December 20, 2019

Victor Madrigal-Borloz

Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination

 Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

United Nations

Palais des Nations

1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

**Re: Call for Inputs - Dated 21 November 2019**

Dear Mr. Madrigal-Borloz,

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) in response to the November 21st *Call for Inputs* on the practice of so-called “conversion therapy” with sexual and gender diverse people. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to bring to your attention significant APA documents that may be helpful to you in preparing for your upcoming report to be presented at the 44th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. Our membership includes 118,400 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students from across the United States and the world. APA has a longstanding commitment to combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and to encourage the use of appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. Since the practices of so-called “conversion therapy” do not meet the definition of “therapy” according to the APA *Dictionary of Psychology* as “remediation of a physical, mental, or behavioral disorder or disease,” we typically refer to them as Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE).

In response to the *Call for Inputs*, we would first like to draw your attention to the following sentence under Background on p. 1, which reads as follows: “Some licensed medical professionals, including psychologists, administer cognitive-behavioural therapies, drugs and physical interventions, such as electric shock treatment or aversion techniques” as a form of conversion therapy to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. While some misguided psychologists, in stark opposition to two decades of APA guidelines for affirmative psychological services, may be providing cognitive behavioral therapy and/or other forms of psychotherapy as “conversion therapy” in the United States, we are not aware of specific evidence of their using drugs, electric shock treatment, or other aversive procedures. We are hopeful that this *Call for Inputs* will help to identify how “conversion therapy” is practiced in different parts of the world and by whom, with the goal of ending such practices.

I would now like to highlight the following key conclusions of APA experts based on reviews of the research literature related to “conversion therapy,” which are detailed in the Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation:

1) Efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve risk of harm,

2) Same-sex sexual and romantic attractions, feelings, and behaviors are normal and positive variations of human sexuality regardless of sexual orientation identity, and

3) Appropriate application of affirmative therapeutic interventions for those who seek sexual orientation change involves therapist acceptance, support, and understanding of clients and the facilitation of clients’ active coping, social support, and identity exploration and development, without imposing a specific sexual orientation identity outcome.

Additionally, as affirmed in the 1997 policy resolution, “Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation,” which is grounded in APA’s *Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct*, psychologists are not to make false or deceptive statements concerning the scientific or clinical basis for their services.

What follows is a listing of six APA documents with hypertext links pertinent to several of the questions presented in the current *Call for Inputs*. Included are formal policy positions of the APA; guidelines for affirmative psychological practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people; and a recent court filing by APA. Also included is a link to a relevant APA-supported U.S. federal government report:

1. In 1997, APA adopted the policy resolution on [Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation](https://www.apa.org/about/policy/appropriate) which was grounded in our code of ethics.
2. In 2009, APA’s legislative body, the Council of Representatives, received the [Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation](https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf). It is a systematic review of the peer-reviewed literature on SOCE, which concluded that such efforts were unlikely to be successful and involved some risk of harm, contrary to the claims of SOCE practitioners and advocates.
3. In 2009, APA also adopted the policy resolution on [Appropriate Affirmative Responses to Sexual Orientation Distress and Change Efforts](https://www.apa.org/about/policy/sexual-orientation), which summarized the key findings of the task force and its conclusions.
4. In 2011, APA adopted the [Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients](https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/index?tab=7), which replaced the original Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients adopted in 2000.
5. In 2015, APA adopted the [Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People](https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/index?tab=7), which are intended to help professionals better understand the lifespan development of transgender and gender nonconforming people, as well as the stigma, discrimination, and barriers to care that they face, so as to be able to provide affirmative care.
6. In June 2019, APA filed an amicus (“friend of the court”) brief with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, in the case of [Otto v. City of Boca Raton](https://www.apa.org/about/offices/ogc/amicus/otto), a legal challenge to laws in Boca Raton and Palm Beach, Florida, banning mental health providers from engaging in “conversion therapy” with minors. A decision is pending.
7. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration issued the APA-supported report, “[Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Ending-Conversion-Therapy-Supporting-and-Affirming-LGBTQ-Youth/SMA15-4928),” the conclusions of which were based on consensus statements from a panel of experts convened by APA.

With respect to the legal case cited above, it is important to point out that numerous jurisdictions around the United States have banned the practice by mental health professions of SOCE with minors, often relying on the findings of the 2009 APA task force report and the 2009 APA Council resolution. The authority of these two documents was called into question by legal counsel for the plaintiffs in Otto v. City of Boca Raton, a challenge to two such bans in Florida. Our 2019 amicus brief reaffirms the findings of both documents that sexual orientation change efforts have not been shown to be effective or safe. In addition, the brief: 1) defends the integrity of the selection process of members of the task force who produced the report; 2) explains the methodology used in the research review; 3) explains the difference between evaluating evidence of treatment effectiveness and assessing the risk of harm; and 4) advises the U.S. Court of Appeals of the results of a review of relevant research that has been published since the 2009 task force report, noting its consistency with the conclusions of the task force.

Thank you for your commitment to explore the human rights implications of “conversion therapy” practices across the globe and to inform the United Nations Human Rights Council of the findings and recommendations that arise from your information-gathering efforts. I hope that our APA materials will help to bring these harmful practices to an end worldwide. If we can provide any further assistance, please contact Ron Schlittler in our Office on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity at rschlittler@apa.org.

Sincerely,



Arthur C. Evans, Jr., Ph.D.

Chief Executive Officer