



PRIDE GUIDE: HOW LAW FIRMS
AND ORGANISATIONS IN NSW CAN
SUPPORT LGBTQIA+ SOLICITORS

FOREWORD

The Law Society is committed to promoting a legal profession that fosters inclusion, diversity and belonging for LGBTQIA+ solicitors. This Resource has been prepared with input from the Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which includes lawyers from the LGBTQIA+ community. The purpose of this document is to suggest practical strategies to law firms and organisations to help create a LGBTQIA+ friendly workplace.

Please note that this Resource has generally utilised the "LGBTQIA+" acronym in an endeavour to be as inclusive as possible to all persons who identify as part of this community. However, where a specific report, study or service provider has utilised a different acronym, this resource has used the same acronym for consistency. Please note that the Law Society is accepting and supportive of all gender identities, sexualities and those with innate variations in sex characteristics regardless of acronym utilised.

This Resource does not include a glossary of terms as the Law Society does not purport to be an authority on terminology used in this Resource. If you or your organisation is unclear on the terms used in this resource, we suggest having regard to organisations which provide relevant resources and educational training, for example:

- [Minus18](#)
- [Twenty10](#)
- [ACON](#)
- [Trans Justice Project](#)
- [InterAction for Health and Human Rights](#)



SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF SOLICITORS IN NSW

According to the Law Society’s [2023 Annual Profile of Solicitors in NSW](#), 6% of respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual/pansexual or queer (LGBQ+), 84% as heterosexual and 10% preferred not to say. Of the respondents that identified as LGBQ+, 62% identified as lesbian or gay, 30% identified as bisexual/pansexual and 8% as queer.

A larger proportion of LGBQ+ respondents identified as male (53%) compared to female (43%), while 3% identified as non-binary. On average, LGBQ+ respondents were younger (24% were under 30 compared to 13% of heterosexual respondents) and were more recently admitted to the legal profession than heterosexual respondents (13 years compared to 18 years).

There was a significant association between sexual orientation and practice sector. Around one in five LGBQ+ respondents were working in the government legal sector (19%) compared to 12% of heterosexual respondents, and there was also higher representation of LGBQ+ respondents within the community legal sector (4% compared to 1%).

This data demonstrates that a portion of our solicitor membership identifies as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Recent data has shown that LGBTQIA+ employees are vulnerable to harassment and bullying in the workplace. In the [Australian Workplace Equality Index’s 2022 Employee Survey](#), 186 organisations were surveyed including over 44,000 employees. Of the respondents, approximately 14% reported witnessing harassment targeting people of diverse sexuality or gender at work, and approximately 5% reported witnessing more serious bullying of this nature. Of the respondents identifying as “LGBTQ”, there was an increasing number who were “not out at all” in relation to their sexuality at work (18.7%, up 2.81% from 2021).



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While the Australian Workplace Equality Index Survey is not specific to the legal profession, the Law Society considers it crucial that the legal profession continues to be proactive about promoting the wellbeing, safety and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ solicitors.

Purpose of this Resource

This Resource suggests strategies law firms and organisations may consider implementing to better foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for employees with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. The Resource also notes how inclusive workplaces can promote LGBTQIA+ clients to feel safe and supported.

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- **Provide access to LGBTQIA+ awareness training for employees** – Workplaces may wish to consider facilitating staff access to LGBTQIA+ awareness training: see, for example, [Twenty10 Prism LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity Training](#). Ideally, training should be led by members of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is important that this training be available to all staff across the legal practice, including reception staff who are often the first point of contact for clients who may be from the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Ensure that LGBTQIA+ diversity training is intersectional** – LGBTQIA+ diversity training or resources provided to employees should be cognisant of intersectionality, including the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural diversity and religious beliefs. It is important that diversity training is alive to these nuances and does not silo LGBTQIA+ identities to a single set of experiences.
- **Promote LGBTQIA+ resources on law firm intranet** – Law practices may wish to promote LGBTQIA+ training and resources on the workplace intranet. Relevant resources, for example, are available on the [Diversity Council of Australia](#) or [Pride in Diversity](#) webpages. Intranet access to LGBTQIA+ training and resources is particularly helpful for employees at international law firms with offices in countries that may not be able to facilitate in-person LGBTQIA+ awareness training because of social, cultural or safety concerns.
- **Ensure solicitors are aware of specific issues for LGBTQIA+ clients** – It is important that LGBTQIA+ clients feel safe and supported by the legal profession and that lawyers understand the specific issues faced by LGBTQIA+ clients in their practice area. For example, better outcomes may be achieved for clients where family lawyers are aware of rainbow (and non-nuclear) family structures and where criminal lawyers have an understanding of the historical challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people when dealing with police and how this may impact interactions with law enforcement. Other areas of law which may affect the LGBTQIA+ community in nuanced ways include lawyers working in the discrimination, family violence, employment and tenancy law spaces.

EMBEDDING SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR LGBTQIA+ EMPLOYEES

- **Integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusion into firm-wide diversity goals and targets** – Consider setting goals and targets for the recruitment and promotion of diverse employees, including those from the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Develop policies and practices that are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ solicitors** – Consider whether internal policies and practices are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons, including in relation to:
 - parental, carers', fertility, adoption or medical leave;
 - the availability of gender-neutral bathrooms;
 - recognising an employee's preferred name, gender and/or pronouns;
 - gender-neutral guidelines for staff dress code;
 - mental health and wellbeing support that is cognisant of the challenges that may be faced by LGBTQIA+ employees; and
 - sexual harassment reporting systems, noting the increased risk of sexual harassment and violence against LGBTQIA+ people.
- **Create an LGBTQIA+ network within the firm** – LGBTQIA+ networks can provide a safe space for LGBTQIA+ employees and allies. Networks provide an opportunity for employees to discuss and advise the law firm or organisation's leadership on issues relevant to LGBTQIA+ staff as well as a chance to celebrate diversity and foster an inclusive community.
- **Encourage allies and advocates for the LGBTQIA+ community from the senior partnership** – It is important that senior partners and managers, whether as members of the LGBTQIA+ community or as allies, demonstrate support of LGBTQIA+ employees and networks within the firm. This support fosters a culture of safety and inclusion, both internally amongst colleagues and externally for existing or potential clients.

SPOTLIGHT ON: DOWSON TURCO LAWYERS



Sydney law firm Dowson Turco Lawyers is gay owned and operated. Since its inception in 2008, Dowson Turco Lawyers has advocated for law reform for the LGBTQIA+ community and provided a safe space for LGBTQIA+ employees and clients. Dowson Turco Lawyers is well known for having led the charge on two NSW parliamentary inquiries into hate crimes, as well as an independent judicial commission of inquiry into LGBTQIA+ murders in NSW, demonstrating the firm's commitment to supporting their community.

Dowson Turco Lawyers demonstrates how having a genuine culture of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity equips a law firm to better understand the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ clients. The Dowson Turco family law and estates team understand the sometimes-fraught relationship that can exist between the LGBTQIA+ community and family members, and the crime team understands the often challenging relationship between the LGBTQIA+ community and law enforcement. The lived experiences of the employees at Dowson Turco Lawyers, including staff with diverse sexual orientation, religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds, means that they are better able to represent, engage with and provide a safe space for diverse clients.

In speaking with Nicholas Stewart, Partner at Dowson Turco Lawyers, he observed that the legal profession in some areas can be antiquated and outdated, which can present difficulties for LGBTQIA+ employees and clients.

For example, Nicholas noted the difficulty of representing non-binary clients in Australian court rooms, where gender neutral language is not customary. However, some progress has been made, with Nicholas pointing to the NSW Supreme Court practice note on [Pronunciation of Names and Forms of Address](#) as well as recent work by the Law Society of NSW and Bar Association of NSW to progress inclusivity in the profession. Nevertheless, Nicholas reiterated that legal representatives should be vigilant to ensure that correct and inclusive language is used, not just by judicial officers, but by other solicitors, barristers, witnesses and experts. Nicholas contended that while some of these challenges may persist in the legal profession for years to come, it is important to continue working toward making the legal profession as inclusive as possible for the LGBTQIA+ community as well as other minority groups.

Dowson Turco Lawyers demonstrates what it means to be a genuinely inclusive law firm that celebrates and champions diversity. Stewart suggested that firms can best support LGBTQIA+ employees and clients by recognising the unique challenges that the community faces, and signposting to the public at large that the LGBTQIA+ community is welcome. Nicholas noted that this can be as simple as including pronouns in email signatures or establishing an LGBTQIA+ support network in the workplace; these initiatives foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for employees and clients alike.

SPOTLIGHT ON: LGBTQIA+ CHAMPION – GORDON WILLIAMS, MINTER ELLISON

MinterEllison.

Over the course of his thirty-year legal career, Gordon Williams has witnessed the way in which workplace inclusion for LGBTQIA+ employees has undergone profound change. Gordon started out in a mid-sized London firm as a law graduate in 1994. At that time, conversations on diversity and inclusion were uncommon, and matters of sexual orientation or gender identity were generally taboo among colleagues. While Gordon does not recall experiencing any homophobia, he notes there were no role-models in the workplace or other visible indicators in an organisational sense that signalled work was a safe and supportive place to come out as LGBTQIA+.

In around 2012, as a relatively junior partner in Minter Ellison's Sydney office at the time, Gordon was approached by two associates who were keen to set up an LGBTQIA+ network for the firm. Over the years, colleagues have shared with Gordon that the network, particularly the visible support and allyship of senior partners and leaders, has helped anchor the sense of inclusion that LGBTQIA+ employees feel in the workplace.

Since starting the network together with his colleagues, Gordon notes that the dial has also shifted on the language of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. References to 'tolerance' have been replaced by 'acceptance' and, most recently, 'belonging'. Gordon considers 'belonging' speaks to what law firms (and other employers) should be striving for – a workplace where employees feel safe, valued and able to thrive.

From Gordon's perspective, the LGBTQIA+ network has paved the way for deeper client engagement as lawyers across the firm can bring greater knowledge and empathy to discussions both on professional and personal matters. While celebration is important to the network – Minter's proudly marches in the Mardi Gras parade – so is reflection, and the network has hosted several thought leadership events to highlight the stories of LGBTQIA+ employees.

Gordon is frank about some of the lessons he has taken on board since the establishment of the network, reflecting in particular on the importance of maintaining diversity within the network itself, for example, ensuring the visibility of colleagues of different sexual orientations and gender identities as well as intersecting forms of identity such as cultural background and race.

In Gordon's view, organisations and individuals should not let their fear of "getting it wrong" and being seen as "clumsy" get in the way of striving for inclusion and belonging. Rather, a spirit of open-mindedness and a willingness to learn goes a long way to fostering an inclusive culture.



ENCOURAGE THE USE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- **Use inclusive language** – In emails and in person, law firms can encourage staff to use gender neutral language to avoid misgendering someone in circumstances where gender is unclear or unknown. For more information, see: the [Law Society's Gender Inclusive Language Best Practice Guidance](#).
- **Encourage employees to put pronouns in their e-mail signature block** – In order to normalise gender non-conformity and facilitate active gender self-identification, it can be helpful to outline preferred pronouns in email signatures and on LinkedIn or other professional profiles. For instance, “Tom Smith (he/him)”, or “Nina Ricci (she/her)”, or “Amiya Woods (they/them)”.

CELEBRATING PRIDE AT WORK

LGBTQIA+ solicitors have unique experiences, skills and attributes that add great value to the work of the legal profession. Law firms or organisations may wish to celebrate the following events to recognise the contribution of LGBTQIA+ members of the profession and to signal their support of the broader LGBTQIA+ community. Putting structures in place to support and celebrate diversity year-round will demonstrate genuine support and avoid the perception of tokenism.

- **Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras – February/March**
Stand up for LGBTQIA+ rights and celebrate the diverse LGBTQIA+ community.
- **International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) – May 17**
Raise awareness for the work still needed to combat discrimination in Australia and globally against the LGBTQIA+ community.

- **Pride Month – June**
Celebrate the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community in the legal profession and beyond.
- **Wear It Purple Day – Last Friday in August**
Dress in purple clothing to signal support for LGBTQIA+ young people.
- **LGBTIQ History Month – October**
Reflect on the history of LGBTQIA+ community. See LSJ article on significant milestones in the area of legal reform [here](#).

ENGAGEMENT WITH LGBTQIA+ ISSUES BEYOND THE WORKPLACE

The pro bono legal work of Australian lawyers has been central in supporting the human rights advocacy of the LGBTQIA+ community in a myriad ways. This has included advice on discrimination and electoral matters through to immigration assistance for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers.

- **Promote access to justice for the LGBTQIA+ community** – Consider engaging in pro bono work and advocacy in relation to issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Highlight challenges facing the LGBTQIA+ community in your communications and publications** – Law firms or organisations that produce regular communications or newsletters to employees and/or clients may wish to include updates in relation to challenges or issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, or legal developments in this space.
- **Collaborate on law reform projects around LGBTQIA+ rights** – Consider contributing to public policy discussion.

SPOTLIGHT ON: IRIS REPRESENTS



In February 2021, international law firm DLA Piper launched a dedicated pro bono unit, Iris Represents. The initiative arose from a collaboration between the firm's LGBT+ staff network and its pro bono team, which had identified a need to formalise the firm's pro bono work in the LGBT+ space.

Iris Represents offers pro bono services tailored to LGBT+ focused NGOs and individuals from the LGBT+ community. The project allows allies and LGBT+ employees to deliver legal services across a wide range of issues – from advising LGBT+ asylum seekers on immigration law to offering legal advice on governance and contractual issues for LGBT+ NGOs – and provides a safe environment for clients accessing legal services.

Nicolas Patrick, Partner and Head of Responsible Business at DLA Piper, spoke to the Law Society about recent Iris Represents projects. Projects include Iris Represents making a submission to the [Senate Inquiry into Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare](#), assisting a client to make a sex discrimination complaint at the Australian Human Rights Commission, and advocating for the repeal of laws and policies that discriminate against the trans community, including in relation to housing, healthcare, employment and education.

Nicolas said that employees from across the firm get involved because they care deeply about using their legal skills to assist the LGBT+ community. For those lawyers who typically work on large-scale deals and commercial matters, the chance to connect in a meaningful way with a different type of client, whether an individual or small NGO organisation, is an enriching experience that adds to their legal skillset and personal development.

It was clear from speaking to Nicolas that pro bono service was embedded within firm culture. Iris Represents provides a thematic anchor to that commitment. The fact that Iris Represents is a global initiative means that lawyers are encouraged to connect with colleagues in other jurisdictions. At the same time, clients benefit from tapping into the expertise of lawyers across the globe to provide tailored advice in response to their legal issues.

The flow-on effects from firm-wide engagement with LGBT+ issues through pro bono work are positive for fostering a sense of belonging for colleagues throughout the network who are LGBT+.

SPOTLIGHT ON: INNER CITY LEGAL CENTRE



The Inner City Legal Centre (ICLC) is a community legal centre based in the heart of Sydney's Kings Cross. It provides a state-wide specialist legal advice service for LGBTQI+ people throughout NSW, as well as advice and representation to sex workers across NSW through its Sex Worker Legal Service. In that manner it is a unique community legal centre, servicing communities beyond its local catchment as well as providing a generalist service for those within it.

In addition to providing legal advice and representation, the ICLC advocates broadly for social justice through policy and law reform, particularly on issues impacting the LGBTQI+ community. Issues that come up regularly include people experiencing or escaping relationship abuse, applications for Apprehended Personal Violence Orders, and instances of discrimination – whether that be in the course of accessing spaces or services, or in the context of employment.

Katie Green, CEO, and Yuva Harish, an employment lawyer at ICLC, shared with us that one of the strengths of ICLC is its ability to address in a practical way the intersectional discrimination faced by many of its clients. Katie cites one of her proudest professional achievements of recent times was assisting an Iranian transgender woman, who had come to Australia via Turkey on a humanitarian visa, but whose passport and other documentation did not reflect her gender identity. The ICLC was able to assist this woman to navigate a change of name in Australia in a culturally safe and supportive manner.

Katie and Yuva speak of the funding challenges faced by ICLC and the fact that it is difficult to reach LGBTQI+ people in regional and rural areas. They value partnerships with pro bono networks, but emphasise that it is important to remember that strategic case work involving LGBTQI+ clients and sex workers often demands specialist skills. It is best when pro bono networks offer services closely aligned to their lawyers' areas of expertise, and work with the CLC to ensure their assistance truly amplifies resources and therefore makes real impact.

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