



Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality Ro Allen was in Robinvale yesterday as part of the LGBTIQ Equality Rural and Regional Program.

# Everyone welcome

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ROBINVALE was turned all the colours of the rainbow when the LGBTIQ Equality Rural and Regional Program rolled into town yesterday.

About 50 community members and service providers from Robinvale, Mildura and Swan Hill, including representatives from Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Mallee Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Unit (MSADVU) discussed issues and barriers LGBTIQ community members in rural areas face.

Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality Ro Allen said the program was aimed

at bringing people across the Mallee together to look at how service provision could be made more "safe and inclusive" for LGBTIQ community members.

"It's a flow on from the original road shows that were held a few years ago," she said.

"We wanted to know how to take the roadshows and really get them embedded ... there's a bit of LGBTIQ training, and we've got a lot more resources and information now.

"The Victorian Government has committed to a whole government strategy, so we're also using the day as a consultation, which is exciting because rural and regional people are being consulted first."

Ms Allen said one of the main

issues discussed was many rural and regional LGBTIQ community members leaving their hometowns in favour of the cities.

"They're taking their careers to Melbourne, Sydney and other places ... you shouldn't have to move to be your authentic, true self," she said.

"If we don't want young people to move away, we need to show them that the smaller towns are inclusive, safe places.

"Access to good mental health services, and drug and alcohol services are also important.

"We're discussing how to make services accessible, the onus for that is on the services to prove that they're accessible, not just assume people know.

"The LGBTIQ community, like

every other community, needs those services. Put up a flag and say 'you're welcome here'.

"We're over represented in mental health and suicide - it's not our gender or sexuality (that's the cause), it's the discrimination and stigma that we experience that makes those indicators for us a bit higher."

Ms Allen said making the trip to Robinvale for the program was "important" to her.

"It's important ... and it's important for any young, queer person in Robinvale who may not have come along today to see that we were here, and to know that they are supported and accepted.

"It's part of why we choose the towns we visit."