

## Report on the Healthwatch Wandsworth Consultation on LGBT Mental Health

### Background

Healthwatch Wandsworth launched a survey to gain insight into the mental health experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community to help inform the London Assembly Health Committee's review into the issues.

Research indicates that members of the LGBT community have higher instances of mental health problems than the rest of the population, while a Stonewall survey highlighted that half of lesbian and bisexual women and a third of gay and bisexual men reported a negative experience of accessing healthcare.

According a *The National Institute for Mental Health<sup>1</sup> in England* report, LGBT people are:

- At higher risk of suicidal behaviour than non-LGBT people
- 50% are more likely to develop depression and anxiety than the rest of the population

The report is supported by research by Public Health England (PHE) which indicates that one in two LGBT young people in the UK reported self-harming at some point in their life and 44% reported having thought about suicide. However, PACE<sup>2</sup>, a mental health charity, reported that the PHE data may not be representative of the entire LGBT community because they found that 59% of transgender people under 26 said that they had considered suicide in the past year alone.

### Our Consultation Survey

The Healthwatch Wandsworth survey was compiled to understand the challenges and needs of the LGBT community with mental health problems in Wandsworth and influence the Mayor of London's policy development in the area of LGBT mental health to reflect local needs.

The Healthwatch Wandsworth LGBT Mental Health survey comprised eight questions based on those posed by the London Assembly Health Committee, which sought to measure the current experiences of the LGBT community in relation to mental health.

The questions posed related to notable challenges the community might face including accessibility to support, performance of services within the community, barriers to support and suggestions for better promotion and prevention of mental ill health for the LGBT community.

The survey was open from 21st October 2016 to 5<sup>th</sup> November 2016, which limited the time available to collect responses and the options for appropriate events to visit.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Institute for Mental Health has now been disbanded.

<sup>2</sup> PACE provided support services for the LGBT+ community - including counselling, advocacy, research and mental health support services. It closed in January 2016.

## Findings

A total of 25 people submitted their views to us. A sample of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. All of the individual responses can be found in Appendix B.

The survey was advertised via our website and social media channels and was circulated to our local contacts. In addition we took the survey to ‘#BornThisWay’, an event organised by Free2B Alliance, a community based organisation supporting LGBTQ+ young people.

The questions, based largely on those circulated by the London Assembly Health Committee, were deliberately open to draw out people’s experiences, thoughts and suggestions. As a result, Healthwatch Wandsworth could draw conclusions about the mental health experiences and needs of the LGBT community in Wandsworth. This could help us understand where provision must be strengthened in order to best support the community.

### Question one: What do you think are the main mental health challenges faced by the LGBT community?

A variety of concerns were raised by respondents, ranging from emotional to the practical problems.

- A recurrent challenge related to **depression and anxiety**, with 11% citing “self-harm” and “suicide” as the main mental health challenges faced by the LGBT community.
- Other respondents emphasised the following as the main challenges faced by the LGBT community:
  - **lack of support**, in relation to service provision - tailored or otherwise
  - **family understanding**
  - **finding a safe space to talk**

The responses demonstrate that **challenges faced are various, complex and require a holistic approach to address the stigma and discrimination** attached to mental ill health; and to identifying as LGBT.

**Question two: What mental health support do you think the LGBT community may want or need?**

The main themes of suggestions for services was the need for:

- Talking therapies
- Specific services for young people
- Tailored, LGBT friendly and specialist support
- A variety of services access to support

The majority of respondents (**60%**) cited that the form of mental health support that the **LGBT community needs most** is a form of **talking therapy**.

Some respondents emphasised the need for **tailored support**, such as counselling, suggesting services should be “specialist”, “tailored”, “targeted” and “bespoke”, while others mentioned drop-in sessions, peer support and online and telephone support lines.

A number of respondents highlighted the need for a **specific support service for young people**, notably those aged 18 and below.

Underlying responses to our questions is a sense that the **mental health needs of the LGBT community are not currently being met** and that **existing services were not encouraging them to access** the services they need. Conveying a **sense of misunderstanding and judgement from existing support systems**, respondents highlight that there are few “gay affirmative therapists who support their lifestyles” or “safe accessible places to go”.

**Question three: Do you know of a service or group that does well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? If yes, please tell us more**

A number of services were named as providing a supportive service to the LGBT community with mental health issues and some were outside of London. This highlights the lack of available services or awareness of services available.

The three services which were consistently cited were:

- Tavistock
- The GAP Youth Club
- Free2B Alliance

One respondent claimed that it is **difficult to access services which are tailored specifically to the mental health needs of the LGBT community** while another lamented that **cuts to funding** led to the closure of PACE which had provided an “amazing service”. This respondent goes on to say that, as a result, they have not located an alternative service to which they can refer members for LGBT-appropriate mental health support.

**Question four: Is there a service of group that isn't working so well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? If yes, please tell us more.**

While there were fewer responses to this question, the general view from those who did suggest that current services **may not be providing adequate levels of support** to the LGBT community.

Various **issues with the process of navigating through the system** were highlighted. There were comments about 'falling through the gaps', being 'ignored' and slow access to support to intervene when cases could easily escalate.

While "the GP", "CAMHS", "schools" and "Springfield" were cited as services that were not providing sufficient support to the LGBT community, further responses highlight that cuts in funding and a lack of training and awareness are likely causes.

**Question five: What do you think may stop the LGBT community from accessing mental health support? Are there any barriers?**

Akin to responses to question one, respondents highlight a **lack of awareness and understanding from the wider community as a barrier** to accessing mental health support.

The main themes of the barriers suggested were:

- Stigma relating to both the LGBT community and Mental Health
- Lack of confidence and fear being judged or discrimination
- Fear of lack of discretion
- Lack of tailored, LGBT friendly and support that understands their needs
- Difficulty in accessing services

**72% of respondents mentioned stigma as the principal reason** that they feel unable to access support while others name **homophobia within the family, high thresholds to access and waiting times** as further reasons.

The stigma discussed by respondents ranges from a stigma attached to mental health problems and, separately, to identifying as LGBT. Moreover, the fear of discrimination and lack of understanding is related to the community as a whole but also to clinicians, family, friends and the media. A few respondents also highlighted the need to know that services will be discreet if they have not yet come out.

**Question six: How can mental health services make their services more accessible for the LGBT community?**

A variety of suggestions were raised to make mental health services more accessible for the LGBT community including:

- Tackling stigma
- Raising awareness of services, sometimes widely and sometimes discreetly
- Promoting support for the LGBT community
- Training for professionals
- Using different channels to promote and provide support

As mentioned in previous responses, the need to tackle stigma and to promote understanding and awareness of LGBT issues were emphasised.

There were conflicting views in regards to publicising services. Although a number of respondents highlighted the need for organisations to actively promote their services online, via outreach, statements, events and advertising, some respondents indicated the need for services to have “low level communications” which are “out of wider public eye”.

Other respondents focused on ensuring that services promote themselves as LGBT-friendly with clear visual indicators while others encouraged services to work with the LGBT community to develop and co-produce services.

Further suggestions to improve accessibility of mental health services for the LGBT community included school programmes and Skype or online appointments.

**Question seven: What do you think can be done to promote better mental health, and prevent mental ill health, for the LGBT community? What can the Mayor of London and the London Assembly do?**

Respondents addressed this question in a similar way to previous questions: emphasising the **lack of awareness and understanding of LGBT issues on the whole**.

In order to confront the stigma mentioned and promote and prevent mental ill health for the LGBT community, respondents suggested:

- Communicating with and “educating” the wider community e.g. advertising, social media, training for professionals, talks in schools and youth clubs.
- Campaigns directed specifically at the LGBT community
- Collaboration with the LGBT community
- Engaging with young people in particular

Respondents also suggested that to raise awareness there should be collaboration with a variety of organisations in awareness raising campaigns and also wider community organisations and key people like teachers and health and social care professionals.

Almost 20% of responses highlighted the need to reach young people in particular, by promoting LGBT societies at schools, launching helplines similar to Childline and holding talks in youth clubs.

#### **Question eight: Is there anything else you think the London Assembly Health Committee should consider?**

**More than 35% of responses stressed that increased funding is critical to addressing LGBT mental health.**

In order to raise awareness of LGBT mental health, provide **“faster treatments” and access to support**, must be provided and a higher proportion of health funding must be targeted at LGBT mental health.

Further suggestions include a greater focus on **campaigning**, celebrity endorsement and **compulsory LGBT awareness training for health and social care staff**.

#### **Conclusions**

The survey results reflect views from the LGBT community and others with an interest in LGBT mental health services, presenting a broad view of the main mental health challenges facing the LGBT community and suggestions for initiatives to better support and influence the Mayor of London’s policy development.

The survey responses highlight the following themes

- **Inadequate access to appropriate support systems and unmet needs for the LGBT community not only in Wandsworth but also in London more generally.** There are limited services available and these are difficult to access and require more funding to address issues raised. The wider community, including schools, could do more to increase awareness, offer support and signposting.
- **A sense of misunderstanding and judgement from existing support systems.** Respondents highlight that there are, at present, few safe spaces to discuss their concerns.

The responses highlighted the lack of awareness and understanding of LGBT issues, and, in certain instances unwillingness of the service provider or support network to engage:

*“Professionals not believing”, “not being taken seriously”, “lack of empathy”, “judged”*

It suggests that **health professionals are not sufficiently informed or trained.**

- **Perceived stigma and discrimination attached to mental ill health and the LGBT community and a fear of accessing services.**

Respondents emphasise that **poor access to information** on LGBT mental health is **isolating** and results not only in the LGBT community being **reluctant to access** support through **fear of discrimination**.

This a **significant barrier** for people in the LGBT community to seek help when they do need it and may delay them doing so whilst their worries or problems develop further.

### Recommendations

Respondents stressed that **better communication and awareness-raising** campaigns are crucial to combating discrimination and isolation and to bring an end to the stigma. People from the LGBT community **need to be able have confidence that services are appropriate to their particular needs**, including understanding and discretion when needed.

Respondents called for an **increase in understanding of LGBT issues**, within the **wider community** and most importantly **training for health professionals**.

**Development of services and funding** is needed, particularly for young people. The majority of responses to our survey highlighted the need for talking therapies to address LGBT mental health. This ranged from tailored counselling sessions to drop-in sessions, peer support and telephone support lines. It is important that the services are available when needed before potential problems escalate.

In addition to the above, a significant number of responses stressed that **safe spaces** for the **young LGBT community** (18 and below) are most important, including need for a specific support service for young people, while others suggested that schools and youth groups should also address LGBT mental health.

Appendix A - The Questionnaire

The **London Assembly Health Committee** wants to influence the Mayor of London's policy development in the area of **LGBT mental health**.

Research indicates that members of the LGBT community have higher instances of mental health problems than the rest of the population. Additionally, a recent Stonewall survey found that half of lesbian & bisexual women and a third of gay & bisexual men reported a negative experience of accessing healthcare.

The questions below are **based on questions posed by the London Assembly Health Committee**, who would like people's input into their investigation of the mental health needs of the LGBT community.

This questionnaire can be completed anonymously, and the answers you give will be shared with the London Assembly Health Committee.

1. What do you think are the main mental health challenges faced by the LGBT community?

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2. What mental health support do you think the LGBT community may want or need?

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3. Do you know of a service or group that does well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? *If yes, please tell us more.*

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4. Is there a service or group that isn't working so well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? *If yes, please tell us more.*

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5. What do you think may stop the LGBT community from accessing mental health support? Are there any barriers?

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6. How can mental health services make their services more accessible for the LGBT community?

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7. What do you think can be done to promote better mental health, and prevent mental ill health, for the LGBT community? What can the Mayor of London and the London Assembly do?

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Is there anything else you think the London Assembly Health Committee should consider?

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***Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!***

## Appendix B - All Individual Responses

### 1. What do you think are the main mental health challenges faced by the LGBT community?

- The main challenges would come from the negative attitudes they would face from other young people their age who are uncomfortable against their sexual preferences
- Finding a safe space to talk/ask about their mental health
- Discrimination, acceptance or lack of, family/cultural expectations
- Suicide, self harm, self hatred
- The main challenges is that we get told we are in too much crisis to get help or which for me I been told I can get help because I'm tran I get told I can't get help
- Depression, self harm, low mood, stress, suicidal thoughts, bullying
- Stress, depression, anxiety
- Finding sources of help that are empathetic. Fear of lack of empathy or general fear about issues of mind
- Lack of understanding of specific needs and increased risk of self harm, drug and alcohol abuse and depression
- Stigma, places to go to talk to someone about their concerns, tailored support for them,
- Depression
- Acceptance; self and from others
- lack of awareness from mental health professionals - we have been advised of counsellors misgendering their clients. Also a lack of clarity to indicate when services are LGBT aware
- Lack of services and the right support
- Depression, anxiety, self-harm. Being in the closet and being an openly gay (LGBT) person causes all of these.
- Depression and anxiety issues and more, depending on the person and their history with their identity.
- Coming out and acceptance by family and the ongoing journey into the community and growing up
- Access to care and being understood. Feeling that care is open to them. Stigma.
- Accessing the service, fear of being labelled, not being able to talk about their issues
- Not enough funding. Professionals not believing LGBT have any mental health issues. Not being taken seriously. Issues with self harm and suicide not being addressed.
- Isolation. Peer pressure.
- Depression or anxiety as LGBT people may feel isolated and not ask for help as they may feel they will not be understood.
- Depression
- Being perceived as having personality disorder. Too long waiting to be referred for services. Possible having to deny themselves trying to conform.
- Lack of understanding. Lack of input / signposting as to where / who they can ask for help.

### 2. What mental health support do you think the LGBT community may want or need?

- From my experience it would be just someone to talk to/vent. Also, maybe counselling to help them through their transition
- Tailored/targeted access to psychological support
- Bespoke, understanding
- Counselling, youth groups
- To have a space to talk about our mental health without being judged
- Someone to talk to, support groups, understanding it's ok to have mental health support and knowing there are people like them
- Support groups, Face 2 Face, telephone, online and professional MH Services (accessible and non discriminatory)
- LGBT dedicated or committed service need to know mental health is for everyone not the sick!
- Peer support

- Counselling face to face and over the phone, support groups, information and advice online
- Counselling
- Counselling and a listening ear; support with family issues
- Staff who understand LGBT issues / clear indication that the service is LGBT aware (we have been told often young people are not out to their support worker, because they don't know if the person is lgbt friendly or not)
- Specialist support and guidance with counselling
- Better anonymous support for young LGBT people.
- Group support
- Counselling, drop in sessions, youth groups, support lines.
- Accessible counselling services, not always face to face, but online etc. Drop-in sessions. Accessing a facility that doesn't say "Mental Health". Counselling - self harm help and avoiding / isolation
- More funding. Someone to listen to them and take them seriously. How transitioning will affect them and their families. Funding and support for under 18 year old.
- Safe accessible places to go to meet friends. Parent groups.
- Gay affirmative therapists who support their lifestyles.
- Places to access support where they can be themselves and not be judged.
- Counselling. Better and clearer referral for support. Groups to share experiences.
- Counselling. Support with general mental health.

### 3. Do you know of a service or group that does well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? If yes, please tell us more.

- GAP Youth Group
- I understand the Tavistock's service for transgender people is well done
- Unanswered
- Trans masculine Birmingham
- No
- Not LGBT and mental health, it's either one or the other, MIND, Mencap, Youth Clubs
- Free 2 BE Alliance
- MIND in Brighton. Personally found mental health unit at Chelsea and Westminster very helpful
- London Friend
- Unanswered
- THT
- No
- Pace was an amazing service but has unfortunately lost funding. We have not found an alternative / replacement service where we can refer our members for lgbt appropriate mental health support and have to take 'pot luck' with mainstream service referrals.
- Free2B Alliance
- Not really. Tavistock is ok, but could be improved greatly.
- The GAP Youth Club
- Kaleidoscope Trust.
- Bison Solicitors specialise in mental health and do LGBT rights

### 4. Is there a service or group that isn't working so well in supporting the LGBT community with mental health issues? If yes, please tell us more.

- Not sure
- I think some services in general are too stretched to offer the best care equally to everyone
- Unanswered
- Unanswered

- Mental health team because they don't know much about it which they don't know much about so they hid behind it
- Blue LGBT+ service in the Harrow borough
- There aren't any services in Wandsworth
- Not that I know of
- Unanswered
- Unanswered
- Unanswered
- Don't know
- Negative feedback from young people & parents re Camhs across various boroughs & GPs
- In general, all of the practises I have been to to combat gender dysphoria (the GP; Springfield; UCLH; Tavistock) have been inadequate. The system is very slow and has lead to me almost being successful in suicide multiple times after joining the service.
- CAMHS. Schools.
- In general, there needs to be more training for mental health professionals to ensure LGBT people don't fall through "the gaps"
- We find that the NHS / GPs struggle to identify / differentiate between LGBT and mental health. Many clients are LGBT, but are ignored and mental health put first, when need to be treated together.

**5. What do you think may stop the LGBT community from accessing mental health support? Are there any barriers?**

- Just general stigmas they may face from the community
- Not being able to be open about their sexuality and identity for fear of discrimination
- Unanswered
- Discrimination or stigma
- Shame, denial
- They don't understand LGBT. Family and Friends, Media
- Them feeling embarrassed. Finding the right person to talk to and lead them to the service. Not being out yet. Mental Health Stigma
- Fear, discrimination. Cuts, thresholds an access too high
- Unanswered
- Clinicians not understanding needs and directing to appropriate clinic
- Stigma, confidentiality
- Unanswered
- Themselves, fear - can't think of any external barriers
- not knowing if the service / individual professional is lgbt aware
- Bias and lack of understanding
- Being outed to homophobic / transphobic parents whilst seeking help
- Homophobia within the family. The person may not have come out.
- Own willingness to take the step forward.
- Worried about disclosing orientation / identity and being understood
- Stigma - not realising / accepting they have any mental health issues. Location or lack of information.
- Feeling isolated, not knowing where to go or who to speak to. Waiting lists too long, especially for under 18 year olds.
- Awareness / knowledge of where to go. Confidence.
- Shame? Not feeling understood or valued or heard.
- Being judged.
- Fear of being labelled. How others view them. Not being taken seriously.
- Lack of understanding. General stigma attached to mental health.

## 6. How can mental health services make their services more accessible for the LGBT community?

- Possibly better link work with the various groups and organisations, workshops and clinics
- Funding! Making sure all services are aware of all diversity
- Welcoming, differently advertising or targeting services - e.g. information at events like this
- Just be open
- To include it within their services with LGBT help
- Go into schools. Anonymous ways for them to refer. Do activities for mental health awareness month/week - time to change
- Talk to and work with LGBT community to develop and co-produce and improve services
- Advertising in gay press - especially local
- Specifically mentioning LGBT community in advertising, targeted advertising as above
- Advertise and signpost to LGBT+ charities, train clinicians in specific LGBT issues
- Integrate them within other counselling services to avoid stigma
- Unanswered
- I think these services should be equally available to all and not particularly to a specific community
- Book awareness training with Free2B Alliance! Clear visual indicators that a service is LGBT aware - e.g. stonewall posters up / pride flag on display / including sexualities and genders on paperwork / equal opps forms
- More friendly, more out there, more accessible
- Better anonymity. Perhaps phone / Skype appointments so that parents do not find out.
- Have the GPs talk about it more to help with the stigma.
- Low level communications out of wider public eye. Availability of discretion using services.
- Visibly accessible - on website, statements, outreach
- Online - skype - keeping referral open for as long as possible as LGBT community members may struggle to attend initially. Advertise - have people with a knowledge and empathy of what others are going through. Training for professionals working with LGBT people.
- Promotion - link in with groups like The GAP / The Bridge. Champion for Change.
- Make sure the mental health practitioners have an understanding of LGBT issues. Make it inclusive.
- Offer a service that does not make them feel they are doing wrong.
- Linking with groups within the community. Visit groups / clubs / venues to share information. Contact numbers where people feel they will be heard.
- Highlight they are LGBT friendly. So many of our clients report back that they are still judged to be LGBT because they are mentally ill.

## 7. What do you think can be done to promote better mental health, and prevent mental ill health, for the LGBT community? What can the Mayor of London and the London Assembly do?

- Best way of reaching young people now is through social media and maybe helplines a la childline for example
- Make public awareness of LGBT issues less prejudiced
- Directed campaigns aimed at LGBT community and addressing issues they may experience
- More money for youth groups to do different activities and day trips
- Talks in schools and youth clubs
- Mental Health posters - Stonewall approaches e.g. do you know we all have a mental health?
- Get out there and talk to people/organisation. Funding, funding, funding!
- I see MH Services for LGBT community much more high profile in Brighton LGBT activities and community than in London
- Unanswered
- Promote LGBT people in public and civic life, raise awareness of services available

- Unanswered
- Other than helping them to go straight, I don't think the mental health issues associated with LGBT can be avoided
- As with all mental health issues, ensure there is a visible campaign using high profile LGBT people (celebrities) to break down negative stereotypes that prevent people from seeking help
- Change the word 'mental health' to 'mental wellbeing'
- Education about LGBT issues and people. LGBT people should be involved at every level. Encourage these issues to be talked about at school (e.g. I run an LGBT society at school and have made educational videos on these topics.)
- To be more vocal about it and to be more vocal about mental health in general, hence beating the stigma attached to it.
- Improve mental health / access in general. Mental health should be treated like physical health.
- Acknowledge the difficulties that the LGBT community face on a day-to-day basis. Better wider information sharing across all communities.
- Work with the community to break the barriers.
- Support projects to 'educate' on LGBT issues. The fight is not over and inequality still exists.
- Mental health support needs to be accessible for all. Funding.
- Training for professionals (Teachers, NHS, etc.)
- More events like this one (Free2B event). Continued conversations. Talk to the LGBT community.
- Better resilience training and support to all people.
- Provide money for engagement and drop-in groups.

**8. Is there anything else you think the London Assembly Health Committee should consider?**

- More campaigning and possible celebrity endorsement could help
- Unanswered
- Unanswered
- Unanswered
- LGBT talks from young people and have young people join in and help the committee team
- Those that mentoring, LGBT based services, people should undergo training to meet certain standards to be able to support them. Some services I know of are bias in understanding/supporting certain sexualities over the other (incl. not caring about heterosexuals) or not being able to connect with the young people or thinking everyone's experience of coming out is the same as their experience. Need to consider differences e.g. religion
- More funding
- Unanswered
- Unanswered
- Asking people what services they would like if they were LGBT
- Unanswered
- No
- Compulsory LGBT awareness training for health & social care staff?
- Mental wellbeing is important for all. At times we all need support mentally. Most access this through friends. Occasionally we need professional support.
- More funding for faster treatments and education.
- Funding for mental health support groups / families / youth clubs etc.
- Funding, understanding for LGBT+ and families. Families need support too.
- Supporting The GAP / Free2B Alliance