



The PDA's LGBT+ Network response to the Equalities Office consultation on banning conversion therapy

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The PDA LGBT+ Pharmacists' Network concerns itself with issues of special relevance to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender pharmacists within the UK.



Summary

The Government is consulting on a ban to conversion therapy. It believes that there is no justification for these coercive and abhorrent practices and states that the evidence is clear that it does not work: it does not change a person from being LGBT and can cause long lasting damage to those who go through it.

The Government states that it is committed to building a society in which conversion therapy no longer takes place. It is proposing to bring forward a ban in the criminal law that is supported by additional civil interventions to ensure that these practices are ended.

The [Pharmacists' Defence Association's \(PDA\) LGBT+ Network](#) strongly believes that so-called 'conversion therapy' for LGBT+ people should be banned without exception.

Contrary to its aims, the proposed legislative change does not protect actual or potential victims of conversion therapy, as it allows adults to consent to the abhorrent practice. The notion of being able to consent to a practice which is ineffective, harmful, and built upon a power dynamic that exploits vulnerable people is flawed. Decisions around legislation should be evidence-based. Given that the evidence unequivocally demonstrates the harm caused by conversion therapy, as highlighted in Section 1, the reference to consent is contradictory to the intended outcome of protecting potential victims of conversion therapy.

Ultimately, any exception to a ban on conversion therapy legitimises the belief that possessing an identity belonging to the LGBT+ community is a defect or a flaw. The perpetuation of this belief is harmful to our society. Simply, the proposal does not serve to address the underlying principles of conversion therapy and is consequently not fit for purpose.

Whilst a ban on conversion therapy is not at odds with religious freedom, [more than 50% of conversion therapy is conducted within a religious setting](#), highlighting the need for a ban to include conversion therapy conducted for a religious purpose. Excusing or allowing any sort of abuse due to religious belief is an incredibly dangerous precedent. Neglecting to legislate against people likening LGBT+ identities to immoral acts in the interest of 'expressing the teachings of a religion', a vague concept which is dependent on interpretation, makes the ban impossible to police. Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights states that freedom of speech and freedom of belief are not legal justifications for degrading treatment. Considering this, it is unacceptable for the consultation document to introduce legal loopholes which facilitate the continued existence of conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy is not 'universal' or 'symmetrical' and the legal ban should, therefore, reflect this. Reminiscent of Section 28, the notion of 'reverse' conversion therapy (where a heterosexual or cisgender person may be 'converted' to an identity belonging to the LGBT+ community) poses a grave risk to LGBT+ people, particularly to those working with charities which support LGBT+ people and the advancement of our rights. Undeniably, there is potential for the ban, as it is proposed, to criminalise those seeking to affirm and support LGBT+ people.

Despite the proposed ban's flaws, the PDA LGBT+ Network does support the introduction of conversion therapy-related policy and training to statutory services, especially within healthcare settings. We also welcome the introduction of longer sentences for perpetrators of violent offences where conversion therapy is deemed an aggravating factor, in addition to the introduction of Conversion Therapy Protection Orders.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Government must legislate against conversion therapy, however, the proposed ban includes intentional loopholes that create legal grey areas in which lies the potential to harm LGBT+ people and their allies.

About the Pharmacists' Defence Association

The Pharmacists' Defence Association (PDA) is a not-for profit defence association and trade union for pharmacists. It is the only organisation that exclusively looks after the interests of employee and locum pharmacists across all sectors of pharmacy, currently with a membership of more than 32,000, the PDA is the largest representative membership body for pharmacists in the UK and this membership continues to grow.

Delivering more than 5,000 episodes of support provided to members who have found themselves in a critical incident situation in the last year alone, provides the PDA with a rich vein of up-to-date experiences which have informed policies and future strategy.

This experience has recently been informed by the very considerable number of Covid-19 related issues being faced by members. The practical experience gained in supporting member issues from the coal face is further enhanced by regular member surveys and focus group interactions. The information in this document is largely built upon the experience of our 32,000 members.

The primary aims of the PDA are to:

- Support pharmacists in their legal, practice and employment needs
- Represent the individual or collective concerns of pharmacists in the most appropriate manner
- Proactively seek to influence the professional, practice and employment agenda to support members
- Lead and support initiatives designed to improve the knowledge and skills of pharmacists in managing risk and safe practices, so improving patient care
- Work with like-minded organisations to further improve the membership benefits to individual pharmacists
- Arrange insurance cover for individual pharmacists to safeguard and defend their reputation.