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HOMOPHOBIA IN SPORT RIFE, STUDY FINDS

The first comprehensive survey of the experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people in community sport in Australia has found that despite improvements in attitudes over the past decade, discrimination and abuse is still widespread.

The report will be launched today at VicHealth 15-31 Pelham Street, Carlton, Victoria at 2.30pm with the authors, VicHealth spokespeople, AFL coach Rodney Eade and members from the GLBT community.

In a VicHealth co-funded survey of 307 adults who identify as GLBT, the research team from Victoria University and La Trobe University found:

- More men (26%) than women (9.9%) reported there were sports they would like to play but didn't, fearing abuse
- Almost half of the participants in mainstream sporting clubs were not 'out' (46%), a third (33.5%) were 'out' to some and 20.5% were 'out' to all
- Verbal homophobia was reported by 42% of those surveyed and of these, 87% reported this homophobia affected them in some way
- Sexism was reported by 42.7% of those surveyed, more commonly women and particularly by the transgender participants
- A majority of those in queer sporting clubs reported their clubs had policies to promote the safety and inclusion of GLBT people, but this was the case for just 12.1% of participants from mainstream clubs.

Lead author of the *Come Out To Play* report, Dr Caroline Symons, said the study provided clear evidence that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people need greater support from sporting clubs. "One of the key recommendations from this study is that clubs be assisted to develop codes of practice that respect, welcome and include GLBT people," she said.

"We also need to develop greater awareness of the need for inclusion and support for the GLBT community from educators of teachers, coaches and sports managers."

VicHealth chief executive Todd Harper said everyone had the right to enjoy the health and social benefits of sport without fear of persecution for their sexuality. "Not only is discrimination illegal, it is deplored by all fair-minded people who enjoy sport," he said.

"It's vital that more research is undertaken to further understand why this behaviour still occurs and to give us more ways to kick homophobia out of sport."

Recommendations include:

- That further research be conducted Australia-wide that includes attitudes of sporting club leaders and members as well as the GLBT community
- That the experiences of those under 18 also be investigated, as this group faces significant barriers
- That the work of the Australian Sports Commission in promoting inclusive practices and challenging homophobia and sexism be supported and expanded.

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