

Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment: a case study

ACON

Relocation of older LGBT people

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have been building vibrant, supportive and safe communities in Sydney's inner suburbs since the 1960s. Inclusive services, including health services, have also been established along the way.

The cost of inner city living, however, is increasingly prohibitive, particularly housing, and some older LGBT people find themselves faced with the prospect of having to move away to less expensive outer suburbs, rural and regional areas.

"There are a lot of complex social issues that arise when people get transplanted from an area in which they have been forming a community for many years," says Johann Kolstee, senior research officer with ACON. "Many LGBT people have a really positive experience of relocating but for others, particularly when it's involuntary, it can be frightening."

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Johann Kolstee

the people for whom it advocates and has become increasingly aware that some older LGBT people, including those with HIV, face a particular set of challenges when faced with relocation and may need targeted support.

"Having to move out of inner city neighbourhoods where we have been able to develop safety and community is often quite difficult for older

members of our community who have experienced many years of stigma and discrimination, and may even have grown up at a time when being gay was criminalised," says Johann. "There aren't a lot of programs for older LGBTI people in Australia and ACON wants to be able to advocate for support and services that can meet their health and wellbeing needs."

The organisation has used the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) toolkit to investigate the issue of relocation for LGBT people in more depth. The process was both a training opportunity - led by Tony Coggins from the UK's South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, who is one of the original authors of the toolkit - and a bone fide MWIA.



Johann Kolstee, senior research officer at ACON

The kit is more typically used to assess a specific project rather than a broad issue, but it is highly adaptable and can be tailored to suit a range of purposes. "Choosing an issue made it more complex for us," says Johann. "[However] the tool allows for broad concepts to be fleshed out and better understood, and the complexity sort of added to the richness of the analysis down the track."

Johann was already familiar with the concept of wellbeing before using the MWIA process. "Viewing services through a wellbeing lens just makes complete sense to me," he says. "I think you can really get people on board when you are talking about staying well and being able to get on with doing the things you want with your life, rather than framing it like 'right, now, how can we fix you?'"

"I had never heard of a MWIA before the Commission approached us about the training but I was familiar with health impact assessments and the positives that can emerge from those, so the MWIA toolkit had a lot of credibility for me."

The stakeholder workshop, which included LGBT people who had already moved as well as those who were considering a move, was perhaps the most valuable step for ACON. "Some of the most interesting recommendations came from people in the community... Unfortunately there is not a lot of research or literature on this topic yet," says Johann.

"Some of the most important information came from people who have experienced relocation in a positive way and have been able to establish new social networks and find inclusive service providers."

"We learnt how we can better support people who are faced with relocation and how we can build resilience ahead of time. We got some really solid, concrete information with which to move forward."

The organisation also hopes to use its report to support a broad range of grant applications related to services that promote the health and wellbeing of older LGBTI people.

"Having this evidence base, a report that triangulates research, community consultation and community profiling, will be really helpful," says Johann.

"It has also been a great way to deepen our understanding of wellbeing and how we can promote it."

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM ACON

- **We recommend choosing a specific project rather than a broad issue, at least for your first MWIA.**
- **Take the time at the scoping stage to tailor the tool to fit your project, including any time and resourcing constraints. It is best if at least one person can devote themselves full-time to the process from beginning to end.**
- **You are likely to encounter many different interpretations of wellbeing when consulting with stakeholders and community but everyone who participates is likely to develop a much deeper understanding of wellbeing and its importance.**
- **The body of evidence you build and the skills you acquire are likely to be useful well beyond the particular project you assess.**
- **Ensure you manage the expectations of those who take part in the consultation process, about what your organisation can realistically achieve.**
- **Unexpected benefits may also result. For ACON, having people from different divisions within the organisation working together on the assessment proved to be a bonus.**

This fact sheet has been produced by the Wellbeing Collaborative. Find out more about wellbeing and how it can be applied to your work.

