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WHERE TO CELEBRATE

**NEW YEAR'S
EVE GUIDE**

ALL THE FIREWORKS ACTION - PAGE 5

NEWS

**BABY
LOVE**

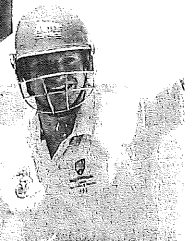
TERRITORY STILL BOOMING



SPORT

**HOOROO
HOODOO**

WATSON'S NERVY TON



Concern as older gays hit by blues

By Rosslyn Beeby

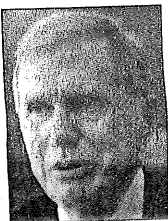
Australia's ageing "gay pride" baby boomers face an increased risk of social isolation, depression and suicide because of a lack of supportive health-care services, a Senate inquiry has heard.

Researchers say recent health surveys show an alarmingly high number of senior gays would rather commit suicide than risk abuse from a "prudish and conservative" aged health-care system.

A recent report by Alzheimer's Australia estimates more than 37,200 gay men and lesbians will be affected by dementia over the next 20 years, but aged-care policies fail to recognise their specific health, social, legal and financial needs.

It said gay seniors feared health workers "will judge them, pity them, avoid physical contact, harass them, treat them as an object of curiosity, betray confidences, provide poor quality services or reject them".

Launching the recent Alzheimer's Australia report, Justice Michael Kirby said that many of these special needs "may be traced to the much higher levels of loneliness suffered by sexual minorities".



LONELY: Justice Michael Kirby launched report.

Several examples of harassment of gay seniors by health-care staff are detailed in submissions to the Senate Community Affairs Committee's inquiry into suicide in Australia. These include the director of a day-care centre ordering a gay senior to "wear latex gloves at all times or leave", in the mistaken belief he was an AIDS risk.

An 80-year-old member of Lesbian and Gay Solidarity, Mannie De Saxe, told the inquiry many non-government and community groups dealing with depression and suicide were "intrinsically homophobic and refuse to deal with people for whom they have the utmost contempt".

A University of Melbourne study found 67 per cent of Australian doctors knew of instances where gay patients "had either been refused care or received sub-standard care as a result of their sexual orientation".

University of South Australia health sciences researcher Dr Jo Harrison said in her submission to the inquiry, there was "a complete lack of mention" of the needs of gay seniors in Federal aged-care policy as well as education and training programs.

This reinforced feelings of social exclusion, "which in turn reinforces discrimination by neglect, and exacerbates anxiety, depression and thoughts of self-harm as well as attempted suicide".

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Depression concern for older gays

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Dr Harrison said there was a growing evidence showing gay seniors were experiencing "discrimination, or fear of discrimination" within an aged industry that remained "unaware and uneducated as to their special needs and concerns".

According to the report, 46 per cent of Australia's gay community lived alone, compared to 23 per cent of the general population.

The report said many gay seniors lived through an era when "homosexuality was considered to be unnatural, wrong, deviant and the basis for societal discrimination". As they aged and were forced to depend on health-care services that assumed all clients were heterosexual, gay seniors may "find themselves again in an atmosphere that is not supportive and even perhaps hostile".

The report pointed out that a gay man now in his 80s "may have developed his sense of identity and self-worth in a secret world where people like him hid their identities and maintained a very different public persona". He would have been in his early 40s when the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, and in his 50s for the first Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras. When he was almost 60, "he may have feared identification and discrimination based on the Grim Reaper advertisements..."

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