

Smoking: LGBT people

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are more likely to smoke than the national average.
- Many within LGBT communities also report barriers to accessing medical treatment.
- Services must, therefore, be inclusive and welcoming to LGBT people.

High smoking rates

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to smoke than heterosexual people. Rates are particularly high for LGB women and bisexual men, with the inequality particularly pronounced when compared with heterosexual women and men ([ONS, 2019](#)). Increased likelihood of smoking amongst bisexual people is further evidenced in surveys by Stonewall ([Stonewall, 2012](#)). However, in recent years the gap between LGBT and heterosexual smoking rates has narrowed (Jackson, to be published 2019).

Smoking prevalence by sexual identity in the UK

Heterosexual (all) - 15.9%	Lesbian or Gay (all) - 23.1%
Heterosexual women - 14.5%	Bisexual (all) - 23.3%
Heterosexual men - 17.1%	LGB women - 25%
	Bisexual men - 26.7%

([ONS, 2019](#))

Whilst there is a lack of robust research on smoking among transgender people, surveys do show transgender people are more likely to smoke ([Rooney, 2012](#)).

Young LGB people are also more likely to smoke, start smoking at a younger age and smoke more heavily ([Corliss et al, 2013](#)).

Associated health risks

Mental Health: LGBT people are more likely to suffer from mental ill health ([Stonewall, 2018](#)). Smoking cessation is associated with reduced depression and improved quality of life ([Taylor et al, 2014](#)).

HIV: Men who have sex with men (MSM) are most at risk of acquiring HIV in the UK ([PHE, 2018](#)). Data from 2017 found 20% of men living with HIV in London smoke, significantly higher than the general adult population ([PHE, 2018](#)). HIV positive smokers are more likely to develop cancers of the lung, anus, mouth and throat ([Tirreli et al, 2000](#)) and are more likely to suffer from respiratory disease ([Diaz et al, 2000](#)).

Gender identity related surgeries: Smoking is a significant risk factor during and after any surgery. Smokers are 38% more likely to die after any surgery ([Turan et al, 2011](#)) and more likely to experience wound infection ([Sørensen, 2012](#)).



Additional vulnerabilities

LGBT people are disproportionately affected by wider social inequalities which can increase the risk of smoking initiation and tobacco addiction.

- Young LGBT people are more likely to be homeless (Albert Kennedy Trust, 2014). Research carried out by the Homeless Link (2014) suggests as many as **77% of homeless people smoke**.
- People from LGBT groups are **more likely to experience mental ill health**. A third of all cigarettes smoked in England are smoked by people with a mental health condition (RCP and RCPsych, 2013).
- People in the LGBT community are also **more likely to use illegal drugs** (NEPTUNE, 2016). High rates of smoking are often found among those using other substances (MacManus, 2010).



Communication and access to services

LGBT people often report limited access to health services. Good communication with LGBT people encourages them to be involved in their own healthcare and promotes better health outcomes.

Services should encourage openness and use inclusive language which avoids making assumptions based on sexuality or gender identity. For guidance on communication and language see briefings from Stonewall Scotland and the Department of Health. You can also see the latest LGBT Action Plan here.

Stop Smoking Services should demonstrate that there are no barriers to access for people from the LGBT community, for example, by displaying equality policies and including members of the LGBT community in health promotion campaigns where appropriate (see the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership's 'You Can' campaign which prominently included two LGBT case studies, here and here).

What actions can local authorities take?

- Commission NICE-compliant Stop Smoking Services that **actively seek to engage with LGBT communities** and are accessible in a range of settings that are appropriate for LGBT communities.
- Ensure services that work specifically with members of the LGBT community offer **Very Brief Advice to stop smoking**.
- Ensure commissioned stop smoking services **record sexual orientation and transgender status** alongside other monitoring data.
- **Advertise existing services** at Pride and other LGBT events and spaces.

More information

- Smoking and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGB&T) Communities, National LGB&T Partnership, August 2015
- LGBT Action Plan: Improving the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people, Government Equalities Office, July 2018

