

Or if you would like help to 'come out' as lesbian, gay or bisexual to your current GP, help is at hand:

- The London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard operates a national 24 hours a day helpline on 020 7837 7324 and can put you in touch with a support group or helpline near to you. They also have a special 'coming out' section on their website at www.queery.org.uk



Useful contacts

PAGE

Working for the emotional, mental and physical health needs of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.
020 7700 1323 or www.pacehealth.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust

The HIV and AIDS charity for life. As well as general information around HIV and AIDS, the Trust offers specific information and advice for gay men.

Helpline 0845 1221 200 or www.tht.org.uk

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

National listings of support groups and helplines throughout the UK.

020 7837 7324 or www.queery.org.uk

NHS Direct

24 hour confidential nurse-led service providing health care advice and information. They can also provide details of GP practices in your area.

0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Opening Doors

Age Concern's programme of publications, resources and events addressing the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

020 8765 7576 or www.ace.org.uk/openingdoors

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Age Concern England, Registered Charity No 261794 / 627_0205 OLGB Lft / 20,000

Out and Healthy

Health and wellbeing information for older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals



AGE
Concern

Ageing Well

Older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are using professional health services less often than their heterosexual counterparts, because of fears about prejudice and discrimination.

www.ageconcern.org.uk

What are the issues?

Although lesbians, gay men and bisexuals face many of the same health concerns as everyone else as they grow older, they do face a number of health problems considerably more often.

Did you know, for example that:

- Mental health problems are greater than in the general population, often linked to the stigmatising effects of discrimination and the stress of keeping sexual orientation a secret?
- The use and misuse of alcohol and tobacco are significantly higher?
- More than 10% of HIV positive men are aged over 50?

All too often, however, the double discrimination of ageism and homophobia prevents people from seeking and finding the help they need.

If you are concerned about any of these health issues, specialist and sympathetic information and advice are available and this leaflet can help get you started.

Helping yourself to better health

Do not put off seeking health information and advice because you are worried about prejudice or a negative response. There are a number of things you can do, such as:

- Try to be open with your doctor about being lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- If you are unhappy with the response and do not feel in a position to challenge your GP, look for a practice that is lesbian/gay/bisexual friendly.
- Be aware that there are specialist gay, lesbian and bisexual health advisors and services. The contact organisations at the end of this leaflet will be able to signpost you.
- Use the Internet if you have access – a search on 'gay health' or 'lesbian health' will give you access to dozens of informative and educational sites.
- And remember – if you absolutely need to seek health advice with complete anonymity, NHS Direct offers a confidential nurse-led information and advice service 24 hours a day on 0845 4647.

Being open about your sexuality with your doctor

A good GP is a vital part of maintaining your health. Not feeling free to discuss your sexual orientation can have a very negative impact, whether it results in feelings of mistrust, or in a doctor missing a diagnosis because she or he doesn't have all your relevant information.

Available research shows that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who are 'out' (open about their sexuality) to their doctor reap a number of positive benefits such as:

- They are more willing to take part in preventative measures (such as screening).
- They are comfortable talking about the health issues that are bothering them.

So if you are looking for a GP:

- Consider phoning up prospective practices anonymously to ask whether they are 'lesbian and gay friendly';
- If you feel uncomfortable doing this, you could ask about other related issues, such as how the practice deals with different cultures, faiths and other diversity issues;
- Ring your Primary Care Trust, the local part of the NHS which monitors the performance of GPs, to ask which practices welcome lesbian, gay and bisexual patients.