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# LGBTIQA+ STUDENT WELLBEING SURVEY REPORT

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August 2022

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Victoria University acknowledges, recognises and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri of the Kulin, who are the Traditional Owners of university land in Victoria, and the Gadigal and Guring-gai of the Eora Nation who are the Traditional Owners of university land in Sydney.

## **Warning to Indigenous Australians**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this document may contain images or names of deceased persons.



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# BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

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Mental Health and Wellbeing is influenced by an interaction of individual, interpersonal, institutional, community and structural factors (Orygen, 2020, p.7).

Tertiary settings, such as Victoria University and Victoria University Polytechnic (jointly referred to as VU), are well placed to enhance the mental health of their students (Mitchell Institute, 2021, p.1). Victoria University aims to strengthen protective factors and minimise risk factors that impact on the mental health of students at VU.

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# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING OF LGBTIQ+ STUDENTS IN TERTIARY SETTINGS

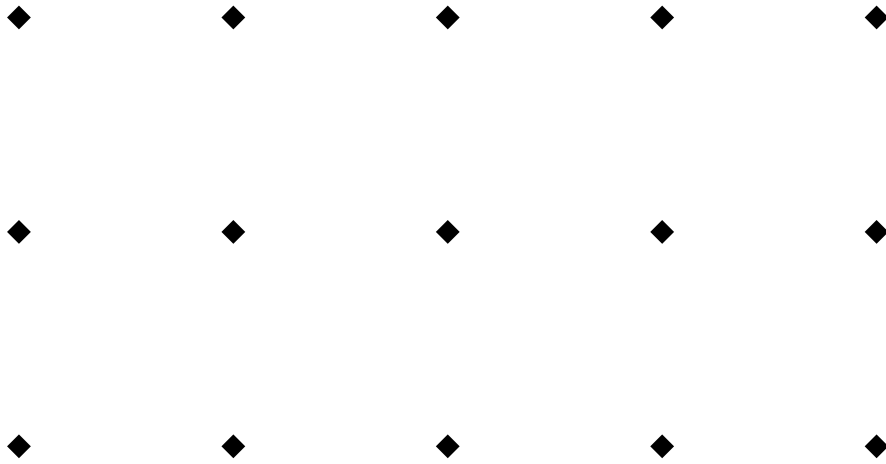
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The release of the Australian University Mental Health Framework (Orygen, 2020), the Productivity Commission, Mental Health, Inquiry Report (2020), the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System: Final Report Summary and Recommendations (2021), and, Improving the mental health of young people in tertiary education setting: Policy evidence brief (Mitchell Institute, 2021) identify groups of tertiary students who are at higher risk of mental ill health and benefit from targeted mental health supports to reduce the risk of poorer mental health outcomes.

Whilst many LGBTIQ+ tertiary students enjoy positive mental wellbeing and flourish in many aspects of academic life, LGBTIQ+ young people continue to be at disproportionately higher risk of poor mental health and suicidal behaviours than the general population (LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, 2021 Statistics). Discrimination, social exclusion, isolation and abuse are key factors contributing to this increased risk and also serve as barriers for LGBTIQ+ people accessing mental health services (Orygen, 2020, p. 11). LGBTIQ+ Health Australia reported that in Australia, LGBTIQ+ young people 16-27 years of age are five times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population, and transgender people aged 14-25 years are fifteen times more likely to attempt suicide.

Moreover, nearly two-thirds (63.8%) of LGBTIQ+ young people aged 14 to 21 have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. LGBTIQ+ Australians are six times more likely to be diagnosed with depression and three times more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety compared to the general population. Likewise, transgender and gender diverse young people aged 14 to 25 years are seven times more likely to be diagnosed with depression than the general population and five-and-a-half times more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety ([lgbtiqhealth.org.au/statistics](https://lgbtiqhealth.org.au/statistics)).





## Intersectionality across the LGBTIQ+ Student Community

Intersectionality recognises that community members “belong to multiple identity groups, such as sexual orientation and cultural groups, people with a disability, religious groups, which are socially constructed and affect community member’s social positioning and subsequent treatment, such as discrimination, within systems” (Unik, Liddelow-Hunt, Daglas & Ducasse, 2020 p. 201).

This intersectional approach deepens our understanding of the effect multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage has on the health and wellbeing of people who identify with a number of minority groups (Leonard and Mann 2018). The survey asked students to identify their membership of diverse communities.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Students.

Young LGLBTIQ+ people from First Nations communities occupy three intersecting identities which increases their risk of mental ill health. Firstly, the rates of mental ill health across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is well documented (Upton, Ford, Wallace, Jackson & Upton, 2021; Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, 2017). Secondly, the higher rates of mental ill health particularly for young people aged 18 to 25 years (Orygen, 2017) and thirdly, the increased risk of mental ill health of the LGBTIQ+ community (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Hill, et al 2021).

According to Korff (2021), the challenges facing LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are racism, sexual health, suicide, mental health problems and identity. Not because being LGBTIQ+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is pathological in and of itself, rather the discrimination, marginalisation, racism, trans and homophobia, violence, poor access to culturally safe and appropriate health services increases the level mental ill health risk in this minority community.

# Culturally and Linguistically Diverse LGBTIQ+ students.

The term Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) is an umbrella term used to describe the numerous different cultural, religious, and ethnic differences within Australia, differentiated from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and white, English speaking Australians of Anglo-Saxon descent (Sawrikar & Katz, 2009). The intersectionality of LGBTIQ+ CALD people is the increased risk of youth, LGBTIQ+ mental ill health (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Hill, et al 2021), as well as the experience of belonging to a CALD community in Australia where you are exposed to experiences of social prejudices including sexism, racism and homophobia (Rainbow Bridges Report, 2021). Young LGBTIQ+ CALD people have been found to face the grief of weakened connection with their culture and family in order to be truly connected to their sexual identity (Uppal and Kelly, 2020).

Where the support and acceptance of family members can protect young LGBTIQ+ people from developing mental ill health, this protective factor can appear missing for LGBTIQ+ CALD people (Asquith, Collison, Lewis, Noonan, Layard, Kaur, Bellei & Yigiter et al 2019). According to Asquith et al (2019), existing research shows that CALD LGBTIQ+ people are at risk of experiencing harassment, physical violence, threats of physical and sexual violence, stalking, family exile, pathologisation, forced marriage, homicide and conversion therapy when they disclose their sexuality to the community and family members. An additional layer according to Asquith et al (2019), particularly for LGBTIQ+ international students who may be living with family is that their family may threaten them with deportation to their original country when they “come out” about their sexual and gender identity.

## LGBTIQ+ and Living with a Disability.

According to the World Health Organisation, “disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition such as cerebral palsy, down syndrome and depression as well as personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support.” In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics states “persons are considered to have a disability if they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities. This includes sensory, intellectual, physical, psychosocial, head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury.

Leonard and Mann’s (2018) review of theoretical, academic research into how the experiences of discrimination and disadvantage impacted the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people with a disability.

Three major areas were identified:

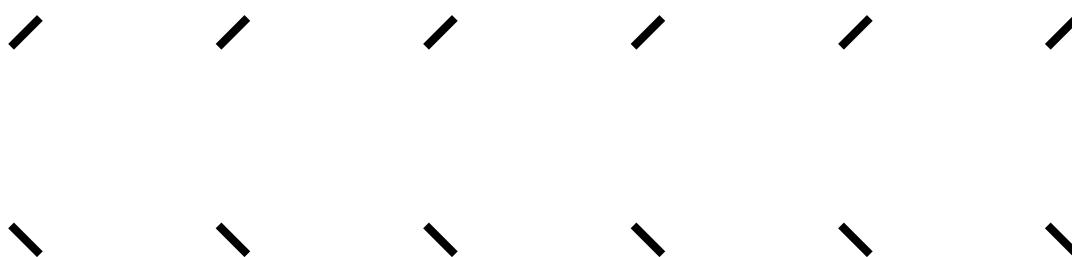
1. Social marginalisation, stigmatisation and disadvantage is experienced by people with a disability and by LGBTIQ+ people.
2. Discrimination against people with a disability and LGBTIQ+ people leads to higher rates and patterns of ill health and barriers to service use.
3. Different types of systemic discrimination intersect with each other, negatively affecting the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities with other marginalised groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD and socio-economically disadvantaged people.

# DISCRIMINATION AND MICRO-AGGRESSIONS

The Australian Human Rights Commission amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to make discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status against the law in 2013. However, homophobia and transphobia continue to face LGBTIQ+ people today. A large number of LGBTIQ+ people continue to hide their sexuality or gender identity in education settings, at work, and when accessing services. Young people aged 16 to 24 years are most likely to hide their sexuality or gender identity. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission investigation into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ Australians (2014), LGBTIQ+ young people continue to report experiences of verbal, homophobic abuse, physical homophobic abuse and other types of homophobia, including cyberbullying, graffiti, social exclusion and humiliation. Transgender males and females continue to experience significantly higher rates of physical and non-physical abuse compared with lesbian and gay men (Australian Human Rights Commission Report, 2014). In 2021, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists prepared a position paper recognising and addressing the mental health needs of the LGBTIQ+ population.

## The key messages in this position paper identified the following:

1. A disproportionate number of Australia and New Zealand's LGBTIQ+ people experience mental illness and psychological distress.
2. People who identify as LGBTIQ+ are at increased risk of exposure to institutionalised and interpersonal discrimination and marginalisation, which increases vulnerability to mental illness and psychological distress.







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# DETAILS OF SURVEY

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In July 2021, VU Student Wellbeing Services invited LGBTIQ+ student colleagues to share their lived experiences about the factors that influence the mental health outcomes for LGBTIQ+ students at VU and to work together to co-design programs and initiatives to enhance the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students at VU. The first step in this process as identified by the students was to co-design a survey which would facilitate the collection of data about the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students at VU, identifying the issues which impact VU students and gauge interest in programs students would be interested in attending to promote LGBTIQ+ student wellbeing at VU.

In 2021, Student Wellbeing Services convened a working group consisting of LGBTIQ+ students and other key stakeholders across VU including VU Student Union (VUSU), VU Queer Collective, and staff from Student Life and Leadership, Student Communications, Learning Hubs, Inclusion and Engagement, and Safer Community. Collectively the working group co-designed the LGBTIQ+ Student Wellbeing Survey questions.

On 19 October 2021, the LGBTIQ+ Student Wellbeing Survey was launched via Qualtrics and all Melbourne VU Students were invited to complete it via an electronic Direct Message. Student engagement was high - over 200 students completed the survey in the first 24 hours of its launch, and 448 responded to the survey by the time it closed on 16 November 2021

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# SURVEY RESULTS

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1

Who responded to the survey?

2

Intersectionality

3

Discrimination and  
Micro-Aggressions

4

Who will LGBTQIA+ students  
turn to for support?

5

Mental Ill Health

6

Mental health and wellbeing  
support

7

Awareness of current programs

8

LGBTQIA+ Student Safety

9

Possible LGBTQIA+ Wellbeing  
Programs

10

Improving Access to Support

11

Final words from students

# 1. Who responded to the survey?

Respondents were asked if they identify as LGBTIQA+.

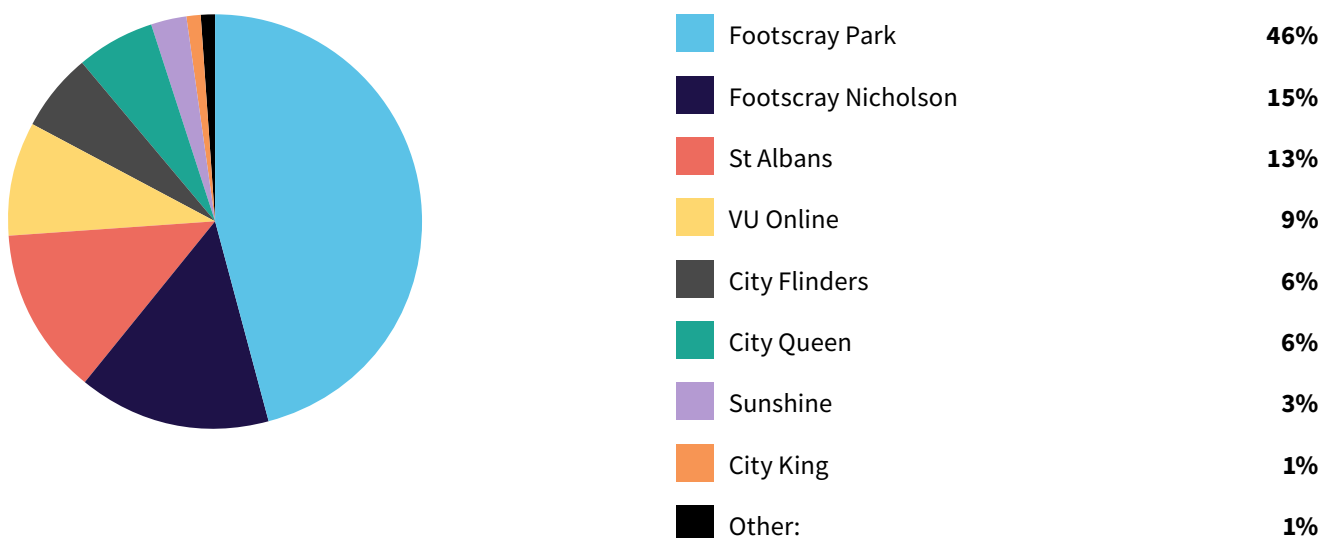
Seventy-six percent of student identified as LGBTIQA+. Students who did not identify as LGBTIQA+ were unable to proceed with the survey.

## ◆ Do you identify as LGBTIQA+



The majority of LGBTIQA+ students who responded to the survey reported Footscray Park as their main campus.

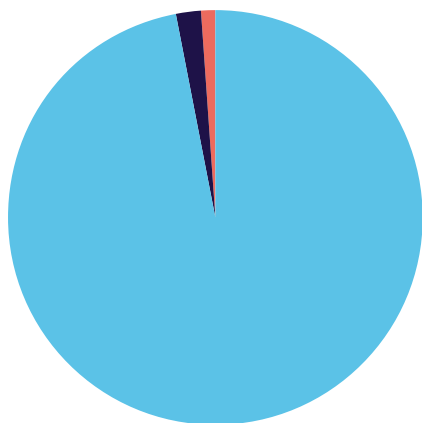
## ◆ Usual campus where students would attend







## 2. Intersectionality

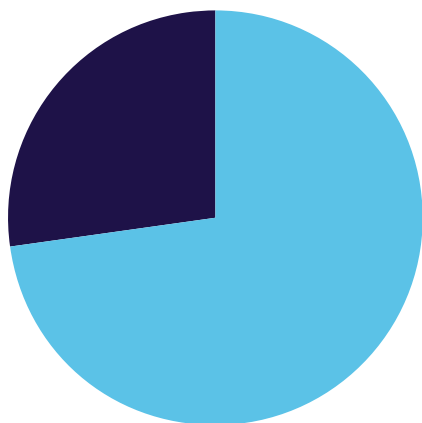
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### ◆ Do you identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander?



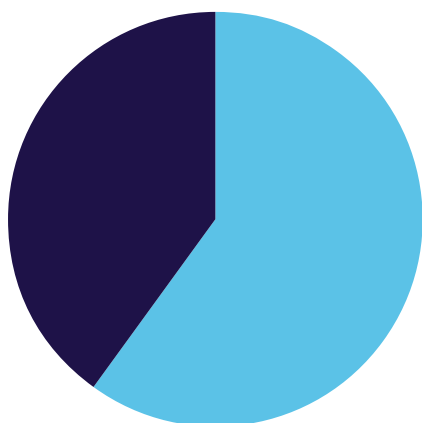
|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
|  | No  | 98% |
|  | Yes Aboriginal                                    | 2%  |
|  | 3rd Yes, both Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander | 0%  |
|  | Yes Torres Strait Islander                        | 0%  |

### ◆ Do you identify as being part of a CALD group?



|   |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
|   | No  | 73% |
|  | Yes | 27% |

### ◆ Do you have a disability or accessibility challenges? This includes illness, neurodiversity etc.



|   |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
|  | No  | 60% |
|  | Yes | 40% |

### 3. Discrimination and micro-Aggressions

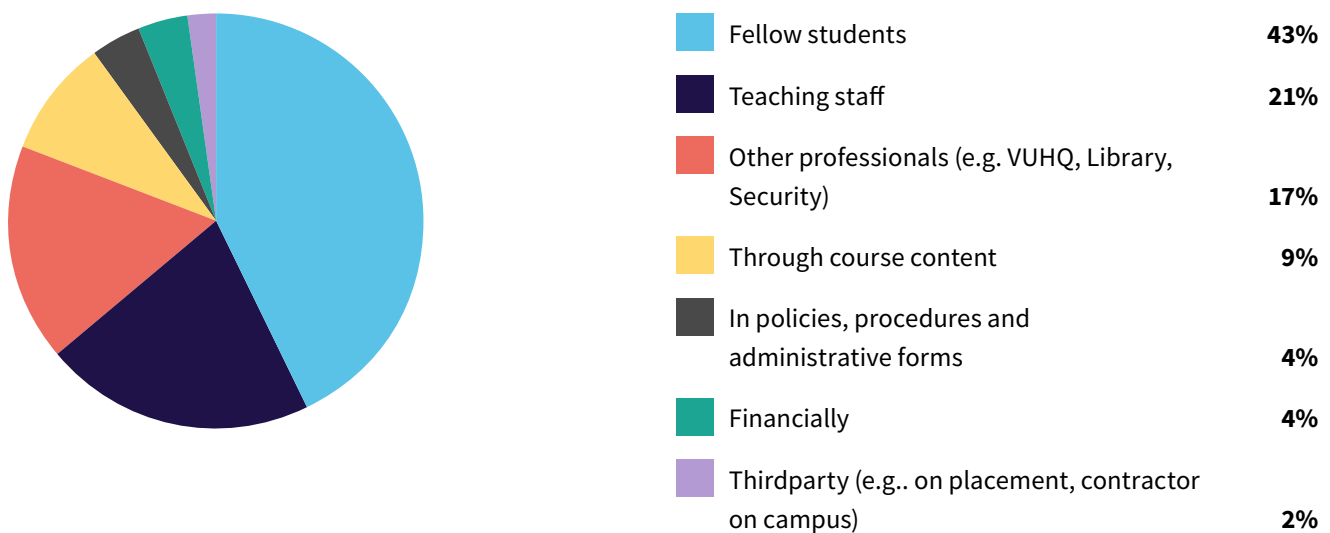
The survey asked students, ‘How often have you experienced discrimination or micro aggressions (e.g., verbal, behavioural or environmental slights whether intentional or unintentional which are hostile, derogatory or negative) for being part of the LGBTIQ+ community at VU?’

#### ◆ Experiences of discrimination and micro-aggressions



For those students who reported discrimination or micro-aggressions at VU, the survey asked students to report the context of their experience of discrimination or micro aggressions at VU.

#### ◆ Where, how and who from: the experiences of discrimination and micro-aggressions at VU toward LGBTIQ+ students



This graph illustrates the various sources of discrimination and micro aggression LGBTIQ+ students experience.

This data informs VU about the sorts of interventions and the target of such interventions in order to reduce levels of discrimination and marginalisation of the LGBTIQ+ students and their experiences.

The survey then invited students to provide qualitative descriptions and examples of the experiences they have had in relation to discrimination and micro aggression. The table below outlines some of the main themes identified in the information students provided.

**SOURCE OF DISCRIMINATION AND/OR MICRO AGGRESSION**

**MAIN THEMES DESCRIBED BY STUDENTS**

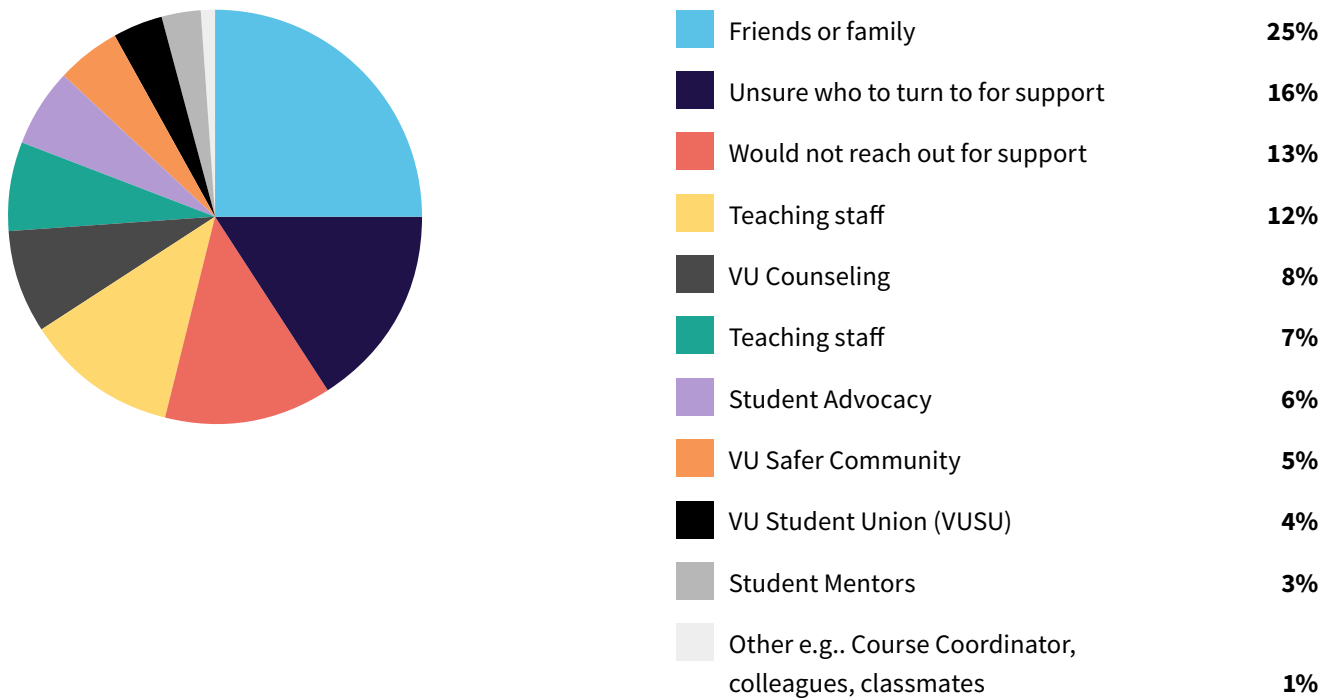
|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Staff</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Staff not updating student’s chosen names or using students dead names.</li> <li>◆ Mis-gendering students</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Course content</b></p>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Gendered terms</li> <li>◆ Use of he/she pronouns only</li> <li>◆ Pathologising homosexuality</li> <li>◆ Heteronormative assumptions and examples in case studies, upholds gender binary discourse</li> <li>◆ Lack of representation of LGBTIQ+ people in training across several courses</li> <li>◆ Erasure of LGBTIQ+ people in course materials and perspectives</li> <li>◆ Students take on responsibility of informing the class about the LGBTIQ+ perspective which should not be left to LGBTIQ+ students, this should be covered within the course content</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Policies, procedures and administrative forms</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Student Administration contacting students requesting clarifications about gender after students identify they would rather not nominate a gender when enrolling into their course</li> <li>◆ Chosen names not used on VU documents, student email addresses; chosen name not recorded on MY VU.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Financially</b></p>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Scholarships or awards not specified for the LGBTIQ+ community</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Third Party</b></p>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ On placement</li> <li>◆ From other students online</li> </ul>  |



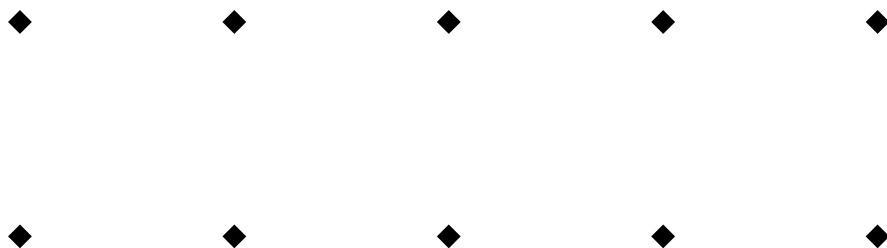
## 4. Who will LGBTIQ+ students turn to for support?

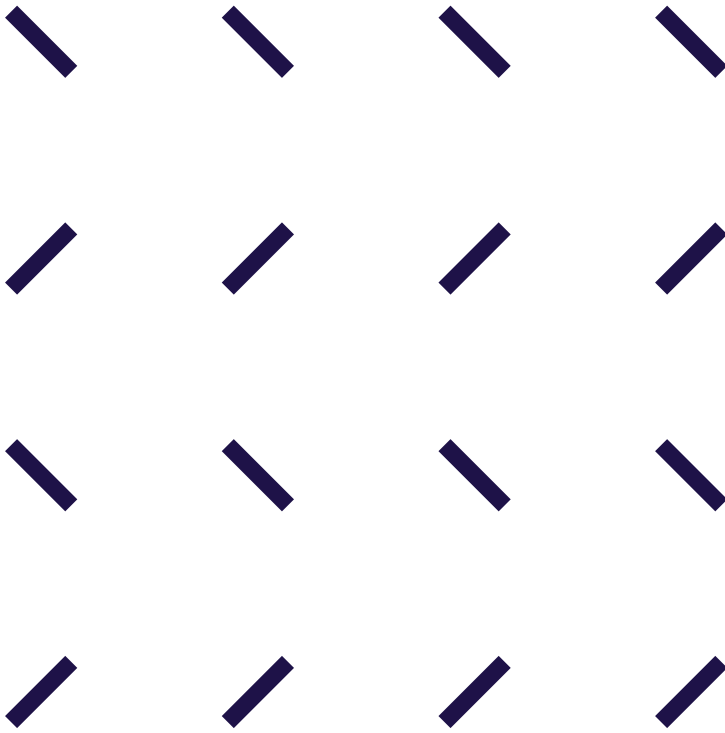
Students were asked whom would they turn to for support if they did experience discrimination or micro aggression at VU.

### ◆ Who do students turn to for support if they experience discrimination and or micro-aggressions at VU?



Forty-six percent of respondents reported they would turn to VU for support if they experienced discrimination or micro-aggressions on campus. Twenty-five per cent would turn to friends and family, sixteen percent were unsure who to turn to for support, and thirteen percent said they did not know who to turn to. It is disappointing that most students reported they would not turn to supports within VU and work needs to be done to ensure that students are fully informed of the ongoing support services available to them at VU.





## 5. Mental Ill Health

The survey asked students to report how frequently they experienced mental ill health.

Forty-one percent of students surveyed reported experiencing mental ill health either most of the time (27%) or always (14%). Thirty-nine percent of students reported experiencing mental ill health sometimes. This survey data is consistent with data on the prevalence of mental ill health in LGBTQIA+ people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Hill, et al 2021).

### ◆ Frequency of experiences of mental ill health





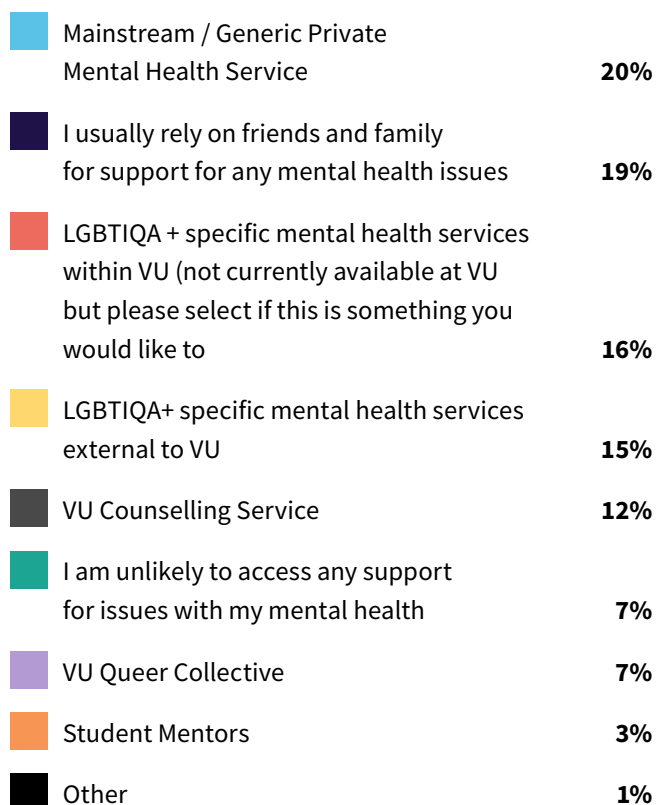
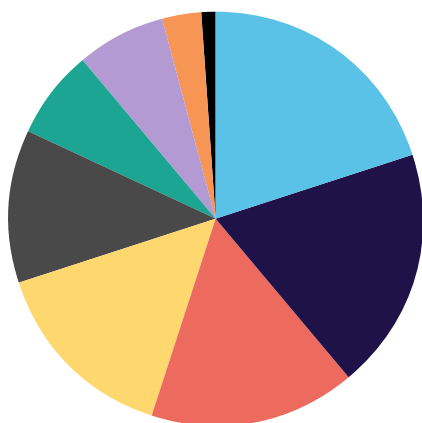


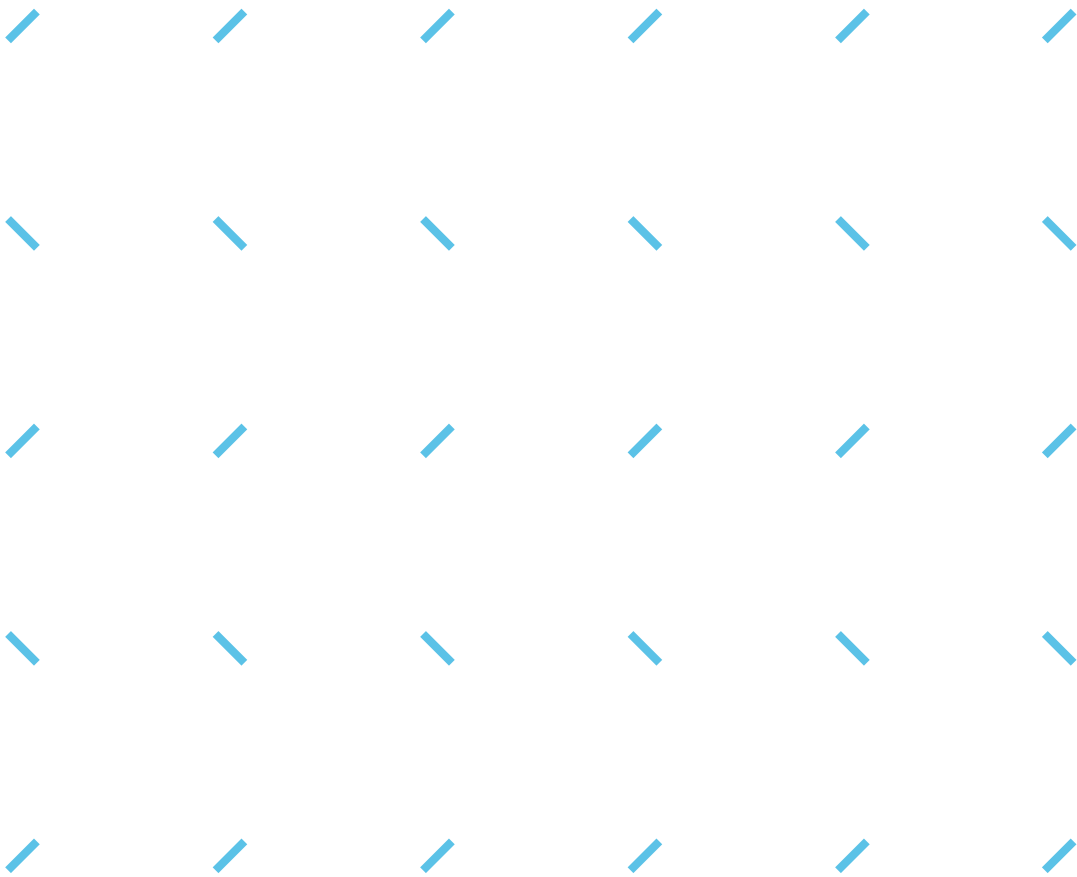
## 6. Mental health and wellbeing support

Students were asked about which services they would be more likely to access for support with their mental health.

The data shows that students access support for their mental health from a variety of sources.

### ◆ Which services would you be more likely to access for support with your mental health?





## 7. Awareness of current programs

Students were asked about their level of awareness and familiarity with VU programs specifically targeted for LGBTIQ+ students.

### ◆ Which VU LGBTIQ+ programs and initiatives are you familiar?



## 8. LGBTIQ+ Student Safety

Students were asked to rate their safety at VU.

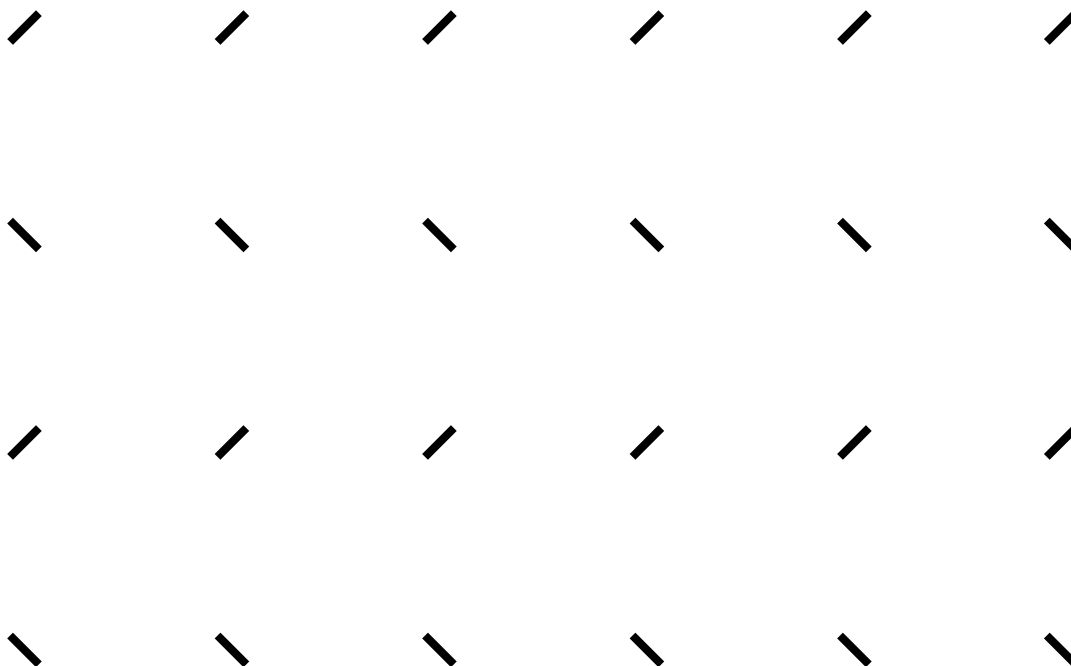
Students were asked to rate their level of safety/satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 = either not safe at all or not at all satisfied and 10 = completely safe or completely satisfied.

| QUESTION ASKED  | AVERAGE SCORE FROM RESPONDENTS |
|---|--------------------------------|
| How safe do you feel to express your identity as an LGBTIQ+ student at VU?                                      | 6.82 <sup>1</sup>              |
| How satisfied are you with how safe you feel at VU?   | 7.05 <sup>2</sup>              |
| How satisfied are you with feeling part of the VU LGBTIQ+ community?  | 4.96 <sup>2</sup>              |
| How satisfied are you with feeling part of the broader VU community as an open member of the LGBTIQ+ community? | 5.79 <sup>2</sup>              |

1. (Rating from 0 to 10. 0=Not at all Safe 10=Completely Safe)

2. (Rating from 0 to 10. 0=Not at all satisfied 10 = Completely satisfied)

The data shows that there are clear opportunities for VU to improve LGBTIQ+ students' sense of belonging to a broader LGBTIQ+ community.



## 9. Possible LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Programs

Students were asked to list the wellbeing programs and initiatives they believe would be most beneficial for students.

Below is a list of the programs put forward by students:

- ◆ Resilience
- ◆ Learning to deal with discrimination in the workplace and educational institutions
- ◆ LGBTIQ+ specific mental health Counselling and support groups
- ◆ Housing support
- ◆ Sexual health awareness
- ◆ Lesbian and women's pride
- ◆ Financial support and advice
- ◆ Queer inclusive clubs for LGBTQI+ students
- ◆ Information sessions regarding how to access healthcare/benefits, navigating governmental and healthcare systems for trans people for example. (Name Changes, Surgery Costs/Subsidies, procedures, etc.) tailored to the area
- ◆ Relationship health and advice
- ◆ Educate the teachers to address students as students not their sex
- ◆ General support groups to find people within the community to engage with at VU
- ◆ Programs to educate cisgender people about treating trans and intersex people with dignity
- ◆ Have programs and services also specific to the CALD/people of colour queer community
- ◆ Access to sexual health care and testing, more accessible programs for Trans and bisexual/queer students as heavy focus still remains on just gay and lesbian students especially in course work
- ◆ List of accessible groups and centres that provide support and services to the LGBTIQ+ community to make it accessible to more areas apart from just VU campuses
- ◆ Education programs for everyone like having a campus day for LGBTQIA+
- ◆ Programs explaining what each letter signifies in order to spread awareness of lesser known aspects such as Asexuality
- ◆ Working through stigma and finding identity journey
- ◆ Consent
- ◆ A program for LGBTQIA+ students which focusses on transitioning from uni into the workforce. A chance to connect with other LGBTQIA+ students to share resources etc.
- ◆ Train the teachers in trans-positive practice. Have teachers introduce their own pronouns
- ◆ More commitment from deans etc to bring courses in line to be safe, proper protocol teachers have to follow (ask pronouns, add preferred name and pronouns to attendances etc)
- ◆ LGBT Moondani Balluk initiative for queer indigenous students

Students were also asked to contribute qualitative data regarding what VU can do differently to make it easier for LGBTIQ+ students to access support?

The next page of this report outlines some of the major themes identified by students.

# 10. Improving Access to Support

- ◆ Develop stronger student bonds and sense of community
- ◆ More clubs and activities, more days of celebration
- ◆ Promote support groups
- ◆ Better publicity/access via website/VU collaborate
- ◆ Partner with LGBTIQIA+-led support orgs (e.g. Thorne Harbour Health, Queerspace) to create resources
- ◆ Ask teachers to announce programs and initiatives
- ◆ Have services targeted for queer students
- ◆ Live chat access for support or report
- ◆ Provide better training to all teaching staff on the use of non-gendered pronouns
- ◆ Everything occurs at Footscray campus so I never had exposure or easy access to any groups or support targeted towards LGBTIQIA+ people. So I would suggest extending these groups and support services to other campuses as well
- ◆ Employing Queer or LGBTIQIA+ teachers
- ◆ Maybe making up a specific group or tab on VU page (myvu) where students can reach out someone who is a part of the LGBTQ community
- ◆ Make sure majority of services for LGBTI students are staff that are LGBTI themselves
- ◆ LGBTIQIA+ related topics are pushed to the side (only briefly mentioned) or left until the last 10 minutes in class. I think that when classes are discussing topics such as mental health/discrimination/diversity/inclusion it would be a great way integrate/Segway into those topics and the types of support and policies that VU has, and to integrate those topics into the required classes so that everyone is aware of them instead of a smaller group of people.



## 11. Final words from students

At the end of the survey, students were asked to make their final comments in relation to promoting the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students at VU.

The following table outlines the main themes students identified by students:

Create a safe, inclusive environment where LGBTIQ+ students feel connected to a community will enhance the wellbeing of LGTBTIQ+ students – this includes training for staff and students

Present more inclusive and diverse perspectives in teaching content and material where the lived experiences of the LGBTIQ+ community is represented

Increase visibility and promotion of LGBTIQ+ programs and initiatives

Promote inclusion and celebration of the LGBTIQ+ community and work to eradicate discrimination

Understand and acknowledge that the LGBTIQ+ community is not homogeneous and express their membership of the LGBTIQ+ community in diverse ways

Use student's preferred names in correspondence

Recognise cultural diversity in queer spaces is also something VU should celebrate and support

Promote programs for LGBTIQ+ students in a highly visible and dynamic way

Promote LGBTIQ+ research conducted by academics at VU

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# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

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The information gathered through the LGBTIQ+ Student Wellbeing Survey will be used to develop wellbeing programs to promote and enhance the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students at VU.

The initiatives will be student led with the support of the VU Student Wellbeing. The programs and initiatives developed will be evaluated by students to ensure such programs are having a positive impact on the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students at VU in diverse and accessible ways.

## Initial Recommendations from this Report

The recommendations of this report will be informed by the hundreds of students who participated in LGBTIQ+ Student Wellbeing Survey, and will be aligned with [Student Mental Health Plan 2022-2024 \(SMHP\)](#) and the [Victoria University Strategic Plan 2022-2028](#). The recommendations follow the six principles of our SMHP, that is:

- ◆ VU Students are experts on their own experience and mental health needs.
- ◆ The VU learning environment supports students' mental health.
- ◆ VU promotes diversity and inclusivity to enhance mental wellbeing and study success.
- ◆ The VU Community has a collaborative approach to support mental health and wellbeing.
- ◆ VU provides the right help, at the right time for students' mental health needs.
- ◆ VU has an evidence based, innovative, and evaluative approach to mental health support.

Likewise the recommendations of this report recognise that VU is a partnering institution and we work with students as colleagues in co-designing initiatives, we are a place of inclusion, opportunity and success, and we are proudly progressive – we care, we act.

# Recommendations

| ACTIVITY  | TIMELINE                              |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Continue to collaborate with LGBTIQ+ students to co-design and co-deliver programs, services and activities that promote their wellbeing.   | Ongoing                               |
| Wellbeing Services recruits Student Wellbeing Mentors from LGBTIQ+, International Student, and disability communities to better understand the impact of intersectionality and co-design and co-deliver programs to enhance, promote and protect student mental health and wellbeing. | Commence Quarter 2, 2022 and ongoing. |
| Wellbeing Services continues its attempts to recruit a Counsellor from the LGBTIQ+ community  | Commenced                             |
| Wellbeing Services invites students to identify if they are members of the LGBTIQ+ community when registering for Counselling Services  | Commenced and ongoing                 |
| Deliver MHFA for LGBTIQ+ community  | Quarter 3 and 4, 2022                 |
| Wellbeing Services continues to participate in the Pronouns Project (led by Inclusion and Engagement) to improve VU systems to recognise pronouns and chosen names, and deliver education programs about the use of pronouns and chosen names   | Commenced                             |
| Promote the Gender Affirmation Guide to students and staff  | Commenced and ongoing                 |
| Wellbeing Services collaborates with external specialised LGBTIQ+ agencies to deliver wellbeing sessions to students  | Quarter 2, 2022 and ongoing           |
| Ensure Student Life and Leadership promote activities and events that are relevant to and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ students   | Ongoing                               |
| Student Life and Leadership, VUSU and VUPA to provide ally-ship training to student leaders   | Ongoing                               |
| Begin work to identify opportunities for more inclusive LGBTIQ+ content and discussion in course materials where relevant   | Quarter 3, 2022 and ongoing           |



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