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## Intersex People in Australia<sup>1</sup>

There is a lack of awareness of the specific needs and situation of intersex people in public, clinical, and policy settings in Australia. Despite a 2013 Australian Senate Committee Inquiry calling for the development of a human-rights based protocol for “normalising” surgery on intersex children, to date Australian governments have failed to adequately act. As such, a pattern of human rights abuses on infants, children, adolescents and adults born with intersex variations continues to occur across the country, without effective, independent oversight, often based on gender stereotypes, and lacking a scientific basis.

The absence of discrete funding for intersex-led institutions has led to a lack of access and knowledge of those institutions and their expertise, and the production and reproduction of inappropriate information that frames intersex as matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, but the issues and populations are distinct. The needs of our population (including children, and their parents and prospective parents) are largely not addressed by LGBTI organisations focused on matters of personal identification of gender and sexuality.

## The Darlington Consortium

Intersex Human Rights Australia (IHRA) (formerly known as OII Australia) and Intersex Peer Support Australia (IPSA) (also known as the AIS Support Group Australia or AISSGA), are national intersex-led organisations with a history of warm collaboration and effective joint work.

**IHRA and IPSA played leading roles in organising the Darlington retreat in 2017 that created the [Darlington Statement](#), a world-leading community consensus statement about the needs and demands of intersex people in Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand. We have established the Darlington Consortium as a strategic, intersex-led initiative that will work with governments, health providers, legal practitioners, intersex community members, carers, family members, allies and others, to realise the vision of the Darlington Statement.**

Our work has contributed to legal and regulatory reform across Australia, including inclusion of “intersex status” in federal anti-discrimination law, and the removal of sex and gender discrimination from Medicare service item codes. Whilst our two intersex-led organisations remain almost entirely volunteer-run and volunteer-led, we have nevertheless contributed to local, national and international policy and norm development, research and provided peer support, front line suicide intervention, and community visibility, which has created a mental health safety net for our communities. Our oversight of on-going medical interventions performed on adults and children born with variations of sex characteristics drives rights-based improvements in clinical practices. Our organisations act as a ‘grass-roots’ regulator of the industry and fill the significant gaps left between services. The National LGBTI Health Alliance is providing support to the Consortium, and modelling best practice in intersex allyship and working with its members.

<sup>1</sup> Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit medical or social norms for female or male bodies. There are many different underlying traits, including at least 40 known to science. Each has different characteristics, and individuals can experience those variations in different ways. Intersex traits can be discovered prenatally, at birth, at puberty, and at other times, such as when trying to conceive a child. Some people may never realise they are intersex.

## How can the needs of intersex people in Australia be met?

Strategic advocacy by the intersex community has led to important recent legal and regulatory changes as outlined above, which has created the potential for Australia to be a world-leader in advancing the human rights, and addressing the needs, of intersex people. Yet, the rapid inclusion of intersex issues into social policy often remains based on misconceptions

and lacks genuine engagement with intersex-led organisations. At the same time, greater visibility and public awareness about intersex issues is increasing the number of intersex people seeking peer support and assistance with accessing affirming health and other social services.

## The Role of the Darlington Consortium

The members of the Darlington Consortium have the expertise, community networks, trust and proven track record in structural and individual advocacy, community development and peer support to play a pivotal role in addressing the specific needs of the intersex community in Australia. With dedicated funding partners, over the next three years the Darlington Consortium will:

- Effectively advocate for a human rights-based and evidence-informed legal, regulatory and policy framework for intersex issues in Australia.
- Ensure that intersex Australians are supported to realise their individual legal and health rights.

- Strengthen and expand the delivery of peer-led programs for our communities so that intersex people, their parents, partners and others feel connected and supported to access the services they need.
- Improve the capacity of the health and education systems to effectively and appropriately respond to the needs of intersex people in Australia.
- Foster the development of a vibrant, proud, supportive and connected intersex community across Australia.
- Address stigma, discrimination and misconceptions about intersex issues amongst the public.

## What resources are needed?

Realising the vision of the Darlington Statement and advancing the needs and demands of intersex people in Australia will require dedicated funding that will enable the Darlington Consortium members to scale up their human resources and organizational capacity.

The Darlington Consortium is looking to establish funding partnerships that will enable us to fulfil the goals outlined in this prospectus and create real and lasting impact in the lives of intersex people and their families across Australia.

**To discuss this prospectus, and partnering with the Darlington Consortium, please contact:**

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