

# Sexual diversity: general practice and primary care services audit

CHAPS

Terrence  
HIGGINS  
TRUST



Attitudes towards gay and bisexual men in the UK have undergone significant change in the last 50 years. Gay and bisexual men experience less social stigmatisation and less hatred than what was once experienced and there is increased visibility of homosexuality.

However, despite these advances, gay and bisexual men continue to be discriminated against, stigmatised and verbally or physically abused. Research indicates that 66% of gay and lesbian people had been the victim of a homophobic incident.

A recent study about gay men attending a general practice indicated that 44% of gay men had not disclosed their sexuality to their GP. If disclosure does not occur in the general practice setting, opportunities to discuss health issues relevant to gay and bisexual men are lost.

Some people would argue that gay and bisexual men have the same health needs as everyone else. While it is true that gay and bisexual men do share the same health needs as heterosexual communities there are some particular things about being gay or bisexual that makes some of their health needs different.

Some research suggests that there are particular health issues that affect gay and bisexual men more than they affect heterosexual men including higher rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis and gonorrhoea. Some gay or bisexual men use alcohol and other drugs at higher levels than the heterosexual community. Most of us use them for recreational purposes but some people use them to cope with the stress and anxiety caused by homophobia and lifelong discrimination. Excessive alcohol and other drug use can have negative effects on our health and is linked to a range of serious health issues such as heart disease.

Being gay or bisexual does not make someone mentally or physically ill. However, a lifetime of feeling 'different' or being treated differently can not only affect someone's mental wellbeing it can also have an impact on their physical health with increased risk of stress related conditions such as ulcers. The discrimination gay and bisexual men face can be so difficult for some men that it can also lead to them physically harming themselves.

This audit is an informal tool to help you assess gay and bisexual access and quality of care at your service.

# Sexual diversity: general practice and primary care services audit, part 1

## Creating a welcoming environment

	Yes	No
Are all staff, including reception, trained in gay and bisexual sensitivity issues?		
Does your service have and display an equality statement which explicitly mentions sexual orientation?		
Is the registration form used in the service inclusive of gay and bisexual patients?		
Are the brochures and educational materials distributed in the waiting room relevant to gay and bisexual men?		
Does your service display posters that visually represent all sexualities?		
Does your service acknowledge and promote relevant days of observance or remembrance such as gay and lesbian pride and World AIDS Day?		

## Knowledge and understanding

	Yes	No
Are staff aware of the impact of sexuality based discrimination on health and wellbeing?		
Do the staff know the particular health and health care issues for gay and bisexual patients?		
Does the practice have a list of gay and/or bisexual referral networks?		
Are staff aware of gay and bisexual support and community groups that they can recommend to patients?		
Do staff understand that many people do not define themselves through a sexual orientation label such as 'gay' but may have sex with people of the same sex?		
Are staff aware that there are additional barriers that increase stigmatisation including ethnic minority status, disability, age or economic status?		

## Communication

	Yes	No
Do staff use gender neutral terms such as 'partner' to facilitate disclosure?		
Is disclosure of sexuality encouraged and facilitated, especially when it is relevant to the health issue presented?		
Are patients assured of confidentiality?		
Are open ended questions used to help facilitate discussion about sex and sexuality?		
Do staff avoid language that presumes heterosexuality?		
If unsure of any terms or behaviours, are patients asked to clarify to ensure miscommunication does not occur?		

If you answered yes to the majority of the questions, your service is doing well in welcoming and understanding the issues for gay bisexual patients. There are always improvements to make so consider what additional things you can do to improve your service even further.

If you answered no to the majority of questions then there are some improvements you can do to make your service more accessible for gay and bisexual men.

Reflect on the answers you have given and using the framework suggested below, keep a record of the actions you might take to bring about short, medium and long term change.

# Sexual diversity: general practice and primary care services audit, part 2

## 1 - Identify important issues to address in relation to:

Creating a welcoming environment

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Knowledge and understanding

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Communication

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## 2 - Identify any actions which you see possible to implement:

In the next six weeks

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In the next six months

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In the next year

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The HIV and sexual health charity for life

Website: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk) THT Direct: 0845 12 21 200 Registered office: 314-320 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP

Telephone: 020 7812 1600 Email: [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk)

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