

It's good  
to talk

# Conversations I Wish We'd Have...

Meet the  
passionate  
changemakers  
shedding light  
on the topics  
they'd love for  
us all to talk  
about more

By Alex Davies



The next time you're after a fresh topic for the brunch table or \*deep breath\* another Zoom catch-up, might we suggest taking inspiration from the pages ahead? It's hard *not* to feel fired up by the thought-provoking words of these nine voices - from the period poverty fighter and inclusive healthcare advocate to the friends who are championing a more diverse beauty space. Empowering and enlightening perspectives, this way...

## SALLY DOUGLAS (LEFT), 35, AND IMOGEN CARN, 33

**These friends met after the unexpected passing of their mums. With warmth, honesty and humour, the co-hosts of the *Good Mourning* podcast (@goodmourningpodcast) want to support others going through loss and to lift the lid on grief.**

**Sal:** "Before it happens to you, grief is just for other people. Society doesn't prepare us for it. When we found ourselves grieving, it made us realise how much it is a taboo topic, because we aren't educated around how to approach it. That's what made us think, 'OK, it's really important to give grief a voice' because people don't know how to support [those going through it]. And to also let others grieving know that what they're feeling is completely normal."

**Im:** "We received a beautiful message from a listener whose mum had died. She wrote that when she listens to us, it feels like she's sitting in the sun, listening to friends talk over coffee, and that she laughs and cries along with us. And even though she's thousands of miles away, she feels seen and heard and that her grief is validated. Her message ended with, 'You feel like a warm embrace. You feel like my mum.' I just started crying. I called Sal and said to her, 'Honestly, we've done our job.'"

**Sal:** "People often think that you don't want to talk about your loved one [when you're grieving]. They might assume it's too painful. Everyone is different, but what we've found on the whole is that it's the opposite - most people [who are grieving] really **want** to hear their loved one's name. If you're [messaging] somebody who's experienced a loss, maybe put 'no need to reply' at the end. That lets them know the pressure's off to try and think of something to say."

**Im:** "Grief is exhausting. One of the best pieces of advice I was given to get through the early days is to strip things right back and take them minute by minute. So, [say to yourself] 'Right, I'm just going to get through the next minute and whatever I need to do - whether it's getting up, having a shower or trying to have a small, nourishing meal.'"

**Sal:** "And don't be afraid to seek professional support. We've both seen grief counsellors and it's been really beneficial."



## ➤ “IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE BREAST AWARE”

**DR ANH NGUYEN, 47**

GP Dr Nguyen is a breast surgery assistant and coordinator of the Breast Cancer Survivorship Program at Specialist Breast Cancer Surgery (breastcancer.specialist.com.au) in Melbourne. This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, she wants us to get curious about our breast health.

“My interest in breast disease stems from the fact that, as a GP, once I suspected or confirmed a patient’s diagnosis of breast cancer, I had very little understanding of the journey they’d go through. I’d see them at the other end once treatment was completed, but many women have ongoing issues, such as effects from surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and endocrine therapy. So it was really important for me to have a better understanding of their journey and what they’d be going through, so I could support them.

“With the Breast Cancer Survivorship Program, I usually see a patient about six to 12 months after their initial treatment. I do [things

like] a clinical examination to check for recurrence of their cancer, as well as checking for any ongoing physical or psychosocial issues. I work closely alongside the breast care nurses who help to coordinate any needs the patient has. That might include referrals to physiotherapists, psychologists, pain specialists and other health professionals, or helping women who need their bras fitted again.

“It’s important to be breast aware and we encourage women to check their breasts once a month, with the best time being just after a period. If you’re not menstruating, try picking the first or last day of the month as a trigger to remind you to do it. You’re looking for anything that feels new or different to the rest of the breast tissue, and not normal for *you*. Some people find checking easier in the shower; it’s about incorporating it into your routine. Seek medical advice if you’re worried – early detection really is key. Most lumps or bumps turn out **not** to be cancer, so it’s much less stressful if you have this confirmed sooner.”

## ➤ “AUSTRALIA IS SO DIVERSE. WHY AREN’T WE CATERING FOR THAT?”

**TALI MASON (LEFT), 28, AND SHAANTI WALLBRIDGE, 32**

Tali and Shaanti founded All Shades Matter Cosmetics (@allshadesmattercosmetics) to close the gap in make-up shade variety and offer more to people of colour. They’re planning to launch their inclusive range of foundations by the end of the year

**Tali:** “When we were younger, we’d just buy whatever [foundation] was darkest, because that was the only option. A lot of products had a white powdery finish, or my mum would tell me I looked orange, but I thought, ‘Oh well, it’s the only choice I have, so I guess it’ll have to do’, which isn’t a nice feeling at all.”

**Shaanti:** “Even though I couldn’t find my shade, I didn’t want to feel left out, like I couldn’t do what my girlfriends were doing. I knew walking out of the house that a shade wasn’t a match and didn’t suit me. My self-esteem took a hit, but I just had to deal with what was there, which wasn’t much. It’s not just foundation; what’s classified as a ‘nude’ lipstick is totally off on a person of colour. This country is so diverse and multicultural. Why aren’t we catering for that?”

**Shaanti:** “Our aim is to fill the gap in shade variety, specifically for people of colour. When



Sparking  
convo

you look at some [foundation] brands, there can be anywhere between 10 and 15 [options] for more Caucasian shades, whereas there might be only two or three for darker shades. We don’t all fit into one box. So instead of waiting for someone else to make the change, we decided to go ahead and do it ourselves.”

**Tali:** “We want to provide people with better opportunities to feel included, with a range that’s accessible and affordable. We’ve had so many messages saying, ‘I can’t wait for this launch. It’s finally something that I can get my hands on in Australia – a make-up brand for people of colour and for my colour’. It’s such a powerful message and really sums up what we’re doing, because all shades **do** matter.”

**Shaanti:** “And regardless of your shade, we’re here for you. We’re flipping the beauty game on its head by starting with darker shades and then expanding to lighter ones. We want people to feel validated, empowered and that they’ve been thought of. The foundation itself is a beautiful external look, but how you feel on the inside? That’s what really matters.”

**Tali:** “It’s important that everyone’s make-up experience is a positive one.”

## “We are flipping the beauty game on its head by starting with darker shades”

Want more?

Subscribe to our podcast *Uninterrupted by Women’s Health Australia* on Apple and Spotify, to listen to the chats in full.



## ↑ “SPARKING CONVERSATION HELPS TO ADDRESS PERIOD STIGMA”

**ISOBEL MARSHALL, 23**

**2021 Young Australian of the Year Isobel is the co-founder and Director of Health and Education at Taboo (@tabooproducts) – a brand of organic pads and tampons where 100 per cent of profits go towards fighting period poverty. Her goal is to break down the barriers facing menstruators around the world.**

“Period poverty is when someone is unable to afford or access the products or services they need to manage their period safely, hygienically and with dignity. People use alternatives to soak up the blood, such as socks, mattress rippings and old cloths. It’s also about a lack of education around the menstrual cycle, and the fact we don’t talk about it – then people in positions of power don’t factor any [related] issues into their decision making. We need to start talking about [periods] so we can create sustainable and meaningful solutions.

“In some developing countries, 30 per cent of girls drop out of school as soon as they get their periods. The fact that it so strongly affects schooling

is a huge issue, but [it also impacts] employment and that has a perpetuating effect on the poverty cycle and gender inequality. You see it in developed countries as well – a report from South Australia revealed young menstruators having to take days off school, reduce their hours at work, disengage in social or community activities [because of periods].

“Sparking conversation is an effective way to address [period] stigma. It makes a huge difference when we shift the tone from negative to positive. For example, instead of the first thing you teach young people being how to hide their periods or deal with them discreetly, it should be things like, ‘What’s going on in your body? Why is it happening? How can you harness the different fluctuating hormones so that you can reach your greatest potential throughout the month?’

“We don’t ask students or employees to bring their own toilet paper, so why do we ask people to bring pads or tampons? When we start to question what’s ‘normal’, we wonder why periods are treated differently to other bodily functions.”

## ↑ “WE SEE BEING DEAF AS AN ADVANTAGE”

**HERMON (LEFT) AND HERODA BERTHANE, 38**

**Hermon and Heroda are content creators and disability advocates via their blog (beinghermonheroda.com) and Instagram (@being\_\_her). The deaf twins, who’ve worked with the likes of MAC Cosmetics, are all about fierce fashion, clearing up stereotypes and changing perceptions.**

“When we started [studying fashion], we were suddenly thrown into the hearing world. We felt people often looked down on us because they didn’t have any awareness of what deafness meant, and that really affected our confidence. But, the doubters gave us determination to succeed and fulfil our dreams.

“Being deaf is not the problem; it’s [the perception] and barriers we face every day that are the problem. We want to encourage all women to gain confidence and learn that anything is possible. We also want to promote awareness and highlight discrimination, especially ableism and audism – discrimination against deaf or hard of hearing [people].

“We see [being deaf] as an advantage. With our hearing diminished, our other senses become heightened, so our touch, taste and vision can appreciate aspects that a hearing person maybe wouldn’t. There are lots of misconceptions, like that deaf people can’t do the same things as hearing people. Yes, they can! They can drive, dance, appreciate music. They can do everything except hear; that’s it.

“Haben Girma was the first deaf-blind student to graduate from Harvard Law School

## “It’s very important to celebrate disability, because knowledge is power”



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in 2013. Now, this amazing Eritrean-American woman is fighting for better accessibility and education for other deaf-blind people around the world. When we’re complaining or thinking of an excuse for why we can’t do something, we always think of Haben Girma because her story gives us the inspiration to push through. She’s a great role model for people with disabilities, as well as those without.

“It’s very important to celebrate disability because knowledge is power. Education and awareness are key to making our society more accessible for all. There are 466 million people in the world who are deaf or hard of hearing. It’s so important to educate about the communication issues they struggle with every day... and improve [their] lives by removing [those] barriers.

“Be aware, always ask, unlearn stereotypes, use your privilege and be an ally. Respect the experiences of people with disabilities and hire or promote them. [Consider] how your words or actions can affect others. Show compassion and understanding. With encouragement, people of any identity or community will excel.”



## ↑ “WE NEED SAFE AND INCLUSIVE HEALTHCARE”

**NICKY BATH, 53**

**Nicky is the CEO of LGBTIQ+ Health Australia (lgbtiqhealth.org.au) – the national peak organisation for providers of health-related programs, services and research focused on LGBTIQ+ people and communities.**

“Once, at a GP surgery, I could just tell by [the environment] that it probably wasn’t a good idea for me to tell that GP that I had a wife. When you’re not able to take your **whole** self to the doctor, there are elements of your health that get ignored. Now I’m privileged to have a great GP – there are amazing practitioners and services out there – but for many people that’s not the case.

“Many of us [in the LGBTIQ+ communities] live happy and healthy lives. But there’s also a phenomenon called minority stress [additional stress that members of marginalised groups face]... caused by prejudice and discrimination, and it’s a particular issue for our trans and gender diverse communities. Access to gender affirming care is

also challenging. In some jurisdictions, the waitlist is unacceptably high, yet access to this healthcare is lifesaving. Other disparities include mental health; a 2020 report\* found that almost 42 per cent of LGBTIQ people had considered suicide in the previous 12 months.

“My wish is for people to be able to access the healthcare they need from a young age. We’re talking about holistic, inclusive services that ask the right questions, understand and are supportive, safe and non-judgemental.

“There are great LGBTIQ+ health orgs across the country – our website has all the information. If you ever don’t have a good healthcare [experience], make a complaint. Talk to friends, family (if you can) and your community about ways to access good healthcare, because it is out there; we just need to join the dots.” **wh**

**Head to qlife.org.au (1800 184 527) for LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral. For 24-hour mental health support, contact lifeline.org.au (13 11 14), and beyondblue.org.au (1300 22 4636).**