

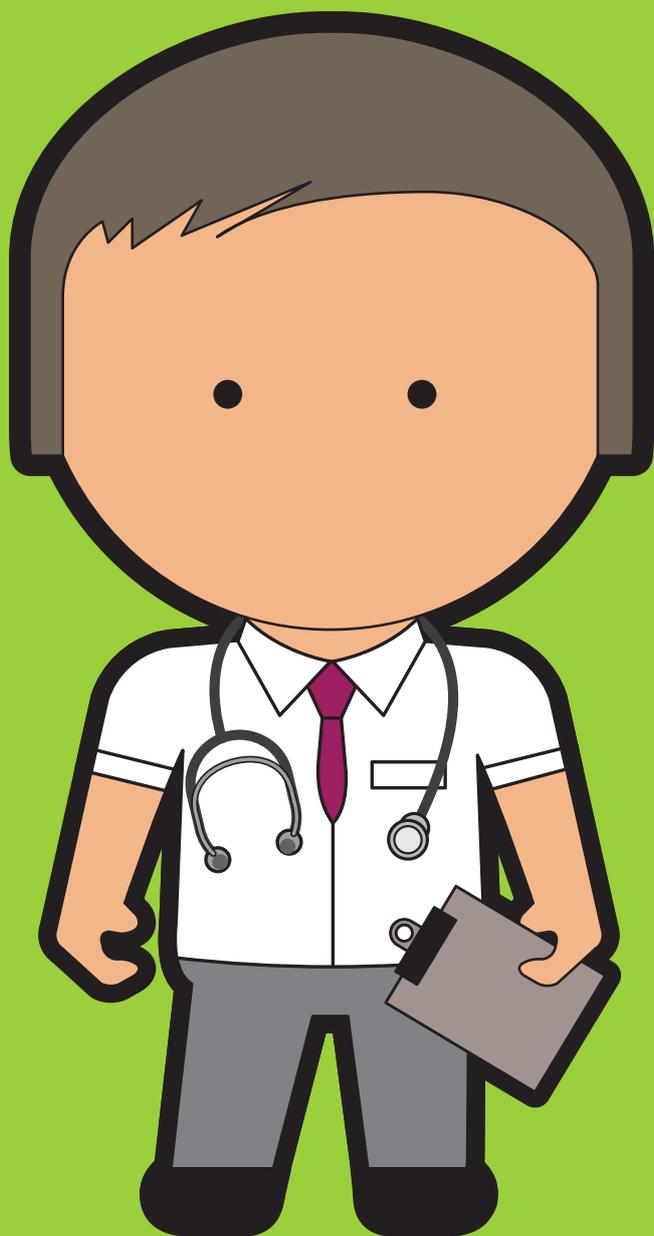


# Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey



# Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

by April Guasp



Survey results analysed  
by Sigma Research

## Introduction

With 6,861 respondents from across Britain, this is the largest survey ever conducted of gay and bisexual men's health needs in the world. However, it demonstrates that many of those needs are not being met and that there are areas of significant concern – most particularly in mental health and drug use – that have been overlooked by health services which too often focus solely on gay men's sexual health.

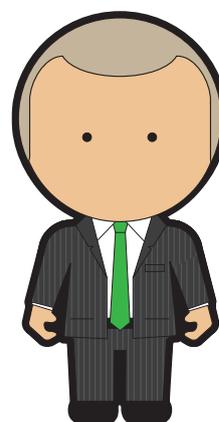
This report also provides hard evidence that gay and bisexual men nationwide are more likely to attempt suicide, self-harm and have depression than their straight peers. They are also more likely to smoke, drink and take illegal drugs. It ill-serves our gay and bisexual communities when these uncomfortable truths are ignored.

Patients accessing healthcare should be confident that they'll be treated compassionately, confidentially and with complete openness. But this pioneering research reveals that for many gay and bisexual men in Britain this is simply not the case.

These men feel demonstrably neglected by a healthcare system that now has a legal duty to treat everyone equally. Respondents told us that they can't talk openly to GPs and other healthcare workers and they are too often anxious that their confidentiality will not be protected. This lack of trust has a material impact on whether gay and bisexual men take advice on health issues and access appropriate testing and monitoring services.

These findings send a stark message that Britain's health services need to rethink how they approach many of their patients. We hope they will rise to that challenge.

**Ben Summerskill**  
Chief Executive



## Contents

- P04** Key findings
- P06** Smoking, alcohol and drugs
- P08** General fitness and exercise
- P09** Mental health
- P12** Eating disorders and body image
- P14** Domestic abuse
- P16** Cancer and common male health problems
- P18** Sexual health and HIV
- P20** Discrimination in healthcare
- P24** What good service looks like
- P26** Recommendations
- P30** The study



## Key findings

### Smoking, alcohol and drugs

- ‡ **Two thirds** of gay and bisexual men have smoked at some time in their life compared to half of men in general
- ‡ **A quarter** of gay and bisexual men currently smoke compared to 22 per cent of men in general
- ‡ **More than two in five** (42 per cent) gay and bisexual men drink alcohol on three or more days a week compared to 35 per cent of men in general
- ‡ **Half** of gay and bisexual men have taken drugs in the last year compared to just one in eight men in general

### General fitness and exercise

- ‡ **Over half** of gay and bisexual men have a normal body mass index (BMI) compared to under a third of men in general. Just **44 per cent** of gay and bisexual men are overweight or obese compared to 70 per cent of men in general
- ‡ However, **one in four** gay and bisexual men report being in fair or bad health compared to one in six men in general
- ‡ Despite being more likely to have a normal BMI, just **a quarter** (25 per cent) of gay and bisexual men meet recommendations for 30 minutes or more of exercise five times or more per week compared to 39 per cent of men in general

### Mental health

- ‡ In the last year, **three per cent** of gay men and **five per cent** of bisexual men have attempted to take their own life. Just 0.4 per cent of men in general attempted to take their own life in the same period
- ‡ **One in sixteen** (six per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 24 have attempted to take their own life in the last year. Less than one per cent of men in general aged 16 to 24 have attempted to take their own life in the same period
- ‡ **One in fourteen** gay and bisexual men deliberately harmed themselves in the last year compared to just 1 in 33 men in general who have ever harmed themselves
- ‡ **One in six** (15 per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 24 have harmed themselves in the last year compared to seven per cent of men in general aged 16 to 24 who have ever deliberately harmed themselves

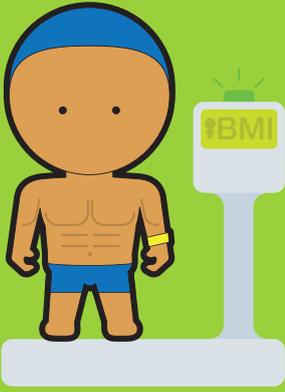
### Eating disorders and body image

- ‡ **Almost half** of gay and bisexual men worry about the way they look and wish they could think about it less
- ‡ **One in five** gay and bisexual men have had problems with their weight or eating at some time
- ‡ **Thirteen per cent** of gay and bisexual men have had a problem with their weight or eating in the last year compared to four per cent of men in general
- ‡ **Two thirds** of gay and bisexual men who have had a problem with their weight or eating have never sought help from a healthcare professional

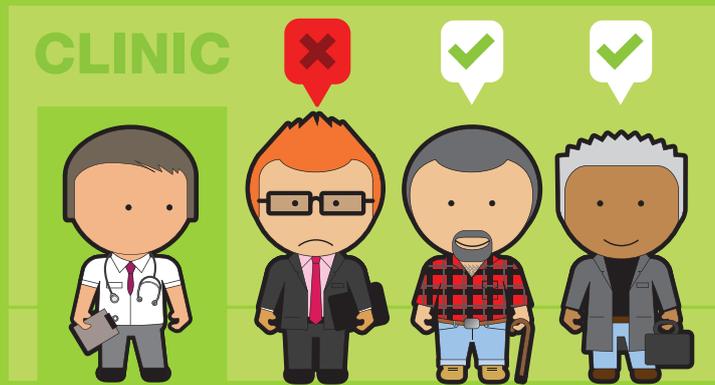


**One in six** gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 24 have harmed themselves in the last year





**Over half** of gay and bisexual men have a normal body mass index



**A third** of gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation

## Domestic abuse

- ‡ **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 compared to 17 per cent of men in general
- ‡ **More than a third** of gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse in a relationship with a man
- ‡ **Almost one in four** gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse from a family member, for example mother or father, since the age of 16
- ‡ **Four in five** gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police. Of those who did report, **more than half** were not happy with how the police dealt with the situation

## Cancer and common male health problems

- ‡ Just **a third** of gay and bisexual men check their testicles monthly as recommended as a preventative measure against testicular cancer
- ‡ Just **one in ten** gay and bisexual men have ever discussed prostate or bowel cancer with a healthcare professional and only **three per cent** have ever discussed lung cancer
- ‡ **Almost nine in ten** gay and bisexual men have never discussed heart disease with a healthcare professional. **Four in five** have never discussed high blood pressure or high cholesterol with a healthcare professional

## Sexual health and HIV

- ‡ **One in four** gay and bisexual men have never been tested for any sexually transmitted infection
- ‡ **Three in ten** gay and bisexual men have never had an HIV test in spite of early diagnosis now being a public health priority

## Discrimination in healthcare

- ‡ **A third** of gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation
- ‡ **A third** of gay and bisexual men are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals. Gay and bisexual men are more likely to be out to their manager, work colleagues, family and friends than their GP

## What good service looks like

- ‡ **More than a quarter** of gay and bisexual men said their healthcare professional acknowledged they were gay or bisexual after they had come out and just **one in eight** were told that their partner was welcome to be present during a consultation
- ‡ **Only a quarter** of gay and bisexual men said that healthcare workers had given them information relevant to their sexual orientation
- ‡ **Only one in five** said that their GP surgery displayed a policy stating that they would not discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation and just **two in five** gay and bisexual men said their GP had a clear policy on confidentiality



# 1 Smoking, alcohol and drugs

While smoking and alcohol consumption among gay and bisexual men is broadly similar to men in general, illegal drug use is much higher.

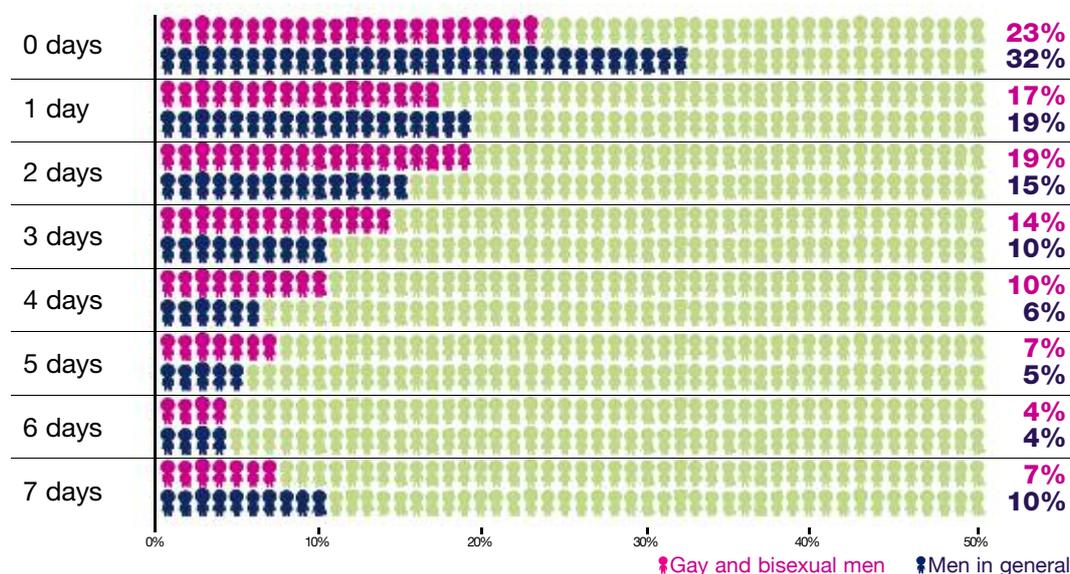
## Smoking

**Two thirds** (67 per cent) of gay and bisexual men have smoked at some time in their life compared to half of men in general who have smoked. **A quarter** (26 per cent) of gay and bisexual men currently smoke compared to 22 per cent of men in general.

## Alcohol

**Eight in ten** (78 per cent) gay and bisexual men had a drink in the last week compared to seven in ten (68 per cent) men in general. **More than two in five** (42 per cent) gay and bisexual men drank alcohol on three or more days in the previous week compared to 35 per cent of men in general.

### On how many days out of the last seven did you drink alcohol?



*'Gay men's culture seems to revolve around getting pissed as often as possible which often then seems to lead to increased drug and tobacco use as well as increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and violence.'*

**Carl, 27, North West**

*'I've drunk until ill.'*

**Duncan, 19, Scotland**

**One in five** (19 per cent) gay and bisexual men have been drunk or hung over while working, going to school or taking care of other responsibilities more than once in the last six months. **One in seven** (13 per cent) have missed or were late for work, school or other activities because they were drinking or hung over more than once in the last six months. **One in twenty five** (four per cent) have drunk alcohol even though a doctor suggested they stop drinking. Just **two per cent** have ever sought help or advice from a healthcare professional about problems with drinking.

*'It's difficult to find other gay men unless you go clubbing or pubbing and so much of gay socialising involves alcohol and often drugs.'*

**John, 40, London**



## Drugs

P07

**Half** (51 per cent) of gay and bisexual men have taken drugs in the last year compared to just 12 per cent of men in general.

In the last year, **one in six** (15 per cent) gay and bisexual men have taken cocaine compared to four per cent of men in general. **One in nine** (11 per cent) gay and bisexual men have taken ecstasy in the last year compared to just two per cent of men in general. **One in twelve** (eight per cent) gay and bisexual men have taken ketamine and mephedrone in the last year compared to one per cent of men in general.

In the last year, **four per cent** of gay and bisexual men have taken amphetamines, GHB and tranquilizers compared to one per cent or less of men in general. **Two per cent** have taken crystal meth in the last year compared to less than one per cent of men in general.

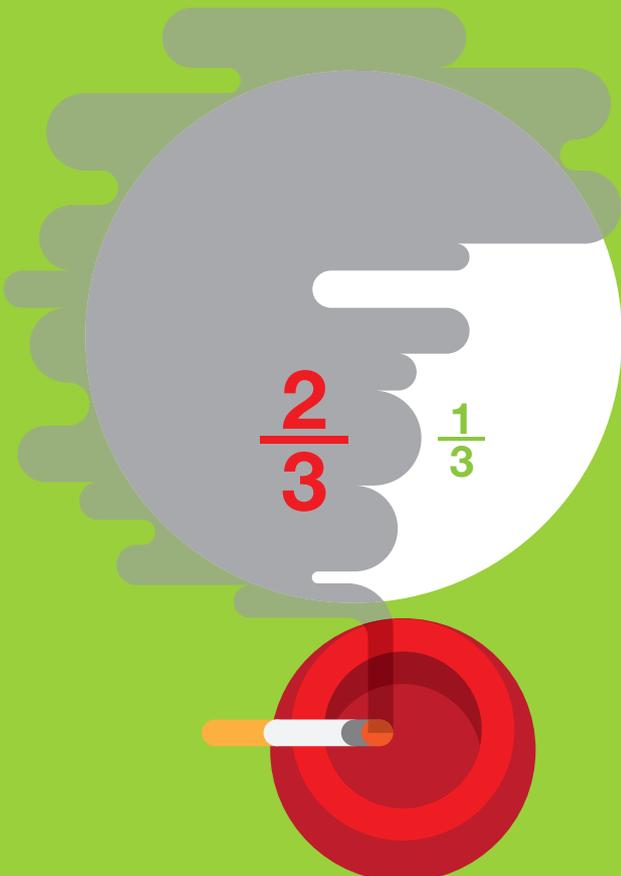
**Two in ten** (21 per cent) gay and bisexual men have used cannabis in the last year, compared to nine per cent of men in general. **Three in ten** (31 per cent) gay and bisexual men have taken amyl nitrate (poppers) in the last year compared to just two per cent of men in general.

*'Drug abuse has been common in my life since coming out and I find it particularly common within the gay scene.'*

**Gareth, 22, Wales**

*'More should be done to get gay men to stop smoking and taking drugs. I don't do either but it seems a lot of gay men seem to depend on it or do it almost as part of the stereotype.'*

**Andy, 31, London**



**Two thirds** of gay and bisexual men have smoked at some time in their life



**Eight in ten** gay and bisexual men have had a drink in the last week



**Half** of gay and bisexual men have taken drugs in the last year



## 2 General fitness and exercise

Despite being more likely to have a normal body mass index (BMI), gay and bisexual men are less likely than men in general to meet recommended levels of exercise.

Gay and bisexual men are less likely than men in general to be overweight or obese. **Over half** of gay and bisexual men have a normal BMI compared to under a third of men in general. Just **44 per cent** of gay and bisexual men are overweight or obese compared to 70 per cent of men in general.

### Body Mass Index



However, gay and bisexual men are less likely than men in general to think their health is good or very good. **Seventy six per cent** of gay and bisexual men said their health is good or very good compared to 82 per cent of men in general. **One in four** (24 per cent) gay and bisexual men report being in fair or bad health compared to one in six (17 per cent) men in general.

Just **a quarter** (25 per cent) of gay and bisexual men meet recommendations for 30 minutes or more of exercise five times or more per week compared to 39 per cent of men in general.



# 3 Mental health

*'My biggest threat is my mental and emotional health.'*

Dennis, 28, London

*'I feel the mental health of gay men can sometimes be overlooked.'*

Seb, 32, Scotland

Worryingly, gay and bisexual men are far more likely to have attempted to take their own lives than men in general. Rates of depression, anxiety and self-harm are also much higher among gay and bisexual men, than men in general.

## Suicide

In the last year, **three per cent** of gay men have attempted to take their own life. This increases to **five per cent** for bisexual men and to **five per cent** for black and minority ethnic gay and bisexual men. In the same period, 0.4 per cent of all men attempted to take their own life.

**One in ten** (ten per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 19 have attempted to take their own life in the last year. **One in sixteen** (six per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 24 have attempted to take their own life in the last year. In the same period, 0.7 per cent of all men aged 16 to 24 have attempted to take their own life.

In the last year, **27 per cent** of gay men thought about taking their own life even if they would not do it. This increases to **38 per cent** for bisexual men and **35 per cent** for black and minority ethnic gay and bisexual men. Just four per cent of men in general thought about taking their own life in the last year.

**Half** (50 per cent) of gay and bisexual men said they have felt life was not worth living compared to 17 per cent of men in general. **Almost half** (46 per cent) of gay and bisexual men who have felt this way did so in the last year.

*'I have tried to hang myself. I have also swallowed cleaning fluid.'*

Gary, 25, South West

*'There was a lot of homophobia in my family. I was around 16 and knew I was gay. When my father was drunk he told me that if I ever came out he would pretend to respect me yet would be always laughing at me behind my back. It was comments like those that made me so disgusted with who I was that I was suicidal for a lot of my youth and I suffered mental issues that only now are starting to be resolved as I grow older and more proud of who I am.'*

Kevin, 20, Scotland



One in ten gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 19 attempted to take their own life in the last year



## Depression and anxiety

**One in seven** (13 per cent) gay and bisexual men are currently experiencing moderate to severe levels of mixed depression and anxiety. Seven per cent of men in general are at any one time experiencing mixed anxiety and depressive disorders. A further **nine per cent** of gay and bisexual men are experiencing moderate to severe depression with mild or no anxiety compared to two per cent of men in general. A further **four per cent** of gay and bisexual men are experiencing moderate to severe anxiety with mild or no depression.

*'I've been suffering from depression due to bullying since I was 15. I've been on prescribed medication since then and still feel that there is little help out there.'*

**Charlie, 22, London**

*'I have been continually bullied at work through a variety of jobs because of my sexuality. I believe that this has had a detrimental effect on my mental health.'*

**Diego, 42, North East**

*'Loneliness is a problem for older gays especially when living in rural and remote areas which can lead to mental health issues.'*

**Evan, 72, Wales**



**One in seven** gay and bisexual men are currently experiencing moderate to severe levels of mixed depression and anxiety



**One in fourteen** gay and bisexual men deliberately harmed themselves in the last year



**Almost one in four** gay and bisexual men who have self-harmed in the last year have swallowed pills or objects



## Self-harm

**One in fourteen** (seven per cent) gay and bisexual men deliberately harmed themselves in the last year, which included cutting themselves or swallowing pills or objects. Just 1 in 33 (three per cent) men in general have ever deliberately harmed themselves.

**One in five** (21 per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 19 have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year. **One in six** (15 per cent) gay and bisexual men aged 16 to 24 have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year. Seven per cent of men in general aged 16 to 24 have ever deliberately harmed themselves.

Rates of self-harm are also higher among bisexual men; **eleven per cent** of bisexual men have self-harmed in the last year.

*'I've punched, bit, pinched myself and pulled my hair out.'*

**Ed, 16, South West**

*'I've tried to break bones.'*

**Nick, 41, North East**

*'Banging my head off a wall and biting myself until I bleed.'*

**Ian, 20, Scotland**

**Three in five** (59 per cent) gay and bisexual men who have self-harmed in the last year have cut themselves and **almost one in four** (23 per cent) have swallowed pills or objects. **One in six** (16 per cent) have burned themselves. Respondents also said they have bit or scratched themselves and punched themselves or objects.

Gay and bisexual men also said that mental health services often failed to recognise their needs.

*'My therapist made a point of telling me he was straight after I came out to him and then ignored the issue completely even though I wanted to talk about it.'*

**Neil, 32, Scotland**

*'I told my GP that I was very depressed and feeling suicidal due to past lost love, work-related stress, very low self-esteem. I told him I was gay when he asked me if I had a girlfriend. He then said I should have an HIV test as HIV could bring on depression. He assumed that I had not already tested and he assumed that gay equals infection.'*

**Lee, 55, London**

*'I was offered group therapy with a bunch of straight strangers, but on the understanding that "some of my issues may be too difficult to talk about in a group setting".'*

**Omar, 43, London**

*'My doctor wouldn't acknowledge the other problems that were contributing to my depression and seemed to presume it was entirely due to my difficulty in coming out and lack of gay friends.'*

**Spencer, 21, Scotland**



## 4 Eating disorders and body image

A worrying number of gay and bisexual men report issues with eating disorders and the way they feel about their body.

### Eating disorders

**Nearly a third** (31 per cent) of gay and bisexual men said they worry a lot about the way they eat and wish they could think about it less. **One in five** (21 per cent) gay and bisexual men have had or have been told they have problems with their weight or eating at some time.

**One in seven** (13 per cent) gay and bisexual men have had a problem with their weight or eating in the last year compared to four per cent of men in general.

**Twenty per cent** of gay and bisexual men who have ever had a problem with eating said they had anorexia, **11 per cent** said they had bulimia and **40 per cent** said they would binge eat.

**One in four** (24 per cent) gay and bisexual men often feel that they can't control what or how much they eat. Within the last three months, **one in nine** (11 per cent) have deliberately fasted or not eaten for 24 hours and **1 in 25** (four per cent) have made themselves vomit in order to lose weight.

**Two thirds** (66 per cent) of gay and bisexual men who have had a problem with their weight or eating have never sought help from a healthcare professional.

*'I starve myself and over-exercise to an extreme level.'*

**Will, 19, East of England**

*'I'm sick of everyone assuming that HIV is the only thing we need to be worrying about - mental health and body dysmorphia are bigger issues most of the time for us I would imagine.'*

**Ricky, 29, London**

### Body image

**Almost half** (45 per cent) of gay and bisexual men worry about the way they look and wish they could think about it less.

**One in three** (32 per cent) gay and bisexual men have had or been told they have problems with the way they feel about their body. **More than three in four** (77 per cent) of those have never sought help from a healthcare professional.

*'I feel there is still a lot of pressure on gay men to be thin and attractive, especially from other gay people.'*

**Derek, 25, Scotland**

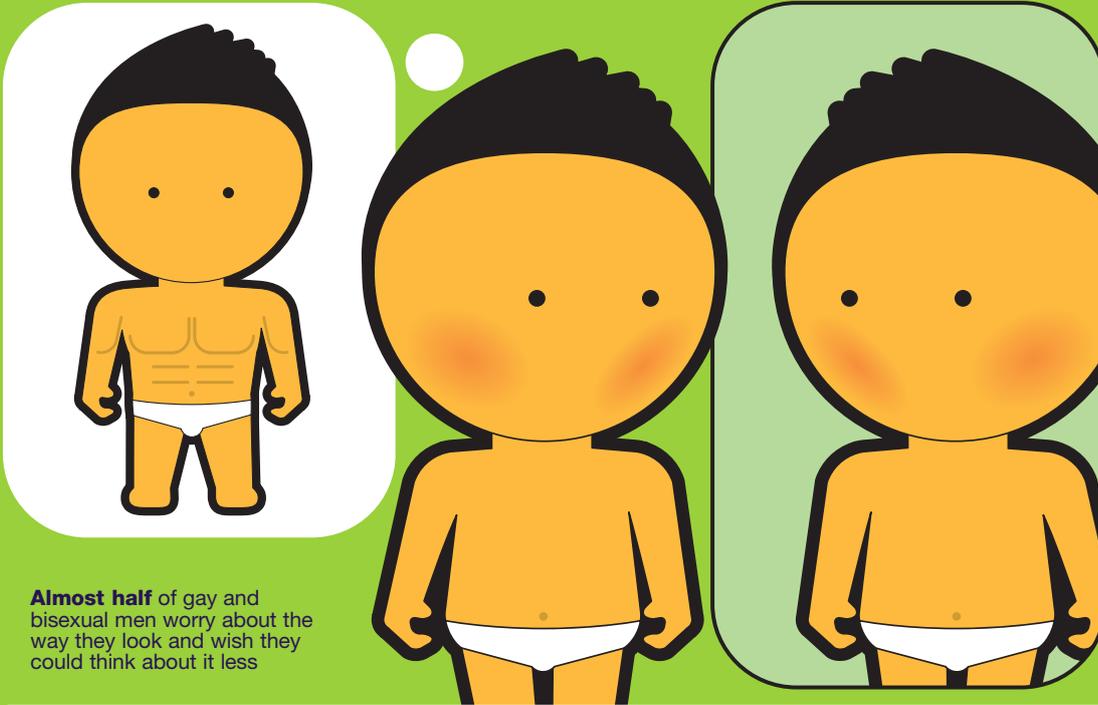
*'There is an expected way to look these days - 'fit' is defined as wearing tight tops and doing drugs. I am none of these.'*

**Glyn, 41, Wales**

*'I think that elements of gay culture have a seriously damaging effect on self-esteem, particularly in relation to physical appearance and 'desirability'. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies.'*

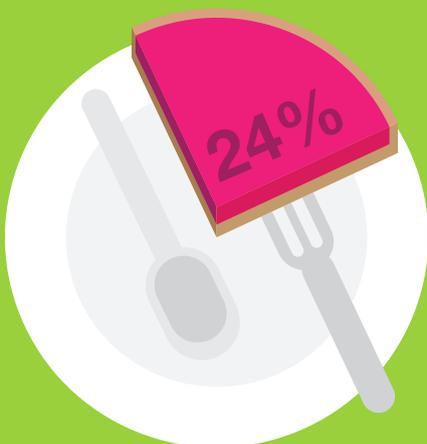
**Linton, 36, London**



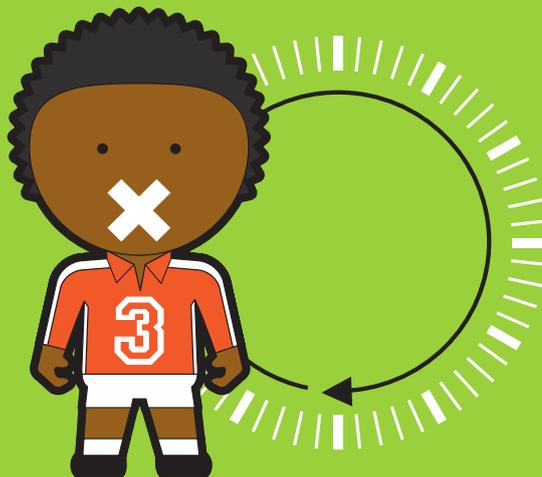


**Almost half** of gay and bisexual men worry about the way they look and wish they could think about it less

**Nearly a third** of gay and bisexual men said they worry a lot about the way they eat and wish they could think about it less



**One in four** gay and bisexual men often feel that they can't control what or how much they eat



**One in nine** have deliberately fasted or not eaten for 24 hours



## 5 Domestic abuse

A greater number 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 than both men and women in general.

*'I went to the GP because I was having a hard time with an abusive partner. They said they didn't have the experience and just suggested I sought help within the gay community. Looking back now I realise that the issues involved in an abusive relationship are the same whether you are gay or straight and that I should not have been told that they could not help because I was gay.'*

**Alastair, 47, Scotland**

**Half** (49 per cent) 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 six (17 per cent) men in general and more than one in four women in general have experienced domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16. **Forty per cent** of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse from a partner compared to 14 per cent of men in general.

**More than one in three** (37 per cent) gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse in a relationship with a man. **Almost one in four** (23 per cent) gay and bisexual men since the age of 16 have experienced domestic abuse from a family member.

*'I had a very bad relationship where I nearly lost my life.'*

**Francis, 42, London**

*'I have had emotionally and financially abusive relationships with men – most of my relationships have been like this.'*

**Desmond, 50, London**

*'I have been on the receiving end of mental abuse from a former partner.'*

**Owen, 42, Wales**

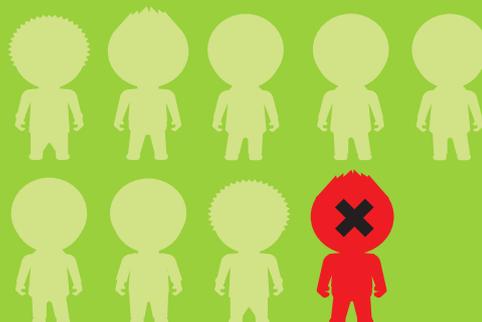
Gay and bisexual men also report that they have experienced domestic abuse from women when in a relationship with them. **One in fourteen** (seven per cent) have experienced an incident of domestic abuse in a relationship with a woman.

*'I had a relationship with a woman for eight years that towards the end grew to be very violent and unhealthy where I became the victim of abuse. I had to walk away.'*

**Phil, 48, North East**



**Half** of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse



**One in nine** have been frightened that they will be hurt or that someone close to them will be hurt





**Four in five** gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police

**One in eight** (12 per cent) gay and bisexual men have been repeatedly belittled and made to feel worthless by a member of their family. **One in twelve** (eight per cent) have been pushed or slapped and **1 in 16** (six per cent) have been kicked, bit or hit with a fist by a family member. **One in fourteen** (seven per cent) have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives.

**One in ten** (ten per cent) gay and bisexual men have had their sexual identity used against them by a family member.

*'I have been mentally abused as long as I can remember by means of name-calling, being ignored, belittled. This started with my dad, and then with male partners and I never understood why.'*

**Alan, 50, Scotland**

**Nearly one in five** (18 per cent) gay and bisexual men said that they had been repeatedly belittled by a male partner and made to feel worthless. **One in six** (17 per cent) have been pushed, held down or slapped by a male partner. **One in six** (15 per cent) have been kicked, bit or hit with a fist.

**One in seven** (14 per cent) gay and bisexual men have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives by a male partner. **One in nine** (11 per cent) have been frightened that they will be hurt or that someone close to them will be hurt. **One in eleven** (nine per cent) gay and bisexual men have been forced by a male partner to have unwanted sex. **One in sixteen** (six per cent) continued to be abused after separation. **One in twenty five** (four per cent) have experienced death threats.

*'I have had problems with being harassed by an abusive ex-partner who has targeted me at work and home. I have made multiple complaints to the police but they have only warned him off and it has not stopped him still harassing me. I have felt very let down by the police.'*

**Steve, 40, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'The front line police officers know nothing about any domestic violence agencies for gay men. It is very hard to talk to them about domestic violence and I was made to feel I was wasting their time. They didn't keep me updated, failed to deal with my complaint and didn't see that the arrest of my partner was important to me and that the delay in doing it added to my worry.'*

**Tony, 33, East Midlands**

**Four in five** (78 per cent) gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police. Of those who did report, **more than half** (53 per cent) were not happy with how the police dealt with the situation.



## 6 Cancer and common male health problems

### Cancer

Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in men aged 15 to 44. It is recommended that men should check their testicles once a month. Just **a third** (34 per cent) of gay and bisexual men do this. Only **half** (50 per cent) have ever had their testicles checked by a healthcare professional.

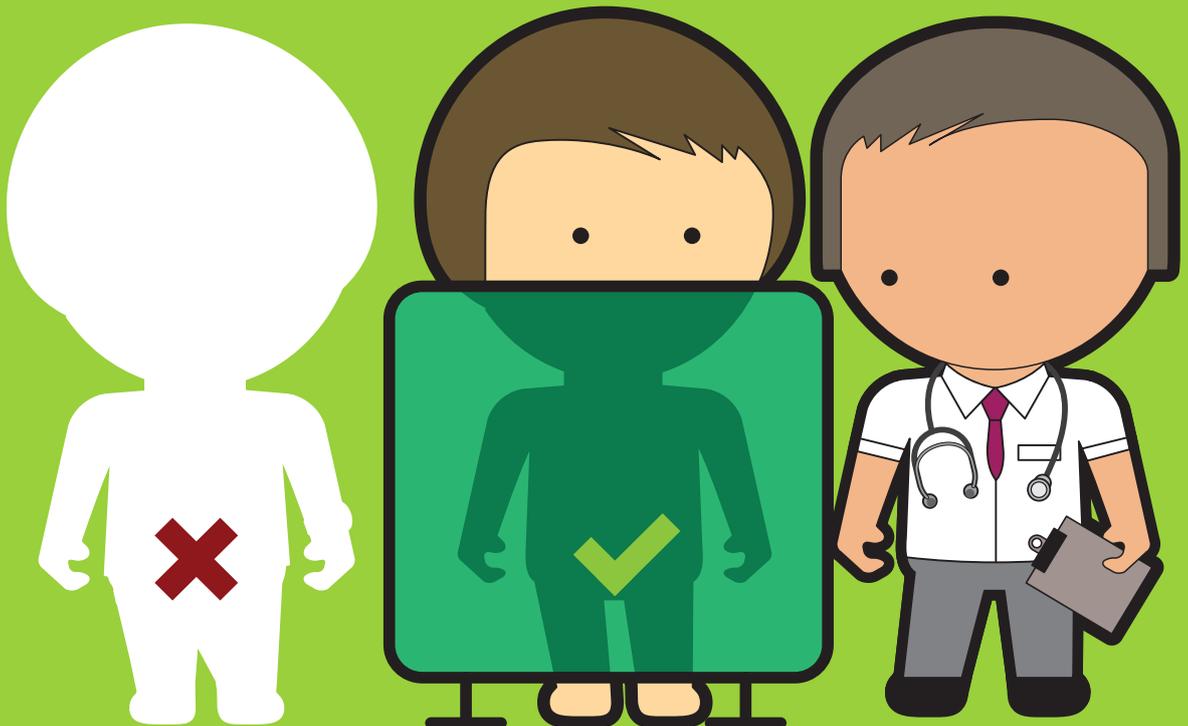
Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in Britain. Its incidence is significantly higher in men over 50. The Department of Health has a programme of awareness raising of risk factors and encourages self-monitoring. Just **one in ten** (10 per cent) gay and bisexual men have ever discussed prostate cancer with a healthcare professional. **More than two thirds** (68 per cent) of gay and bisexual men aged over 50 have not had a discussion.

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in men in Britain. Its incidence is significantly higher in men over 40. Just **three per cent** of all gay and bisexual men have ever talked about lung cancer with a healthcare professional and **96 per cent** of gay and bisexual men aged over 40 have not had a discussion.

Bowel (colorectal) cancer is the third most common cancer in men in Britain. Its incidence is also strongly related to age. **Fewer than one in ten** (nine per cent) gay and bisexual men have ever talked about bowel cancer with a healthcare professional. **Four in five** (80 per cent) gay and bisexual men aged over 50 have not had a discussion.

*'More information should be available about general health and wellbeing and not just about sexual health.'*

George, 56, Yorkshire and the Humber



Only **half** of gay and bisexual men have ever had their testicles checked by a healthcare professional



## Heart and circulatory disease

Heart and circulatory disease is the number one cause of death in Britain.

Almost **nine in ten** (86 per cent) gay and bisexual men have never discussed heart disease with a healthcare professional. Just **12 per cent** have ever been tested for heart disease.

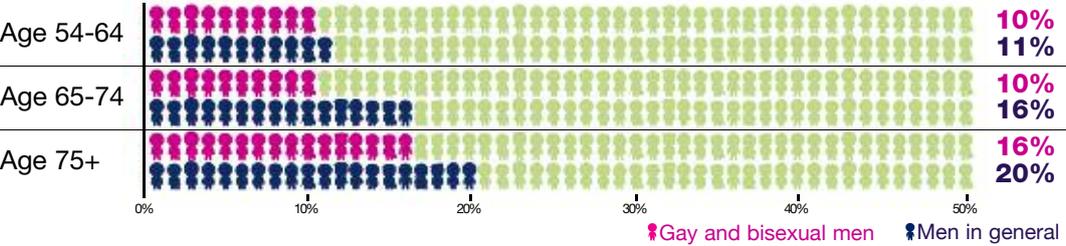
**Four in five** (79 per cent) gay and bisexual men have never discussed high blood pressure (hypertension) with a healthcare professional. Just **29 per cent** have been tested for high blood pressure.

**Four in five** (78 per cent) gay and bisexual men have never discussed high cholesterol with a healthcare professional. Just **34 per cent** have had a cholesterol test.

## Diabetes (type 2)

Just **one in nine** (11 per cent) gay and bisexual men have ever discussed diabetes with a healthcare professional. Gay and bisexual men were less likely than men in general to have diabetes, which is consistent with a population that is less likely to be overweight or obese.

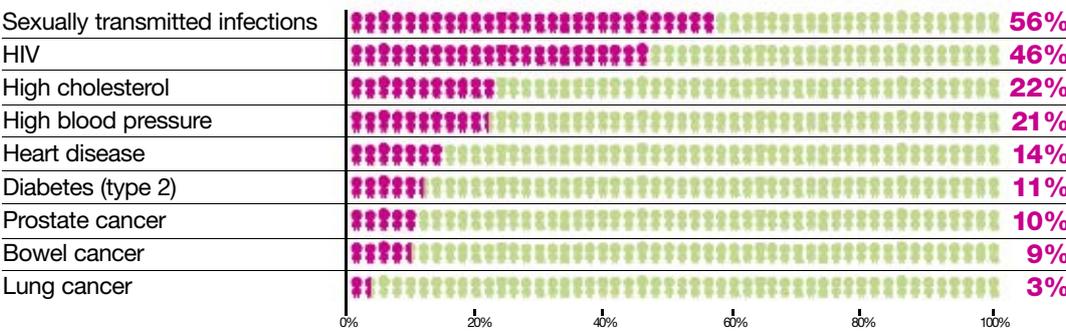
### Prevalence of diabetes



## Erectile dysfunction

**Almost half** (48 per cent) of gay and bisexual men say they have at some point experienced problems with delayed ejaculation, which is higher than estimates that range from 3 to 11 per cent of men in general. However, rates of problems with getting and maintaining an erection and with premature ejaculation are similar between gay and bisexual men and men in general. **Almost two in five** (38 per cent) gay and bisexual men have at some point had problems with getting and maintaining an erection as have 39 per cent of men in general. **Twenty seven per cent** of gay and bisexual men have had problems with premature ejaculation compared to an estimated 20 to 30 per cent of men in general.

### Have you ever discussed any of the following with a healthcare professional?



*'I am surprised how healthcare workers only concentrate on one aspect of your health in this country.'*

**Patrick, 56, South West**



## 7 Sexual health and HIV

Despite the focus of the NHS on the sexual health of gay and bisexual men and the acknowledged benefits of early HIV diagnosis and regular testing, many gay and bisexual men have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections or HIV.

### Sexually transmitted infections

**One in four** (26 per cent) gay and bisexual men have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

**More than four in five** (83 per cent) gay and bisexual men who have never been tested said 'I don't think I'm at risk'. **One in seven** (13 per cent) are 'scared' to have a test. **One in eleven** (nine per cent) said they are 'too busy'.

*'I've never had any symptoms and therefore not sought help.'*

**Aaron, 44, Wales**

*'I know I should have one but I've never made the effort.'*

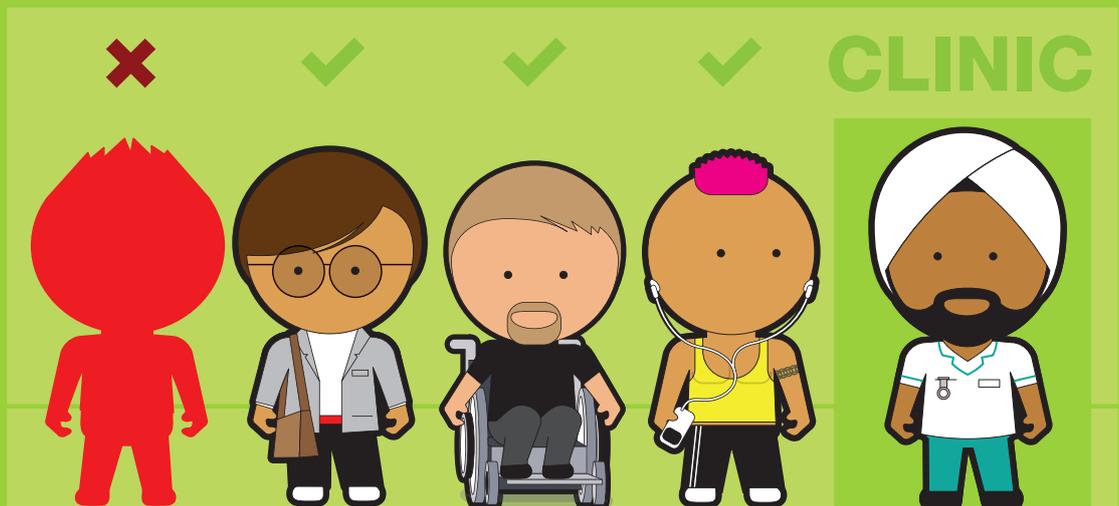
**Tyler, 33, Scotland**

*'It is difficult to access STI and HIV testing and face-to-face advice when working. Services are never available at times that can fit around work.'*

**Isaac, 52, West Midlands**

*'I don't know where to go to get tested.'*

**Bradley, 19, North West**



One in four gay and bisexual men have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections



Three in ten gay and bisexual men have never had an HIV test



*'My GP refused to speak with me about my sexual health because I came out to him. He instead ushered me out of his office and told me to contact my local GUM clinic.'*

**Nathan, 20, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'It would be great if GUM clinics would open during the weekends as most people can't get tested during the week because clinics are open during working hours only.'*

**Raj, 23, London**

**More than two in five** (44 per cent) gay and bisexual men have never discussed STIs with a healthcare professional.

In the last five years, **85 per cent** of respondents have had sex with men only, **ten per cent** have had sex with both men and women, **one per cent** have had sex with women only and **five per cent** have not had sex with anyone.

*'In school we experienced very little sex education and none of the sex education we did receive mentioned or related to same-sex relationships.'*

**Trevor, 18, Wales**

*'Health (particularly sexual health) issues start at school. I feel that a lack of gay sex education at school constitutes a negative health experience.'*

**Matt, 25, London**

## HIV

Even though testing for HIV is a Department of Health priority, because early diagnosis reduces onward transmission and facilitates much better treatment, **three in ten** (30 per cent) gay and bisexual men have *never* had an HIV test.

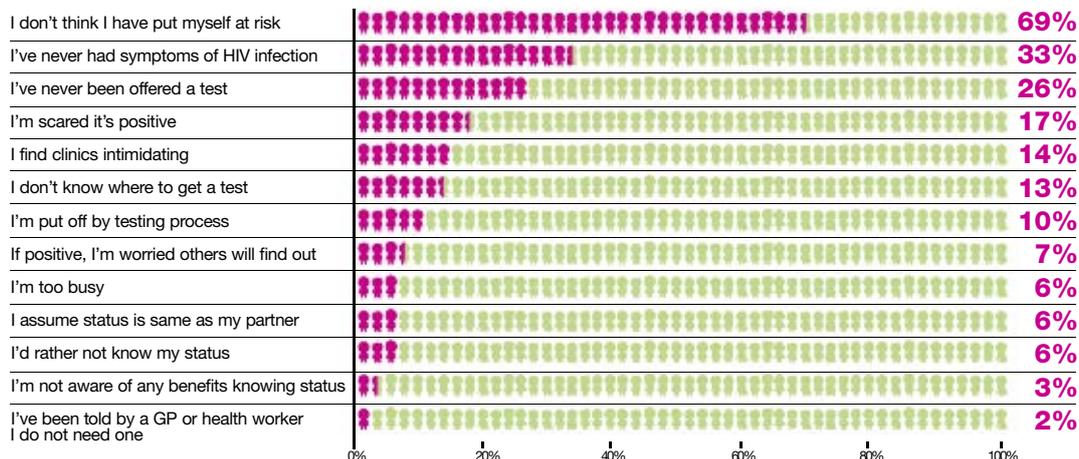
**Seven in ten** gay and bisexual men who haven't tested said they haven't had a test because they don't think they have put themselves at risk. **A third** said it is because they have never had any symptoms of HIV infection.

**One in four** gay and bisexual men who haven't had an HIV test said it's because they've never been offered one. **One in seven** said it's because they don't know where to get a test.

**More than half** (54 per cent) of gay and bisexual men have never discussed HIV with a healthcare professional.

These figures do raise grave concerns about the effectiveness with which hundreds of millions of pounds of public money have been spent on HIV awareness and prevention in recent years.

### Why have you never had an HIV test?



## 8 Discrimination in healthcare

**A third** (34 per cent) of gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation.

*'My GP assumes I sleep around just because I'm gay.'*

**Ricardo, 24, South West**

*'I had terrible tonsillitis and went to a walk-in centre. A doctor that I'd never seen before suggested one of the reasons for my sore tonsils could have been from rough oral sex. I felt very insulted and disrespected as I feel he wouldn't have made the same comment to a heterosexual male or a woman.'*

**Darren, 21, London**

*'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, 44, West Midlands**

*'I overheard the reception staff say to a nurse "the poof is here for his appointment".'*

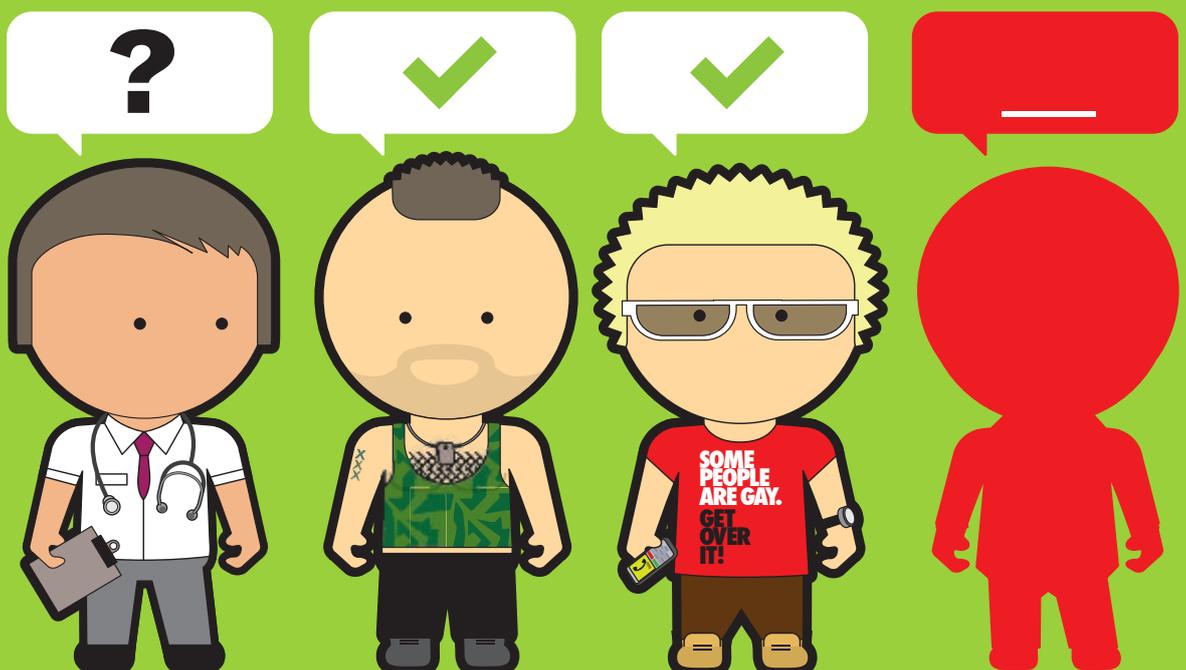
**David, 23, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'I came out to my new local GP and when I informed her she physically moved back in her chair.'*

**Cliff, 40, East of England**

*'Medical advice given assumed I was HIV positive.'*

**Malcolm, 35, Scotland**



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



## Coming out to a healthcare worker

**A third** (34 per cent) of gay and bisexual men are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals. They are more likely to be out to their manager, work colleagues, family and friends than their GP.

*'I wish I was able to be myself with health professionals. If I thought that they were trained and sensitive to lesbian, gay and bisexual 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, 24, Wales**

*'I have not revealed my sexuality to anyone in healthcare.'*

**Christian, 23, North West**

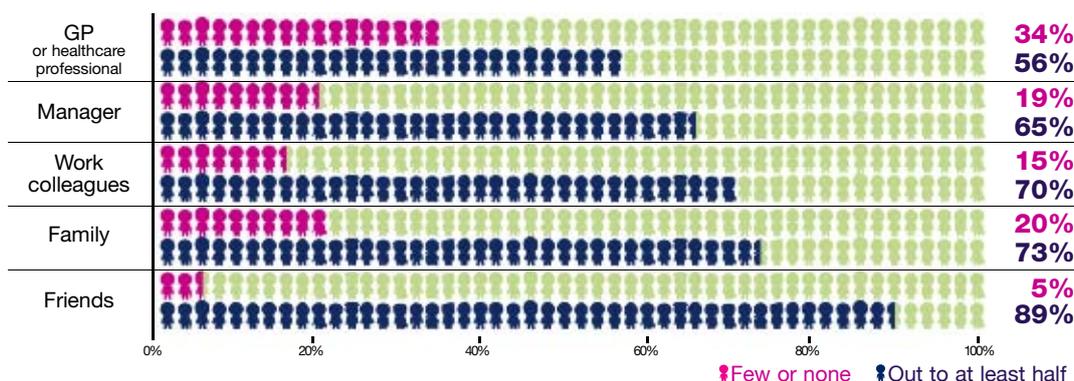
*'It is easier and safer to fit in with assumptions rather than run the risk of negative reactions.'*

**Frankie, 21, Scotland**

*'It does not always feel safe to come out because they might cause you unnecessary pain or discomfort – e.g. being rough with injections deliberately.'*

**Kieran, 28, Scotland**

## What proportion of people know you are gay or bisexual?



## Making assumptions

**One in six** (16 per cent) gay and bisexual men said that in the last year healthcare professionals had assumed that they were straight.

*'In my experience they always assume you're heterosexual.'*

**Leon, 31, Scotland**

*'There is an assumption that I'm straight so advice normally follows that assumption.'*

**Jamal, 36, West Midlands**

*'My GP is aware of my sexuality as my partner has attended some of my appointments, but he and other doctors in the surgery have never given me advice tailored to my sexuality. There has been no discussion about it, formal or informal. I don't feel safe to discuss my sexuality with some of the doctors.'*

**Dan, 22, London**



*'One physiotherapist kept on referring to my partner as my wife even after I made clear I was gay and did not have a wife.'*

**Colin, 41, South East Coast**

*'While having haemorrhoids removed and given that my rectal passage seems to be narrower than usual the practitioner said: "You're so tight. I can tell you're not gay". And while I was laying there I confirmed I am. Silence thereafter until I left.'*

**Ralph, 40, London**

**One in six** (15 per cent) gay and bisexual men said that during the last year there was no opportunity to discuss their sexual orientation with a healthcare professional.

*'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, 30, South West**

*'I live in London and yet there's nothing at my GP surgery or local hospitals that has ever made me feel safe to be openly gay whilst using their services.'*

**Hugh, 36, London**

*'There was no visible commitment to equality. I saw lots of posters about services for disabled people and the elderly, but nothing for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.'*

**Rhys, 24, Wales**

## Confidentiality

**One in eight** (12 per cent) gay and bisexual men are not sure what their GP's policy is on confidentiality.

*'I am not sure what the policy of the GP surgery is on confidentiality.'*

**Wyn, 53, Wales**

*'My doctors had written on a letter I took to the hospital after breaking my wrist **HOMOSEXUAL** in big letters for the A&E staff to see. Also, every time I saw a different doctor and they would pull my details up on the computer it would say **HOMOSEXUAL** in big letters.'*

**Jack, 37, North West**

*'When I stepped on glass at university, a GP had to make a note about the incident and put it in an envelope for a doctor at the hospital, but he mentioned I was gay which I thought was completely unnecessary.'*

**Stanley, 24, East of England**

*'I don't know if my GP surgery has a clear policy on confidentiality or a non-discrimination policy.'*

**Arthur, 49, Scotland**

## Respect and dignity

Gay and bisexual men were less likely than patients in general to feel they were treated with respect and dignity all of the time across key health services.



**Healthcare users in the last year who felt they were treated with respect and dignity all of the time**



*'My partner is terminally ill with cancer. Even though he asked for his treatment to be talked over with me and to call me before his family, they have often not done so.'*

**Eddie, 52, North West**

*'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**

*'The trainee GP I saw made no effort to acknowledge the sudden unexpected death of my partner. When I asked for time off I was advised I could self-certify for one week and he didn't need to do it. As a healthcare manager myself, I know the rules and "forced" him to write the certificate, but his manner was appalling. He took a phone call during the consultation and pushed the sick note towards me whilst talking on the phone. He made me very angry and I refused to see him for my test results that also arose from that visit.'*

**Jeremy, 50, London**



**One in eight** gay and bisexual men are not sure what their GP's policy is on confidentiality



## 9 What good service looks like

Gay and bisexual men also described occasions when they had positive experiences in healthcare and the difference this made for them.

*'Within the healthcare services I've attended I have had no negative comments and no negative or incorrect assumptions have been made. Everyone has always treated me with respect.'*

**Richard, 50, Wales**

*'My partner suffered a stroke and I was included in all aspects of treatment and consultations by our GP. Unfortunately my partner died, but I still received good counselling from my GP.'*

**Mark, 57, East Midlands**

*'As someone who is currently receiving multiple complex treatments from a number of consultants and other sources I have been treated exceptionally well. My sexual orientation has been both acknowledged and treated positively and my partner has been fully involved at all stages.'*

**Dominic, 59, North East**

### Acknowledging sexual orientation

**More than a quarter** (28 per cent) of gay and bisexual men said their healthcare professional did acknowledge they were gay or bisexual after they had come out.

**One in eleven** (nine per cent) said that their healthcare professional had provided them with the opportunity to come out.

*'My GP surgery is considerate and acknowledges my sexuality and doesn't see it as a problem.'*

**Terry, 42, Wales**

*'I have openly discussed my sexuality with my GP in the past without any negative comments or issues raised. He was fantastic and very supportive of my health needs at that time.'*

**Oliver, 25, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'Healthcare professional was non-judgemental and supportive and understanding. Made me feel normal.'*

**Craig, 33, Scotland**

*'Psychiatric nurse was very positive after I came out to her and treated me very well.'*

**Robert, 22, Scotland**

**One in eight** (12 per cent) gay and bisexual men said they were told that their partner was welcome to be present during a consultation.

*'My partner was allowed to stay at my bedside during major surgery without question.'*

**Ryan, 29, Wales**



*'Hospital staff have always treated me with respect, not turning a hair when I gave my civil partner as my next-of-kin and allowing him access at all times during my stays in hospital.'*

**Peter, 72, London**

*'I visited the A&E department and the nurses were very friendly and accommodating about having my partner attend with me and made a conscious effort to make him feel at ease and welcome.'*

**Graham, 27, London**

*'My partner died six weeks ago, after being diagnosed with cancer ten days before he died. My GP has called me twice to check up on me and make sure I'm coping. He has been really great.'*

**Gregory, 48, South West**

## Getting the right information

Just **a quarter** (26 per cent) of gay and bisexual men said that healthcare workers had given them information relevant to their sexual orientation.

*'I have found the healthcare professionals I've dealt with to be pleasant and understanding and they haven't come across as judgmental. They have proved to be knowledgeable about gay men's health issues and concerns.'*

**Kenny, 27, Scotland**

*'I have a great GP who is brilliant at addressing any specific health needs that relate to my sexuality.'*

**Damien, 28, London**

*'The healthcare professionals did not at any time criticise or comment on my sexuality other than to ask about the specific questions relevant to homosexual men.'*

**Emmett, 25, South West**

## Clear policies

**One in five** (21 per cent) said that their GP surgery displayed a policy stating that they would not discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation. Just **one in eleven** (nine per cent) said their GP surgery was a welcoming environment for gay and bisexual men by, for example, displaying posters that included same-sex couples or relevant health promotion materials.

*'My GP had posters about gay and bisexual issues and were sensitive about asking about sexuality.'*

**Luke, 20, South East Coast**

**Two in five** (40 per cent) gay and bisexual men said their GP had a clear policy on confidentiality.

*'My GP has a well established policy on confidentiality.'*

**Fred, 51, North East**



## 10 Recommendations

### 1 Understand the specific health needs of gay and bisexual men

Gay and bisexual men are more likely to attempt suicide, self-harm and have depression than their straight peers. They are more likely to take illegal drugs. **Half** have experienced domestic abuse, from a family member or partner, compared to 17 per cent of men in general.

Schools and universities teaching healthcare should cover the specific health needs of gay and bisexual men in their curricula.

*'My sexual activity has severely dropped and loneliness is a greater factor. My GP assumed that because I identify as gay I must be sexually active and infected with HIV.'*

**Noah, 55, London**

*'Being gay can affect many aspects of health – not only sexual health. Being comfortable discussing how being gay may impact upon health issues may be the only way for treatment to be really effective.'*

**Liam, 43, Scotland**

### 2 Train staff

Only **a quarter** of gay and bisexual men said their healthcare professional acknowledged they were gay or bisexual after they had come out and only **one in eight** said they were told that their partner was welcome to be present during a consultation.

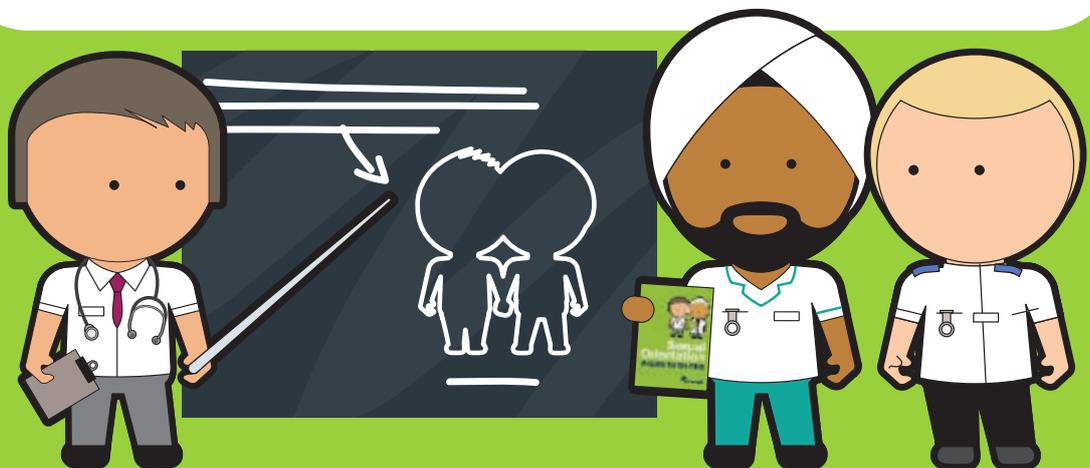
Royal Colleges should update professional development programmes to include topics such as same-sex partner rights.

*'My partner is terminally ill with cancer. Even though he has asked for his treatment to be talked over with me and to call me before his family, they have often not done so.'*

**Eddie, 56, North West**

*'I went to the GP because I was having a hard time with an abusive partner. They said they didn't have the experience and just suggested I sought help within the gay community.'*

**Alastair, 47, Scotland**



**Train staff**



*'I overheard the reception staff say to a nurse: "the poof is here for his appointment".'*

**David, 23, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'Training is needed for medical students and existing healthcare professionals.'*

**Connor, 39, London**

### 3 Don't make assumptions

**One in six** gay and bisexual men said that in the last year healthcare professionals had assumed that they were straight.

Training for frontline healthcare staff should cover the importance of not assuming someone's sexual orientation.

*'In my experience they always assume you're heterosexual.'*

**Leon, 31, Scotland**

*'There is an assumption that I'm straight so advice normally follows that assumption.'*

**Jamal, 36, West Midlands**

### 4 Explicit policies

Just **one in five** gay and bisexual men said their GP surgery displayed a policy stating they would not discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation.

GP surgeries and hospitals should display non-discrimination policies that explicitly protect gay and bisexual people from discrimination.

*'I don't know what my GP's policies are.'*

**Nathaniel, 36, Scotland**

*'A more open and publicised non-discrimination policy which includes sexual orientation and a clear policy on confidentiality should be available across all healthcare mediums – not just GP practices but hospitals, clinics, A&E etc.'*

**Marlon, 22, East of England**

### 5 Increase visibility

Just **one in eleven** said their GP surgery was a welcoming environment for gay and bisexual men.

GP surgeries and hospitals should use posters, leaflets and information that include images of gay and bisexual men to help create a welcoming environment.

*'No positive statements, posters or leaflets inclusive of sexual orientation. Nothing to tell me I'm welcome or it is safe to come out.'*

**Ethan, 48, South West**

*'More evidence of same-sex couples in pictures or written health material so that we can see ourselves in health literature and on-line. GP surgeries, health centres and hospitals should display statements saying that gay patients are welcome and respected.'*

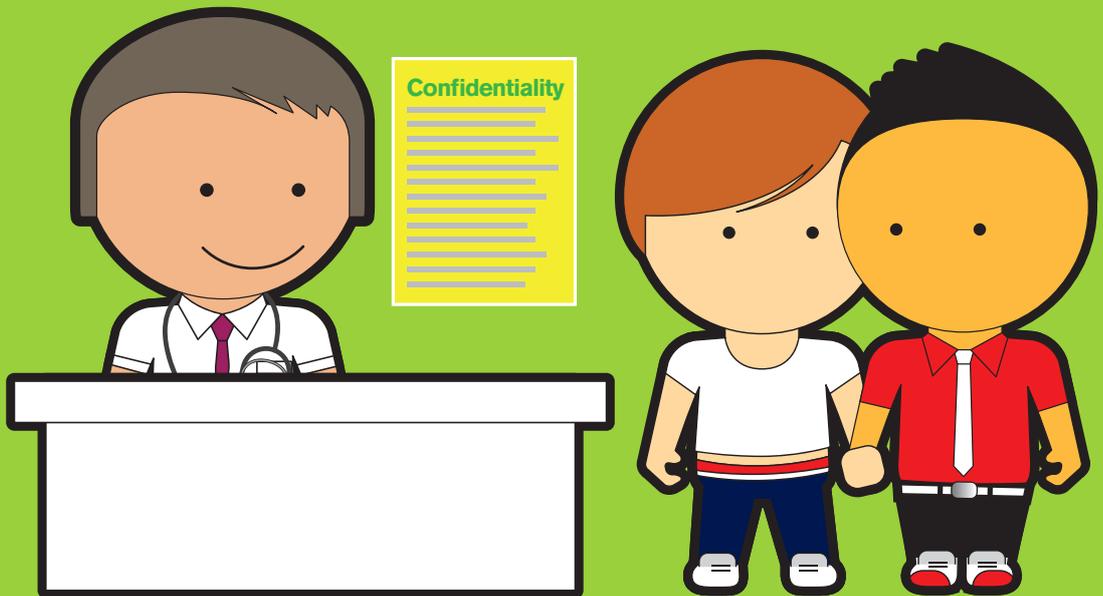
**Max, 55, West Midlands**



# CLINIC



Increase visibility



Encourage disclosure and make confidentiality policies clear

**INFORMATION**

**SUPPORT**



Tell gay and bisexual men what they need to know



## 6 Encourage disclosure and make confidentiality policies clear

**One in three** gay and bisexual men are not out to healthcare professionals, in spite of improvement on why being out is meant to be a good thing for their health. Just **two in five** said their GP had a clear policy on confidentiality.

Doctors and healthcare workers should encourage disclosure by asking open questions and having clear confidentiality policies.

*'GP surgeries should be a safe place for gay and bisexual people to be open but I wonder if many people feel that way.'*

**Reece, 22, Scotland**

*'I am uncomfortable with my sexuality being recorded or more to the point what the information could be used for. At the same time I would rather that my doctor knew I am gay as I think that would mean I receive more focused care.'*

**Louis, 20, Wales**

*'I wish I was able to be myself with health professionals. If I thought that they were trained and sensitive to lesbian, gay and bisexual issues then perhaps I would be able to.'*

**Morgan, 24, Wales**

## 7 Improve monitoring

Just **one in eleven** gay and bisexual men said they were given the opportunity to come out.

The Department of Health should ensure sexual orientation is a field available on all confidential electronic patient record systems used by hospitals and GP surgeries.

*'I believe that sometimes they don't ask in case the question is "offensive".'*

**Joe, 49, Scotland**

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

**Harvey, 41, North West**

## 8 Make complaints procedures clear

**A third** of gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience in relation to their sexual orientation.

NHS complaints teams should make sure information on how people can complain includes information on sexual orientation discrimination.

*'Promote rights and how to complain.'*

**Archie, 44, London**

*'Experience of discrimination on sexuality grounds (and any others) should be mentioned as an appropriate cause of complaint in leaflets describing complaints services such as the Patient Advice and Liaison Services.'*

**Oscar, 50, Yorkshire and the Humber**



## 9 Tell gay and bisexual men what they need to know

Just **a third** of gay and bisexual men check their testicles monthly as a preventative measure against testicular cancer as recommended. **One in four** have never been tested for STIs and **three in ten** have never been tested for HIV, in spite of this being regarded as a Department of Health priority.

Schools and colleges should make sure they include the needs of gay and bisexual men in preventative healthcare and healthy lifestyle lessons.

*'More information should be available about general health and well-being and not just about sexual health.'*

**George, 56, Yorkshire and the Humber**

*'I've never had any symptoms and therefore not sought help.'*

**Aaron, 44, Wales**

*'Health and well-being for gay men needs to begin in secondary schools as part of a normalised educational approach in line with similar needs of heterosexual people.'*

**Ollie, 32, South West**

## 10 Improve access to sexual health services

**One in four** gay and bisexual men who haven't had an HIV test said it's because they've never been offered one. **One in seven** said it's because they don't know where to get a test.

Improving access to sexual health services for gay and bisexual men should be a public health priority for the Department of Health.

*'I don't know where to go to get tested.'*

**Bradley, 19, North West**

*'It's actually quite difficult to work out who we can see or where we can go.'*

**Seth, 30, Wales**

*'Access to GUM clinics can be difficult (inaccessible, too busy).'*

**Caleb, 28, Scotland**

## The study

In 2011 Stonewall and Sigma Research asked gay and bisexual men from across Britain to complete a survey about their health. The survey received 6,861 responses making it the largest survey of gay and bisexual men's health needs ever conducted in the world.

Ninety two per cent of respondents said they were gay and eight per cent said they were bisexual. Eighty five per cent of respondents live in England, nine per cent in Scotland and six per cent in Wales. Ninety five per cent of respondents were white and five per cent of respondents were black or minority ethnic. Eight per cent of respondents were aged 20 or younger and 15 per cent were aged over 50. The youngest participant was 16 and the oldest was 85.

Further statistics are available by region at [www.stonewall.org.uk/gaymenshealth](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/gaymenshealth)



## Stonewall Healthy Lives

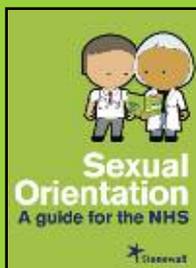
Stonewall's Healthy Lives campaign supports NHS organisations to improve their workplace and services for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.  
[www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk)

## Stonewall Diversity Champions programme

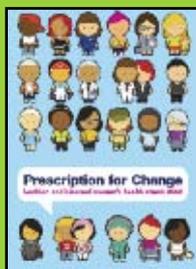
Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum through which major employers work with Stonewall and each other on sexual orientation issues to promote diversity in the workplace.  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/dcs)

## Further publications

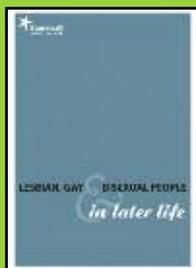
[www.stonewall.org.uk/publications](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/publications)



Sexual Orientation:  
A guide for the NHS

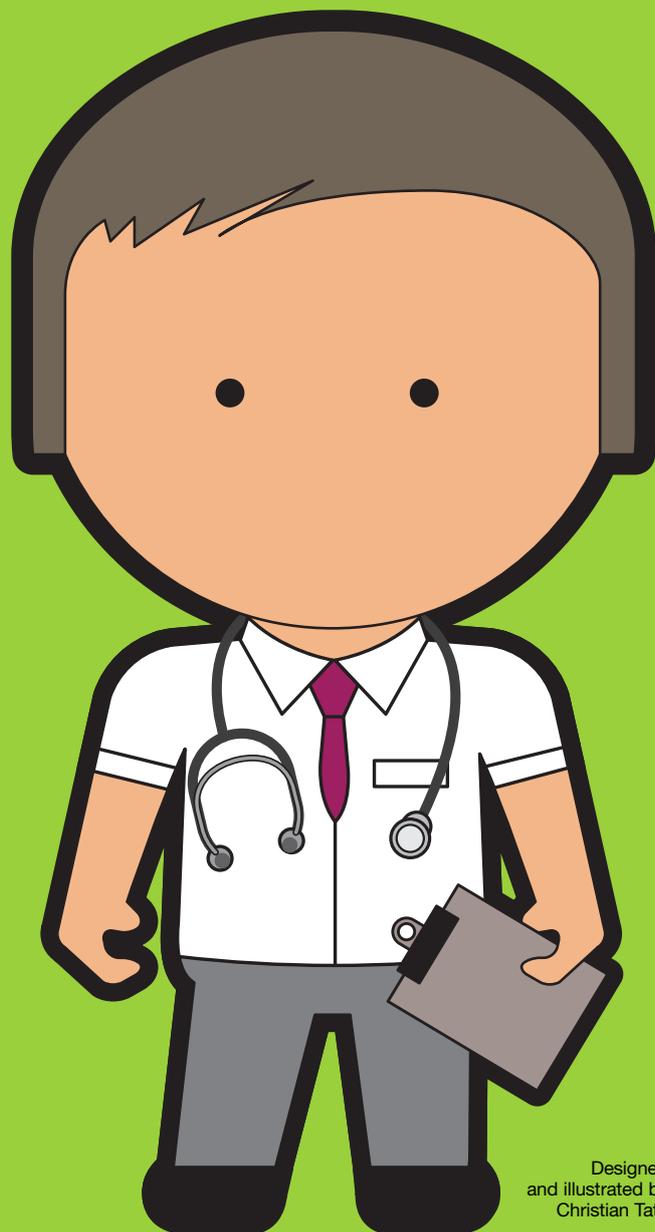


Prescription for Change:  
Lesbian and bisexual women's  
health check 2008



Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual  
People in Later Life

Being the Gay One: Experiences  
of lesbian gay and bisexual people  
working in the health and  
social care sector



Designed  
and illustrated by  
Christian Tate

# Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey

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

