

With songs like Katy Perry's "I Kissed a Girl" reaching number one on the music charts one would anticipate a greater understanding of the members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) community. In society however, there are many myths and even greater stigma surrounding gay and lesbian relationships. LGBT persons are diverse and vary by race, religion, age and socioeconomic status. In contrast to popular beliefs, healthy relationships and safe sexual encounters can be part of everyone's life regardless of sexual orientation. Yet apprehension to seek out medical attention and preventative care is an unfortunate trend among the LGBT population due to the impact of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. (Statistics Canada study showed that gay men, lesbians and bisexuals were more likely than heterosexuals to report having had an unmet health care need in the past year. Health Report, Vol.19, No.1, March 2008)

There are some specific health issues that are more likely to affect LGBT persons – some directly related to sexual practice, most related to the stress of coping with prejudice and discrimination. Being aware of these health concerns, and knowing how and where to access good health care is important to improve your well-being.

Being healthy means being able to take care of physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and spiritual needs. Optimize your health with good nutrition, regular exercise, sufficient rest and sleep, and healthy stress releasers. Here are some resources within the university and the community-at-large to help address health issues.

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## GLBTQ Resources

### On Campus

**QSCC (Queer Students Community Centre)– MUSC 221, ext. 27397**

-Peer Support

-GLBT Resource Library

-Nurse Don *Have your health related questions answered by QSCC Health*

*Awareness Executive. Email [nursedon@gmail.com](mailto:nursedon@gmail.com) or drop by from 1:00-2:00pm every Tuesday. Totally confidential.*

**2. CSD – Centre for Student Development MUSC B107 ext.24711**

**<http://csd.mcmaster.ca/personal> for Personal Counselling**

**3. Campus Health Centre**

– MUSC B101 ext.27700 to book an appointment with a physician

- MUSC B106 ext.23312 for health education resources

**4. SHEC (MSU Student Health Education Centre) –MUSC 202 ext.22041**

- Peer Support

### Community

**5. The Well - The LGBTQ Community Wellness Centre of Hamilton**

**<http://www.thewellhamilton.ca> for peer support and social groups.**

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## Some Health Issues of Concern for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans People

### *Depression/Anxiety*

-Mental health is often disregarded but is a key contributor to overall wellness. LGBT persons have particular challenges -facing negative attitudes, discrimination and violence; and stressors – coming out, staying in the closet, transitioning in gender. All have a profound impact on self-esteem and self-identity.

- Depression, anxiety and suicide occur at higher rates than in the general population.

### *Substance Use*

-There is a higher rate of substance use from tobacco and alcohol to illicit drugs as a function of higher stress levels and social interaction (“party drugs” associated with dance clubs, circuit parties).

-It is important to discuss the long-term health impacts of substance use such as heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis; and seek healthier supports to deal with stressors.

### *Safe Sex*

- Having unsafe sex puts you at greater risk for many STIs and HIV/AIDS. Sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, syphilis,, and gonorrhea occur in sexually active gay and bisexual men at high rates. STIs such as herpes, HPV (genital wart virus) and trichomoniasis are transmitted fairly easily between women during sex

-Safe sex, through the use of latex condoms, and dental dams, and the safe use of sex toys, reduces risk. Regular STI testing is important.

### *Cancer Screening*

- Lesbian women are at high risk for breast cancer and many gynecological cancers. Gay men may be at risk for anal cancer (possibly related to HPV infection).

-Regular physical exams, anal or vaginal pap smears are recommended to ensure overall bodily health.

### *Fitness (Diet and Exercise)*

- Research indicates that lesbian women are more likely to be overweight or obese than heterosexual women, which can put them at greater risk for a number of health problems including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Gay men have increased problems with body image, and are more likely to experience an eating disorder such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa.

-Advice on healthy living, eating and exercise are important to discuss with your health care provider.

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## Choosing a Health Care Professional

### **Get a recommendation from a friend.**

Be aware of your comfort level. Choose a health care practice that promotes healthy sexuality and demonstrates inclusivity, (*a space that doesn't assume heterosexuality*). Is your partner welcome to attend your appointments with you?

Make sure that your mental, emotional and physical needs are being considered, and that there is enough time for concerns to be addressed and questions answered.

Reference: [www.rainbowhealthontario.ca](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca)  
[www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)