

# Experiences of healthcare

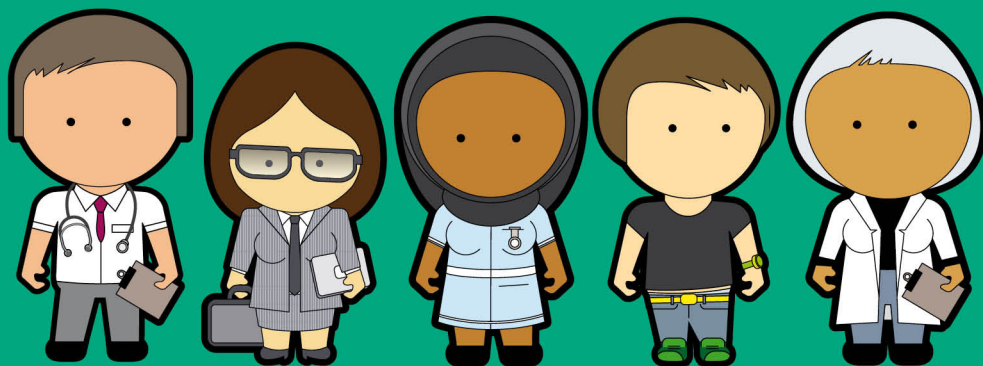
**Stonewall health briefing**



# Experiences of healthcare

## Stonewall Health Briefing

[www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk)



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# Stonewall Health Briefings

Stonewall's pioneering research demonstrates that the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time, many experience hostility, poor treatment or outright discrimination from healthcare professionals.

Stonewall now works with NHS organisations to improve the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and make sure the NHS is aware of its legal duties to provide an equal service to everyone.

This is one in a series of briefings on the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Britain today.

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## Other briefings in the series:

- **Bisexuality**
- **Disability**
- **Domestic Abuse**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Mental Health**



## Experiences of healthcare

Patient experience is at the heart of good healthcare. Patients should be treated with dignity and respect by healthcare staff they can trust. This briefing provides evidence that for many gay people, this is simply not the case. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to be open to their manager, to friends and to colleagues than their GP or healthcare professional. Gay people also report having assumptions made about them by healthcare staff that can impact on the care they receive.

Improving patient experience needn't be difficult, and there are some simple and cost effective measures which can help. Healthcare organisations that put patients at ease, and have well informed staff are much more likely to deliver high quality care to diverse communities.

# Lesbian and Bisexual Women

Stonewall's research into the health needs of lesbian and bisexual women, Prescription for Change, has found clear differences in their health compared to that of women in general. Lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to have smoked and to drink heavily than women in general. Levels of attempted suicide and self-harm are much higher than in the wider population. In addition, many lesbian and bisexual women have had a negative experience of healthcare in the past year.

**Half** (52 per cent) of lesbians and bisexual women who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience. Lesbians and bisexual women have experienced the following when accessing healthcare in the last year:

- **Two in five** (39 per cent) said their GP or healthcare professional assumed that they were heterosexual
- **More than one in five** (23 per cent) felt there was no opportunity to discuss their sexual orientation
- **Nine per cent** came out to their GP or healthcare professional and they were either ignored or the healthcare professional continued to assume they were heterosexual
- **Six per cent** were asked inappropriate questions by their GP or healthcare professional after coming out to them

Few lesbians and bisexual women had positive experiences of healthcare in relation to their sexual orientation in the past year:

- Just **seven per cent** said their healthcare professional had provided them with the opportunity to come out
- Just **26 per cent** said their healthcare professional acknowledged they were lesbian or bisexual after they had come out to them
- Only **12 per cent** said they had been told their partner was welcome to be present during a consultation
- Just **11 per cent** said healthcare professionals had specifically given them information relevant to their sexual orientation

- Only **nine per cent** said their GP surgery displayed a non-discrimination policy that included sexual orientation
- Only **24 per cent** said their GP surgery has a clear policy on confidentiality

*'Healthcare workers continually assume I am heterosexual and ask inappropriate questions about my relationships. I am often lectured about safe sex and preventing pregnancy without being given a chance to say that I do not sleep with men anymore.'*

**Maya, 28, South West**

Half of lesbians and bisexual women are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals.

### What proportion of GPs or healthcare professionals know you are lesbian or bisexual?



# Gay and Bisexual Men

Stonewall's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey demonstrates that their health needs are not being met, and there are areas of significant concern – most notably in mental health and drug use - that have been overlooked by health services which too often focus solely on gay and bisexual men's sexual health.

**A third** (34 per cent) of gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience. Gay and bisexual men have experienced the following when accessing healthcare in the last year:

- **Sixteen per cent** said their GP or healthcare professional assumed that they were heterosexual
- **Fifteen per cent** felt there was no opportunity to discuss their sexual orientation
- **Three per cent** came out to their GP or healthcare professional and they were either ignored or the healthcare professional continued to assume they were heterosexual
- **Three per cent** were asked inappropriate questions by their GP or healthcare professional after coming out to them

Few gay and bisexual men had positive experiences of healthcare in relation to their sexual orientation in the past year:

- **Just nine per cent** said their healthcare professional had provided them with the opportunity to come out
- **Just 28 per cent** said their healthcare professional acknowledged they were gay or bisexual after they had come out to them
- **Only 12 per cent** said they had been told their partner was welcome to be present during a consultation
- **Just 26 per cent** said healthcare professionals had specifically given them information relevant to their sexual orientation

- Only **21 per cent** said their GP surgery displayed a non-discrimination policy that included sexual orientation
- Only **40 per cent** said their GP surgery has a clear policy on confidentiality

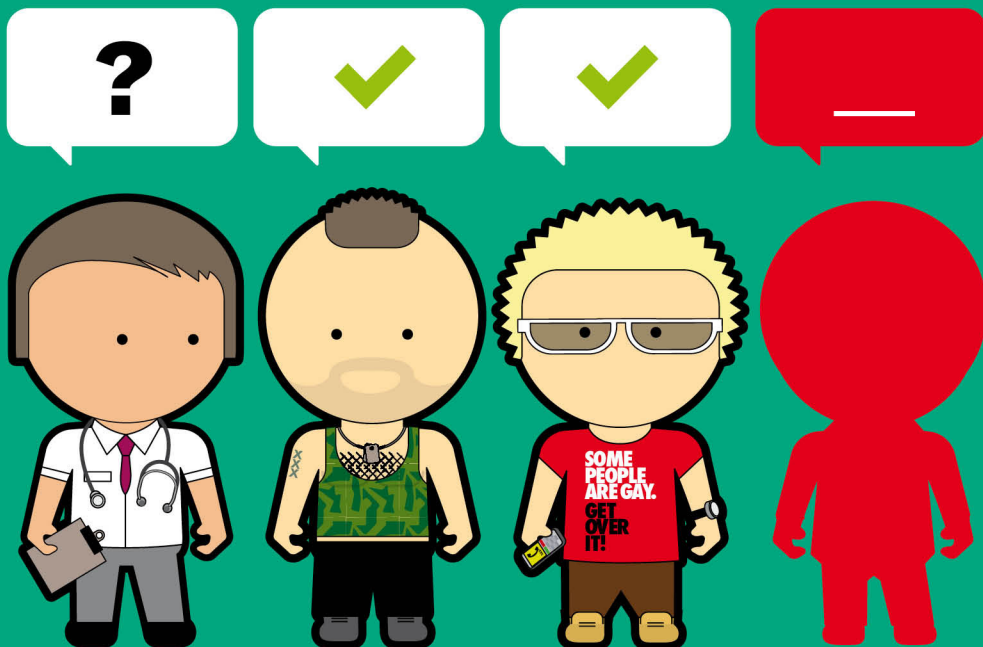
*'As a healthcare professional I have come across issues where the partners of gay men have had difficulties in visiting their loved ones because they were gay or other healthcare professionals deemed it inappropriate for them to be there although other relatives were allowed to visit.'*

**Tom, 21, Wales**

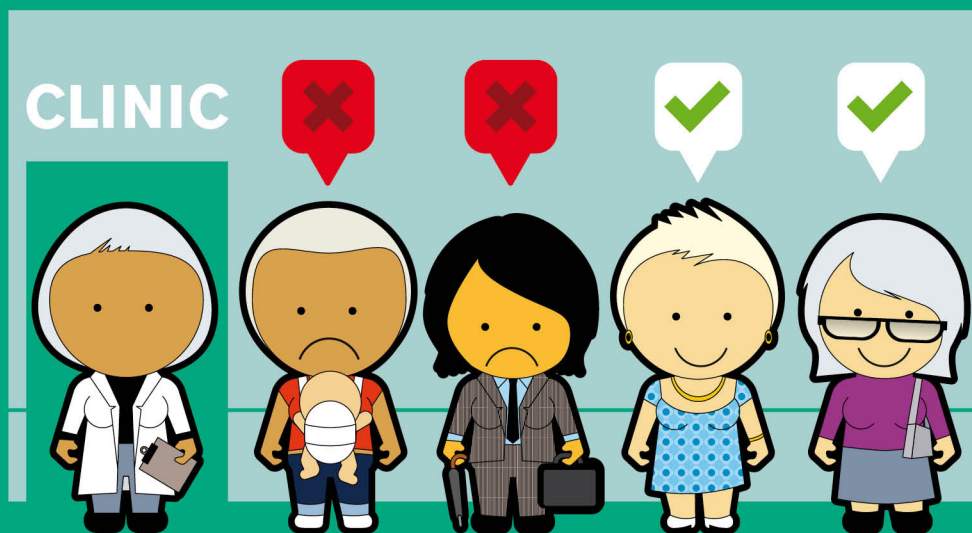
A third of gay and bisexual men are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals.

### What proportion of GPs or healthcare professionals know you are gay or bisexual?





**A third of gay and bisexual men are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals**



**Half of lesbians and bisexual women who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience**



## What the health service can do

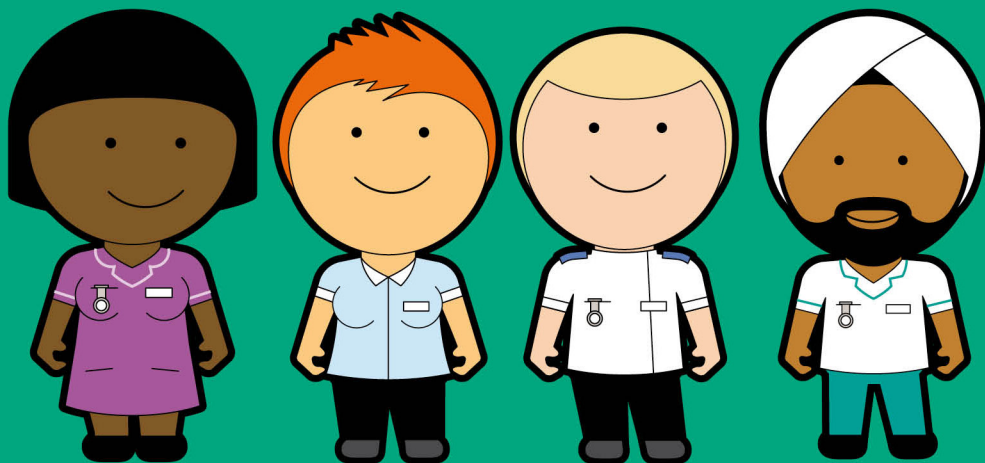
Treating patients with dignity and respect is at the heart of a good healthcare service. Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people report that they are assumed to be heterosexual by healthcare staff which impacts on the way they interact with the health service and on how comfortable they feel using health services.

There are a number of steps health services can take to improve the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people:

- **Train staff on the importance of not assuming someone's sexual orientation**
- **Use posters, leaflets and information that include images of lesbian, gay and bisexual people to help create a welcoming environment**
- **Provide health information that is relevant to lesbian, gay and bisexual people**

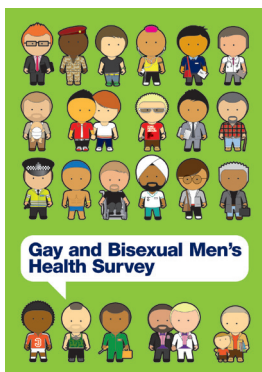
## INFORMATION

## SUPPORT



# The Studies

The findings in this briefing are taken from the following Stonewall publications:



## **Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey**

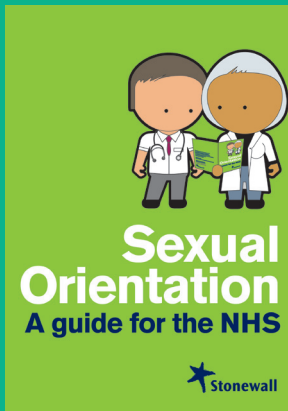
In 2011 Stonewall and Sigma Research asked gay and bisexual men from across Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,861 men responded making it the largest survey of its kind in the world.



## **Prescription for Change: Lesbian and bisexual women's health check 2008**

In 2007 Stonewall and De Montfort University asked lesbians and bisexual women from Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,178 women responded making it the largest survey of its kind in Europe.

## Further Resources



**Sexual Orientation:  
A Guide for  
the NHS**



**Lesbian and  
bisexual  
women's health  
posters**



**Gay and  
bisexual  
men's health  
posters**

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## Healthy Lives

For more NHS specific case-studies, best practice examples and research visit [www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk)

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## Stonewall publications

All Stonewall publications cited in this briefing are free to download from [www.stonewall.org.uk/publications](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/publications)

For hard copies of any of these publications visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/resource](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/resource)

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