

count me in too community summary

Disability & LGBT lives

Chapter 11 of the Count Me In Too General Health report outlines the key findings for those LGBT people in the study who identify as having disabilities or long-term health impairments. 119 people, making up 15% of the sample, responded 'yes' to the question 'are you or do you identify yourself as having a long-term health impairment or physical disability?'. Some respondents indicated these labels did not describe their experiences and conditions, or that they rejected these labels as stigmatising their condition. This may contest understandings of who sits within the 'disabled' category used by services and other people.

Over a third of those with a disability/long-term health impairment found living in Brighton & Hove easy/very easy. A quarter found it difficult/very difficult.

There was evidence of positive experiences in Brighton and Hove with LGBT specific services, venues and spaces being valued and enjoyed.

'I belong to a group for lesbians with ME – a good space. On the whole the networks I'm in are reasonably good around this.'

However, there were significant difficulties with isolation, exclusion and access issues.

'I can't work or participate in many social activities. I am very poor, living off benefits, which affects all aspects of my life. I have trouble getting appropriate care from my GP and I do not have the energy to fight for it. My housing opportunities are limited.'

Experiences of prejudice, suicidal thoughts, domestic violence and abuse, discomfort using services, and housing issues were more likely to affect LGBT people who are disabled or long term health impaired, compared to other LGBT people.

People with a disability/long term health impairment reported having experienced bullying, abuse, discrimination or exclusion in employment (21%); and from health services (19%) and they felt more uncomfortable using services because of their gender/sexual identity than other LGBT people.

They were more likely to have had serious thoughts of suicide, to have exchanged sex for payment, and half of respondents with a disability/long-term health impairment had experienced domestic violence and abuse. They were also less likely than other LGBT people to feel safe, both at home and outside. 18% did not feel safe inside LGBT venues.

They were also over twice as likely (48%) to struggle getting accommodation as those who do not identify as disabled or as having a long-term health impairment (21%).

LGBT people with disabilities/long-term health impairments could be marginalised by both their disability/health impairment and their LGBT identity. More than half of these respondents said they did not fit well or at all into disabled activities, events and groups in Brighton & Hove. 38% said they did not fit well or at all into LGBT activities, groups and events, while another 38% said they did fit well or very well into LGBT activities, groups and events.

'Having to stand around when I need to sit, being physically pushed around at venues because I cannot rush around (LGBT venues). Seen as a bit of a pain – not just a dyke, but one with extra needs!'

Almost half of the LGBT disabled people in this research regularly participated in national LGBT groups. This figure was much less for local disabled groups and local LGBT groups, indicating that these were not available or accessible. The absence of a local LGBT disabled space was perhaps why national organisations were relied upon.

Access to LGBT spaces was revealed to be a key issue for many respondents with disabilities / long-term health impairments.

'The support services are extremely poor and underfunded. I feel isolated and alone because I cannot join in a lot of LGBT activities.'

'I can't afford to socialise on the gay scene.'

'I think Brighton is... it has a huge gay population and yet I can't think of a venue that is accessible apart from Cafe 22 at most but I mean most of the pubs/clubs have got steps so if people aren't visible then people are not going to get used to it.'

Almost a quarter of disabled / impaired LGBT respondents reported bullying, abuse, discrimination or exclusion by other LGBT people.

'You can't see the stick in the sauna. When I'm dressed and going out and they see the stick, you can see the look of absolute horror. [They] think oh I've had sex with a cripple, you see that look which makes me laugh! I met somebody who wouldn't go to a gay club because people were staring at him because he had a stick.'

People with disabilities / long term health impairments were invited to offer suggestions as to what could change to make them feel more included in LGBT and/or disabled communities, activities and events and groups in Brighton and Hove. Some indicated they had no desire for special provision, while others requested improved accessibility, acceptance, understanding and information.

'Brighton and Hove Council and the LGBT community both tend toward an emphasis on the city as the place for young people who are fit, healthy and always up for going clubbing at night!... the city's diversity does encompass many more people who deserve more funding into alternative means of socialising, clubs and alcohol-free activities. We have such beautiful surroundings and parks- I'd like to meet the LGBT community out there too!'

The analysis group recommended that:

- services commissioned and provided should recognise the multiple and diverse needs of LGBT people who have long-term health impairments and physical disabilities. This includes cross-service working.
- local LGBT spaces for disabled people are provided that do not rely on the limited resources of disabled people, but are still run by LGBT disabled people.
- LGBT communities, venues and businesses to make these spaces are made accessible for LGBT people with disabilities.
- the Federation of Disabled People explore the possibility of adding LGBT-friendly accessible venues to their web-based City Guide.

To find out more details about the results of the research and recommendations the full report can be downloaded for free from :

www.countmeintoo.co.uk