

beyondblue congratulates AFL on showing anti-homophobia ads at finals – but urges a long-term commitment

beyondblue CEO Kate Carnell AO and Chairman Jeff Kennett AC congratulated the AFL for taking the first step to stop discriminatory and stigmatising language and behaviour in the AFL community.

Mr Kennett said the showing of the No to Homophobia TV ads on the big screen at tonight's game between Sydney and Collingwood, and tomorrow's clash between Hawthorn and Adelaide means the AFL is taking a stand on discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex (GLBTI) people. Showing the ads tonight and tomorrow is a good first step in a campaign that will need to be ongoing.

"I think the majority of Australians believe discrimination is simply unacceptable. Discriminating against someone just for being themselves is wrong. The AFL has done a great job in curbing racist behaviour and comments in the AFL community, and I believe it can achieve similar results with regard to discrimination against gay men and others in the GLBTI community.

"I want to congratulate Yarra Glen footballer Jason Ball, who is gay, for having the guts to speak out publicly and organise a petition to encourage the AFL to show the anti-homophobia ads. Hopefully, his actions will allow other footballers to feel safe in being honest about their sexuality," Mr Kennett said.

Earlier this month, beyondblue launched a major national awareness campaign aimed at reducing discrimination and bullying particularly against young gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex (GLBTI) people.

beyondblue CEO, Ms Carnell said she hopes the AFL will also promote beyondblue's recently-produced antidiscrimination ads. "Besides the No to Homophobia ads, beyondblue, together with Movember, has contributed \$1.5 million to a major national antidiscrimination and stigma-reduction campaign which includes cinema ads, TV, print and outdoor ads, and personal video stories from GLBTI people who have experienced depression and anxiety as a result of discrimination."

The ads focus on the outdated practice of past generations which forced children who were born left-handed to use their right hand, as this was deemed to be 'correct'.

Mr Kennett said: "Now it seems ludicrous that adults tried to make left-handed children conform to what they considered was the 'right way' of doing things. This campaign draws a parallel between past behaviour towards left-handed people and our current approach towards the GLBTI community. Is it all right to be left-handed? Of course. Is it all right to be gay or lesbian? Of course."

Ms Carnell said: "beyondblue research shows that, discrimination is a major contributing factor to depression and anxiety, and risk of suicide. GLBTI people are at least two to three times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the broader population and are at greater risk of suicide and self-harm. Almost half hide their sexuality or gender identity in a range of situations fearing violence or discrimination – with young people aged 16 to 24 years more likely to do so than any other age group.

"beyondblue wants to reduce discriminatory and stigmatising, behaviour and attitudes that cause people real psychological distress which can lead to depression, anxiety and suicide. Discrimination, shame and stigma often stop people from getting help.

"Things need to change. We want everyone in Australia to STOP the discrimination, THINK about how comments you make could cause real distress and harm, and RESPECT people who are different from you," Ms Carnell said.

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