychiatric Assoc, removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1973 and World Health Organisation removed it in 1990.

Emotional abuse and/or physical abuse when used in other circumstances can lead to criminal charges being laid. However, parents even if their intentions are good, through conversion practice will unwittingly be compounding a negative emotional impact and trauma on their child. Plus, practitioners will have the freedom to create additional trauma and exacerbate mental health concerns on individuals free of responsibility of their actions... Meanwhile, the rights of the victim to have the right to say NO to this abuse are rarely taken into consideration when it comes to conversion practice.

Queensland Practice Therapy Legislation:

In Queensland, our legislation is a disgrace, it's almost useless. Only professionals are banned from applying this therapy. However, those in informal settings are permitted to practice this therapy freely. But once again, what about the rights of the victims when they say NO?

What is good about Conversion Practice?

Nothing good comes from Conversion Practice. First, it is nonsensical for people to assume the banning of this outdated and unnecessary abuse on LGBTIQ is an attack on their religious freedoms. Australians have religious freedom but that doesn't mean we should be condoning such treatment of people in the name of God

Second, sexual and gender diversity is not a choice. And, furthermore, it is no longer classified as a mental illness, a deviance or a disorder that needs to be cured, homosexuality and transgender identity are considered a natural sexual orientation. Sexuality and gender diversity are like eye colour they are both a given when we are born. However, Conversion Practice is a choice which definitely does more harm than good.

It should be noted that many Christians and Christian Groups are very much opposed to Conversion Practice and welcome LGBTIQ+ people into their congregations without judgement.

Unfortunately, substance abuse, homelessness and mental health issues increase along with the rate of suicide, because of this practice and the negative repercussions it produces, for example:

- many feel they haven't tried hard enough and have let themselves and/or loved ones down

- others feel they are just failures and doomed to what they are told is a sinful existence
- others are just broken by the whole experience and feel they have no worthwhile future
- while others feel they are more sinful than before, because the Conversion Practice failed and now they have not only let themselves down, but let their God down as well

Nobody wins:

Conversion practices should be completely banned and criminalised, including their promotion. I know of a young girl in Brisbane who was sent to a professional person for Conversion Practice. During the session, she became so distraught the professional stopped, but it was too late for the child. She became traumatised, and her suicidal ideation increased, she has tried running away from home several times and has now turned inward on herself.

If adults choose to accept Conversion Practice and it fails, they feel they have also failed and become more depressed. When young people are given Conversion Practice and it fails, they know at minimum they have failed their parent's hopes and expectations and again the young person, who didn't choose to be LGBTIQ+ feels more of a failure which again increases mental health issues and the risk of suicide. Personally, I know of pastors and ministers who have tried Conversion Practice and not surprisingly, it has failed.

People who claim to be a practitioner of Conversion Practice regardless of profession or faith should be considered charlatans like the snake oil sellers in days of old, because it's deceptive marketing and really is just a scam, giving people false hope. Now people can be jailed for scamming and so should people who promote and practice Conversion Practice .

One day, a person of religion explained to me how he believed studies on the issue of Conversion Practice done by Universities were skewed towards LGBTIQ+ people and of course any research done by an LGBTIQ organisation was just not credible.

So, with a little research I found several credible professional bodies that I believe are not run by Universities, LGBTIQ organisations, Christians or Christian groups but are still **not supportive** of Conversion Practice Therapy (CPT)

In America:

- Academy of Child Adolescent
- Academy of Pediatrics of
- College of Physicians
- Counseling Association
- Association of Marriage and Family Therapy
- Medical Association
- College of Physicians
- Psychiatric Association
- Psychoanalytic Association

- Psychological Association
- School Counselors Association
- School Health Association
- National Association of Social Workers
- Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) Regional office of World Health Organisation
- Just the Facts Coalition
- World Psychiatric Association

In Australia:

- Psychotherapy and Counseling Federation of Australia
- Association of Social Workers
- Australian Medical Association
- Royal College Australian College of Physicians
- Australian Psychiatric Association

In the UK

- Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy
- Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Psychotherapies
- Psychological Society
- College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists
- National counseling society
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- The Scottish Government
- UK Council of Psychotherapy

In conclusion, this practice is just abuse, whether it is physical or emotional. Severe sentences should apply to anyone who promotes this practice or engages someone to apply this practice on an individual.

People on this panel and those who make the decision about whether this practice should be allowed must always keep in mind how many deaths occur and how many lives have been emotionally shattered by conversion practices.

Be assured suicide and mental health issues for those who experience this treatment will be emotionally shattered and suicide will be the silent killer that no one speaks about, especially the families and practitioners.

Shelley Argent OAM