

# LGBT Mental Health & Wellbeing

✖ A specialist health service is being piloted in Lothian, to help reduce the mental health inequalities experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

The LGBT Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme will provide access to specialist mental health service, specifically aimed at addressing the needs of people in Lothian's LGBT community.

By increasing access to specialist mental health services, it aims to improve mental health in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and reduce the risk of self-harm and suicide.

The programme is designed to tackle the mental health risk factors affecting LGBT people, such as isolation, discrimination and hate crime. It will provide social activities and set up peer support groups that improve social networks, as isolation and social exclusion greatly increase the risk of poor mental health.

The service is being set up as part of a national demonstration project which is being piloted in Lothian.

The national project is being run by the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing, which is part funded by NHS Lothian, with a grant from the Scottish Government.

Plans to launch the national project have been outlined in a paper due to be approved by NHS Lothian's board members on Wednesday.

The pilot project will work in partnership with mainstream advice and advocacy agencies, providing advice on housing, employment and education to help reduce discrimination against

people in the LGBT community.

Improved access to specialised and mainstream mental health services, and increased awareness of the needs of LGBT people and the mental health inequalities they experience will help to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

The project will also link in with national mental health initiatives, such as Choose Life and 'See Me' to provide input on the specific issues affecting LGBT people.

Linda Irvine, Strategic Programme Manager for Mental Health and Wellbeing, NHS Lothian, said: "The LGBT community has been identified as a group which can be at higher risk of having mental health problems. This can sometimes be linked to a feeling of isolation, or social exclusion.

"This national demonstration project aims to improve mental health in the LGBT community, and reduce the stigma which can be attached to mental health. This project will provide learning on how we can tailor the services on offer, and help to tackle the mental health risk factors which can affect people in the LGBT community."

The LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing is a unique organisation that works to tackle health inequalities by improving the health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. It runs a varied programme of services that promote physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing.

Maruska Greenwood, Director, LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing, said: "Stigma, discrimination, harassment and hate crime are part of the day-to-day experience for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. It is also common for those 'coming out' to be met with rejection from friends and family members. All this increases the risk of poor mental health for LGBT people. Mental health problems are often compounded when individuals experience discrimination, ignorance or invisibility from the mainstream services they

turn to for support.

“This national demonstration project will provide not only much needed culturally sensitive support to tackle both the poor mental health of individuals, but will also address the risk factors that can lead to poor mental health, such as social isolation, hate crime and homelessness.

“This specialist project will also work in partnership with mainstream mental health providers to ensure they gain a better understanding of the issues affecting LGBT people and can provide more culturally sensitive and inclusive services.”