



## Conversion Therapy Legislation

*By James Parker*

Some of Australia's regional politicians would have us believe that they truly care for children and the vulnerable. Within a matter of days, two regional governments – Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory – have passed laws to criminalise so-called gay conversion therapy.

Their legislation has set out to stop health service providers using any form of therapy which might even suggest changing or suppressing a person's sexual attraction or gender identity. The penalty? Up to 18 months in jail in Queensland, and up to \$24,000 in fines and 12 months' imprisonment in the ACT.

"Being LGBTIQ is not an affliction or disease that requires medical treatment," Queensland's Health Minister, Steve Miles has said. "No treatment or practice can change a person's sexual attraction or experience of gender."

"To young people out there who might hear this... there is nothing wrong with you. You can't be fixed because you are not broken, and anyone who tells you otherwise is wrong – your government supports you."

ACT's Chief Minister Andrew Barr described conversion therapies as "a form of abuse. It is a profound violation of human rights." He has even ensured it is an offence to take a person outside the ACT for sexuality or gender identity conversion therapy.

Clearly, both Barr and Miles know little of the inner struggles of unwanted same-sex attractions and gender dysphoria.

In the past, I have received therapy and prayer in Australia and several other countries. I believed myself to be born gay and came out at 17. I became a frontline LGBTIQ activist and at the

time would have wholly backed both Barr's and Miles' legislative interventions. Then my life turned an unexpected corner.

The perfect long-term gay relationship I had found after a labyrinth of promiscuity hit some serious obstacles. I chose to enter regular therapy.

Here, a deep-rooted fear of rejection was uncovered, plus commitment issues and struggles with anxiety. I came to see that, although I yearned for men, I had an intrinsic fear of the average guy.

The harrowing horror stories told by gay-straight 'conversion' documentaries do not apply here. They never have applied to Australia.

I underwent cognitive therapy to challenge my core beliefs, behavioural therapy to change problematic actions ingrained through years of reinforcement, and EMDR which helped to dampen the power of traumatic memories.

My therapists' focus was never solely on my sexual attraction to men, but "being gay" was definitely a part of our dialogues, otherwise I would have been leaving a portion of my life at the therapists' doors.

Therapy uncovered a mountain of crippling pain. I had been born premature and abandoned at birth, incubated, fostered, orphaned and adopted and saw myself as rejected by men even as a small boy. I had made a vow never to trust them deeply. By my teens, men had become a mystery, even an obsession, leading me to erotically crave them through overdosing on pornography and fantasy.

Disconnected from men, I had thrown myself into a world of

the feminine, with no masculine counterbalance. At times, I strongly believed myself to be a woman trapped in a man's body, considering hormones and mutilating surgery.

Therapy and spiritual discipline challenged my core beliefs and behaviours around my looks, my body, my walk, my perceptions. I was suddenly given permission to think and do things differently.

I faced repressed memories of childhood sex abuse by a number of men, and being raped whilst still a teenager on three occasions by three different gay men, years before I had reached the age of consent.

Yet within a few years of therapy, my insatiable eroticisation of men diminished. Unexpectedly, I began to see *woman* as I had never seen her before. In my late twenties I experienced what most males feel towards the opposite sex when in their teens. I then dated women and eventually married one. Today I love being a father.

I had honestly believed that, like Barr and Miles today, my entire life would be spent preaching that people are born gay and must not attempt to change. The opposite has become true.

Without the courageous health service providers who saw beyond the "can't change" mantra, I would never have uncovered my childhood sex abuse which in turn led me to being key witness in a court case some years later that saw a paedophile convicted of his crimes.

It is not surprising that most of those I walk alongside today with unwanted same-sex attraction and who question their gender were sexually abused as minors.

It is tragic for those who have been told is not only impossible to change but that any attempt is life-threatening, and for those who have had their genitalia and fertility destroyed, to get in touch as adults with the deeper reality that they were sexually abused as children.

Queensland and the ACT's bans on therapy are highly likely to mean more childhood sexual abuse going unreported. Yet more frightening is that more states are queuing up to follow suit. Sheer madness.

Society is told by gender ideologues, by some ill-informed educators, medics and politicians to see our identity solely as our sexual attraction. This is a lie. Some of us have lost their lives falling into this pit.

The words of Barr and Miles are a form of further abuse of children and vulnerable adults and are a profound violation of human rights. I, like many others, was seriously broken, and

needed fixing – and could be fixed.

Stripping citizens of their fundamental rights to choose their own therapeutic journeys is also likely to result in more suicides and greater pressure on mental health services. And yet we now see regional governments blatantly ignoring the real-life stories of their citizens, and rejecting the overwhelming and clear scientific evidence that sexuality and gender dysphoria are incredibly fluid in adults, and especially in children.

It should not surprise anybody to learn that these new laws are underpinned by a deeply flawed report that came out of La Trobe University, ironically entitled *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice*.

The authors interviewed a mere 15 people who claim to have had negative experiences with conversion therapy, and failed to interview even one person who had experienced lasting change from therapy. These people, whose lives are on public display across many websites in Australia and abroad, and more recently comprehensive research of over 45 people's stories at [www.freetochange.org](http://www.freetochange.org), have changed sufficiently to enter into long-term heterosexual marriages, to diminish same-sex attractions or to wholly reject long-term transgender lives.

One 20-year-old male with unwanted same-sex attraction from Brisbane commented: "The recovery journey I recently began has decreased my depression, addictions and raging anxiety, and has given me hope to reach my full potential. I want more counselling and avenues of access to people who understand the causes of my issues, not total lockdown.

"Since my government passed this law, I feel completely betrayed. I'm being plunged into greater depression and increased anxiety.

"The message they're sending is that they don't respect me. They're forcing me to embrace something I don't want to embrace. That's not their decision to make. It's mine."

An 18-year-old male with unwanted same-sex attraction who recently began therapy stated: "I began having flashbacks a few years ago about my childhood sexual abuse at school. I started getting help at 16. My pain's slowly been reducing but now I'm getting really stressed about this new law. I'm feeling even more vulnerable than ever.

"It feels as though my government is now attacking me personally when I am the one who was wronged and hurt as a kid. The government could end up passing laws to police anyone for anything anywhere. And no decent Australian wants that to happen."

A 28-year-old male, two years out of his long-term gay

relationship, reported: “I was once an addict filled with impulses I couldn’t control, with anxiety and depression, and no direction of where I was going. Now, my anxiety has significantly reduced. My depression has lifted. I have direction and hope for the future. I no longer prostitute myself, hustle drugs, steal men from their girlfriends or wives, or try to escape reality. Many only tried to make my life comfortable rather than find me help to face the underlying discomforts and pains of my past.

“The support group and one-on-one therapy I now experience each week are helping me to address childhood traumas. These, plus the concrete support of those around me who respect my ability to make my own life decisions, mean the world to me and are making long-term change imaginable.”

Does my own story of therapeutic conversion, or the stories

above, honestly speak of what political leaders have termed “a form of abuse”, “a profound violation of human rights”, or lives that “can’t be fixed because they are not broken”?

Are therapists and pastors truly the abusers and violators when politicians dishonestly proclaim that no treatment or practice can change a person’s sexual attraction or experience of gender?

For the moment at least, be grateful that you are still free to decide for yourself how to respond to these questions.

*James Parker facilitates True Identity, a network that supports those struggling with sexuality, gender and identity issues.*