

9<sup>th</sup> May, 2005.  
Stuart Baanstra.

Dear Ms. Plibersek,

I would like to take the opportunity to write to you today about the Medicare Safety Net. In particular, as it applies to gay and lesbian people.

It is my understanding a family consisting of a man, a woman and dependent children may combine all individual medical costs to attain a common safety net threshold, known as "Medicare Plus." When this is reached, Medicare shall pay a much higher rebate on future eligible medical expenses. This is over a twelve month period.

Unfortunately, this Safety Net feature does not apply to same-sex couples with dependent children. Respective partners may not combine expenses. They remain separate.

As well, Medicare invites male-female couples without dependent children to register their relationships to also obtain a combined Safety Net. Same-sex couples are prevented from doing this.

It is clear discrimination in the form of financial disadvantage exists towards gay and lesbian people, with or without dependents.

Incidentally, the Federal Government realizes the importance of same-sex relationships. In respect of requirement for a witness in the application of a passport for instance, relatives, spouses, as well as same-sex partners do not qualify under terms and conditions as an independent witness known to the applicant.

It is time the Prime Minister and Government recognized same-sex relationships. This is a crucial issue. Gay and lesbian people are not afforded the same rights and protection as most Australians enjoy. It is precisely through this unjust culture the Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, has formulated the present Medicare structure I have described. In my view, these two men express a low collective consciousness. This policy is repugnant.

Same-sex couples need legal recognition of their relationships now. Ideally, this should be through granting of de-facto status. The right of marriage must also apply. Marriage is not an exclusive institution preserved for the union of a man and woman only. Marriage is a commitment between two people, regardless of gender.

I understand that you personally are supportive of issues within the gay and lesbian community. However, it was Labor policy at the last Federal election to refuse gay people the right to marry as well.

I trust you understand the matters I have expressed. Looking forward to your reply.

Many thanks,

Stuart Baanstra

Stuart Baanstra.





Federal Member for Sydney  
House of Representatives

16 May 2005

Dear Mr Baanstra

Thank you for your letter dated 9 May 2005, concerning the discrimination faced by same sex couples in the area of Medicare.

Your understanding of the definition of "family" under the Medicare Safety Net is correct. Like you, I also believe this policy is unnecessarily discriminatory and unfair to same sex couples and their children.

This one of many issues I have previously raised in parliament concerning the LGBT community, unfortunately falling on the deaf ears of the Howard Government.

You also raise the issue of relationship recognition under commonwealth legislation for same sex couples.

ALP policy and commitments in this area are:

- *Labor believes that Australians are entitled to respect, dignity and the ability to participate in society and receive the protection of the law regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.*
- *Labor in government will work with all groups to reform federal laws to recognise the diversity of legitimate relationships in the Australian community.*
- *Labor will work to eliminate discrimination against Australians in same-sex relationships across a range of federal laws, including taxation, superannuation, immigration, family law, industrial relations and government benefits.*
- *As part of its consideration of measures to eliminate discrimination against Australians on the grounds of sexuality, Labor will examine options to achieve more consistent national treatment of all de facto relationships.*



We are committed to reviewing every piece of Commonwealth legislation and remove all discrimination against the GLTBIG community; to treat same sex and hetero sexual couples exactly equally; and to immediately introduce anti-discrimination and anti-vilification legislation to protect against sexuality and gender identity based vilification and discrimination.

Further, and more importantly, the ALP is committed to examining a national system of relationship recognition. This might follow the model of the Tasmanian partnerships register, or it may take some other form. We will be continuing extensive consultation with LGBTIQ community organisations and the broader community to ensure we come up with the best model.

Please find enclosed copies of speeches I have made in parliament concerning issues affecting the LGBT community.

Again, thankyou for taking the time to contact me on this very important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tanya Plibersek". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Tanya Plibersek MP  
Member for Sydney