

**Being gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) is not a health problem in itself. However, the GLBT population has specific health needs.**

Sexual orientation and gender identity<sup>1</sup>, just like other factors such as ethnicity or socio-economic status, have an impact on health and wellbeing.

Health problems that are shared by GLBT populations are usually results of discrimination and isolation and include poorer general health, decreased access to healthcare facilities and a diminished quality of health services. These negative experiences result in GLBT people becoming disengaged and not returning for service. Each subgroup (e.g. lesbians or transgender people) also has specific health issues.

### What do GLBT clients need?

- Clear messages that the service welcomes diverse sexualities and genders
- To know that confidentiality will be respected
- Services that are understanding of GLBT health and wellbeing concerns

### What health issues are of specific concern to the GLBT community?

Research indicates that individuals from the GLBT community, especially younger people, will be more likely to:

- Have drug and alcohol issues
- Self harm
- Consider or act on suicidal thoughts
- Have increased risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Experience mental health problems
- Experience homelessness
- Not be screened for breast, cervical or anal cancer
- Have higher rates of smoking
- Have issues around body image

Also:

- Gay men in particular are susceptible to HIV
- Lesbians are at higher risk of obesity and cancer
- Transgender people may have additional health risks, for example, issues related to hormone treatments

1. Gender identity refers to people who may identify as transgender, transsexual, genderqueer or who may be living as the gender not assigned to them at birth.

You can learn more about GLBT health issues at:

[www.acon.org.au/mens-health](http://www.acon.org.au/mens-health) and  
[www.acon.org.au/womens-health](http://www.acon.org.au/womens-health)

### Is this issue my responsibility?

Yes. Every service and worker has a responsibility and duty of care to provide equal, accessible services free from judgement and discrimination. Throughout their lives GLBT people may access the whole gamut of community and health services and these interactions will impact on their experience of health.

**GLBT people have a right to access safe health services and as service providers we all have a responsibility to provide this.**

### Why can't we just treat everyone the same?

Treating everyone the same does not recognise the different health issues experienced by some demographic groups and can mean that people fall through the cracks.

Research shows that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Australians often have poor experiences of health and support services.

**Providing clients with the opportunity to disclose their sexuality or gender identity in a safe and welcoming environment will build honesty and trust and enable individualised and holistic care.**

It's important for services to provide clear messages that allow GLBT clients to disclose their sexuality or gender identity if and when they want to and on their own terms.

### Do I need to be an expert?

No. Being aware of the impact sexuality and gender identity can have on an individual's health and wellbeing puts you in good stead to support GLBT clients.



# Is your service GLBT\* friendly?

*\*Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender*



# What can I do to engage GLBT clients?

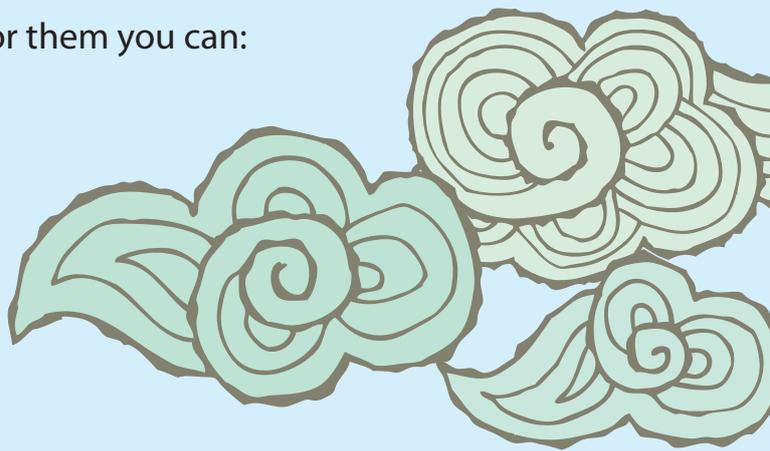
To indicate to GLBT people that your service is for them you can:

## 1. Show your support:

- Display educational materials, posters, pamphlets, GLBT magazines and children's books that represent families with same-sex parents in your workplace. Update and change these regularly.
- Clearly display and explain any confidentiality and diversity statements to your clients. This will indicate to your client that your workplace is open and welcoming to disclosures of sexual orientation, HIV status or trans status.
- Make sure your own client brochure and website has GLBT people listed as a client group.
- Develop and deliver specialised programs, as needed, for GLBT clients.
- Advocate for non-faith based branding. Many members of the GLBT community feel alienated by some religions.

## 2. Speak up:

- Use language that is gender neutral and doesn't assume heterosexuality e.g. use 'partner' instead of 'wife', 'husband', 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'. Be aware of this in all client interactions and workplace documents such as intake forms and organisational policies.
- Use the language your client uses. If your client is a gay man and he refers to his partner as his 'husband' you should also. If someone describes themselves as 'queer' then this is the word that should be used etc. If someone who 'appears' female to you refers to themselves as 'he' then you should follow suit. If you're unsure of how to address someone it is polite to ask the person what term they prefer.
- Ensure that homophobic or heterosexist comments or behaviour from staff, clients and volunteers are not tolerated and are dealt with promptly.
- Be prepared to respond to anti-gay, anti-lesbian, anti-bisexual and anti-transgender slurs including jokes – just as you would to racist or sexist comments. Remember that many people including yourself will have friends and family members that have diverse sexualities and/or gender identities.
- Speak openly about your support of GLBT people.



## 3. Equip staff:

- Train staff or encourage external training in issues that face the GLBT community.
- Employ openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender staff.
- Cover GLBT policies in staff/volunteer orientation and training.

## 4. Connect with your community:

- Make contact with local GLBT networks, and services, other GLBT inclusive services, and identify useful websites and resources for referrals.
- Research, attend and celebrate GLBT events. Look for opportunities to participate in activities that allow you to experience being different and take responsibility for becoming better informed.

**Ask yourself 'If I were a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person in my workplace could I choose comfortably to be open about my life?'**

*ACON is the largest GLBT Health and HIV/AIDS organisation in NSW, with branches state wide.*

*To find the ACON branch closest to you, visit: [www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au), email [info@acon.org.au](mailto:info@acon.org.au) or call 1800 063 060*



**acon** <sup>25 YEARS</sup>  
BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S  
HEALTH & WELLBEING 1985-2010

lesbian  
& gay  
**anti-violence**  
project