



## Factsheet #17

# Speaking up for LGBT equality

**Achieving equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is intrinsic to strengthening public services and building a fairer society.**

### LGBT people are everywhere

Prejudice and discrimination mean many LGBT people keep their sexual orientation or gender history private. Some employers and public service providers think they have no LGBT staff or clients. They are wrong – LGBT people are everywhere.

UNISON has been working for decades to make LGBT rights visible. Sometimes equality means treating everyone the same and sometimes it means treating people differently – meeting their particular needs.

### LGBT equality at work

- in a recent survey, over 60% of UNISON LGB members and two thirds of trans members reported prejudiced comments from colleagues and managers
- a third experienced mental health problems they thought were linked to fear of anti-LGBT prejudice and discrimination
- other surveys show managers have little awareness of LGBT equality issues

*“The fact that LGB people would not even consider certain jobs for fear of other people’s reaction is a worrying sign that prejudice and discrimination still limit people’s choices and chances in life.”*

– Equality and Human Rights Commission

### LGBT equality in public services

Public services matter to LGBT people. Where mainstream services really do meet everyone’s needs, or there are good services targeted at LGBT people, this changes lives – in some cases it saves lives.

But many service providers give no thought to the needs of LGBT service users

- young LGBT people are particularly dependent on youth, housing and other services, particularly when estranged from their family of origin
- anti-LGBT bullying is rife in schools
- many LGBT people delay seeking healthcare for fear of prejudice, making treatment more difficult

- “family-friendly” services must meet the needs of children from LGBT families, not deny their home lives
- mainstream refuge services are not always appropriate for LGBT people experiencing domestic abuse, leaving them vulnerable for longer
- sports and leisure can feel like a no-go area for LGBT people, whether as participants or spectators
- people don’t report anti-LGBT hate crimes, for lack of confidence in the criminal justice system
- older LGBT people can be just as isolated as younger LGBT people

### The impact of the crisis

Like all vulnerable groups, when times get hard LGBT people need public services even more. But services for LGBT people are among the first to be cut in a downturn. They’re a lifeline for those who use them, but they don’t win popularity contests.

In the workplace, bullying tends to increase in the face of reorganisation and redundancies. LGBT workers fear to complain when their jobs are at risk.

*“In difficult times transgender people suffer eroded rights as well as healthcare cuts. UNISON is in the forefront defending my interests on all fronts. UNISON knows my needs are unique but my rights are universal.”*

– **Local Government worker, UNISON**

### What needs to change

Employers and service providers must recognise that LGBT people are in all workforces and communities. LGBT people must be able to work and participate in all parts of society with dignity and respect. This is far from reality now, and the impact of the crisis threatens those gains that have been made.

The 2010 Equality Act requires public bodies to take active steps to promote equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. It is no excuse to say they don’t know what people need – they have a duty to find out.

UNISON works to make sure the voices of LGBT members are heard.

### Add your voice

We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign:

- talk to your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours about these issues
- raise these issues with your employer, local media, and political candidates
- take the campaign to workplace or community meetings – or organise your own – we can help with materials and speakers
- visit our website for more information, more campaign ideas and to tell us what you’ve been doing
- if you work in public services, join us at [www.unison.org.uk/join](http://www.unison.org.uk/join)

**We have a million voices for public services – to add yours go to**  
[unison.org.uk/million](http://unison.org.uk/million)  
 or call 0845 355 0845  
 Textphone  
 0800 0 967 968