

## POLITICAL PARTY QUOTAS FOR LGBTI CANDIDATES

### Summary position

The Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) believes that all major Australian political parties should introduce quotas for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) candidates in winnable seats. This will result in increased LGBTI representation in Australia's major political parties and in Parliament, and ensure sufficient attention is paid to issues affecting our community.

Representative quotas have been used successfully in Australia in the past, and are common practice in many countries around the world. LGBTI quotas should be adopted by the major parties to address the historically poor LGBTI representation within each party. At a minimum, all parties should adopt soft quotas, or a commitment in principle to greater representation by LGBTI people among their candidates and caucuses.

### Purpose of LGBTI quotas and the need to introduce them

VAC hopes to draw attention to entrenched discrimination within Australia's political parties and campaigns. VAC further hopes to initiate and encourage discussion within the parties about their LGBTI-related policies and about issues affecting LGBTI communities. The increased presence of LGBTI lawmakers will provide much needed advocacy for this community, regardless of political party. It will help curb the extreme rhetoric about LGBTI people that has become commonplace in the public sphere and balance those extreme viewpoints in the party room.

Recent political and public conversations in Australia around marriage equality and the Safe Schools Coalition anti-bullying program have resulted in significant acrimony toward LGBTI communities. Research has linked homophobia in public discourse to poor mental health outcomes for LGBTI people. If the interests and the wellbeing of LGBTI communities are to be protected, it is critical that advocacy come from positions of influence within the major political parties.

Without adequate LGBTI representation in Parliament, issues impacting our community are often the given the lowest priority for discussion, if they are discussed at all. These issues extend beyond marriage equality and anti-bullying programs in schools. They include robust anti-discrimination laws; funding for LGBTI-specific health services; support for people living with HIV; support for LGBTI people experiencing homelessness and other forms of economic disadvantage; the approval and subsidy of HIV-prevention tools; education and action around trans and intersex health issues; and the treatment of LGBTI refugees and migrants. In order to see lasting change with respect to these issues, it is critical for community groups and the broader LGBTI community to advocate for greater representation in State and Federal parliaments.

### Criticism and impact

A common objection to quotas is that they overlook merit and expertise. However, quotas and merit-based systems are not mutually exclusive. Quotas encourage parties to look outside traditional paths to preselection, leading to greater diversity among the pool of candidates. This diversity recognises the value of different backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints and creates the potential for a parliament that better reflects the views and values of the electorate.

Using quotas as a means to achieve greater representation of certain groups is not without precedent, even in Australia. The Australian Labor Party in 1994, recognising the need for increased representation and input by women, implemented quotas for women candidates. This has increased the proportion of women Labor MPs in State and Federal parliaments from less than 10 per cent in the 1990s to 43 per cent today. This representation has directly contributed to major policy reforms and legislative changes that benefit women, on issues including paid parental leave, pay equity, and anti-domestic violence laws.

**For more information contact the Victorian AIDS Council on 03 9865 6700 or visit [www.VAC.org.au](http://www.VAC.org.au)**