

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and mental health

Changes in equality in the past twenty years have meant that society is changing for the better. However, many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experience difficulties that can affect their health and well-being. This factsheet looks at some of these issues and how to get support. Some people question including transgender people in the LGBT umbrella. For this factsheet we felt it was right to cover LGB and T people. Lesbian, gay and bisexual relate to sexuality and transgender is about gender. These are different things. However LGBT people all experience coming out and can face prejudice and discrimination as part of a minority.

 KEY POINTS

- LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.
- Research shows that mental health problems like depression and anxiety can be more common in LGBT people.
- There may be specialist LGBT mental health services in your area that you can access for support.
- The Equality Act 2010 states that no service provider may discriminate against anyone because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What do we mean by LGBT?](#)
2. [What issues might LGBT people face?](#)
3. [Where can I get help?](#)
4. [What if I have problems accessing services?](#)

1. What do we mean by LGBT?

'LGBT' is a term that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. This term is used in many different countries around the world. You may not feel you fit into one of those terms. We recognise that everyone is different. We use the phrase LGBT to describe people who may fit under this general term.

Transgender

Transgender is a term that includes people who are transsexual and transvestite. We explain these terms below. There are also many other terms used in the transgender community.

Transsexual person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has a strong and consistent desire to live as the opposite gender• Has surgery or takes hormones to do this
Transvestite	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dresses in clothes of the opposite gender occasionally• Doesn't have surgery or take hormones

In this factsheet we use the word transgender to cover the transgender community.

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2. What issues might LGBT people face?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual

Early medical professionals felt being LGB was a mental illness. Homosexuality was seen as 'part of the problem' and people needed psychiatric treatment.¹ In 1993 the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality from their list of mental illnesses. As this happened recently LGB people still face discrimination.

Transgender

The situation for the transgender community is more complex but there are signs that things are improving.

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) is a guideline doctors use to diagnose mental health conditions. The ICD-10 lists Gender Identity Disorders as a mental disorder. This includes Transsexualism and Dual-role transvestism.

Gender dysphoria is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V). This is another guideline doctors use to diagnose mental health conditions. Most transsexual people experience gender dysphoria. Dysphoria means being unhappy. Gender dysphoria is a term medical professionals use. It refers to the distress people feel when their physical gender does not match their gender identity. This alone does not make it a disorder. When this causes a lot of distress it can be defined as a disorder.²

Being LGBT does not in itself lead to mental health issues. However, members of the LGBT community have higher instances of mental health problems. The National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) carried out a review into mental health issues in the LGBT community. They reported what they found.³

- LGB people are at more risk of suicidal behaviour and self-harm than non-LGBT people.
- Gay and bisexual men are four times more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population.
- LGB people are 1½ times more likely to develop depression and anxiety compared to the rest of the population.

Stonewall's 'Prescription for Change' report found lesbian and bisexual women had higher rates of suicidal thoughts and self-harm compared to women in general.⁴ A transgender mental health study showed that 88% of transgender people had experienced depression and 84% had thought of ending their life.⁵ Young LGBT people under 26 are more likely to attempt suicide and to self harm.⁶ Among gay men, an estimated 14-20% has anorexia or bulimia.⁷

Below are some of the issues LGBT people face that can have an impact on health and wellbeing:

Discrimination and bullying

More than half of younger LGB people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools.⁸ Nearly half of pupils who experience homophobic bullying have symptoms of depression⁹. One in six lesbian, gay or bisexual adults has experienced homophobic hate crime or incident in the last 3 years.¹⁰ In a survey:

- 52% of the participants had experienced problems with work due to being trans or having a trans history,
- 19% had experienced discrimination, and
- 7% had left a job due to harassment or discrimination even though they had no other job to go to.¹¹

Coming out

Coming out for the first time can be exciting and liberating, or very difficult. It could be a combination of the two. It may not be a one-off event but something you do many times during your life. If you come out and experience rejection, you may not want to come out again. You may feel that you have to hide your real self which can affect your mental wellbeing and cause stress.

LGBT people often experience homophobia or transphobia. You may turn these feelings inwards. You could develop negative feelings towards your own sexuality or gender identity because of this. This can make it difficult for you to accept your own sexual orientation or gender identity. This can be called 'internalised homophobia' or 'internalised transphobia'.

Coming out to at least one supportive person, such as a friend or a work colleague, can lessen feelings of depression.¹² It can increase your overall sense of wellbeing and self-esteem. This is compared to someone not coming out at all.

Older people

Many older LGBT people have experienced ill-treatment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past. This could have been at work, from authority figures or their own family. Half feel that their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on them when getting older.¹³ Their concerns are around future care needs, independence, mobility, health and housing. Age UK have a guide for older members of the LGBT community. Details of this can be found in the useful contacts section of this factsheet.

Substance abuse

LGBT people may be more likely to use drugs than heterosexual people. Lesbian and bisexual women are at more risk of substance dependence than the rest of the population.¹⁴ The Crime Survey showed:¹⁵

- drug use by gay and bisexual men was three times higher than for straight men, and
- illegal drug use by gay and bisexual women was four times higher than among heterosexual women.

Heavy drinking or drug use can make existing mental health problems worse and potentially trigger new ones. You can find more information about 'Drugs, alcohol and mental health' at www.rethink.org. Or contact 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

Culture and identity

You may feel pressure to look a certain way as a gay person. Nearly half of gay and bisexual men worry about how they look and wish they thought about it less.¹⁶

HIV and medication

LGBT people living with HIV can find that their medication affects their emotional wellbeing. However there are now many different anti-HIV drugs available. You could try another one that suits you better.

HIV specialists are very experienced in working with people who have depression and anxiety. If you have had any mental health problems you should tell your HIV consultant when you start discussing treatment options. You can't take some anti-HIV medications with certain medications used to treat mental illness. But there are some which you can take with mental health medication.¹⁷ You should discuss any medication issues with your HIV consultant and psychiatrist. You should let them know if you are taking any medication for your mental health.

Accessing Healthcare

LGBT people, especially trans people, can experience more social isolation than the general population.¹⁸ This could make it harder for LGBT

people who have mental health problems to get support and treatment. LGBT people and their carers may experience discrimination. This may affect their ability to access services and receive the most appropriate support. A survey found that in gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year:

- a third have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation
- Only a quarter felt that healthcare workers had given them information relevant to their sexual orientation.
- One in eleven found their GP surgery welcoming.¹⁹

In a survey of lesbian and bisexual women:

- half reported a negative experience of healthcare in the last year
- two in five found practitioners assumed they were heterosexual and were therefore not given appropriate advice
- one in five felt they had no opportunity to discuss their sexual orientation²⁰

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3. Where can I get help?

Having a mental health problem is not something only LGBT people experience. However if you or someone you know might be struggling then it is important to seek help.

Here are some suggestions about where to get support:

Specialist LGBT mental health services

In some areas there are LGBT organisations that provide mental health advice and support. This might be through a counselling service, support groups, mentoring or a helpline. Many of these services are listed in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet. You can find local services by searching online for LGBT organisations in your area. You can also call our advice service on 0300 5000 927 or email us at advice@rethink.org and we can look for you.

General mental health services

GPs

Going to see your GP is the main way to get support and treatment for mental health issues. You may have had problems accessing healthcare. However, there are steps being taken to improve things. The government brought in the NHS Constitution. This says that we all have the right 'not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services.' This includes sexual orientation and gender reassignment.²¹ All NHS services must comply with this principle.

Some NHS trusts have published their own LGBT guides for medical professionals.^{22, 23, 24} There is a project in Manchester called 'Pride in

Practice', this is a service that GP surgeries can sign up for. It offers surgeries support to become LGBT friendly and inclusive. The LGBT Foundation run the project with support from the Royal College of General Practitioners. GPs can call the LGBT Foundation helpline and get advice for supporting LGBT patients. Their contact details are in the '[Useful Contacts](#)' section of this factsheet.

Direct Payments

Disabled and older LGBT people may get help with their social care needs. One way to do this is through direct payments. If you have eligible needs your local authority gives you the money to buy the services you want. This can give you more freedom to organise your own care. Direct payments may enable people to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity without fear of discriminated against.²⁵

You can find more information about direct payments at www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

LGBT support services

There are many organisations offering emotional and practical support to the LGBT community. National relationship counselling service Relate offers LGBT relationship counselling through some of its local services. There may be LGBT social groups, sports clubs or activities in your area that you could become involved in. There are services for younger people that can help with advice, support and meeting other LGBT people.

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4. What if I have problems accessing services?

Accessing general health services can be a difficult experience for someone who is LGBT. People can be worried about disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to health professionals. This may be in case they are misunderstood, or the service cannot meet their needs. You may decide to come out to your GP or any other medical professional. It may help to talk this through with someone beforehand. You could practice the conversation with a friend. You may prefer to do this with someone you do not know. For example, you could talk it through with someone on an LGBT helpline.

What does the law say?

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is illegal for a service provider to directly or indirectly discriminate against LGBT people. This includes anyone who identifies as LGBT. The NHS and any other organisation that offers services is a service provider.

Stonewall have a guide called 'Protecting Patient Rights' with the General Medical Council. This is about protecting the rights of LGBT people in health services. You can find it at:

www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/protecting-patients-your-rights-as-lgb-people-3.pdf.

What if I am not happy with my treatment?

If you are not happy with your treatment you can:

- talk to your doctor about your treatment and ask for a second opinion,
- get an advocate to help you speak to your doctor,
- contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and see whether they can help, or
- make a complaint.

There is more information about these options below:

Second opinion

If you are not happy with your treatment you should talk to your doctor and see if you can resolve the situation with them. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produces guidelines for the treatment of different mental health conditions. You can refer to these guidelines if you feel your doctor is not offering you the right treatment.

You may feel that your treatment should be changed. If your doctor does not agree you could ask for a second opinion. You are not legally entitled to a second opinion but your doctor might agree to it if it would help with treatment options.

Advocacy

An advocate is someone who is separate from the mental health service but understands the system and your rights. They can come to a meeting with you and your doctor and make sure you get what you are entitled to. Advocates help you make sure your voice is being heard. Some organisations have specialist LGBT advocacy services. You can search online to see if there are any local advocacy services in your area or the Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service could search for you.

'PALS'

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at your NHS trust can try and help you with any problems or issues you have with an NHS service. You can find your local PALS' details at [http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363).

Complaints

If you have no success using an advocate or PALS you could complain using the NHS complaints procedure. The GP practice or mental health trust should be able to give you a leaflet about their complaints procedure.

You can find more information about:

- Second opinions
- Advocacy
- Complaining about the NHS or social services

at www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy

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Age UK

An organisation that offers guidance and support for older people including LGBT who may be experiencing difficulties in accessing services or care. Their guide for older LGBT people can be found using this link:

http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Information-guides/AgeUKIG02_Lesbian_gay_or_bisexual_inf.pdf?dtrk=true

Telephone: 0800 169 8787

Email: [form](#)

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk/

Antidote

A service that offers information and support exclusively to LGBT people around drugs, alcohol and addiction. Part of London Friend's service.

Helpline: 0207 833 1674, open 10am-6pm Monday to Friday

Address: London Friend main office, 86 Calidonian Rd, London, N1 9DN

Website: www.londonfriend.org.uk/get-support/drugsandalcohol

Being Gay is Okay

A service that gives online information and advice for under 25 year olds.

Email: [form](#)

Website: www.bgiok.org.uk

The Beaumont Society

A national transgender support network offering emotional support via a weekly helpline, as well as general information and support groups

Telephone: 01582 412220

Address: The Beaumont Society, 27 Old Gloucester St, London, WC1N 3XX

Email: [form](#)

Website: www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/

ELOP (East London Out Project)

A London based LGBT mental health and wellbeing centre offering a holistic approach. They offer free counselling, support groups, and young people's services.

Telephone: 020 8509 3898

Address: ELOP, 56-60 Grove Rd, Walthamstow, London, E17 9BN

Email: info@elop.org

Website: www.elop.org

Equality Advisory and Support Service

An organisation that provides advice on discrimination and human rights issues

Helpline: 0800 444 205, open 9am–8pm Monday to Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday

Textphone: 0800 444 206

Email: advice@equalityadvisoryservice.com

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

The Gender Trust

An organisation that provides support and information for those in the transgender community and anyone affected by gender identity issues.

Telephone: 01527 894 838

Address: Gender Trust, 76 The Ridgeway, Astwood Bank, B96 6LX

Email: info@gendertrust.org.uk

Website: <http://gendertrust.org.uk>

GIRES (Gender Identity Research and Education)

A charity that provides information for transgender people and medical professionals, including research and links to support groups

Telephone: 01372 801554

Address: The Gender Identity Research and Education Society, Melverley, The Warren, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 2SP

Email: info@gires.org.uk

Website: <http://www.gires.org.uk>

GMFA (Gay Men Fight Aids)

A gay men's health charity and have booklets and workbooks that you can download for free. They are written by counsellors and cover topics exploring self esteem and relationships. They also have information on HIV medication and offer a UK social, leisure and sports activities handbook called 'The Guide'.

Address: 11 Ebenezer St, London, N1 7NP

Email: aboutgmfa@gmfa.org.uk

Website: www.gmfa.org.uk

Leicester LGBT Centre

Voluntary organisation providing support to LGBT people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Offers counselling, and wide range of support groups.

Telephone: 0116 254 7412

Address: 15 Wellington St, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE1 6HH

Email: [form](#)

Website: <http://leicesterlgbtcentre.org>

LGBT Foundation

A charity offering mental health services and resources to the gay community. This includes befriending, free counseling and a support helpline. They are based in the Manchester.

Helpline: 0345 3 30 30 30, open 10am- 10pm every day

Address: LGBT Foundation, 5 Richmond St, Manchester, M1 3HF

Email: helpline@lgbt.foundation support within 72 hours

Website: <http://lgbt.foundation>

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

An organisation promoting the health, wellbeing and equality of LGBT people in Scotland. Offers support, services and information. This includes

mental health and wellbeing services such as counseling, workshops and groups.

Helpline: 0300 123 2523, open Tuesday and Wednesday 12-9pm

Website: <http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk>

Edinburgh

Telephone: 0131 523 1100

Address: LGBT Health and Wellbeing, 9 Howe St, Edinburgh, EH3 6TE

Email: admin@lgbthealth.org.uk

Glasgow

Telephone: 0141 271 2330

Address: LGBT Health and Wellbeing, 12 Queen's Crescent, Glasgow, G4 9AS

Email: glasgow@lgbthealth.org.uk

LLGS (London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard)

A service that gives national information and a listening service over phone and email and instant messaging. All volunteers identify as LGBT so the person answering the telephone will have an understanding of your situation. The helpline operates from 10am to 11pm 365 days of the year. They are based in London but do take calls from the whole of the UK.

Helpline: 0300 330 0630, open 10am-11pm every day

Address: London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard, PO Box 7324, London, N1 9QS

Email: chris@switchboard.lgbt

Website: www.llgs.org.uk

London Friend

A long-running LGBT charity which offers a telephone support service, as well as low-cost counseling, social and support groups. They run a specific befriending service and a carers support group. Based in North London.

Helpline: 020 7837 3337, open Monday to Wednesday 7.30pm-9.30pm

Address: London Friend main office, 86 Calidonian Rd, London, N1 9DN

Email: office@londonfriend.org.uk

Website: www.londonfriend.org.uk

Metro

Provides health, community and youth services across London and the south east of England. Mental health support includes counselling, mental health drop-in, sexual health counselling and advocacy.

Telephone: 020 8305 5000

Email: info@metrocentreonline.org

Website: www.metrocentreonline.org

Mind Out

A mental health service for LGBT people which provides advice, information, advocacy, peer support groups, mentoring and wellbeing events.

Telephone: 01273 234 839

Address: MindOut, Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG

Email: info@mindout.org.uk

Website: www.mindout.org.uk

Opening Doors London

A service led by Age UK Camden providing a range of services and activities for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people over 50 in London.

Telephone: 0207 239 0400

Address: Opening Doors London, Age UK Camden, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9NA

Email: odl.info@ageukcamden.org.uk

Website: <http://openingdoorslondon.org.uk>

Outcome

A LGBT mental health service run through Mind in Islington, offering psychotherapy, counselling, art therapy, alternative therapies and activities

Telephone: 020 7272 5038

Address: Outcome, Mind Spa, 35 Ashley Rd, London, N19 3AG

Email: sigal.avni@islingtonmind.org.uk

Website: <http://www.islingtonmind.org.uk/outcome.asp>

PACE

An organisation offering specialised LGBT advocacy, counselling services and family support, and also hold workshops and produce publications. They are based in London.

Telephone: 020 7700 1323

Address: PACE, 54-56 Euston St, London, NW1 2ES

Email: info@pacehealth.org.uk **Website:** www.pacehealth.org.uk

Pink Therapy

Pink Therapy has a directory listing qualified therapists throughout the UK who work with the LGBT community from a positive stance

Telephone: 020 7836 6647

Address: Pink Therapy, BCM 5159, London, WC1N 3XX

Email: admin@pinktherapy.com

Website: www.pinktherapy.com

Pride in Practice

A service that offers GP surgeries support to become LGB friendly and inclusive. The project is run by the LGBT Foundation

Telephone: 0345 3 30 30 30

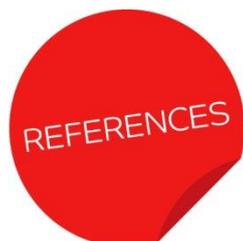
Email: pip@lgbt.foundation

Website: <http://lgbt.foundation/for-professionals/pride-in-practice>

Stonewall – What’s in my Area?

This database can help you find your local lesbian, gay and bisexual community groups or services.

Website: www.stonewall.org.uk/at_home/whats_in_my_area



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www.dsm5.org/documents/gender%20dysphoria%20fact%20sheet.pdf

³ National Institute of Mental Health England *Mental disorders, suicide, and deliberate self harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual people: a systematic review;* 2007.

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⁵ McNeil, J., Bailey, L., Ellis, S., Morton, J. & Regan, M. *Trans Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Study* Scottish Transgender Alliance 2012. www.gires.org.uk/assets/Medpro-Assets/trans_mh_study.pdf
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(accessed 2 July 2015).

⁹ As note 7 (*The School Report* 2012).

¹⁰ Stonewall. *The Gay British Crime Survey* 2013.

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¹¹ As note 4.

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- ¹⁸ Williams, H., Varney, J., Taylor, J. Fish, J., Durr, P., Elan-Cane, C., *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Public Health Outcomes Framework Companion Document* (2013). <http://lgbt.foundation/downloads/191> (accessed 2 July 2015).
- ¹⁹ As note 15.
- ²⁰ As note 2.
- ²¹ Department of Health *The NHS Constitution* 2013. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/170656/NHS_Constitution.pdf (accessed 16 July 2015).
- ²² NHS Leicester City *In the Pink: A Practical Guide for GPs & Other Health Practitioners* 2012. www.leicspart.nhs.uk/Library/INTHEPINKA4FinalMay2012.pdf (accessed 16 July 2015).
- ²³ NHS Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County *In the Pink: A Practical Guide for GPs & Other Health Practitioners*. www.nottinghamwestccg.nhs.uk/attachments/article/21/In20the20pink.pdf (accessed 9 July 2015).
- ²⁴ NHS Suffolk Mental Health *Practice Guidelines for supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people* 2009. <http://www.smhp.nhs.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Cw9jyGjtoBQ%3D&tabid=181&mid=607> (accessed 9 July 2015).
- ²⁵ The National LGB&T Partnership *The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Companion Document* 2014. <http://lgbt.foundation/downloads/365> (accessed 9 July 2015).

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This factsheet is available
in large print.



Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

Feedback

PO Box 68795

London SE1 4PN

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday.



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