

CHALLENGING INEQUALITIES SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT - LGBTQI+

For Improving Access to Mental Health Services



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Introduction

Following the 2021 publication of Challenging Inequalities Self-Assessment Toolkit on improving access across racial and ethnic groups in mental health services, Islington Mind has worked with local and national organisations providing specialist services to LGBTQI+ communities, and created this toolkit. The main part of this toolkit will focus on provision of LGBTQI+ inclusive services, with an aim to increase an understanding of specific issues and needs within the community by sharing the best practice, asking questions about existing practice, and sharing further resources to support different groups within the LGBTQI+ community (Parts 1 and 2). Towards the end of the toolkit (Part 3–6), we include practical guidance on organisational governance, staff training and working collaboratively with other organisations.

Throughout the toolkit, recommendations and questions for self-assessment are in yellow boxes.

The best practice shared by organisations and further resources are in blue boxes.

This toolkit has been designed on the basis that you have an understanding of what LGBTQI+ stands for. If you need information on this, there is a comprehensive [glossary of terms on Stonewall website](#)¹.

Since the recommendations for commissioners of mental health services are extensively covered in the [toolkit published by Healthwatch Islington](#)², and the principles for inclusion of various populations are transferrable to LGBTQI+ as well, this toolkit does not cover this aspect.

¹ List of LGBTQI+ terms <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms>

² Challenging Inequalities Self-Assessment Toolkit <https://www.healthwatchislington.co.uk/report/2024-01-09/challenging-inequalities-self-assessment-toolkit>

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.1

Promoting inclusivity for the LGBTQI+ community

LGBTQI+ individuals and communities continue to face discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping. This can often lead to a compounded isolation, mistrust of service providers, and a fractured sense of belonging within the wider community. It is important that services make the effort to practise and demonstrate inclusion and acceptance in a variety of ways.

- **Display LGBTQI+ affirmative posters, slogans, and statements that reflect gender, sex, sexuality, and relationship diversity.**
- **Demonstrate an LGBTQI+ affirmative and inclusive approach by creating a gender-neutral bathroom space.**
- **Present visual cues that your practice is a safe place: team member pronouns visible on lanyards and email signatures, rainbow stickers or flags.**

- **Ensure campaigns, imagery, and visual communication reflect positive and diverse representation of LGBTQI+ lives and experiences and are inclusive of intersex individuals, and black and brown communities.**
- **Display brochures and materials about LGBTQI+ issues and health concerns prominently.**
- **Visibly post a non-discrimination statement or code of conduct, clearly indicating what is and is not acceptable within your organisation.**
- **Display key LGBTQI+ contacts such as Switchboard, Stonewall Housing, Positive East, alongside local LGBTQI+ projects in a focal place.**
- **Ensure that any lists and resources are kept up-to-date and relevant.**

Rainbow lanyards, bracelets, or badges worn by team members can be helpful clues for individuals, signalling a level of knowledge, understanding, and awareness of LGBTQI+ issues. We encourage staff members to actively deepen their ongoing understanding of LGBTQI+ experiences to avoid these symbols being tokenistic gestures.

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.2

Affirmative and inclusive language

The language we use to describe our sex, gender, and sexual orientation is always changing. For some, this can be disorientating, confusing, and anxiety-inducing. A need to get things “right”, or a feeling that newer terms or expressions are erasing our identities or affirmative labels we may have worked hard to develop for ourselves, can close an openness to meet others in their experience/s. This can potentially give way to defensiveness, shame, and resistance.

It is important that staff practice acceptance to these changes and give space for individuals to talk about any confusion or concerns relating to language and experience. Staff should stress that diverse expressions are not going to take space, resources, or rights away from others and be willing to hold space.

Curiosity or lack of information about gender diversity can be explored respectfully through conversation. However, no person’s individual learning should be to the detriment

of others' safety and wellbeing. Gender diverse members of staff and clients should not be burdened with informing/educating other people.

- **Develop an evolving glossary of key terms and affirmative language. Be clear that this glossary is always open to change and not a fixed representation of people’s identities.**
- **Familiarise yourselves with the differences between gender, sex, orientation, and other key terms.**
- **Employ inclusive language that can challenge internalised hetero/cisnormative assumptions; avoid ‘guys’, ‘ladies and gents’, ‘Mr/Mrs’, ‘Sir/Madam’ and instead use gender neutral terms like ‘folks’, ‘people’, ‘colleagues’, and ‘friends’.**
- **We encourage services to actively model use of pronouns, to normalise their use and encourage clients to become familiar with this. Everybody has pronouns and they are not exclusively for trans or gender non-conforming folk. It can be assumed that if an individual does not present in a typically male/masculine or female/feminine way that they are expected to declare their gender.**
- **Let your communities lead with what language they prefer to use to describe themselves and their experiences. Language is unique and personal to each individual.**

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.3

Embedding awareness

There is a greater LGBTQI+ presence and visibility in wider society. However, there is also an increase in reported hate crime, and open homophobia and transphobia in political discourse and mainstream media.

Services must actively practise acceptance and inclusion and challenge any expression of intolerance. Services should be actively anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic.

Pride celebrations can get a lot of attention and other LGBTQI+ awareness days, weeks, and months that arise throughout the year can often be overlooked. We encourage services to create a rolling calendar of events.

These moments are also chances for allies to express allegiance with the community. It's also important to remember the origins of these events, often involving traumatic harm and a subsequent reactive need for protest and change. These histories can be triggering for LGBTQI+ individuals, who may have direct or indirect experiences with these histories and who may feel that contemporary Pride celebrations have forgotten these important histories.

- **17 May: International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)**
- **June: Pride Month**
- [Black Pride](#)
- [ParaPride](#)
- **July: Disability Pride Month**
- **13-19 November: Trans Awareness Week**

www.ukblackpride.org.uk
www.parapride.org

Consider how you might sensitively hold the multiplicities of celebration, recognition, and integration alongside other realities they may speak to such as grief, oppression, and loss.

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.4

Culture, heritage and identity

Heritage focuses on connecting stories and histories. It is a form of community building, encouraging individuals to tell their stories that may otherwise be overlooked or lost, a chance to educate, empower, and integrate nuanced LGBTQI+ narratives and locate them as part of the fabric of a wider LGBTQI+ culture.

People are more likely to connect over things, people, places, and sites they know or have some connection to, and heritage as a form of storytelling can act as a means of inclusion, reducing isolation and improving well-being.

Organisations can work collaboratively with heritage spaces and service users to help preserve, protect, and share experiences, histories, and cultural moments.

Connecting with Heritage spaces to activate service users' lived experience and can give shape and expression to points in personal and collective memory that may not otherwise be documented.

- **Who are the dominant voices in your project or space?**
- **What stories are and are not being heard and told?**
- **How might you invite service users to share their stories?**
- **In what ways might you preserve or share these experiences?**
- **How will you include service users throughout this process?**

[Islington's Pride](#) was an archival project created by Islington Heritage that focused on Islington's LGBTQI+ heritage. As part of the redevelopment process, the Heritage department aims to integrate more direct experiences from local residents, opening up their archives, widening engagement with their services. Islington Heritage recognizes the diversity of the borough and welcomes contact with local services to enrich its projects and amplify access. Islington Heritage recognizes the need to open their archives, and make accessible its contents. They schedule LGBTQI+ opens days in a bid to promote LGBTQ histories and culture with the wider public.

islingtonpride.com

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.5

Social inclusion and belonging

Whilst LGBTQI+ people face discrimination, it is important to not reduce LGBTQI+ peoples to their trauma, harms, or oppressions. LGBTQI+ communities have demonstrated creative potential that is generative and collaborative. Creative practices enable services to connect with groups and individuals who might otherwise be excluded from opportunities or lack access to resources and means to fulfil or explore their potential. These practices allow for ownership and autonomy in the process, supporting marginalised groups and individuals to build meaningful connections, pursue their goals, and foster a sense of belonging. Embracing wider creative avenues of expression involving non-verbal creative practices can be profoundly impactful, especially for individuals and communities that may experience verbal communication barriers.

Micro Rainbow works with LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum. They also have developed a social inclusion support group Weather The Storm, that includes body and movement workshops, spoken work, and more recently art making. They have invested in a creative team that works in a trauma informed approach to deliver weekly workshops and activities. The team recognizes the need for individuals to participate and express themselves in a holistic way, using creative expression to overcome stigma and isolation.

microrainbow.org

- **What and where is the need of your community?**
- **What is available to you right now?**
- **What skills and activities are your members engaging with and interested in?**
- **How might you develop these existing activities?**
- **What skills sharing opportunities might be available?**
- **How might you encourage greater participation, and support members to facilitate and lead sessions?**
- **Who is not currently represented?**

1. Welcoming and inclusive services

1.6

Physical accessibility

Disabled LGBTQI+ individuals find many spaces inaccessible. This can cause a withdrawal from services leading to further isolation and disconnection. Services should review their spaces to ensure that adequate accessibility measures are implemented. For example, services should provide clear information about accessibility constraints (e.g. width of corridors, availability of ramps), and reduce the labour of disabled individuals having to seek clarification. We also recommend having a permanent quiet space within your service.

For properties where it may not be feasible to install lifts, services should regularly monitor their programme and scheduling to ensure that activities and events are as accessible as possible for individuals with access requirements, and that alternative arrangements can be made and are clearly communicated.

Regard have a number of resources on their website that provide information, advice and support for LGBTQI+ disabled people, alongside campaigns and advocacy on a wide range of issues, that promote inclusion for disabled LGBTQI+ people. Their Access Pride Guide is particularly useful for services delivering events and activities. The resource is recommended to ensure that spaces and events are organised and designed in a manner that is inclusive, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone.

regard.org.uk/pride-access-guide/

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.1

Trans awareness

Trans awareness is a large topic and cannot be covered in its entirety in this chapter. The terminology of transness has changed over time. Contemporarily, “transgender” is used to describe being trans. As an umbrella term, trans can include gender-nonconforming people, non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer and intersex people.

As a term, transness is often associated with the clinical/medical and has been pathologised by the medical/psychiatric industry. Anybody can identify as trans irrespective of legal gender and medical intervention.

- **Respect and use people's pronouns, name, forms of address and how they choose to identify.**
- **Avoid assumptions as to what pronouns someone might use, listen and model your own pronouns to encourage a safety for others to disclose theirs.**
- **Avoid questions or speculation around medical transitioning; like everyone, trans people have a right to privacy.**

- **Understand the diversity of experiences with transitioning, recognising that there is no “correct” or singular way to be trans**
- **Accept that you will make mistakes and get things wrong. Be open and receptive to critique. Dwelling on your mistake is not helpful.**
- **Train your staff to effectively engage clients during referral processes, demonstrating confidence and sensitivity to capture accurate reflections of your communities and ensure that your monitoring forms are inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.**

UK based helplines specialised in supporting trans people

- [Gendered Intelligence](https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/services/66-support-line)
- [Mindline Trans +](https://www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/our-services/adult-one-to-one-support/mindline-trans/)
- [switchboard](https://switchboard.lgbt)
- [CliniQ \(peer mentoring\)](https://cliniq.org.uk)

genderedintelligence.co.uk/services/66-support-line
www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/our-services/adult-one-to-one-support/mindline-trans/
switchboard.lgbt
cliniq.org.uk

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

All staff should undertake gender awareness training, which would include reflections across diverse gender identities, notably trans awareness, and awareness of non-binary and intersex identities, that can often be overlooked in cisnormative society. Training should also include broader reflections on gender, sex and relationship diversity.

Frontline professionals and service users both report feeling overwhelmed at the increasing speed with which language may change. It is important to remember that you may not need to understand everything but be respectful of how these terms can make others feel.

Not A Phase is a trans-led, grassroots charity dedicated to awareness campaigning, social projects and new initiatives for the trans community. The organisation recognises the diverse needs within the trans community and has developed a range of projects and safe spaces that centre and support trans voices and experience. Identifying the challenges trans individuals can face when entering conventional gym spaces they have developed Misfits - a fitness, wellbeing and self-defence programme created to empower and build confidence.

notaphase.org

Islington Mind's LGBTQI+ project Outcome offers various training workshops which address the various dynamics and intersecting needs of LGBTQI+ communities. Workshops include Building and Sustaining Community-led LGBTQI+ Therapeutic Spaces and broader Allyship training, which can be tailored to your organisation's specific needs. Workshops are intended to increase staff confidence in supporting LGBTQI+ communities, and to explore what tangible actions can be taken to move towards affirmative and inclusive allyship.

www.islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome/



2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.2

Gender affirmative groups and spaces

Whilst it is crucial to establish inclusive community spaces, it is equally important to acknowledge the specific needs of different groups. LBT women, in particular, frequently encounter misogyny, sexual violence, and other forms of harm. Creating dedicated gender-specific groups can cultivate trust and confidence, providing individuals with a safe environment to express themselves, seek support, and voice their needs. These gender-specific groups should be trans inclusive.

You will want to maintain dialogue with your communities, and continually reflect on how you could be making your spaces safer. We encourage providers to integrate these discussions into team meetings, to monitor who you are not supporting, and who is not coming back.

Whilst it may not be possible for some providers to develop dedicated spaces for specific communities or groups, we encourage providers to explore how you can develop or deepen access points for different LGBTQI+ people within your existing structures.

The Maya Centre's Not My Shame project, developed in collaboration with King's College London and the Women's Hub, delivered creative writing workshops as a way of storytelling through a therapeutic lens, for Sexual Minority Women (SMW) to address trauma, particularly gender-based violence. Whilst not an exclusive LGBTQI+ service, The Maya Centre recognises the importance of intersectionality and offers a commitment to supporting SMW through various initiatives, including counselling, peer support groups, and community engagement.

www.mayacentre.org.uk



2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.3

Allyship - more than a buzzword

Allyship, much like “safe space”, can be easily adopted but not always properly enacted. It is not so much a label or title, as an ongoing process. Some individuals may take issue with the term as it has connotations of war and combat, which may be important to keep in mind. In essence, it is affirmative, active support for oppressed communities.



- **Educate yourself and others, raising awareness and understanding of the challenges, diversity, and experiences of LGBTQI+ communities.**
- **Be conscious of the language you are using, making efforts to understand unfamiliar terms or terminology.**
- **Develop your understanding of the origins of Pride and LGBTQI+ histories.**
- **Appoint LGBTQI+ allies to advocate for LGBTQI+ communities and understand the importance of LGBTQI+ people representing themselves.**
- **Engage in conversations with LGBTQI+ people that are reflective of the diversity within the LGBTQI+ community.**
- **Stand in when you are needed but resist telling others' stories or speaking for them.**
- **Step forward to challenge stereotypes and negative attitudes towards LGBTQI+ individuals and communities in an effort to combat hate and bigotry.**
- **Avoid burdening LGBTQI+ people to educate you.**

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.4

Supporting LGBTQI+ carers

LGBTQI+ individuals who take on caregiving responsibilities often face many challenges that can significantly impact their wellbeing and identity. One common struggle is caring for family members who may not be aware of or who have rejected their LGBTQI+ identity, adding emotional strain to the caregiving dynamic. The demands of the caregiving role may lead LGBTQI+ carers to sacrifice aspects of their identity, which can contribute to feelings of isolation, and negatively impact mental health and self-esteem.

Accessing services as an LGBTQI+ carer can also be fraught with prejudice and discrimination. The pressure to assume the caregiving role alone, especially for unmarried people and people without children, adds to the burden carried by LGBTQI+ carers. Moreover, the continual need to disclose their identity to service providers who make assumptions can be exhausting and discouraging, leading many to conceal their LGBTQI+ identity altogether out of fear of discrimination or biased treatment.

Spaces supporting carers should develop forums, particularly for unpaid carers to share experiences. Through these conversations appropriate support structures, community, and resources can be explored, helping raise awareness of the nuanced challenges unpaid LGBTQI+ carers face.

- **Collaborate with LGBTQI+ caregivers to co-design projects or services that effectively address their needs whilst respecting their own capacities and acknowledging their existing amount of work.**
- **Facilitate peer support meetings. These can play a vital role in promoting resilience and empowerment within the LGBTQI+ caregiving community.**
- **Create a group of LGBTQI+ allies to gather and highlight real-life LGBTQI+ stories, review and improve current practices.**
- **Make space for Experts by Experience to share their experiences and input feedback.**

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.5

Sexual health and sex work

LGBTQI+ individuals may have experiences of sex work and engage in other activities and behaviours that might sit outside of what can be deemed socially acceptable, such as cruising and chemsex. Alongside compulsive sexual behaviours, these activities can be pathologised or judged in wider settings. It is important to develop an openness and sensitivity when engaging in these conversations. Individuals report a reluctance to talk to services about their experiences, expressing they can feel uncomfortable talking to workers, sharing that these issues can feel taboo, awkward, and that support or information is often difficult to find.

There are specialist projects to help individuals and organisations develop understanding of issues around sexual health and wellbeing, especially about potential risks and precautions. A regular LGBTQI+ specialist in-house drop-ins that can act as a bridge between clinical settings and community spaces can be organised. This helps diffuse the stigma individuals may experience in NHS or statutory services. However available resources and

support should not be imposed on individuals, with respect and focus given to empower individuals' own agency and privacy.

The Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust delivers free and confidential sexual health services across boroughs in North London. CLASH supports sex workers, homeless individuals, drug users, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals (BAME), and men who have sex with men (MSM) residing or employed in Camden and Islington, offering confidential sexual health outreach services.

www.sexualhealth.cnwl.nhs.uk/clash-and-shoc/

Services should also be aware of other intersecting needs and priorities that may sit alongside sexual health, e.g. homelessness, individuals with vulnerable immigration statuses or with no access to public funds, and racialised community groups.

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.6

LGBTQI+ newcomers and refugees

The ongoing hostile environment for people seeking asylum in the UK can have a compounding negative impact on individuals fleeing persecution on the grounds of their sexuality and/or gender identity.

Frontline professionals working with LGBTQI+ people going through the asylum-seeking process are encouraged to take responsibility for background research on clients' country of origin. Sites like [Human Dignity Trust](#) provide current data on worldwide LGBTQI+ laws and legislation. [ILGA \(International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association\)](#) will also provide information on LGBTQI+ rights across the globe. Accessing these resources are intended to better understand the individual's experience and history but those supporting the individual must recognise the nuanced complexity of the asylum-seeking process.

www.humandignitytrust.org
ilga.org

LGBTQI+ refugees may conceal their stigmatised sexual or gender identities, leading them to potentially hide other stigmatised aspects, such as mental health concerns. Mental health professionals should create normalising and destigmatising environments that encourage LGBTQI+ people to openly discuss their experiences.

- Professionals should undergo training to ensure they are proficient in LGBTQI+ affirmative, culturally sensitive, antiracist, and intersectional practices.
- Training in trauma-informed principles should be compulsory for all service providers assisting those seeking asylum.
- Providers should acknowledge their cultural biases and acquaint themselves with diverse gender and sexual expressions, as well as partnership and family structures in different cultures.
- Specifically recruiting queer migrants, or Experts by Experience into staff and volunteer positions can foster a greater sense of belonging.
- Services supporting people seeking asylum who have no recourse to public funds are strongly encouraged to set aside a travel fund for those accessing the service.

Islington Mind's [Freedom From Fear to Love project](#) hosts a therapy clinic that specially supports LGBTQI+ individuals seeking asylum in the UK on the grounds of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The clinic offers 20 sessions for clients in English and other languages. The service is LGBTQI+ affirmative, and all therapists and counsellors are part of the LGBTQI+ community. The project recognises both the financial and emotional strains individuals face living through the Hostile Environments and offers clients the flexibility to have sessions online or face to face.

www.islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome/freedom-from-fear-to-love/

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.7

LGBTQI+ homelessness

LGBTQI+ individuals face disproportionate rates of homelessness compared to the general population. Factors contributing to this disparity include family rejection, discrimination, and lack of access to adequate support networks. Homelessness among LGBTQI+ individuals can have a compounding impact on issues such as mental health, the use of substances, and vulnerability to violence. Other recent pressures, such as COVID-19, increasing rent prices, and the cost-of-living crisis, create further stress already and puts individuals at greater risk of homelessness.

Many LGBTQI+ individuals report harassment and discrimination within generic temporary housing schemes or shelters. Services should develop their understanding of current housing spaces and resources specific for LGBTQI+ individuals. These resources should be made visible and shared with their service users.

Staff should develop an understanding of the various housing options, referral pathways, and entry points to

LGBTQI+ affirmative safe spaces. Staff should take any discriminatory behaviour relating to clients' housing seriously and support individuals in exploring reporting procedures if they wish to do so.

The Outside Project is an LGBTQI+ Community Shelter, Centre and Domestic Abuse Refuge in London for trans and gender non-conforming individuals. The staff and volunteer team largely identify as LGBTQI+ and continually engage in open and robust conversations about how structural issues impact different groups and individuals differently, informing their intersectional approach. Their attention to the multiplicities of LGBTQI+ experience within homelessness underpins a need for a holistic approach towards housing solutions, sharing that many individuals experiencing homelessness will have PTSD, experienced some form of violence, discrimination, sex work, and be living with some form of neurodiversity.

lgbtiqoutside.org

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.8

Housing for asylum seeking and refugee communities

Clients report discrimination from housing staff and providers within Home Office accommodation, and a lack of transparency around reporting procedures and feedback. Exposure to others with strong belief systems and religious views that are not affirmative of LGBTQI+ identities and orientations can trigger PTSD symptoms and stressors.

Frontline staff supporting LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Home Office accommodation should develop a robust understanding and sensitivity to the repeat trauma individuals may face when housed with others seeking asylum from countries that criminalise LGBTQI+ people. This dynamic can exacerbate further distress at the prospect of being outed, discriminated against, and can develop ongoing mental anguish at having to conceal one's authentic self in a supposedly "safe" host country where a potential threat re-emerges.

Alternative housing options to consider:

- [Refugees at Home](#)
- [Micro Rainbow Housing](#) (asylum seekers only)
- [NACCOM](#) No Accommodation Network

refugeesathome.org
microrainbow.org/housing/
naccomm.org.uk



2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.9

Older people

The media landscape and online social media platforms privilege younger LGBTQI+ voices and experiences, which can leave older LGBTQI+ people and communities feeling unseen. The changing landscape and the loss of historic and significant LGBTQI+ venues, clubs, and spaces can further compound feelings of erasure for older LGBTQI+ people. Efforts should be made to ensure representation and inclusivity across all communities in all communications and marketing materials. It is important for organisations to strongly consider diversity when connecting with older people. Typically, the focus tends to be on older white cis gay men, leaving older LGBTQI+ individuals from global majority backgrounds and older trans and non-binary people less visible.

Older people are not a homogenous group, and their voices need to be heard and services to respond to accordingly. Older LGBTQI+ people can face multiple risks and vulnerabilities and, having faced discrimination over many decades, are potentially more prone to isolation and mental ill health. Many may have lost loved ones to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Services should develop provisions in-line with client's expressed interests and motivations. Activities should be reviewed regularly and feedback mechanisms in place.

Heterosexism and cisgender assumptions can be common for older people within the community and make it challenging for individuals

to express themselves openly. Receiving care can be an intimate and vulnerable experience. Without affirmative care, mental health issues can be further exasperated and lead to individuals withholding significant parts of their identity or withdrawing from care services completely. Care providers should undergo training to actively develop their awareness and understanding of heteronormative defaults and to unlearn biases, recognising the diversity of our LGBTQI+ elders' experiences and identities. Specialist training for workers supporting LGBTQI+ individuals living with long-term health conditions, such as dementia and HIV should also be provided.

Tonic Housing is a community-led LGBT+ affirming retirement community where people can share common experiences, find mutual support and enjoy their later life. Tonic has created a unique offering of housing with care that celebrates LGBT+ identities with the community at the very heart of their homes. Events and activities are developed with residents based on their interests, including collaborations with other LGBT+ organisations and support providers. The project is driven by the demand of older LGBT+ people for better choices in housing, support and care recognising that "a one size fits all approach" does not meet the needs of diverse communities.

www.tonichousing.org.uk

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.10

LGBTQI+ disabled people

Services should scrutinise internal biases and dominant representations of disabled folks within their organisation. Often images of straight white male wheelchair users are at the forefront, representing a singular disabled experience. It's important for services to be inclusive of diverse representation, presence, and integrate stories and experiences that reflect the wider disabled community.

- **Consider the diversity within the realm of disability, which encompasses individuals who are deaf or blind, those with cognitive disabilities, as well as those with non-visible disabilities such as learning disabilities like dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD, or mental health and behavioural conditions like anxiety, depression, and OCD.**
- **Consider how your services are meeting these various needs.**

For those with non-visible disabilities, this can be another coming out experience, with many individuals making the decision to disclose their disability or not. Individuals should be given the dignity and agency as to how, when, and if they are to disclose their disability or needs.

Services should be mindful of the nuanced stressors this often dual coming out can hold for LGBTQI+ disabled people, and the impact of its repeating, rarely a one time coming out. Services should demonstrate a sensitivity, confidentiality, and awareness of these intersections, allowing individuals to come out on their own terms if they wish.

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.11

Neurodiversity

Existing support services for LGBTQI+ have been expressed as insufficient for neurodiverse individuals, particularly addressing essential self-supporting skills.

Whilst sporadic pop-up ad hoc workshops are available, there is a pressing demand for consistent and comprehensive support and aftercare, especially in areas like interview preparation and practice.

Keep flexibility in mind. Every individual will experience and process things in their own unique way and services should be prepared to adapt and learn accordingly.

- **Diverse communication styles and methods; such as written, verbal, visual, and electronic channels, to accommodate different preferences and needs.**
- **Creating sensory-friendly spaces; this can include providing quiet rooms, adjustable lighting, furniture reconfigurations to minimise distractions and sensory overload.**
- **Peer or Employee Support Groups can provide a safe and inclusive space to connect, share experiences, and access resources.**
- **Mentorship and Coaching can provide guidance, support, and advice tailored to the unique challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals within the LGBTQI+ community.**

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.12

Sex and relationships

Disabled folks are often desexualised and seen *only* as disabled by broader society.

Services that engage in sexual health or education should develop a Disability Inclusive Sex Education that incorporates the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ disabled folks. Facilitators or workshop providers should make education accessible for all and make active efforts to incorporate materials and resources that reflect disabled individuals' experiences of sex and relationships to challenge stigma and promote inclusivity.

Professionals working directly with disabled individuals should develop an openness and preparedness to have conversations about sex and relationships and recognise the loneliness and isolation disabled LGBTQI+ individuals may experience. Bringing these conversations out into the open takes necessary steps towards reducing the assumed taboo and silence surrounding sex and disability, normalising an inclusive attitude towards sexuality and sexual expression.

LGBTQI+ disabled folks are also more likely to experience abuse and sexual violence. It is important for workers to integrate conversations around consent and boundaries into a wider discourse, to encourage autonomy, and empowerment for disabled folks who may otherwise be at risk of harm. Likewise, with conversations around sexual expression, there needs to be increased awareness and dialogue around sexual violence and risk prevention.

These conversations might feel awkward and difficult at times. It is important that staff working directly with disabled LGBTQI+ people are able to develop and communicate clear boundaries when engaging in these conversations. Workers should be supported with relevant training to initiate and sustain these conversations sensitively and openly, supporting individuals to express themselves and their needs more fully and with dignity.

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.13

Faith

LGBTQI+ individuals of faith may experience complicated relationships when seeking and integrating support that is affirmative of their faith, and their sexuality and gender identity. It can be challenging for individuals from religious backgrounds to access faith spaces, where they may have previously experienced discrimination or harsh judgement from others within their faith communities.

Faith spaces are encouraged to confront bias, distrust, and contentment within their perceptions of the LGBTQI+ community. We encourage them to explore how they can enhance their communities' readiness to warmly welcome LGBTQI+ individuals into their services and broader environment.

- **What LGBTQI+ representation or active allyship is present in your space across different levels of your organisation?**
- **How might you be able to collaborate with other local or national LGBTQI+ faith spaces that can support you in actively promoting LGBTQI+ inclusion and belonging?**

- **What support groups or networks might you be able to offer that recognise and give voice to the challenges LGBTQI+ individuals may face in search of a holistic and affirmative faith?**
- **What visual clues are you signalling to LGBTQI+ individuals that they are safe and welcome?**
- **How might you create spaces of open dialogue without debate, encouraging conversation without denying LGBTQI+ identities and experiences?**

Due to historical use of faith to oppress LGBTQI+ people, we encourage faith spaces to be transparent and to publicly acknowledge past harms and problematic viewpoints to move towards a space of healing and reconciliation. Spaces will want to look at how they visibly show solidarity and genuine public affirmation through participation in LGBTQI+ events and advocacy for the rights and protection of the community on local, national and global scales.

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

2.14

Supporting LGBTQI+ survivors of violence and reporting crimes

To support LGBTQI+ individuals who have experienced violence, it's crucial to approach survivors with care, empathy, and a strong dedication to fostering a secure and inclusive space for their healing and wellbeing. A trauma-informed approach is essential to ensure a space of psychological and emotional safety is upheld.

Many LGBTQI+ individuals express not feeling comfortable reporting acts of violence or harm to authorities, often recalling incidents of not being believed or taken seriously and may fear retaliation. Services may be set up heteronormatively and could give the impression that domestic violence exists predominantly within heterosexual relationships. This can perpetuate further barriers to LGBTQI+ people accessing services and limit their comfortability in seeking support, without seeing explicit signals of affirmative and inclusive care and support.

LGBTQI+ clients who use specialised services that support post-assault can often experience homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia through misgendering, particularly if they may present in a gender-nonconforming way.

For LGBTQI+ people police reporting can be particularly retraumatising given the role of the police in criminalising LGBTQI+ communities historically. Individuals should be given space and support to explore what options are available to them, prioritising their agency, pace, and choice at all times.

GALOP is a Pan London service supporting LGBTQI+ people who have experienced abuse and violence. They provide comprehensive advocacy and support, including safety planning, practical support and casework, and support if individuals wish to report to the police. They also have an advocate for housing, recognising the intersection of how violence can compromise living situations. Sexual violence workers also offer ongoing support as this work can extend over long periods of time due to the nature of criminal justice system processes. Alongside this work GALOP has a comprehensive resource library for wide issues impacting LGBTQI+ people, including hate crime and conversion therapy.

galop.org.uk

2. Supporting clients with different needs and backgrounds

Services should be aware of the diverse forms of violence and abuses LGBTQI+ people may face, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crimes, conversion therapies or conversion practices, honour-based abuse, or forced marriage. These harms can occur across various settings, spanning public spaces, workplaces, intimate spaces, online platforms, and may manifest in physical, verbal, sexual, and digital forms.

There are also very few refuges for cis-men and trans communities, which can further perpetuate a narrative that LGBTQI+ individuals are less likely to experience domestic violence or abuse, or that support is not available to these communities.



- **Improve existing counselling services to integrate and strengthen support for LGBTQI+ survivors.**
- **Respect the survivor's choices concerning reporting the violence, seeking medical assistance or accessing support services.**
- **Provide information about local support services, such as LGBTQI+ community centres, counselling services and support groups.**
- **Ensure that resources are visible and accessible to facilitate and encourage dialogue in ways that are comfortable for individuals.**
- **Invest time in understanding the distinct challenges and struggles encountered by LGBTQI+ individuals, such as violence and discrimination.**
- **Explore the ways in which you engage with LGBTQI+ survivors; web chat facility or phone lines can strengthen confidence to reach out anonymously and reach diverse communities and demographics.**

3. Data collection and analysis

Collecting demographic information of service users as part of referral process is a basic yet effective way to ensure an organisation's reach to the widest community. Asking service users to self-identify and describe their gender and sexual orientation is recommended, rather than having a list of limited options for them to choose from, as the language continuously changes. It also offers an opportunity to ask and record their gender identity and pronouns, although staff should be aware of any changes that may occur in the future and service user records needing updating, if so.



4. Organisational governance and staff training

4.1

Inclusive staff policies and processes

Services should continue their ongoing efforts to ensure human resource policies and processes are inclusive to people from all communities.

CIPD have a range of resources on their website that support LGBTQI+ inclusivity in the workplace:

- [LGBT+ Business Champion's call to engage: inclusion at work](#)
- [Championing inclusion of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities](#)
- [Supporting LGBT employees at work](#)
- [Inclusion at work: perspectives on LGBT+ working lives](#)

www.cipd.org/uk/

- **Make sure anti-discrimination policies and practices are fit for purpose, understood, and carried out throughout the organisation.**
- **Organisations are encouraged to explore Employee Resource Groups or diversity networks that could offer support, foster career growth, and nurture personal development within the workplace.**
- **Focus Groups are a good way of building local knowledge about LGBTQI+ needs and feedback to the wider organisation.**
- **Explore what mentoring or coaching schemes might look like within your organisation. There are different modes of delivery and something like reverse mentoring may be an option for smaller grassroots spaces where expertise can be shared across all levels internally.**
- **Employers could build a peer support and allyship network that LGBTQI+ employees can approach as the first point of contact when they have faced bullying and harassment.**

4.2

Cultural competence and awareness training

LGBTQI+ people may experience stress where they can feel unseen or unheard in a widely heteronormative society. LGBTQI+ individuals consistently express a need for LGBTQI+ identifying counsellors. Within your counselling provision make concerted efforts to recruit LGBTQI+ identifying counsellors and therapeutic practitioners. Where LGBTQI+ identifying counsellors may not be possible, recruit LGBTQI+ affirmative practitioners, who although may not have lived experience of LGBTQI+

Gender, Sexual, and Relationship Diversity (GSRD)

was commissioned by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) as a Good Practice guide for counselling professionals.

Encourage conversations and best practice relating to GSRD to ensure individuals and communities you support can feel confident in the care and support that is available.

www.bacp.co.uk/media/5877/bacp-gender-sexual-relationship-diversity-gpacp001-april19.pdf

issues, would have an invested interest and commitment to providing robust support for LGBTQI+ communities.

Pink Therapy has online learning models and continual professional development for therapists and counsellors working with LGBTQI+ communities. They also have a directory for individuals seeking LGBTQI+ affirmative care, although private psychotherapy may not be affordable for many. Also see 2.1 for training offered by Outcome and others in the next page.

pinktherapy.com

Counsellors should stay up to date with the latest LGBTQI+ issues. Some clients will have experienced Conversion Therapy in some form and will likely be distrustful of counselling services. Trans individuals may have experienced what is commonly referred to as 'exploratory therapy'. This can be experienced as denying trans experiences, moving away from the client's best interest. We strongly advise all recruiters to ensure a robust interview process with counsellors interacting with LGBTQI+ individuals to ensure they are trans affirmative and centre clients' experiences.

5. Partnerships; strengthening internal and external support

Islington Borough is noted for its rich and diverse LGBTQI+ culture, history, and community with one of London's largest LGBTQI+ populations. There are a number of specific LGBTQI+ spaces that provide focused support for the community. Within your provision, you may not have capacity to offer a dedicated project or group that caters to the community, but there will be support around you.

If you've not already connected with a LGBTQI+ specific project, reach out and start a conversation and see what might be possible in terms of collaboration and project building.

6. Knowledge and skills sharing

Services should consider mutual support and other opportunities such as reciprocal training and awareness raising to enact best practice. Some services may be well resourced and fluent in working with certain communities, but less proficient in other areas.

It is important to your communities that you develop confidence in mapping what services are available in your area, and gain an insight into what they can offer.

Mapping clear referral pathways both to and from your service will help to increase trust and confidence in our communities, particularly our LGBTQI+ clients who report feeling distrustful of services after many years, or even decades of discrimination.

Training providers

- [Gendered Intelligence](https://genderedintelligence.co.uk): trans awareness and inclusion
- [Outcome](https://islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome): LGBTQI+ awareness and separate trans specific inclusion
- [ELOP](https://elop.org): LGBTQI+ awareness
- [London Friend](https://londonfriend.org.uk/training): LGBTQI+ mental health and drug and alcohol use by LGBTQI+ people, including chemsex

genderedintelligence.co.uk

islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome

elop.org

londonfriend.org.uk/training

Contributions

[CNWL Sexual Health Services](#)

www.sexualhealth.cnwl.nhs.uk

[GALOP](#)

galop.org.uk

[Hidayah](#)

hidayahlgbt.com

[Hillside Clubhouse](#)

www.hillsideclubhouse.org.uk

[Islington Faith Forum](#)

www.islingtonfaithsforum.org.uk

[Islington Heritage](#)

www.islington.gov.uk/libraries-arts-and-heritage/heritage

[LGBT Community Centre](#)

londonlgbtqcentre.org

[London Friend](#)

londonfriend.org.uk

[Maya Centre](#)

www.mayacentre.org.uk

[Micro Rainbow](#)

microrainbow.org

[Nafsiyat](#)

www.nafsiyat.org.uk

[Naz & Matt Foundation](#)

www.nazandmattfoundation.org

[Not A Phase](#)

notaphase.org

[Outcome Islington Mind](#)

www.islingtonmind.org.uk/our-services/outcome/

[Rainbow Sisters](#)

www.refugeewomen.co.uk/support-our-rainbow-sisters/

[Room To Heal](#)

www.roomtoheal.org

[St Luke's Community Centre](#)

www.slpt.org.uk

[The Outside Project](#)

lgbtiqoutside.org

[Tonic Housing](#)

www.tonichousing.org.uk