

Working with older lesbian, gay and bisexual people

A Guide for Care and Support Services

James Taylor



Stonewall
C Y M R U



When you get older, you find you become invisible – this is a great blow to one’s self-esteem. **Kathleen**, 61, Wales

From personal experience of visiting older friends in retirement and nursing homes I know as an absolute truth that they have felt more comfortable in hiding their sexuality from other residents and carers. **Ray**, 59, South East England

Everything is predominantly heterosexual orientated ... It’s depressing to think I might end up in a home where I could be isolated because to disclose or talk about my life would lead to ostracisation. **Molly**, 68, London

I have lived alone for so long it would be hard to change even if I met someone. Coming out so late I seem to have well and truly missed the boat. I compensate at the moment by being active and interested in things, but as my health goes that option will be lost. **Sandra**, 58, Wales

Foreword

For more than 57,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales over the age of 55, growing old is a real concern.

We know from YouGov polling of 1,036 older lesbian, gay and bisexual people and 1,050 heterosexual older people, commissioned by Stonewall, that a significant proportion of older gay people are likely to live alone, have limited family support and rely on formal services for help in the future. This ground breaking research *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life* demonstrates that many older gay people have experienced, or fear, discrimination because of their sexual orientation and they say this creates a barrier to receiving appropriate care and treatment.

This guide offers practical advice to organisations providing care and support services about how to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Sometimes changes to policy, staff training and awareness about the law can make things better. But often it is about simple things such as awareness and communication – individual actions will have a big impact.

We're hugely grateful to the organisations featured in this guide who have shared valuable practical insights on making care and support services relevant to lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

We hope this advice and guidance will help care providers to improve the services they offer to gay people and to deliver those services with the dignity and respect that all older people deserve.

Andrew White Director of Stonewall Cymru

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1 What older gay people need

Older lesbian, gay and bisexual people want many of the same things in later life as heterosexual older people. This includes staying in their own homes for as long as possible and being treated with respect and dignity when they access health and care services.

Stonewall research has shown that half of older gay people feel their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on getting older. Gay people are much more likely than heterosexual people to face the prospect of living alone with limited personal help from their families and therefore are more likely to rely on formal services for support in later life.

Many older gay people express considerable worries about the future – about having to hide their sexual orientation, about having to move into a care home that is designed for heterosexual people and about a lack of opportunity to socialise with other older gay people.

Stonewall's research into the needs of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people shows:

- Gay and bisexual older men are three times more likely to be single than heterosexual men
- 41 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual older people live alone compared to 28 per cent of heterosexual older people
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual older people are less likely to have children and less likely to see biological family members on a regular basis – just a quarter of men and half of women see their children compared to nine in ten heterosexual men and women
- 45 per cent drink alcohol at least 'three or four days' a week compared to just 31 per cent of heterosexual people
- 1 in 11 have taken drugs in the past year compared to 1 in 50 heterosexual people
- Lesbians and bisexual women are more likely than heterosexual women to have ever been diagnosed with anxiety and depression

Older gay people also have a lack of confidence in a range of social and health support services:

- Three in five are not confident that social care and support services will be able to understand and meet their needs
- More than two in five are not confident that mental health services would be able to understand and meet their needs
- One in six are not confident that their GP and other health services will be able to understand and meet their needs
- 50 per cent are uncomfortable being out to care home staff, 33 per cent to a housing provider, and 20 per cent to a GP

One doesn't have a younger generation of family to fight your corner should you be unable to do it for yourself. Barbara, 62, Wales

2 What the law says

There are a number of laws that protect older lesbian, gay and bisexual people and apply to all care and support services.

Civil Partnership Act 2004

The Civil Partnership Act means that same-sex couples in civil partnerships must be treated the same as married couples and any policies or practices should reflect this.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 outlaws discrimination when providing any goods, facilities and services on the grounds of someone's sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. This means, for example, that it is unlawful to refuse to house a same-sex couple together in a care home if a heterosexual couple in similar circumstances would be housed together.

The public sector Equality Duty, often known as 'the duty', also requires public and private organisations that deliver public services to act to eliminate discrimination. They have a duty to encourage equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups including lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Under the duty, organisations delivering public services must:

- Set and publish equality objectives which outline how they plan to tackle inequalities faced by different groups including gay people
- Publish data on how they are meeting the aims of the duty

There is no fixed form or number of equality objectives but they should be measurable and proportionate to the size of the organisation and the services it delivers. A local authority for example might set the following objectives:

- Improve the experience of older gay people in care homes
- Provide better information and services to older gay people
- Improve healthcare to older gay people
- Demonstrate a commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual equality

I am a gay woman in a very loving and long relationship. We have signed our Civil Partnership but I still worry for the future. My biggest fear is that if we both become ill and need care that we might be separated or be looked after by people who are anti-gay and would treat us badly. Sheila, 62, North West England

The Welsh Specific Duties additionally require bodies to actively seek relevant information to make evidence-based objectives and Equality Impact Assessments through engagement and involvement at all key points.

Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 allows men with historic convictions for consensual gay sex to apply to have them removed from their criminal record. Many gay men who were unfairly convicted of these offences have been put off from volunteering fearing they would be revealed in criminal records checks. To find out more about the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 visit www.stonewall.org.uk or call 08000 50 20 20.

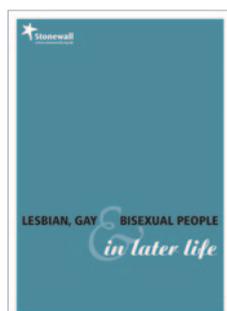
Mental Capacity Act 2005

Under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 civil partners are treated the same as heterosexual married couples. Decisions cannot be made on a person's behalf as to whether they consent to a civil partnership or dissolve a civil partnership, the same as for heterosexual people and marriage. Lasting and Enduring Power of Attorney's can be same-sex partners, as well as family or close friends. If a patient loses mental capacity under the Act, staff must respect the decisions of the nominated Attorney.

Next of Kin

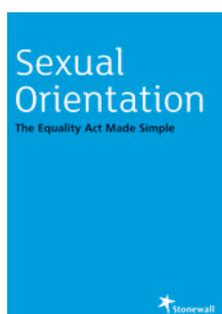
The term 'next of kin' has limited meaning in health and social care, it doesn't have to be a blood relation or civil partner (or husband or wife). Older gay people may have concerns that their same-sex partner or even their friends won't be acknowledged by staff and may therefore hide their existence.

Next of kin can be anybody in a patient's social or family network. Staff must respect the patient's wishes about who this is. Asking open questions such as 'who would you like us to contact in an emergency?' or 'do you have somebody at home?' can encourage open discussion about who to nominate to arrange appropriate care.



Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life

To read the **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life** research visit www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/age



Sexual Orientation
The Equality Act
Made Simple

For more information on the **Equality Act 2010** including how to set equality objectives visit www.stonewall.org.uk/EqualityAct

3 How to involve older people

All service providers should regularly involve older gay people in decisions about how their services are run. Individual gay people, community groups and advocates are all in a good position to provide practical and cost-effective ideas on how to improve services.

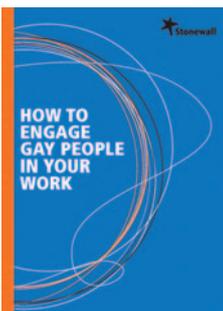
Effective involvement can include:

- Consulting directly with lesbian, gay and bisexual people via surveys or face-to-face interviews
- Setting up lesbian, gay and bisexual older people groups to offer feedback, suggest improvements and provide advice
- Reporting any changes or decisions made about services to lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals and community groups

Sheffield County Council has started to talk to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community about their housing needs through a survey. Although small in scale, it has identified issues such as isolation and vulnerability experienced by older lesbian, gay and bisexual people which has helped the development of the Council's housing strategy.

East Sussex County Council runs an LGBT and T carer and patient group to test ideas and involve in service developments and training. The Council understands that older gay people need to be involved to make sure its services meet everyone's needs. The group has begun using social media to reach out and share information confidentially to older people who are at home.

For more information see the following useful Stonewall reports and resources



How to engage gay people in your work



What's it got to do with me?



What's it got to do with you?

4 What care and support workers can do

Care and support workers play an important part in the lives of older people who need extra support. However, many older gay people worry that paid care and support workers and personal assistants will not be able to understand and meet their needs.

Some feel they have to hide anything that might reveal that they are gay, such as photographs of their partner, because they are unsure of who is coming into their home. Older gay people may also be anxious about coming out and the response they will receive from a care and support worker or personal assistant.

All care and support workers should recognise that by going into an older person's home they are expected to respect them and treat them with dignity. Treating older gay people as individuals and recognising the challenges they may have faced in their lives is important to help build trust and an on-going relationship.

As a care and support worker, there are many simple things you can do to help make older gay people feel more comfortable in their home. When talking to people you care for don't assume they are heterosexual. Ask them open questions about their life such as 'which people are important in your life?' and talk about gay people or issues in a non-judgemental manner.

TIPS FOR CARE AND SUPPORT WORKERS

- Don't assume that people you care for are heterosexual
- Ask people open questions about their life and who is important to them
- In everyday conversation talk about gay people or issues in a non-judgemental way
- Don't force people to talk about their sexual orientation if they don't want to
- Ask older gay people you care for how you can help, for example, by putting them in touch with a local gay group

East Sussex County Council is embedding equality, including sexual orientation equality, into every service department that works with individuals. It runs a Support with Confidence directory of local personal assistants and carers registered with, and vetted by, the Council.

All service staff in this directory have received the Council's own equality and diversity training which includes information about the needs of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Personal assistants can make explicit that they are gay-friendly in the directory.

Suffolk Family Carers is an independent charity supporting family carers, employing over 100 staff and supporting over 6,000 carers. The organisation wanted to reach out to lesbian, gay and bisexual family carers, including those who care for older lesbian, gay and bisexual relatives. It now runs an LGB and T family carers group, with the majority of carers over the age of 50 caring for partners and occasionally close family at home.

The group has an active, private social networking page where older LGB and T carers can discuss how they are feeling. The group also attends Suffolk Pride promoting the service and its presence in the community. Suffolk Family Carers publishes information about the LGB and T group in its 6,000 reader newsletter and within its general information pack.

5 What homecare providers can do

Many older gay people have lived through a time when same-sex relationships were outlawed and see their home as a safe space where they can be themselves. The vast majority, 95 per cent, of older gay people say they would prefer to live in their own home for as long as possible and they are nearly twice as likely as older heterosexual people to rely on a range of external services for support.

Having a stranger come into their home may impact on older gay people's ability to be themselves. They need to trust that a carer coming in to carry out tasks such as bathing, cooking, cleaning or helping to get into bed will not make assumptions or be discriminatory towards them.

I have had bad experiences with social services and carers, in respect that I was cautioned not to mention I am gay, in case a carer did not approve. Harry, 74, London

Homecare services should make sure they have policies in place to reassure potential clients of their commitment to equality and diversity. Training should be provided to staff who go into people's homes on asking open questions, respecting people's privacy and treating people with dignity and respect.

Homecare services that promote themselves as gay-friendly and provide training to staff on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues can demonstrate to older gay people that they can use their services free from discrimination.

I am worried about having to have 24-hour care and the attitudes of care staff. This would make me keep my sexuality to myself – this is bound to have a negative effect on my wellbeing.

Sarah, 59, South East

TIPS FOR HOMECARE PROVIDERS

- Train staff who go into people's homes on sexual orientation equality
- Include equality and diversity as an essential criteria in job descriptions
- Develop an equality policy that explicitly covers lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Demonstrate your commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual equality, for example by joining Stonewall Cymru's Diversity Champions Programme
- Work with local authority to share best practice and advice
- Support older gay people to attend gay-friendly social events if they wish
- Conduct surveys to understand the needs of older gay users and use this to improve what is on offer

I would, by virtue of the need to have carers in my home, be at a particularly vulnerable stage of life. The thought of being in my own home requiring help from someone who brings in with them the prejudices and judgements of the world I experience 'out there' fills me with dread. **James**, 55, London

For more information see the following useful Stonewall reports and resources



Some People Are Gay, Get Over It posters



What's it got to do with you?

6 What care homes can do

The decision to move into a care home is not easy to make and can be very stressful. Older gay people worry about having to go into a care home – they worry how others may react, how they might be treated by staff and fear they may have to hide their sexual orientation.

The best care homes make sure that they treat lesbian, gay and bisexual people the same as heterosexual residents, but also understand the barriers gay people can face when accessing services. They audit all their services to find out where improvements can be made, for example by making sure same-sex partners are treated equally to opposite sex partners.

Care homes need to work with both staff and other residents to foster a culture of dignity and respect for people of all backgrounds. The best care homes have a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and act immediately if this behaviour occurs.

If I were to need residential care and found myself in a heterosexual care home I would find this very difficult. Maggie, 63, East Midlands

I don't expect social care staff to be adequately trained in issues relating to homosexuality/lesbianism. Kathryn, 57, Wales

TIPS FOR CARE HOMES

- Display clear policies which set out how you handle discrimination and anti-gay bullying
- Monitor the sexual orientation of residents to understand the make-up of your home
- Train staff on the law and on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues including same-sex partner rights
- Encourage staff to use open language rather than assume residents are heterosexual
- Include lesbian, gay and bisexual people in your promotional literature and information packs
- Make same-sex partners feel welcome by allowing private time for couples and the sharing of rooms
- Include lesbian, gay and bisexual events and social occasions
- Make sure that residents know about any codes of conduct that include sexual orientation discrimination and can complain if necessary

Kent County Council launched a working group of staff and service users to look more closely at the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It developed a toolkit for adult social care staff on sexual orientation equality and its in-house residential care homes then asked for further training to be able to assess how gay-friendly their homes were. Staff are encouraged to talk openly about sexual orientation, to challenge homophobic language and to display gay-affirmative imagery in windows and communal areas.

The Council's training package for its homes has improved the knowledge of care staff, including supporting a number of staff to come out. The training looks at the personal experiences of older gay people, the history of criminalisation and medicalisation, real-life examples of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people and their experiences of care and tackling homophobia. The toolkit and training have influenced the way staff work with gay people and given them the confidence to ask what they think are difficult questions but which are important to ensure a person receives individual support.

Age UK Opening Doors project in Camden has developed a checklist for adult social care and other service providers to encourage good practice around older LGB and T people. The project supports over 700 older LGB and T people with advice, social events and befriending as well as a monthly newsletter. Partnering with the London Borough of Hackney, Opening Doors developed a checklist for social care providers which includes examples of good practice, such as the kinds of questions that encourage people to be open. It is designed to help residential care homes and providers of health and social care services to make changes and to have a clear sense of achievement, as well as identifying areas that still need improvement.

The people in the nursing homes are still feeling guilty and ashamed and isolated and dare not come out for fear that they will be judged because they have lived like that all their lives.

Andrew Howarth, Leeds Partnership Trust

7 What housing providers can do

Three in five older gay people find sheltered housing and retirement communities attractive options for the future. However, the limited support networks available to older gay people mean they might be at risk of further isolation if they move out of their home into community housing.

The best housing organisations actively promote what they do for lesbian, gay and bisexual tenants and prospective tenants and work with gay people themselves to improve their services. The Equality Act means housing providers cannot refuse to house lesbian, gay and bisexual people or offer them a service of lesser quality than that provided to heterosexual people.

I do feel very strongly there should be provision for gay people in care homes and in supported housing. It is so important to feel comfortable in one's living surroundings and shared experiences are one way of ensuring that. Anita, 69, West Midlands

Housing organisations should have policies in place to protect gay residents from homophobic hate crime and anti-gay bullying, and work with police to create a safe place to live. They also have a duty to take complaints seriously and train staff on how to handle homophobic complaints.

TIPS FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS

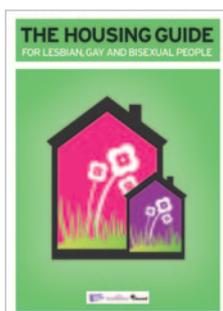
- Include lesbian, gay and bisexual people in promotional material
- Engage directly with gay residents, for example by setting up a tenants network
- Hold events that celebrate the different backgrounds of tenants, including those who are gay
- Actively promote policies that protect residents from anti-gay bullying
- Work with the police and tenants to help gay residents feel safe and secure in and around their homes

I didn't come out until my late 40s so didn't have a chance to build up my network of lesbian and gay friends. Sandra, 58, Wales

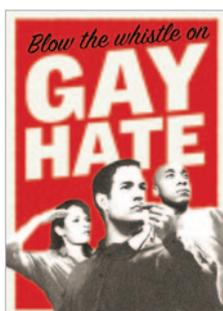
Gentoo housing association, England monitors the sexual orientation of its customers, including those in sheltered housing schemes, and has begun a programme to improve awareness of older gay residents amongst staff. Many Gentoo publications include lesbian, gay and bisexual images. Gay residents are also offered the opportunity to speak to a gay member of staff if that would make them feel more comfortable, and this service was promoted in the regular residents' magazine. Gentoo staff have access to briefing sheets on working with and supporting older gay residents.

Anchor housing association, England established its own LGBT and T staff and residents group several years ago following a query from a gay resident who expressed concern over potential isolation. The group is made up of over 50 residents and other clients and meets regularly around the country to make sure the views of Anchor's lesbian, gay and bisexual population are heard. The group has helped to improve the policies of the organisation, inputted into staff diversity training and raised awareness of lesbian, gay and bisexual residents using Anchor services. The group has also taken part in Pride events, supported staff on using appropriate language and led specific events on bisexuality. Members of the group also work with Anchor's customer services committee on how to be gay-friendly.

For more information see the following useful Stonewall reports and resources



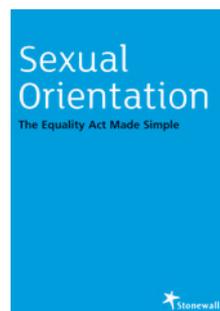
The Housing Guide



Blow the Whistle on Gay Hate



Some People Are Gay, Get Over It posters



Sexual Orientation The Equality Act Made Simple

8 What health services can do

The NHS has a responsibility to make sure that the needs of older gay patients are met across all its services. It faces the challenge of creating open services, free from discrimination, that gay people feel comfortable to use. It must also take into account the specific health needs of older gay people.

Stonewall research into the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people demonstrates clear health inequalities:

- 9 per cent of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people have taken drugs in the past year compared to 2 per cent of heterosexual older people
- 45 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual older people drink alcohol at least 'three or four days' a week compared to just 31 per cent of heterosexual people
- 8 per cent of older gay people rate their mental health as 'poor' and are more likely to be worried about their mental health than heterosexual older people
- Single older gay people are more than three times as likely to rate their mental health as 'poor' than those in a relationship

Healthcare services that consider the needs of older gay people when planning and designing care can meet their needs much more easily. The best NHS organisations recognise that if older patients are at ease they will be able to tell staff they are gay. Organisations can then provide better advice that prevents poor health, saves money, and ensures patients are treated with dignity and respect.

Although things are improving, there is still a lot of ignorance at least, homophobia at worst, among health and social care people.

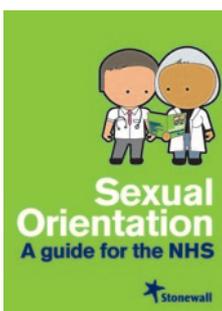
Rita, 61, South East England

Some of us born before the more open, modern times in the UK were not supported in developing attachments which might have flourished towards becoming a 'family'. I'm now socially inept and emotionally isolated. Carl, 61, East Midlands

TIPS FOR HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Understand the health needs of older gay people and use this evidence when designing health services
- Have clear policies that set out how the organisation intends to promote equality for older lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Include lesbian, gay and bisexual people in posters on wards and waiting areas
- Update policies on visitors to include same-sex partners and make sure staff understand these policies
- Provide the same private time to same-sex partners as provided to heterosexual partners
- Train staff who work with older people on the law, relevant policies and how to ask open questions
- Involve older gay people in patient surveys and reviews of services
- Monitor the sexual orientation of patients to improve services
- Demonstrate your commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual equality, for example by joining Stonewall Cymru's Diversity Champions Programme

For more information on lesbian, gay and bisexual health visit www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk



Sexual Orientation:
A guide for the NHS



Lesbian health
posters



Gay men's
health posters

9 What local authorities can do

Local authorities play a key role in the support and care given to many older people in their local communities. They provide a range of services specifically for older people, such as telecare or care in an older person's home, and more general services used by older gay people such as libraries and community centres. Local authorities must make sure that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are not only able to access all of these free from discrimination but are also welcomed to do so.

Local authorities should recognise that older gay people often face particular challenges. They are:

- More likely to be single and therefore more likely to require housing support or a personal assistant
- Less likely to have family support and therefore more likely to require care and support services
- Likely to have experienced discrimination and hostility and therefore are less likely to access the services they need

The best local authorities provide detailed information for older gay people, allowing them to choose which services they want. This may include lesbian, gay and bisexual friendly services in a directory of care providers to help individuals make informed choices on what is best for them.

Top local authorities also build links with lesbian, gay and bisexual voluntary organisations alongside maintaining accessible mainstream care and support services. This helps older gay people to exercise choice and control in the services they receive and can improve the limited opportunities for older gay people to network with other older gay people.

TIPS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- Include same-sex couples and single lesbian, gay and bisexual people in promotional materials, advice brochures and leaflets
- Consider monitoring sexual orientation to provide data on how older gay people are using local services
- Promote the work you are doing to improve services for older gay people in local media. Encourage senior staff and councillors to publically support this work
- Deliver staff training on how the law protects gay people and the specific needs of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Work with local gay groups to understand their needs and to flag up where specific support and information is required
- Work with procurement and contract teams to make sure suppliers and contractors commit to sexual orientation equality and deliver better services to older gay people
- Demonstrate your commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual equality, for example by joining Stonewall's Diversity Champions Programme.

As an older lesbian I don't think support services are approachable and would treat me with equality and I still think there is a lot of homophobia. **Rebecca**, 64, Scotland

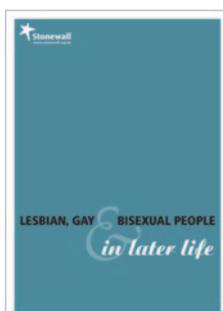
London Borough of Tower Hamlets worked with its Primary Care Trust, third sector organisations and charities as well as older LGB and T community groups to explore the experiences of older gay people living and working in the borough. It wanted to ensure that services provided or contracted by local authorities benefit all residents, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. An awareness raising conference, two knowledge exchange workshops and a final showcase conference were organised to share learning and good practice.

One practical outcome was a programme to encourage occupational therapists in Tower Hamlets to ask service users for their sexual orientation data. This involved explaining to service users why the information is needed and how it is used. The programme was launched via team meetings and the LGB and T staff Forum.

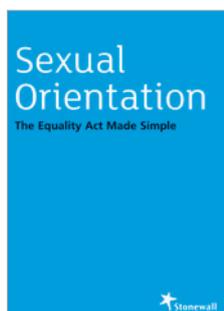
East Sussex County Council As a result of feedback from the local gay community, East Sussex County Council worked with local LGB and T groups to research how it could better support its older gay population. The Public Health department of the council regularly uses the findings to ensure its work does not impact negatively on older gay people.

Staff who carry out assessments are offered training using the research, which is delivered by local LGB and T older people. The training helps all staff to understand same-sex relationships, offers tips on collecting sexual orientation data and advice on how to make a service area gay-friendly.

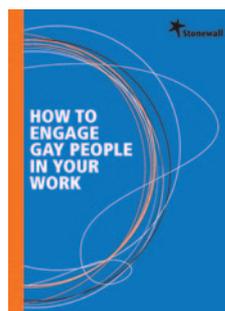
For more information see the following useful Stonewall reports and resources



Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life



Sexual Orientation
The Equality Act
Made Simple



How to engage gay
people in your
work

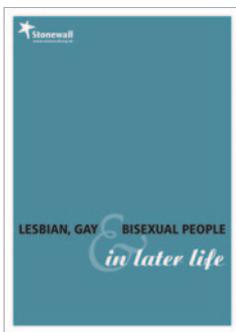


What's it got to
do with you?

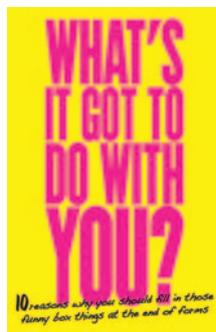
10 Further Support and Resources

- For tailored support and advice on improving your workplace for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees contact workplace@stonewallcymru.org.uk
- For tailored support and advice on improving your services for older lesbian, gay and bisexual people contact healthylives@stonewallcymru.org.uk
- For advice and support on all other areas covered in this guide and more please contact 08000 502020 or cymru@stonewallcymru.org.uk

- We would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who provided case studies for this guide



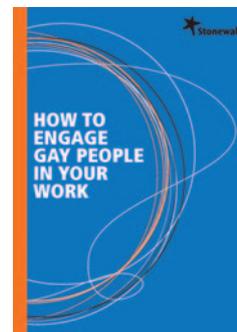
Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life



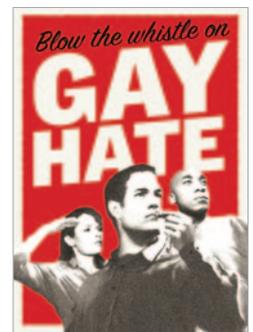
What's it got to do with you?



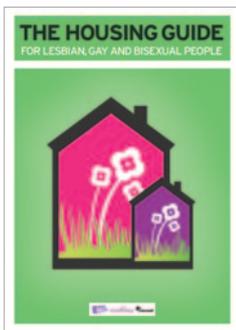
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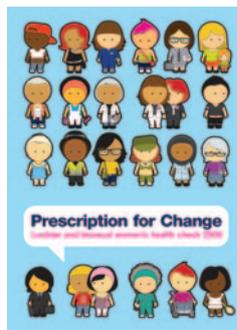
How to engage gay people in your work



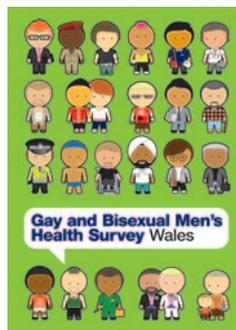
Blow the Whistle on Gay Hate



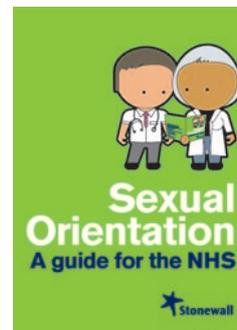
The Housing Guide



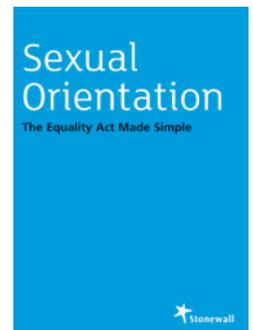
Prescription for Change



Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey



Sexual Orientation: A guide for the NHS



Sexual Orientation The Equality Act Made Simple



Lesbian health posters



Gay men's health posters



Some People Are Gay, Get Over It posters

- All English Stonewall publications referenced in this guide are available to download for free from www.stonewall.org.uk/publications
- For Stonewall Cymru bilingual publications please email cymru@stonewallcymru.org.uk