



Sexual Orientation

A guide for the NHS



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Funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission

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Foreword

Sexual Orientation A guide with action plans for the NHS

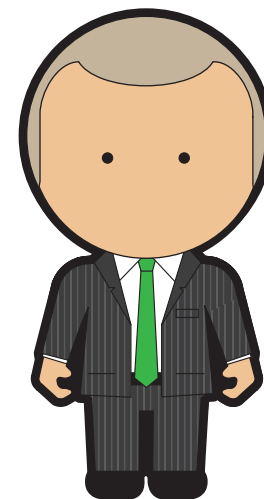
Lesbian, gay and bisexual people in England provide funding of some £6bn annually to the NHS. Over 100,000 of them work for the NHS too.

Yet recent Stonewall research has demonstrated that the specific needs of gay people are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time lesbian, gay and bisexual patients and employees continue to face discrimination, sometimes inadvertent, across the NHS.

Stonewall now works with NHS organisations across England helping them to meet their legal obligations and, more important, to model best practice. We're hugely grateful to the organisations and individuals featured in this guide who shared valuable practical insights on making the NHS better for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

These organisations recognise that a high quality 21st-century health service is one that understands the needs of all those who use it, pay for it and work in it.

Ben Summerskill
Chief Executive



Introduction

This guide for NHS organisations offers practical advice about how to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people– both as patients and as NHS staff. Each and every Trust featured in this guide is committed to securing fair outcomes for the 3.3 million lesbian, gay and bisexual people in England today.

Stonewall research has clearly found significant differences between the health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and those of heterosexual people. Compared to heterosexual people, more lesbian and bisexual women have self-harmed, gay and bisexual men misuse drugs more frequently and older lesbian, gay and bisexual people do not feel able to access the health services they need.

Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people report that they have experienced or fear discrimination because of their sexual orientation. They say this creates a barrier to receiving appropriate care and treatment. Additionally, many lesbian, gay and bisexual staff in the NHS experience discrimination and hostility at work because of their sexual orientation. They say this stops them from performing to the best of their ability and reaching their full potential.

If that wasn't reason enough for NHS organisations to think about how to treat their gay patients better, the Equality Act 2010 now says that all public bodies – including NHS organisations – are required by law to take steps proactively to promote equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

This guide will help you support lesbian, gay and bisexual patients and staff. It is practical, straightforward and based on our on-going work with dozens of NHS organisations across England.

www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk

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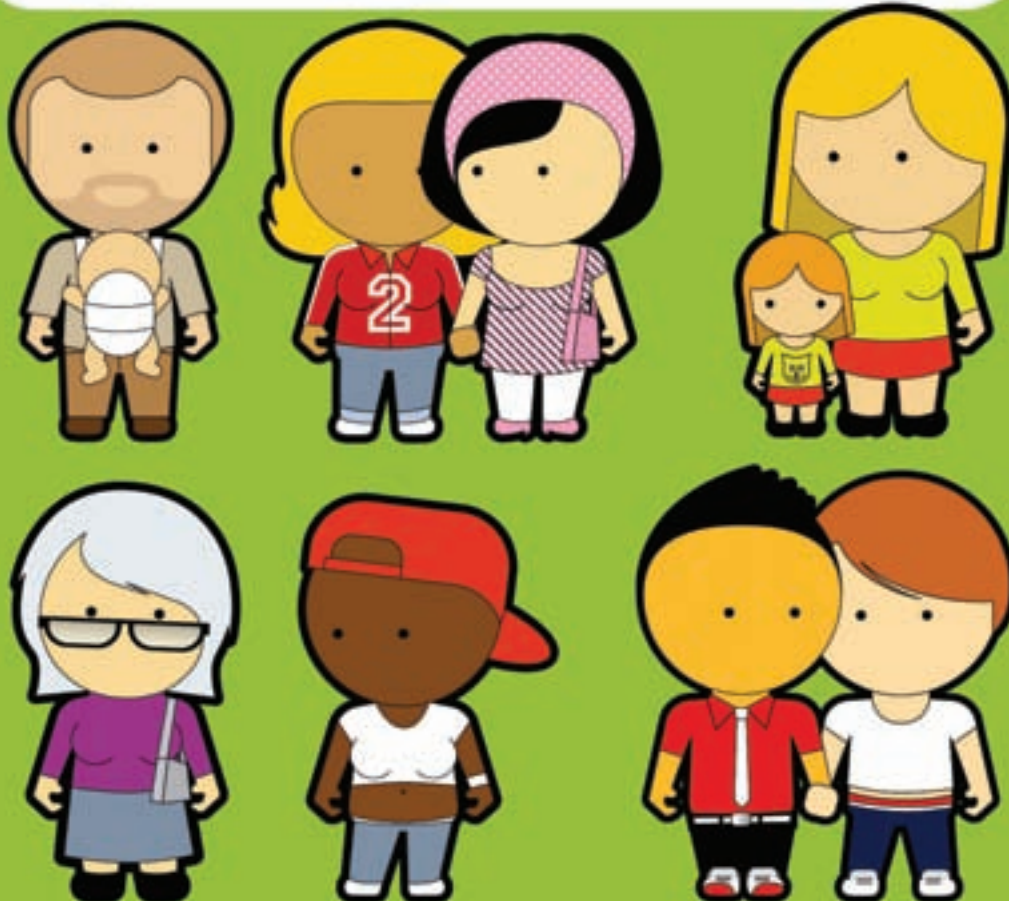
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Patients



What are the health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual patients?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people become ill just like everyone else. However, they can have distinct health issues that can be neglected by healthcare professionals. At the same time many gay people continue to experience discrimination, sometimes inadvertent, from health professionals too.

Taking steps to make sure that the needs of gay patients are sufficiently addressed leads to better health outcomes and saves the NHS money. Identifying the underlying causes of health problems sooner saves the time and money spent on misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment.

Stonewall's recent ground-breaking research into the health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across Britain has found alarming evidence of current health inequalities. We also know that many lesbian, gay and bisexual people face discrimination and poor treatment when accessing health services:

- Lesbian and bisexual women are **twice as likely** to have never had a cervical smear test, compared with women in general
- **One in five** lesbian and bisexual women have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year, compared to 0.4 per cent of the general population
- **Half** of lesbian and bisexual women are not out to their GP
- **Three per cent** of gay and bisexual men have attempted to take their life in the last year, compared to just 0.4 per cent of men in general
- **Half** of gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16
- **One in four** gay and bisexual men have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections
- **Forty one per cent** of lesbian, gay and bisexual people over 55 live alone, compared to 28 per cent of heterosexual people of the same age

- **One in eleven** lesbian, gay and bisexual people over 55 have taken drugs within the last year compared to 1 in 50 heterosexual people
- **One in six** lesbian, gay and bisexual people over 55 are not confident that their GP and other health services would be able to understand and meet their needs



'I was treated for cervical cancer after receiving a positive smear. I was originally told that I didn't need a smear as I had never had sex with a man.'

Francesca, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

'I have never seen any literature, posters or any information in my surgery about gay issues and I have never been asked or given the opportunity in conversation or otherwise to disclose my sexual orientation.'

Martin, Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

'I am appalled at how little sexual health advice and support there is for lesbians. I recently had a check and had no idea I could contract so many STDs through lesbian sex. There is little education and support for lesbians.'

Saheema, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

'My GPs do not understand my mental health needs and I believe have actually caused some of my problems which have made me suicidal.'

Andrew, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life

What do lesbian, gay and bisexual patients want from the NHS?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people want the same things from the NHS as everyone else— to receive good quality care, and to be treated with respect by staff they can trust. Gay patients want to be able to talk openly with health professionals without judgement. They also want health professionals to be well informed in order to give them the best advice possible.

The best NHS organisations recognise that if patients are put at ease and feel comfortable telling healthcare staff they are gay, staff can offer better advice that prevents poor health, saves costs, and ensures patients are treated with dignity and respect.



There are many simple and cost-effective measures – including many that cost nothing at all – that can improve the experience for lesbian, gay and bisexual patients. These range from putting up a poster in a waiting room that tells patients they won't be discriminated against if they are gay to staff making it clear that gay patients can bring along their partner to future consultations or appointments.

Taken together these small steps can have a huge impact on how lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel about their health service, and can ultimately lead to better health outcomes for patients and cost savings for the NHS.

'There were lots of people saying; "Actually you've got no positive images... when I look at posters and pictures around I don't see me on them".'

Scott Durairaj, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

'I think when you join a GP surgery their confidentiality policy should be made clear. Also, I would like to know that if I disclosed my sexuality and asked them not to write it on my records that they would follow my request.'

Fay, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

'I think nurses should be encouraged to ask more inclusive questions when giving smears. I find it amusing when nurses ask "Do you have sex?" followed by "Do you use contraception?" and "Are you pregnant or seeking to become pregnant?"'

Abigail, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

'The feedback we have had from people at the Pride parades has been how fantastic that the NHS is here talking about my well-being and my state of mind, rather than asking what I do in the bedroom and offering me condoms.'

Andrew Howarth, Leeds Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

'I wish I was able to be myself with health professionals. If I thought that they were trained and sensitive to gay issues then perhaps I would be able to. My main concern is coming out and having to talk about my sexual health rather than my real health issues.'

Morgan, Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

'I would like to see more being done to make arrangements for gay couples to continue to live together and be cared for should they be unable to continue living in their own homes or to live without outside assistance.'

Alex, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life

'I worry about how I will be treated when I enter a home or hospital in the future both by staff and other residents/patients as I would wish to be open about my sexuality and expect a homophobic reaction.'

Gordon, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life



Measures that can improve the experience for lesbian, gay and bisexual patients range from putting up a poster in a waiting room that tells patients they won't be discriminated against if they're gay to staff making it clear that gay patients are welcome to bring along their partner to future consultations or appointments.



The law

There are now several laws that NHS organisations should be aware of as they affect how lesbian, gay and bisexual patients should be treated when using NHS services.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act says that NHS organisations mustn't discriminate against lesbian, gay or bisexual patients. This means a doctor can't refuse to treat a patient or provide poor care because they are gay. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people have been protected by the law in this way since 2007.

However, the Equality Act also now says that NHS organisations must take steps to proactively promote equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. This is called the public sector equality duty or the 'duty'.

It's up to NHS organisations to decide how they meet the duty but they do have to set themselves equality objectives, setting out what they intend to do in order to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. They also have to annually publish data which shows how they're getting on. This might include, for example, publishing data on the sexual orientation of patients who make complaints about the service they've received.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004

Since 2005 same-sex couples have been able to enter civil partnerships and gain the same rights as married couples. For the NHS this could cover, for example, providing patients the opportunity to declare they are in a civil partnership on forms which ask about marital status.

The phrase 'next of kin' doesn't have a legal definition in Britain, so patients can nominate anyone to be their next of kin – it doesn't have to be a civil partner (or husband or wife). NHS staff should bear in mind that a patient's next of kin may be a same-sex partner, and may ask this person about what a patient's wishes might be.

Civil partners have certain rights in relation to their partner's mental health treatment, under the Mental Health Act 2007. Couples who aren't in a civil partnership don't have these rights.

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Act 2008

Under this Act, lesbian couples can now access fertility treatment in the same way as heterosexual couples. A pregnant woman's female partner can also, in certain circumstances, be recognised by law as the legal parent. NHS staff must make sure these rights are fully respected when providing fertility treatment or antenatal care to lesbian and bisexual women.

The provision of fertility treatment on the NHS differs across the country, but NHS organisations aren't allowed to refuse access to fertility treatment simply on the basis of sexual orientation.



Since 2005 same sex couples have been able to enter civil partnerships and gain the same rights as married couples.

Gay-friendly policies, practices and services

It's important to have policies that tell staff and patients how they are expected to conduct themselves. This makes clear to gay patients that they should expect the same level of service, regardless of who treats them. It also makes it easier for the NHS to address discriminatory behaviour when it takes place.

NHS organisations should ensure that healthcare services and organisational policies are designed with lesbian, gay and bisexual patients in mind. This is particularly important when developing new services. It is far easier to ensure policies and practices take lesbian, gay and bisexual people into account from the outset than having to adapt services later on.

Here are just some ways of doing this:

- Having an equality and diversity policy that sets out how the organisation intends to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual equality
- Targeting services specifically at lesbian, gay and bisexual patients where appropriate, for instance if lesbian, gay and bisexual people are under-represented in taking up a particular service
- Conducting patient experience surveys to find out the views of lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Auditing policies to examine their impact on lesbian, gay and bisexual patients
- Encouraging suppliers to promote sexual orientation equality when outsourcing services

See our guide on Procurement



Communicating with gay people

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people need to know that they can use health services without experiencing or fearing poor treatment. If they aren't sure they may not access the healthcare they need. NHS organisations need to send a clear message to gay people that they have considered their needs and will deliver a service that is free from discrimination.

There are many ways to communicate this message to gay people, but the best organisations devise a strategy first to make sure their staff and senior leadership understand from the outset why this work is being done.

Top organisations:

- Display gay-friendly policies where patients will see them
- Use images of same-sex couples and their families in promotional materials
- Make sure that preventative health messages don't exclude gay people – for example, saying 'smoking will make you unattractive to the opposite sex' doesn't include gay people
- Promote the work they're doing on sexual orientation through their website and local media
- Join the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme and use the logo in recruitment advertising
- Attend lesbian, gay and bisexual community events

'If health workers made it obvious, for example, through posters or direct contact with me, that patient sexuality was not an issue for them and that lesbians were welcome, I might feel easier about visiting the GP for things like smears.'

Trudy, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

Training frontline staff

It's important that lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel comfortable when accessing healthcare. If they feel they've been treated with respect, they're more likely to feel confident talking about health problems and more likely to continue using health services. Health professionals who understand the particular health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are in turn able to provide a better, more tailored service to their patients.

The best NHS organisations deliver training around sexual orientation to all staff who come into contact with patients on how appropriately to treat lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

The best training covers:

- The organisation's policies on discrimination, dignity and respect and patient confidentiality
- The laws on discrimination in providing services
- Health inequalities experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- How best to encourage patients to tell health professionals they are lesbian, gay or bisexual
- The diversity of the gay communities, including gay people from different ethnic backgrounds and gay people with disabilities



'My dentist's assistant made a series of homophobic comments, not directly to me but just airing her views while the dentist was working on my teeth. They may not have been aware that I was gay but that was beside the point!'

Larry, Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

Engaging with gay people

Gathering views from lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the local community is a good way of learning what local people think about how health services are run. Individuals and community groups are well placed to understand the needs of gay people in the area and to make suggestions about how to improve healthcare services.

NHS organisations that consult local lesbian, gay and bisexual people about the issues that affect them send a clear message that the organisation is serious about improving healthcare services for gay people.

The best organisations:

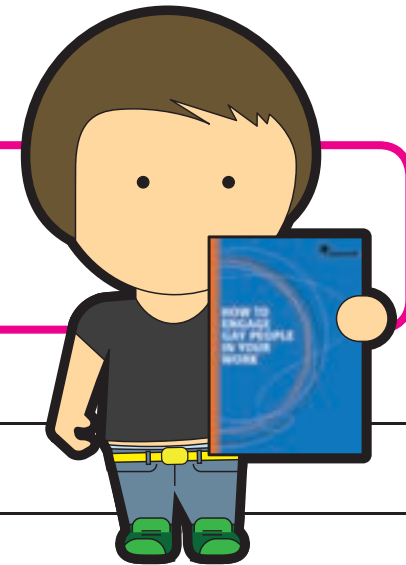
- Hold regular meetings with a patient advisory group, made up of local people with relevant expertise
- Conduct open public meetings, online forums and internet surveys to gather a wider range of views
- Consult lesbian, gay and bisexual staff about the obstacles they encounter in accessing healthcare, since they are likely to use NHS services too
- Report back any changes that have been made as a result of community engagement

'Consultation needs to be meaningful and not disappear into a void. It has to be a two way street. If we give our opinions we need to know they're taken seriously and receive feedback.'

Graham, How to Engage Gay People in your Work

See Stonewall's guide on **How to engage gay people in your work.**

See case studies on page 36



Asking patients if they are gay

It's important that lesbian, gay and bisexual people can be open about their sexual orientation with staff. Patients who feel comfortable telling staff they are gay are much more likely to be honest about aspects of their lifestyle that may have an impact on their health. Health professionals need to know when it's appropriate to try and find out someone's sexual orientation and how to do so sensitively – they mustn't just assume that gay patients will automatically open up to them.

Training can give staff the confidence to ask patients about their sexual orientation, and enable them to put patients at ease about giving an honest answer.

The best organisations:

- Train staff on why patients' sexual orientation may be relevant to the care they receive
- Train staff to explain to patients why the patient's sexual orientation may be relevant to the care they receive
- Train health practitioners to avoid making assumptions or asking inappropriate questions
- Train staff how to ask open-ended questions, such as "Have you got a partner?" rather than "Are you married?"
- Train healthcare staff to acknowledge when a patient tells them they are gay
- Display clear policies on confidentiality and non-discrimination which explicitly mention sexual orientation
- Put up posters with images of same-sex couples and healthcare messages that are relevant to gay people

'Despite being out to almost everyone I know, and comfortable with my sexuality, I still can feel unsettled and intimidated by questions relating to my sexual history that automatically relate to heterosexuality.'

Eva, Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey

Collecting patient data on sexual orientation

Without accurate information about how many lesbian, gay and bisexual people use healthcare services, and how they use them, it's difficult for NHS organisations to know exactly if, or how they need to improve. Monitoring the sexual orientation of patients on confidential user satisfaction surveys or through complaints procedures is a good way of finding out who is using a particular service and what they think of the service. Over time this can also help organisations to identify whether the work they're doing around sexual orientation equality has led to any significant improvements, and to target areas where further work may be needed. To begin with return rates will be low, this is normal. Organisations say it can take up to five years to get to 6 per cent declaration rate.

Monitoring exercises should be carried out alongside work to make gay patients feel more confident about health organisations. Patients are unlikely to answer the question honestly if they think an organisation doesn't take the issue seriously.

Top organisations:

- Explain clearly that the data is being collected to improve services
- Assure patients that their personal data will be held in confidence and treated sensitively
- Provide training to staff on how to ask the question sensitively and how to encourage people to respond
- State that answering the question is optional
- Do something as a result and tell people what they've done

'Monitoring of sexual orientation by health services would help identify ongoing needs of gay and bisexual men and the planning of services to meet those needs.'

Harvey, Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

Action plan for improving services for lesbian, gay and bisexual patients

Issue	Goal	Getting started	Maintaining momentum	Developing further	Achieving excellence
Health needs	<i>Your services meet the health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people</i>	When designing services your organisation uses health inequalities evidence which includes sexual orientation	Staff understand that lesbian, gay and bisexual people have a range of health needs and are able to provide relevant information	Specialist staff have in-depth knowledge and understanding of relevant health needs	Local patient data is used to inform local needs assessments Your organisation has audited care pathways for sexual orientation impact and actioned any issues Your organisation reports in Quality Accounts (or similar) lesbian, gay and bisexual health data
Patient monitoring	<i>Your organisation uses sexual orientation monitoring data to improve access, outcomes and experience</i>	Clear confidentiality policies are in place to reassure patients	Your organisation has identified a range of clinical and non-clinical areas where monitoring can be implemented	Your organisation can monitor complaints by sexual orientation and act on issues that arise, and has IT systems in place to do so	Your organisation regularly surveys patients on their experience, breaking down results by sexual orientation, to improve services
Consulting, engaging & communications	<i>Your organisation targets, supports and engages the local lesbian, gay and bisexual community</i>	Your organisation's communications have a specific section on sexual orientation	Your comments, feedback and other forms are monitored by sexual orientation and encourage feedback from gay people	Your organisation is visible and active within lesbian, gay and bisexual communities	Your organisation routinely engages with lesbian, gay and bisexual people to inform service design and progress and impact is assessed
Encouraging disclosure	<i>Lesbian, gay and bisexual patients feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation</i>	Your organisation has a visible zero-tolerance approach to homophobia	Staff are encouraged and trained to acknowledge disclosure and to put patients at ease	Your organisation has visible messages on confidentiality and what data will be used for	Your organisation has sexual orientation as a field on all patient records and sexual orientation declaration rates improve year on year
Health promotion	<i>Health information is relevant and targeted at the gay community</i>	Your organisation considers how messages will be received by lesbian, gay and bisexual people	Your services consider how messages can be targeted, for example using same-sex images	You've done an audit and identified which services might need to be targeted at lesbian, gay and bisexual people	You have services which are specifically targeted at lesbian, gay and bisexual people based on Joint Strategic Needs Assessment evidence
Staff training	<i>Staff are equipped to provide a personal, tailored health service</i>	Mandatory training includes legal duties and patient policies	Your organisational training includes partner rights and staff are empowered to tackle discrimination against patients	Your organisation provides in-depth training on the different needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people	Your organisation provides training on multiple identities, unconscious bias and promotes links with other local agencies
Patient areas	<i>Patient areas are welcoming and friendly to lesbian, gay and bisexual people</i>	Your organisation has a visible zero-tolerance approach to homophobia	Your patient areas have visible images of same-sex couples and families	Your organisation regularly undertakes and promotes engagement activity within the lesbian, gay and bisexual community	Your organisation works with lesbian, gay and bisexual patients, groups and the community to make all patients areas accessible



Staff



What are the issues for lesbian, gay and bisexual NHS staff?

People are key to the performance of the NHS – their knowledge, skills and performance make sure the health service is there for everyone when they get ill. The NHS is one of the largest employers in the world, yet a significant proportion of its employees still experience discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Stonewall research has found that gay staff in the NHS continue to experience hostility and discrimination at work. This makes it harder for them to perform well in their jobs. Many hide who they are from their colleagues for fear of being bullied or not getting promoted.

Since 2003 discrimination and bullying in the workplace because of someone's sexual orientation has been unlawful – and since the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 NHS organisations have been required proactively to promote equality for their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.

Stonewall's research has found that lesbian, gay and bisexual staff who can be open about their sexual orientation at work are more likely to enjoy going to work, are more confident and are ultimately more productive.

'I was in the lab and one of my peers came in to see us and said "oh my god, I've just seen a horrific traffic accident" and we were like oh yeah that's really bad and he went "oh yeah it was just so gay, and I didn't want to look like a complete gay so I went down there and got my stethoscope out and that looks really gay but I had to do something. I just didn't want to be such a gay"'

Ronda (Medical Student), Being the Gay One

'I have heard someone say if you go into surgery, for example, that you may not want to make it widely known that you are gay because it may be a bit of a glass ceiling.'

Barbar (Final-year medical student), Being the Gay One

'If I'm not out at work, I spend more time trying to conceal my home life and therefore not concentrating on my job.'

Emily, Peak Performance

What do lesbian, gay and bisexual NHS staff want?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people working in the NHS want the same as other staff – to work in a safe environment where they can perform to the best of their ability and be valued for their hard work. But the fear of discrimination felt by many gay employees means that extra work is needed by their employers to help them feel safe and able to perform.

Employers have a legal duty to tackle discrimination in the workplace, including on the grounds of sexual orientation. For the NHS to be effective it must take bullying and harassment seriously, and send a clear message that it values all its workforce.

The thousands of lesbian, gay and bisexual people we speak to who work in the NHS have lots of ideas about what could be done significantly to improve their experience at work.

Many are very simple and cost effective – from having a senior leadership commitment to sexual orientation equality to setting up a staff network group to share information and support.

Taken together these steps can help create a working environment free from discrimination where all staff feel able to be themselves.

INFORMATION

SUPPORT



'Training is a definite issue, we should have diversity training across the board and sexual orientation is included in whatever diversity programme that is happening.'

Ronda (Medical student), Being the Gay One

'It's very important for gay people to network together and it also just relieves a sense of isolation because you may think you're the only person in the building – I know I'm not – but it still feels like I'm alone in the building. And actually, having some of that isolation relieved is like having some type of solidarity in a way.'

David (Specialist registrar in clinical oncology), Being the Gay One

'It's very, very difficult to identify gay women in the workplace... it would be quite helpful I think to know that they're there and there is someone who can share your experiences with you.'

Ronda (Medical student), Being the Gay One

'A mentor system for gay students so that you meet role models that are gay who can nurture you and provide you with an aspiration – I think a mentor system would be a great idea. Just a supportive person, so if you did need to make a complaint that there would be support there for you as well.'

Simon (Final year medical student), Being the Gay One

'I think the NHS, as an employer, has not done the things, for example the Metropolitan Police have done, say very publicly you know we're doing the best for our gay staff and our gay users...and I think a lot of big organisations have done a lot better at that.'

Olivier (General practice/Neurology), Being the Gay One

'...if you're a lawyer, for example, or you work in an accountancy firm...Deloitte for example, [people there] talk openly about civil partners, a lot of my friends work for big organisations and they seem to be treated much better and I think that the problem with the NHS is...I know for a fact that they would never remove a consultant for homophobic bullying.'

Simon (Final year medical student), Being the Gay One

The law

There are a number of laws that NHS organisations should be aware of, as they affect how lesbian, gay and bisexual staff should be treated.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act says that NHS organisations mustn't discriminate against their lesbian, gay or bisexual staff. This means the NHS can't pass someone over for promotion or appointment because they're gay. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people have been protected by the law in this way since 2003.

The law says that NHS organisations mustn't allow their staff to suffer homophobic harassment at work. This includes working in an environment that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive, even if the behaviour isn't directly targeted at the victim.

The law, does however, allow NHS organisations to take action to level the playing field for gay staff, in cases where they're under-represented in an organisation, for instance by introducing a mentoring scheme specifically for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff members. The NHS is now also allowed to select a lesbian, gay or bisexual candidate for a job or promotion if, and *only if*, they are up against another candidate who is equally qualified. This scenario will, however, be very rare, and only if there is under-representation.

NHS organisations must also take steps proactively to promote equality for their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. This is called the public sector equality duty, or the 'duty'.

It's up to NHS organisations to decide how they meet the duty, but at the very least they have to publish equality objectives, setting out what they intend to do in order to comply with the law. Stonewall's annual Workplace Equality Index supports organisations to measure their progress year on year and against other organisations in improving their workplaces for gay staff.

NHS organisations have annually to publish data which shows how they're complying with the duty. Organisations with at least 150 employees or more have to publish data that specifically relates to staff. This might for instance include workforce data about the sexual orientation of employees at different levels of the organisation.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004

The Civil Partnership Act enables same-sex couples to have their relationship legally recognised. Civil partners have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples.

NHS organisations must ensure that any employee benefits such as partner benefits, paternity or adoption leave are accessible to all staff regardless of sexual orientation. NHS organisations should actively promote these policies as applying to lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.



Since 2005 same sex couples have been able to enter civil partnerships and gain the same rights as married couples.

Gay-friendly workplace policies and practices

Having to be secretive in the workplace about who you are, including about your sexual orientation, can be a stressful experience for NHS staff and has a significant impact on how well they are able to do their job. Staff who have confidence that their workplace is gay-friendly are more likely to be open with their colleagues and managers about being gay. Research has shown that this makes them more productive, more creative and more loyal to the organisation they work for.

The best NHS organisations show that they value their gay staff by having workplace policies that take sexual orientation fully into account. Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index benchmarks organisations on sexual orientation equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. Those that earn a reputation for being gay-friendly establish themselves as role models in the health sector and can attract talented gay employees from further afield.

The best organisations:

- Have an equality and diversity policy and strategy that sets out how they intend to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the workplace
- Have a clear strategy for tackling homophobic bullying and harassment
- Make clear that employee benefits such as paternity or adoption leave apply to gay staff
- Encourage job applications from lesbian, gay and bisexual applicants, such as by advertising in the pink media or advertising on Stonewall's Proud Employers Website
- Set up a lesbian, gay and bisexual staff network
- Enter the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

'While working with the Trust I have felt able to be open about my sexual orientation. The Trust ethos is all about fairness and respect.'

Helen Ritchie, Derbyshire Community Health Services
NHS Trust, Stonewall Careers Guide

Tackling anti-gay bullying

Many lesbian, gay and bisexual NHS employees continue to be bullied and harassed by their colleagues or managers, simply for being gay. From 'jokes' and 'banter' to being excluded from team activities or outed to colleagues, anti-gay bullying and harassment severely affects employees' well-being, as well as their ability to do their job effectively. For healthcare staff this can have a knock-on effect on how well they treat their patients.

The best NHS organisations put zero-tolerance anti-bullying policies in place effectively to tackle anti-gay bullying. This enables them to increase the confidence of gay staff and retain staff for longer.

The best employers:

- Extend existing anti-bullying policies to explicitly include examples of homophobic bullying
- Make guidance available to managers on how to identify and tackle anti-gay bullying
- Tell staff what the organisation is doing to tackle anti-gay bullying
- Provide several routes for reporting complaints, so that gay staff have someone they can talk to other than their manager
- Collect data on the number of incidents of anti-gay bullying, in order to measure progress on tackling it



Communicating with staff

There's no point having gay-friendly workplace policies in place if staff don't know about them. Strong statements saying the organisation values its lesbian, gay and bisexual staff send a clear message to them that it's safe to be themselves at work, which in turn allows them to do their job more effectively.

It's also important to make it clear to all staff why lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are important to the organisation. It's particularly important that all staff are told that homophobia will not be tolerated in the workplace.

The best employers:

- Display clear messages about gay equality on posters, on staff noticeboards and in articles on the intranet or in the staff magazine
- Promote employee benefits to all staff, making clear they apply to gay staff too
- Encourage senior managers to proactively show support for initiatives designed to promote a gay-friendly workplace
- Encourage lesbian, gay and bisexual senior staff to come out in the workplace and to take an active role in offering support to other lesbian, gay and bisexual employees

'I'm comfortable being out at work – it's just not an issue. I can discuss my partner in the same way as my colleagues discuss theirs. Our CEO is out, and I think that really sends a clear message about the organisation's commitment.'

Carla Hurst, NHS Coventry, Stonewall Careers Guide



Encourage lesbian, gay and bisexual senior staff to take an active role in offering support to other lesbian, gay and bisexual employees

Training staff

Equality and diversity policies are only as good as the staff who follow them. If staff don't understand why the organisation has equality and diversity policies in place, they're unlikely to pay much attention to them. Taking the time to help staff understand why the organisation is committed to gay equality encourages staff to treat their lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues with respect.

A lot of NHS organisations already include explicit references to sexual orientation in mandatory equality and diversity training for all staff. The best organisations also provide training and support specifically for gay staff, recognising that gay staff experience additional pressures that may make it more difficult to progress in their careers.

The best organisations:

- Provide specific training for managers so they know how to support their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff
- Train staff involved in recruitment and selection, so that strong gay candidates aren't overlooked for jobs or promotions
- Make sure that appraisals systems give gay employees a fair chance, for instance by recognising any work they have done for a lesbian, gay and bisexual staff network
- Offer mentoring schemes or training courses to gay staff and encourage staff to apply for Stonewall's next generation Leadership Programme
- Measure the take-up rate of training courses amongst gay staff, to check they are developing their skills at the same rate as other employees

'Being gay and working at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital is not an issue. In fact, I was encouraged to join the staff LGBT network and I am now on the hospital's equality and diversity sub-committee. Being supported to take part in these meetings has made it an opportunity for professional development.'

Warren Hartley, Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust, Stonewall Careers Guide

Engaging gay staff

It's easy for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff to feel isolated at work if they don't feel the organisation values them for who they are. Encouraging gay staff to get involved, listening to them and taking action as a result can make gay staff more satisfied in their jobs— meaning they stay longer in the job and perform better.

Taking the time to find out what gay employees really think about their workplace is also a good way of tapping into their unique perspective. Their experiences at work may highlight issues the organisation hasn't thought of.

The best organisations:

- Set up a staff network for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees, with the support of senior managers
- Invite the network to input into new and existing workplace policies
- Encourage views from all staff about new workplace policies, to try and reach gay people who aren't out at work or who don't attend a network
- Monitor staff attitude surveys by sexual orientation to measure any differences in satisfaction between gay and heterosexual staff
- Include specific questions about sexual orientation in staff attitude surveys, such as whether staff have witnessed or experienced anti-gay bullying at work

'As a member of the LGBT network, I feel empowered within the organisation to help improve the experience of LGBT staff and patients. Our network has made a significant positive contribution and I am proud of its achievements in supporting staff and helping patients.'

Helen Lushpenko-Brown, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Stonewall Careers Guide

Staff monitoring

Knowing how many lesbian, gay and bisexual people work for an organisation provides key information about whether gay people want to work there, or whether they are having difficulties getting jobs. If NHS organisations know they have a problem encouraging gay people to work for them, they can do something about it. This can also help NHS organisations measure their progress on gay equality over time.

The best organisations collect data on the number of gay people working at different levels of the organisation, those applying for jobs or promotion, and those leaving the organisation. People don't always want to tell their employer about their sexual orientation, but there are a number of things organisations can do to encourage them to do so. To begin with return rates will be low, this is normal. Organisations say it can take up to five years to get to 6 per cent declaration rates.

The best employers:

- Carefully explain to staff why they are being asked the question, emphasising that it will lead to improvements in the workplace
- Assure staff that their personal data will be held in confidence and treated sensitively
- Ask gay staff first what they think about collecting this data and how it should be done
- Involve a gay staff network group in interpreting the data
- Take steps to tackle any problem areas revealed by the data
- Ask staff about their sexual orientation in staff attitude surveys

'We really improved our data [and] those statistics are really telling... The number of bisexuals that were declaring that they were bisexual at application stage, that went through the roof... So to see those numbers coming up, that to me is a significant sign of culture change.'

Scott Durairaj, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Action plan for improving the workplace for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff

Issue	Goal	Getting started	Maintaining momentum	Developing further	Achieving excellence
Understand the issues for staff	<i>Lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are supported in their careers</i>	All staff understand that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is unlawful Enter the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index	Your organisation has an employee network group for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff	Your organisation breaks down staff survey data by sexual orientation	Your organisation encourages lesbian, gay and bisexual staff to be involved in policy development
Recruitment and career development	<i>Your recruitment process is fair and transparent</i>	All staff involved in recruitment understand that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is unlawful	Your organisation is able to track applicants and appointments and address inequalities by sexual orientation	Your job adverts reference your commitment to sexual orientation equality and your organisation advertises in the 'pink media' such as Stonewall's Proud Employers	All sections of your workforce are representative of the local population and workforce as a whole Your organisation offers mentoring or professional development for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff
Training	<i>Sexual orientation equality is embedded in mandatory training</i>	References to sexual orientation are included in mandatory training	Your organisation has different levels of sexual orientation equality training for different staff grades	Your training encourages staff to tackle homophobic language	All staff are aware of their duties to each other and to patients
Bullying and harassment	<i>Procedures are in place to tackle and prevent homophobic bullying</i>	Your bullying and harassment policy includes specific reference to sexual orientation	All staff are aware of policies and your organisation actively promotes them	Your organisation has specific mechanisms in place for reporting homophobic bullying e.g. a named lesbian, gay and bisexual contact	Your organisation is able to break down complaints by sexual orientation and use this data to inform workforce policy
Monitoring and data	<i>Your organisation monitors staff across the employment cycle and acts on the data</i>	Your organisation has sexual orientation as a field on ESR with frequent data cleanses to address gaps	Your organisation consults with staff about monitoring processes and communicates the reasons for monitoring	Your organisation is able to break down distribution by grade and area and staff satisfaction is also broken down	Your organisation monitors across the employment cycle and sexual orientation declaration rates improve year on year. All departments are briefed on these results
Communications and engagement	<i>All staff are engaged on sexual orientation equality</i>	Your internal communications pages have specific information for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff	Your organisation has a nominated SMT/Board champion– who promotes lesbian, gay and bisexual equality	Your organisation regularly includes lesbian, gay and bisexual information in direct communications such as emails, news items, blogs	Your organisation has a communication plan focused on sexual orientation equality Efforts are made to reach all staff and action is assessed for impact
Employee policy and practice	<i>Sexual orientation equality is part of your organisation's core business</i>	You have an equality and diversity strategy which specifically includes equality objectives on sexual orientation	Your organisation has a lead or team who has equality within their remit or job role	Your organisation regularly audits workforce policies with sexual orientation in mind and these are promoted to LGB staff	Your organisation regularly reports on progress at board level All policies have been assessed for impact on equality and are updated regularly
Supplier policy	<i>Equality is embedded in the procurement cycle and suppliers are fully compliant</i>	Your commitment to equality and diversity is in the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire/ Invitation to Tender document	You require organisations to comply with your equality policy	You are able to break contracts if there are breaches in equality and diversity and staff managing contracts can recognise this	You regularly engage with current and future suppliers on best practice on sexual orientation equality and provide opportunities for training

Case studies

Many NHS organisations have begun work around sexual orientation equality in the workplace and in services, in many cases building on work they've already been doing around race, disability and gender. These case studies demonstrate some of the many ways in which workplaces and services across the country have been improved for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff and patients.

Staff networks

Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust has an active lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff network with over 75 members. The group regularly promotes dignity, respect and anti-discriminatory practices at network events across the Trust. The Forum is championed by an Executive Director who regularly meets with and supports the network in setting objectives and undertaking work. The group meets every two months to share information and provide support.

The network uses social media to share messages and stay in touch with members. A safe, secure and confidential email address is also available for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff who may have concerns about how they're treated or need support from the network leadership. The network is visible across the Trust and promotes itself to all staff in patient areas, on computer screensavers and the intranet. The network proactively collaborates with other, local LGBT networks at neighbouring hospitals.

Staff monitoring

North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust collects monitoring data on the sexual orientation of staff throughout the employment cycle, including at application, shortlisting, promotion and exit, as well as monitoring the sexual orientation of staff who make a claim of bullying or harassment.

The Trust identified from this monitoring data that it was receiving a large number of complaints of bullying and harassment from lesbian, gay and bisexual people in one particular area within the Trust. In response the Trust developed a Dignity at Work policy that made clear that homophobic bullying would not be tolerated and recruited Dignity at Work officers

to support staff experiencing incidents of bullying and harassment. Subsequently, the Trust's annual staff survey showed there had been a reduction in the numbers of staff who had experienced this discrimination.

The Trust also wanted to increase the number of people responding to the monitoring exercises. A letter and monitoring form was sent out by the Chief Executive to all staff at their payslip addresses. The letter asked staff to provide their monitoring information, including their sexual orientation, and explained that the information was being collected in order to ensure that there were no avoidable barriers to employment or progression within the Trust. The letter emphasised that all data would be treated with the strictest confidence.

After completing the exercise, the percentage of staff declaring their sexual orientation rose by over 30 per cent.



See Stonewall's guide on Monitoring

Staff communications

Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has issued every member of staff with a guide on 'Inclusive workplaces'. The guide includes information and support on coming out in the workplace and reporting homophobic bullying, and an accompanying manager's guide complements this by including information on how to support someone coming out at work.

At the same time the Trust launched an anti-bullying and harassment campaign called Respect. Framed posters are in every communal area, including reception areas, staff rooms, consulting rooms and, where appropriate, bedrooms. Easy-read versions have also been distributed to each of the Trust's learning disability services.

Messages around promoting lesbian, gay and bisexual equality are regularly promoted to all staff by the Deputy Chief Executive, who is also the Trust's Executive Director for Quality and Safety. This has included writing out to all staff explaining the importance of equality training, including around sexual orientation issues, and being featured in Nursing Times talking about the Trust's work during LGBT history month. ▶



Staff communications: Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has launched an anti-bullying and harassment campaign called Respect and issued every member of staff with a guide on 'Inclusive workplaces'.

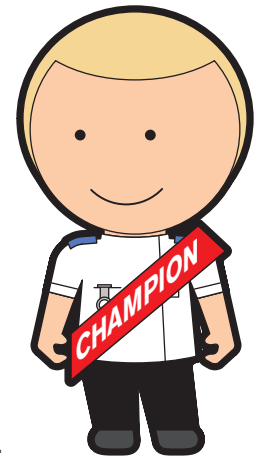


Staff and patient communications: Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust runs a campaign called 'Expect Respect', which focuses on bullying and harassment with specific posters and resources for different types of bullying

Visible role models

Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust's Matron for Medical Services is a highly visible openly-gay figure across the Trust. Since attending the Stonewall Leadership Programme he has visibly promoted messages around lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the Trust, including becoming a champion for lesbian, gay and bisexual issues within the Trust's Equality and Diversity Group.

With this staff member's active participation, the Trust has set up a confidential staff telephone line and email address for staff members to talk about any aspect of sexual orientation. This complements the informal support he had previously offered to gay staff members.



Staff and patient communications

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust runs a campaign called 'Expect Respect', which focuses on bullying and harassment with specific posters and resources for different types of bullying. The campaign was introduced in response to findings from the annual staff survey which found that 21 per cent of the staff had experienced some form of bullying and harassment, either from other staff or from service users.

The Trust decided to re-write its Dignity at Work policies to make them more robust and at the same time introduced an equivalent policy for service users. The Trust met with LGB service users and as a result made a number of amendments to the way in which the policy was worded and how it was communicated to users, including a 'normalisation programme' to ensure that images of gay people were featured across all of the Trust's publications, not just on the equality pages. The posters were put up in every ward, department and patient area, and pop-up banners were moved around between different reception areas and patient waiting areas. The images were also used for a number of months on staff screensavers. This was further supported by Dignity at Work theatrical training delivered to all managers.

Following the introduction of the 'Expect Respect' campaign, the Trust found that the number of staff saying that they had experienced harassment or abuse because of their sexual orientation had halved.

Patient monitoring

Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust has implemented patient monitoring across a range of services. To encourage disclosure patients are given a sheet and asked to point to the answer that best describes their sexual orientation. Easy-read versions have been developed for patients who require them. Healthcare staff then enter the response into the Trust's electronic patient information system, and explain to patients that the information will be held confidentially.

As well as improving disclosure from patients, this method has also given healthcare staff the confidence to ask patients about their sexual orientation, many of whom were previously reluctant to do so. Training has been provided on how to ask the question sensitively and senior staff at the Trust have written to all staff emphasising the importance of asking the question.

Patient communications

Leeds Partnership NHS Foundation Trust runs a poster campaign across the organisation called 'Gay OK?' The posters feature images of same-sex couples in front of well-known Leeds landmarks, and advertise the service as gay-friendly. Some of the posters feature older gay people and are displayed around the Trust's older people's patient areas, while posters featuring younger gay couples are placed in general adult wards. The Trust used the opportunity of advertising for models to raise awareness of the campaign in the local press.

The campaign was introduced in response to research conducted by the Trust which found that lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Leeds perceived local health services to be homophobic and judgemental. Since the posters have gone up, feedback from both staff and service users has indicated that they feel it's been a good way to raise awareness.

Patient engagement

Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust conducted and co-funded a piece of community research in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council called 'LGBT voice counts', a Hertfordshire based community survey looking at the health and social care needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the local area.

The questionnaire was advertised using posters and staff were encouraged to conduct it one on one with patients. The Trust followed up the survey with a series of community focus groups for LGB and T people, using local networks and social media to recruit participants.

The research identified that a significant number of participants had experienced long-term mental health problems, but did not feel that services were open to lesbian, gay and bisexual people. In response the Trust has undertaken a programme of work, in collaboration with other public services in Hertfordshire, to make local services more accessible to gay people. This has included ensuring that the Trust's performance is measured against how well services cater to the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and that local lesbian, gay and bisexual people continue to be involved in decision-making.

Targeted services

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust employs an LGB&T specific Teen to Adult Personal Advisor (TAPA) worker, working on a permanent basis within the Child Adolescent Mental Health Service. The role was introduced in response to local research which found high levels of poor mental and emotional health within the local lesbian, gay and bisexual community. The Trust decided to develop early intervention and access services, rather than treating people once their mental health had significantly deteriorated.

The role is to engage with young people who may be in the process of identifying themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual and require emotional support. A drop-in service is run at a LGB&T Youth Centre, enabling young people to talk about problems they are experiencing on an informal basis. Referrals are also made from adult mental health services, youth agencies and a local sexual health clinic.

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust runs a dedicated clinic specifically for younger gay and bisexual men, the GUYS@Mary's Clinic. The clinic offers free and confidential sexual health screening, vaccinations and advice, and all staff are trained to ensure high quality care is provided in a non-judgmental manner.

The clinic materials reassure gay and bisexual men that they will be welcomed and respected. The clinic conducts regular patient satisfaction

surveys, which have identified that many men choose the service on the basis that they know it will be gay friendly. Clinic surveys have also found that all patients attending the service feel it meets the aim of being gay-friendly.

Staff working in generic sexual health services also undergo a comprehensive education programme covering lesbian, gay and bisexual health issues. This includes using appropriate language when taking a patient's history, such as asking about recent sexual activity with a partner rather than with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

The Trust has pages of its website dedicated to the needs of gay men, bisexuals and lesbians, and raises awareness of the GUYS@Mary's Clinic in gay media, at Pride events and through outreach work in bars and clubs.

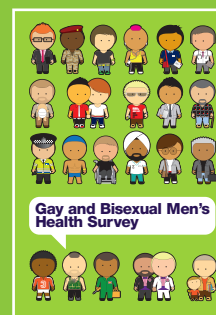
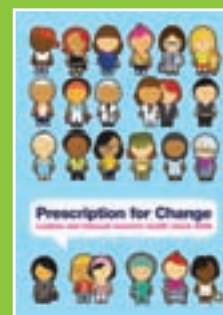
Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust runs a drugs and sexual health clinic, the Health Shop, which caters to the needs of men who have sex with men, and women who have sex with women. It offers sexual health and blood-borne virus screening, hepatitis B vaccinations and free condoms, lube and dental dams. The clinic provides practical support and a clinical psychology service for people who may have issues with their sexuality, such as coming out within different ethnic communities or coming to terms with being gay having been married for a long time.

The Health Shop is able to provide pregnancy testing and family planning support for same-sex couples trying for children. This includes making referrals for antenatal care, and directing clients to LGBT parent support groups.

The clinic also provides drug-related harm reduction such as needle exchange, anabolic steroid advice clinic and advice/support to those using ketamine. The clinic signposts patients to other services, such as gay friendly GPs, and housing services for gay people who have recently come out and been made homeless.

The clinic is actively involved with health promotion within the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and offers a wide range of leaflets and information aimed at or that cater to the needs identified by lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Clinic staff regularly promote the clinic at Pride events and in the local gay press, as well as in local universities and colleges.

Further resources



Healthy Lives

For more NHS specific case-studies, best practice examples and research visit www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk

Stonewall Diversity Champions programme

Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum through which major employers work with Stonewall and each other on sexual orientation issues to promote diversity in the workplace.

www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs

Workplace Equality Index

The Workplace Equality Index is Stonewall's comprehensive annual benchmarking exercise that showcases Britain's top employers for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.

www.stonewall.org.uk/wei

The Stonewall Leadership Programme

The Stonewall Leadership Programme supports personal development by providing a unique space to look at questions around sexual orientation and authenticity and how these can be used to develop an individual's leadership abilities.

www.stonewall.org.uk/leadership

Stonewall publications

All Stonewall publications cited in this guide are free to download from

www.stonewall.org.uk/publications

For hard copies of any of these publications visit

www.stonewall.org.uk/resources

Sexual Orientation

A guide with action plans for the NHS

