

# LGBTQ people urgently need specialist mental health support, but it is lacking

24 June 2020, by Willem Stander



Credit: [Olga W Boeva/Shutterstock](#)

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a [significant rise](#) in demand for mental health support.

LGBTQ people are especially in need of this support, as [research suggests](#) that their mental health may be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Mental health charities offering specialist care for LGBTQ people have already seen an [increase in demand](#) for their services. However, this [specialist care](#) remains limited.

My [Ph.D. research](#) shows the importance of this specialist support. I have found that gay and bisexual men often seek specialist online services as their first source of mental health support—and many participants in my study only sought this help when they were in severe distress or at a crisis. This demonstrates the urgent need for relevant and appropriate support aimed at LGBTQ people.

## Increase in demand

A report by the [LGBT Foundation](#) has pinpointed issues that may put LGBTQ people at risk of being severely affected by the coronavirus crisis. LGBTQ people are [more likely](#) to face mental health difficulties, homelessness and [domestic abuse](#)

when compared to the general population.

In addition, many LGBTQ people may be caught in unsupportive or abusive environments as a result of safety measures such as social distancing and self-isolation. They may either have to [come out](#) to potentially unsupportive family or hide part of their identity.



Mental health support provided online is particularly valuable when face-to-face support is limited. Credit: [fizkes/Shutterstock](#)

However, LGBTQ people face barriers in accessing mainstream mental healthcare. A recent [national LGBT survey](#) by the UK government revealed that 28% of respondents found it "not at all easy" to access mental health support. When they did get mental health support, 22% reported a negative experience.

Worryingly, some respondents had been offered harmful treatments such as conversion therapy, most often by faith groups but also by healthcare professionals—despite [condemnation](#) of this treatment by major counselling and psychotherapy bodies and the NHS. A 2015 [Stonewall report](#) also

suggested that some health and social care workers lack confidence in their ability to understand and respond to the needs of LGBTQ people.

These challenges also extend to online support. For example, a [review](#) of web and mobile phone resources for depression and anxiety suggests that they are largely aimed at heterosexual users and seldom cater to the needs of LGBTQ people. These resources fail to address issues that are common to this community, such as coming out and coping with experiences of discrimination or harassment. Few include referrals to mental health services that specifically focus on the LGBTQ community.

### Limited funding

Voluntary and community organisations run by and for LGBTQ people fill an important gap. [Research](#) shows that social support from volunteers or counsellors who identify as LGBTQ is uniquely beneficial, given their personal connection and insight.

During the coronavirus pandemic, charities focused on the [mental health](#) of the LGBTQ community, such as [MindOut](#), have continued to provide essential services online. These include emotional support, information and direction to further resources.



LGBTQ organisations have also been affected by the cancellation of Pride fundraising events over the summer. Credit: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com)

However, the pandemic has seen these charities report a sharp fall in community fundraising events and other forms of planned income, as well as a loss of volunteers.

This is evident in the results of a survey carried out by [Consortium](#), a specialist infrastructure [charity](#) supporting LGBTQ groups and organisations. According to the [survey findings](#), many of their members are reporting a loss or reduction in grant funding, donations and other sources of income. This has resulted in a reduction of staff hours and services among some organisations.

The UK government has allocated a [£750 million support package](#) to help charities across the UK continue their vital work during the pandemic. However, Consortium's survey reveals that a majority of its members have been [unable to access any of the government support schemes](#) and some are fearing imminent closure.

The cancellation of Pride events is also a major setback for fundraising efforts and those organisations who benefit from corporate partnerships such as proceeds from special merchandise or products. As a result, several charities such as the [Allsorts Youth Project](#) and [London Friend](#) have launched crowdfunding initiatives to help maintain and expand their online services.

In light of increased demand and the ongoing need for specialist services, it is vital that LGBTQ charities continue offering support to those in need for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. It is likely that these charities will need to rely on donations to ensure that those who are the most vulnerable and marginalised among us are able to access relevant and appropriate support.

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