**ADVANCING SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH - IMPACT CASE STUDY**

**MARK HUGHES**

Title of Case Study: LGBTAgeing

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**1. CONTEXT**

This program of research commenced in 2002 when LGBTI ageing was just beginning to be recognised as needing attention by researchers, service providers, and policy makers. Very little research had been published on this topic in Australia, although lesbian and gay gerontology had been emerging as a field of research in the US since the late 1970s. The research occurred in the context of wider reforms in relation to LGBTI rights – including the removal of citizenship barriers to those in same-sex relationships by the Rudd-Gillard Labor governments. It also occurred in the context of reforms to the aged care system with its increasing emphasis on consumerism, personaliazation and choice.

**2. SUMMARY OF IMPACT**

Increased community awareness. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s this program of research occurred alongside the formation of – and was able to influence – working groups on LGBTI ageing, initiated by LGBTI community organisations and other bodies such as the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, Uniting Care, and the Australian Association of Gerontology.

Changes to policy and legislation. The research was cited in submissions to public inquiries (e.g. Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians) and the development of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy (National Strategy), and influenced the reform of the Sex Discrimination Act.

Impact on service delivery. The development of the National Strategy and the reform of the Sex Discrimination Act set new standards for service providers in the ageing/aged care and health fields to provide: inclusive, LGBTI-friendly services, and to co-construct of discriminatory practices.

**3. RESEARCH UNDERPINNING IMPACT**

1. Older gay men and social workers talking about sexual identity (2002). This was an initial pilot project on how older gay men want social workers to talk with them about their sexual identity in assessment processes and social workers’ response to these views. It involved focus groups and identified differing perspectives on the extent to which sexual identity should be discussed openly, with older gay men highlighting need for privacy and trust in their relationships with professionals.

2. Sexual identity in health and aged care (2004-2006). This involved qualitative research on the experiences of 14 older lesbian and gay people accessing health and aged care services, as well as expectations for the future. Concerns were identified about heteronormativity, direct and indirect discrimination, and lack of options for future care. The findings were drawn upon in training programs and information resources.

3. Diversity and older people’s care networks (2008-2009). The project sought to examine older lesbian and gay people’s care networks, drawing on concepts of communities of practice. It involved in-depth interviews with older lesbian and gay people, although not all interviews were completed due to staffing issues.

4. LGBTI people’s experience of looking and presenting of age (2008-2010). The Queensland Association for Health Communities (now Queensland Health Alliance) surveyed 443 LGBTI Queenslanders on their experience of legal rights and choice.

**4. DETAILS OF IMPACT**

**Approach to impact** This program of research aimed from the start to influence service delivery and professional practice, with the ultimate goal of improving the social, cultural and material conditions of LGBTI older people. As a gay man, Prof Hughes had a personal stake in improving these conditions and so they can make use of the research findings. This has not always been straightforward, with some of the challenges including: the lack of a dedicated time, service providers, and policy makers to who to deliver outcomes. The project had an impact on: service provision, policy and legislation, and public awareness.

Impact on public policy and legislation. Over the past 15 years there has been substantial change in Australia in each of these areas regarding the recognition of LGBTI ageing and the needs of LGBTI older people. The chapter, “Towards the inquiry into aged care and beyond: the promise and challenge of a new era in LGBTI ageing” traces these developments and notes the increasing institutionalisation of service and policy responses to LGBTI ageing.

That is, what was once a primary concern of activists and researchers has been increasingly embedded within government policies and government practices. This has been driven by a range of factors, including the increasing institutionalisation of service and policy responses to LGBTI ageing.

**5. LGBTI people and end of life care (2012-2014).** Focus groups were held with older LGBT people and community workers, followed by a survey of 305 LGBT people in NSW on attitudes towards end of life care and advance care planning. The research demonstrated limited knowledge of legal rights and relatively low take up of end of life legal options.

Information resources for LGBTI community organisations were generated.

6. Health and wellbeing of LGBTI older people (2012-2014). A survey of health and wellbeing of 312 LGBTI older people (aged 50+) across Australia, funded partly by Gay Life and Lesbian Life, and Southern Cross University, was undertaken. Findings revealed higher levels of psychological distress and loneliness than is typically found in the general population. Older lesbians were found to have lower physical health status than typical for women. Barriers to health and other services were identified. The findings informed the work of Gay Life and Lesbian Life and led to development of personal training programs for LGBTI older people.

7. Representations of LGBTI ageing in Australia and UK (SCU, University of Surrey 2015). This was a small study that examined cultural representations of LGBTI older people in UK and Australasian websites. Using membership categorisation analysis, it revealed constraint and celebration narratives and highlighted the limitations of framing LGBTI ageing and older people in homogenous ways.

8. Reducing health disparities for older LGBTI Australians (La Trobe University, University of Newcastle, Australian LGBTI Health Alliance, Carers Australia, SANE Australia 2016-2020). This involved a national survey of health and wellbeing of older LGBTI Australians (aged 60+), followed by qualitative interviews with older LGBTI people, and focus groups with service providers. Resources were produced for policy makers and service providers. In progress.

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**8. Other members of research team**

Ms Sujay Kenton (QUni), Dr Colleen Caraghettle (SCU), Anthony Lyons (La Trobe), Emeritus Prof Victor Minello (La Trobe/UNE), Prof Karen Fredrickson-Goldman (Uni Washington), Prof Andrew King (Uni Surrey), Prof Peter Robinson (Swinburne).

**9. Researcher and Institution.**

Professor Mark Hughes, Southern Cross University (previously UNSW, UQ)
Commission Report on Caring for Older Australians (2011), the subsequent Government response, the development of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy, the national roll-out of LGBTI sensitivity training to aged care providers, the establishment of the special needs group under the Aged Care Act, the funding of targeted services (e.g., community visitors programs, home-care packages) to support LGBTI older people, and the current development of a new National LGBTI Aged Care Action Plan.

Submissions to public inquiries to influence policy and legislative reform

Submissions to a range of public inquiries have cited the research, including:

- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians – Submission 1, Submission 2.
- Human Rights Commission Consultation on Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation – Submission 1, Submission 2.
- Inquiry into Palliative Care in Australia
- Inquiry into Planning Options and Services for People with Disability – Submission 1, Submission 2.
- Inquiry into Suicide in Australia
- Inquiry into the Opportunities for Inclusion of Victorian Seniors

Findings on discrimination and homophobia experienced by LGBTI older people (Project 1, 2) cited by Justice Michael Kirby in speech to Second World Congress on Adult Guardianship, 15 October 2012.

Findings re: impact of discrimination on LGBTI older people's preparedness to access sexual orientation and gender identity services caused by religious organisations providing aged care services – cited 5 times, including large group audits, in Reports on LGBTI Affirmation Legislation Committee on Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-discrimination Bill 2012, full evidence included in Hansard 24 January 2013. While not cited directly, the Report by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-discrimination Bill 2012 referred generally to the evidence provided in the Inquiry into the Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-discrimination Bill regarding the impact of xenophobia of religious providers of aged care on LGBTI older people – this Amendment Bill removed these exemptions.

Four articles (from Projects 1, 2, 3, 4) were included in the key reading list for the Australian Government’s National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy (2012).

Impact on service delivery:

It is difficult to draw a straight line between the research and engagement activities and the changes in policy and practice. The research contributed to multiple policy and service development citations. These included:

- National Mental Health Professionals Webinar, 27 April.
- ACON Roundtable on LGBTI Aged Care, Sydney, 27 February.
- Queensland Mental Health Training Day, Brisbane, 24 June.

Queensland

Dr Hughes (2009) issues for older lesbians and gay people accessing health and aged care services. Presented at Gay and Lesbian Immigration Taskforce Seminar, Brisbane, 8 October.


Dr Hughes (2012) issues in ageing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. In interview with Podsok.com, Griffith University, www.podsok.com

Media and public awareness:

Research findings of the projects have been included in a range of blogs, newsletters, websites targeting the general public, including:

- Alzheimers Australia Newsletter, Summer 2009
- European Association of Palliative care blog, July 2015
- Chisholm Health Ethics Bulletin, Autumn 2015
- Psychiatry Advisor, April 2014
- Organisation Intersex International Australia blog, 2013
- COTA QLD blog on Marriage Equality, September 2017
- Carers NSW – LGBTI website
- Rainbow Tasmania LGBTI Equity and Inclusion website
- PaigAlaged on LGBTI individuals
- Aged Care Guide website
- Agility Communication website
- Aging Optimised Blog, February 2017
- Starts at 60 website, 2014
- ACON Roundtable on LGBTI Aged Care, Sydney, 27 February.
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