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Gay footballers need support

An admission by Western Bulldogs star Jason Akermanis that he felt threatened by a gay team mate in the change room will not help young gays and lesbians, Family Planning Victoria CEO Lynne Jordan said today.

In his *Herald Sun* column (20.5.2010 P94) Akermanis said while he knew the openly gay team mate in a local competition was 'not trying and convert me', he was uncomfortable in the change rooms with him.

Ms Jordan said while he meant well, Akermanis' comments marginalised gay players and legitimised straight boys and men not wanting them in the locker room. As AFL players were employees, it was the same as saying you could not be gay in your workplace. She added that whether it was female trainers or gay players in change rooms, the only issue was appropriate behaviour – not gender or sexuality.

'What if Jason has a gay team mate?' Ms Jordan asked. 'How would he feel now? As employers, the Western Bulldogs and the AFL need to ensure all players and officials, gay or straight, feel comfortable in the workplace.'

'As someone young people look up to, Jason is sending a misguided and negative message to his team mates and the general community. If other players feel the same way, there is a need to educate them.'

Ms Jordan said whether an AFL footballer came out was up to them, but comments like Akermanis' would not encourage them.

'If a player or players did come out, it could help young people unsure about their sexuality and boost their self-esteem,' she said, 'but they are unlikely to do so while other players say they feel threatened in the change room.'

FPV endorsed Monday's International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), which focused on homophobia in sport. The AFL endorsed IDAHO with its 'Courageous Conversations' campaign.

Based on Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) data, 8-11 per cent of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual.¹ With more than 650 players on AFL lists, this means that up to around 50 could be gay. Ms Jordan said this highlighted the need for acceptance.

'Chances are, there are gay AFL players and we should all get over it. Positive gay and lesbian role models are crucial for young people and having them in sport is fantastic because clubs engage them and encourage healthy lifestyles and team work. But no one should feel they have to declare their sexual preference if they don't want to.'

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FPV is the leading Victorian provider of youth sexuality education and clinical services.

¹ Hillier, L, Dempsey, D. et al (1998) *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-Being of Same-Sex Attracted Young People*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University: Melbourne.