



Insight Report

LGBTQ+ Experiences of health and social
care services in Leicester and Leicestershire

August 2024

healthwatch
Leicester

healthwatch
Leicestershire

Accessing Health and Social Care Services: LGBTQ+ Community

Introduction

When it comes to accessing health and social care, your views count. Part of our role is to understand the experiences of people who are using these services and to give people an opportunity to speak up and have their voices heard.

We developed a survey to give us a snapshot of how people in Leicester and Leicestershire who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) access local services.

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire are an independent voice for the people of Leicester and Leicestershire. Our role is to listen to the voice of the public and represent their views with commissioners and providers of services to influence service improvement and hold to account where appropriate.

We work with all communities and use feedback to help shape services and drive up quality and improvement. As part of our project; 'Access to Health Care for all' we wanted to find out:

- What are the challenges and barriers in Leicester and Leicestershire people face in accessing health and care services?
- The impact these barriers are having on the community.
- What could improve the experience of accessing health care services in Leicester and Leicestershire for the identified communities?



What we did

We wanted to gain a better understanding of the specific health and care needs of the LGBTQ+ community as members of this community may face unique challenges related to healthcare access, discrimination and culturally competent care.

- We met with the Chief Executive Officer at Trade Sexual Health¹ to gain an understanding of the local issues currently being discussed within the community.
- Trade have been collating evidence (alongside Leicester & Leicestershire Citizens) about specific local issues affecting the Trans community (particularly in primary care). Leicester Citizens have been collecting stories through their access to healthcare campaign and TRADE have collected 76 survey responses from people at Leicester Pride in September 2023.
- We launched the survey on 1 December 2023 at the World AIDS Day Red Ribbon Remembrance event held outside the Curve theatre.
- We provided people with the opportunity to share their experiences directly with us via telephone, in-person meetings and at events. The survey was available online and distributed through our social media channels and available on our website.
- We reached out to local community groups to promote our survey and listen to the experiences of the community. All our evidence was gathered anonymously.

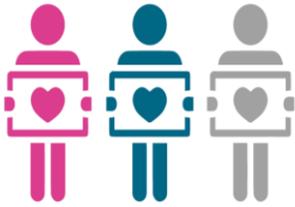
Disclaimer

There were **82** responses to the survey.

The findings in this report reflect the opinions of the individuals who took part in the survey and their experiences of accessing services. The sample is not representative of all people in Leicester and Leicestershire and therefore provides a snapshot of their views.

¹ Trade Sexual Health is a health and sexual health charity, providing free, confidential health advice, information, services and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans (LGB&T) communities of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. www.tradesexualhealth.com

Findings



82 responses

In the last 2 years, have you experienced any difficulties in accessing local health and care services due to gender identity or sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation



Yes	No	Prefer not to say
9	70	3

The majority of people (70) reported that they had not experienced any difficulties in accessing services.

Those who had experienced difficulties shared that there are challenges with:

- booking online appointments to start PrEP²
- finding support groups
- sexual health clinics
- assumptions made about their sexual orientation and contraception.

Gender Identity



Yes	No	Prefer not to say
10	68	4

² Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is used to reduce the risk of getting HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
<https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep/about-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep/>

The majority of people (68) reported that they had not experienced any difficulties in accessing services.

Those who had experienced difficulties shared that there are challenges with:

- GP practices and obtaining prescribed hormone medication
- being misgendered by healthcare professionals
- medical systems not being able to change to their preferred name
- being deadnamed on medical systems
- being refused a blood test due to being on DIY hormones
- Long waiting times to be seen by the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC).

People told us that:



"I was refused care because I was self-medicating, it was not directly related to any prescriptions but I was seeking advice on what I could do however I was refused care or advice."

"I have lost my healthcare records, and been unable to get my flu jab to protect my elderly grandmother, I have been told my shared care hasn't been received by one GP, and then another has said it's been there for weeks. I have also had my name reverted to my deadname, and my title changed without my consent multiple times."



In your opinion, do you feel that local health and care service providers are knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of the LGBTQ+ community?

Answer Choices	Very knowledgeable and sensitive	Somewhat knowledgeable and sensitive	Not at all knowledgeable and sensitive	I don't know	Prefer not to say
GP Practices	6	41	21	13	1
Hospital Services	7	41	14	19	1
Dentists	5	19	16	40	2
Mental Health Services	7	35	9	30	1
Social Care Services	5	20	2	44	1

The majority of people did not feel that local services are **'very knowledgeable and sensitive'** to the needs of the community. Most people also responded that **'they did not know'** for dentists and social care services.

In the last 2 years, how often have you encountered discrimination or prejudice while seeking healthcare services locally due to your LGBTQ+ identity?

Very Often		6.33%	5
Sometimes		21.52%	17
Not very often		58.23%	46
I don't know		11.39%	9
Prefer not to say		2.53%	2

Eight people shared that they had never encountered any discrimination. Seven people shared that they have experienced misgendering and deadnaming by their doctors.

Three people shared that their pronouns have not been used even when requested.

6

“Deadnamed, misgendered, or referred to as “that” by GPs and receptionists.”

“Odd looks from nurses when my partner is introduced or present. Insensitive remarks regarding being gay or transgender – ‘which way round are you?’, ‘I could barely tell!’, ‘No, this bathroom is for males only’ (am a transgender male), ‘if he’s the boyfriend, does that make

you the girlfriend?”

“I have felt uncomfortable at times when health professionals have asked about the father of my children/ my husband - I am married to a woman and a lot of the time, people just presume that as I have children, I therefore must be heterosexual.”

9

Which healthcare services or treatments related to your LGBTQ+ identity do you feel are lacking or need improvement in your local area?

This was a free text question and the key themes from the responses were: Access to GICs, Access to sexual health services, Access to mental health services, lack of sensitivity or awareness and family planning.

Access to Gender Identity Clinics (GIC)

“Gender clinic and the way Leicester’s system works differently to the rest of the UK’s system.”

“GICs have incredibly long wait times, this is expected but it would be useful to have clarification on the time scale. I have been on the waitlist for about a year and haven’t received anything follow-up information from the GP (apart from a month after referral when I reached out to them) or anything information from the clinic at all.”

“Please, please, please, please just do an informed consent system, the current one clearly doesn’t work.”

Access to sexual health services

“Sexual health services administrating and booking poor, online services only work in part.”

“No STD testing available locally, nowhere to for LGBT specific advice (Coalville).”

“I think Leicester Sexual Health services think they are providing an LGBT inclusive service, but many of their attitudes are dated, judgemental and heteronormative.”

“More instant access to sexual health advice and regular STD testing. I feel that this has been harder to access since the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Better planning for how to make Asian LGBTQIA+ people feel safe to disclose, when high numbers of their communities are in medicine and they are not out. Issues with disclosure anxiety etc.”

Access to mental health services

“Mental health support particularly for young people.”

“Adult Social Care and the Mental Health teams do not recognise the need for extra support with LGBTQ+ identity.”

“LGBTQIA+ mental health specialists required, or funding towards community-led provisions as many mental health needs are related to acceptance, belonging, divergent sense of identity, etc.”

“All services need regular face-to-face training in LGBTQ+ awareness to understand not only the diversity of our identities but also our specific/universal health needs. This does not happen currently. Brief online mandatory “awareness” training and the occasional online webinar is insufficient. Of particular concern is the significant gap in the recording of sexuality in healthcare. There needs to be a systematic push on ensuring this is done - how can we address health inequalities if we can't interrogate the data inclusively?”

Lack of sensitivity or awareness

“Unable to book an appointment online to start PrEP. PrEP needs to be available easily to all for free through your GP without question.”

“Rather than specific services, I would suggest that it's about awareness of the specific needs and circumstances of LGBTQI+ people i.e. cultural sensitivity.”

“SystmOne does not allow for non-binary gender to be recorded or non-binary titles such as Mx to be recorded as a default option.”

“Awareness that there may be specific nervousness associated with cervical screenings for women who are not used to being penetrated.”

“Contraceptive services desperately need to have more training on how to be appropriate towards transgender patients, and the ways transgender patients may have specific health needs that are not the same as those of people of their assigned or acquired sex. Many GP surgeries in Leicester also have appointment booking systems that don't allow you to book an appointment related to transgender endocrine health, so my friends have had to put down appointment reasons as 'mental health issues' when they haven't been experiencing them - this is stigmatising and desperately needs to change.”

Family Planning

“Access to fertility treatment.”

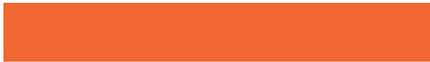
“More support for LGBTQIA+ couples who want to birth children.”

“Fertility options for LGBT couples. Both information and services are lacking.”

"Better information and access to fertility services - the women's health strategy advises that there should be an end to non-clinical eligibility criteria. As I am in a female same-sex marriage, even if I have fertility problems, I would need to self-fund 6 cycles of intrauterine insemination privately to prove my infertility before I would then be able to access NHS-funded support. This would likely cost tens of thousands of pounds. I feel this area needs improvement as this a priority for female same-sex couples."

In the last 2 years, have you ever avoided or delayed seeking treatment or care for fear that you might experience prejudice or discrimination due to gender identity or sexual orientation?

Sexual Orientation

Yes		16
No		60
Not sure		4
Prefer not to say		1

The majority of people (60) had not delayed seeking treatment or care due to their sexual orientation. People who answered yes (16) shared that:

Sexual Health Screening

"(I'm) worried about judgement from others (mostly family and friends finding I am sexually active) regarding getting tested."

"(Not) accessing sexual health services, mainly due to embarrassment."

"Don't feel the attitude of some staff at sexual health services are welcoming or supportive."

Cervical screening

"Smear test - as LGB I do not want to expose myself to the presumption of having gender issues and have my "pronouns" tiptoed around, so simply avoid the procedure altogether."

"I don't feel comfortable visiting some services so put off going in for appointments."

"I had some concern that the GP would not consider my sex life important unless I was heterosexual. I worry about other cultures doing this as well, even though they are in the medical profession. I have seen it happen."

"After my experience with contraceptive healthcare, I put off getting a smear test, expecting the same level of mistreatment and inappropriacy but in a more intimate setting. In the end, I went and had a positive experience, but I was too afraid to go when I was meant to, and didn't attend until 2 years after I turned 25."

"Due to other health conditions, I need to discuss with my GP before starting any private fertility treatment, however, I am anxious about accessing this as would need to discuss my sexuality with my GP."

Gender identity

Yes		15
No		61
Not sure		3
Prefer not to say		2

The majority of people (61) had not delayed seeking treatment or care due to their gender identity. People who answered yes (15) shared that:

"I'm not sure what you're asking here, I don't have a gender identity, the concept is meaningless. I am female though and my female body creates specific issues in healthcare. I feel services don't take into account women's experience of trauma and needing female staff, particularly around gynaecological health. I have been treated for cancer over the last year and I've had to repeat over and over again, my experience of sexual assault and male violence. Staff have responded to this okay each time, but it's exhausting having to ask over and over again."

"The forcing of gender identity issues is becoming more harmful than inclusive, it is alarming to see it in the NHS which is supposedly science-led."

Lack of sensitivity from staff

"I don't feel I can get any support at all as a female or lesbian anymore."

"GP services. They're not at fault, it is just a stressful topic that I wouldn't rather avoid."

"Explaining you're transgender, what that means and what that entails to therapists is extremely draining."

"I think my gender as a cis woman is part of the reason I am dismissed more, yes. It may not be the only contributing factor. But it does make me delay access to care."

"I avoid going to the dentist due to constantly being misgendered no matter how many times I correct them, it has gotten to the point that they don't believe I am who I say I am when I speak to them over the phone as my voice isn't "feminine enough"."

"I am non-binary, and would like to pursue top surgery to be more comfortable in my body, but when I brought up having feelings of gender dysphoria to my GP he was a little dismissive - fairly stating that he didn't have any expertise in the matter. The only problem with that is that he didn't signpost or refer me to anyone who did have that expertise. After that experience, I have been hesitant to pursue anything for fear of a similar reaction."

What improvements would you like to see to the accessibility, sensitivity and inclusivity of local health and care services for the LGBTQ+ community?

People told us that:

Accessibility

"Would prefer separate service for sexual health or better booking system."

"Just general acceptance and delicacy with the subject as well as accessibility."

"More local support in smaller towns."

"Relevant training, especially around not making assumptions."

"Please be aware that some people don't want the main focus to be on their sexuality or gender identity, they just want to be treated like everyone else without patronising measures. The main thing is that the primary health need is addressed."

"I am not aware of if there are any only LGBTQ+ sexual health clinics as to attend such clinics open to everyone can make me feel more anxious due to my sexuality and perhaps open to mocking/abuse from other patients if waiting in the same waiting area. Perhaps age-specific group clinics (being an older male), it can be a little intimidating waiting with younger people for whom society accepts will be promiscuous but I do feel there is a judgement on older people who are promiscuous and needing/wanting to access services."

"Check if booking systems exclude transgender patients or our healthcare needs by default."

"Increased information about what is available would be useful. Follow-ups on wait times and confirmation of referral would also be good. I only received a copy of my referral to a GIC from the GP because I emailed them about it a month after my referral."

"I would like to see healthcare professionals treat LGBTQ+ patients with respect and to not refuse certain services due to their identity. I'd also like it if there was more support for the transgender community e.g. more GICs."



Sensitivity

"Staff across the board need training on gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity. The experiences of my transgender friends, with primary care and mental health services, have been extremely poor, to the point of being dehumanising."

"More staff awareness training of the specific requirements and needs of the community."

"I would like staff to have knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ people in a family setting and be aware of the language they use/questions they ask."

"Across the board (in society generally as well as in healthcare) people need to be better about awareness, e.g. using non-gendered terms when asking if one is married/do they have a spouse (rather than "husband" or "wife") and being mindful about not making jokes that make a marginalised person or identity is the punchline."

"I think just generally, having to 'come out' every time you go into your GP feels frustrating and insensitive like you aren't listened to, even just a 'has your sexual orientation changed since the last time we saw each other? I'm just asking to see if there could be a possibility of you being pregnant?'"

"Have a minimum level of training for all staff (including nurse practitioners and contraception specialists) on how to interact appropriately with transgender patients, without insulting them or asking inappropriate and invasive questions that are not medically necessary or related to the procedure or appointment they are having."

"Better training of healthcare professionals, particularly in the areas of mental health, gender bias, binaries etc."

"I don't bother using mental health services anymore due to discrimination and misdiagnosis. I feel that everything comes under 'personality disorder' which is patronising and an issue".



Inclusivity

"To recognise that the LGBT community is not a coherent one, and many lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals believe that gender identity is harmful as it is predominantly same-sex attracted young people, particularly young lesbians, who are being convinced, they have been born into the wrong body. Many of us who are older also had a period of gender non-conformity, but now feel thankful that nobody suggested medication and surgery to us. The constant "celebrating" of our sexuality is wearing too, many of us want it to be the least interesting thing about us, rather than being patronised with rainbows and continual pride celebrations."

"Stop trying to treat "LGBTQ+" as a trendy issue to get behind, the constant rainbow displays in surgeries and emails signed off with pronouns make us feel like a project rather than regular humans."

"Not making assumptions about people, asking their name/pronouns as it may not always match records."

"Competent awareness training so people can ask the right/ appropriate questions, don't make assumptions about our sexualities (including social and sexual behaviours). This should be delivered by local providers not parachuted in using organisations such as Stonewall and THT. Assurance from local providers that they are genuinely inclusive in service delivery and that assurance is contractually monitored not just flying the occasional rainbow flag."

"More inclusivity, educating staff on how to be more sensitive around gender identity."

"I think the services are acutely aware of the needs of the LGBT+ Community."

"Awareness and knowledge around sexual health for transgender individuals and their partners as well as polyamorous individuals."

"Any gesture towards inclusion would have made me more likely to go and get my smear test - there's just nothing. No leaflets, no training, no support. It feels uphill all the time."

"Increased visibility of LGBTQ+ within the local health and care services. I am an NHS staff member, and even staff I speak to assume that because I am married that I must have a husband - they are often surprised/embarrassed when I then have to correct them. When researching into fertility services locally, the focus still seems to be on "mum and dad" rather than a baby's parents - despite describing themselves as LGBTQ+ friendly."

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the local health and care services as they relate to the LGBTQ+ community?

Very Dissatisfied		9
Dissatisfied		22

Neutral		33
Satisfied		12
Very Satisfied		5

We asked people to share any additional comments about local services. They told us:

“Ensure that young people can get good mental health support around trauma, same-sex attraction, neurodiversity and the other things that occur commonly with gender dysphoria so they don't end up going down a surgery and medication route that ultimately affects their cognitive and bone development and creates other lifelong health problems.”

“I would suggest that an audit of services to really understand how aware they are of the specific requirements and needs of LGBTQI+ people would be a valuable next step. This should include an analysis of how representative of the community the various Boards and Senior Leadership Teams are.”

“So much harm is being done, especially to young people, in terms of “gender issues/identity”. I do not feel safe as a woman being treated in hospital knowing physically born males can be included in what should be women-only spaces. Growing up marginalised as LGB I finally felt comfortable in my late teens and twenties in terms of equality, now as a grown woman being included in the “LGBT” bracket, I feel more isolated than ever in terms of services I can access and my needs being understood. Pandering to transgender activists is oppressing more than it is including and the NHS is falling into this trap hook, line and sinker.”

“Just how many LGBT people are too frightened to talk about issues that bother them because of the reaction you will receive. If you are told that you are 'hateful' because you will not sleep with a woman with a penis as a lesbian, you have to just accept this or risk your job, etc.”

“I believe they could be tailored more for the LGBTQ+ community and if they already are, then I have little awareness and so there may be a lack of promotion of such services, especially for the over 50s. It is easy to feel judged more so attending a clinic as you get older.”



“Transgender healthcare is so limited, the GP I spoke with did seem to care but there's little they can do when faced with the wait times. I'm just grateful that I have the ability to go private because otherwise, I'm not sure I would be able to handle how long it would be before I get the help I need.”

“Perhaps have somewhere where LGBTQ+ can go for free health checks. Somewhere like a leisure centre hall. It can be daunting going on your own to a sexual health clinic for the first time.”

“Some of the problems are relating to what services don't exist, rather than explicit discrimination in those that do. Sometimes the way that the system runs makes it clear that it conceptualizes health and well-being in a way that does not include or acknowledge us.”

“Be more inclusive in talking and promoting initiatives.”

“Better neutral gender and sexuality assessments.”

“No assumptions.”

Recommendations

The recommendations relate to the survey findings.

1. Ensure that Healthcare professionals receive comprehensive training on LGBTQ+ health issues, including understanding diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, respectful communication and culturally competent care. This training should be ongoing to ensure continued awareness and sensitivity.
2. Health services to ensure that they implement patient-centre care that prioritise respect for people's self-identified gender and sexual orientation. This includes using inclusive language, asking for preferred pronouns and respecting individuals' chosen names.
3. Review Electronic Health Records (EHR) Systems including SystemOne to allow people to easily update their preferred name and gender marker. Dead naming and misgendering can be reduced by ensuring that EHR systems are flexible and inclusive.
4. Ensure that sexual health services are inclusive and accessible to all individuals.
5. Review the resources available for free sexual health checks in Leicestershire borough and district community settings.
6. Ensure that mental health services and family planning services are inclusive and tailored to the needs of individuals that use the services.
7. Review awareness campaigns within healthcare settings to promote sensitivity and inclusivity towards LGBTQ+ patients. This could include reviewing the language and accessibility of resources for both staff and patients.

8. Review the resources and information available for cervical screening that are inclusive of transgender, non-binary individuals, lesbians and bisexual women.
9. Involve LGBTQ+ communities in the design and evaluation of healthcare services to ensure they meet the needs of the population they serve.
10. Work with the VCSE sector to understand what is available and what is possible. Ensure that there is a local system in place to enable people to easily find and access services.



Response from Gavin Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Trade Sexual Health

“This report is very valuable in highlighting the positive and negative interactions of local LGBTQ+ people with health services. The findings and recommendations resonate with many of the experiences we hear from LGBTQ+ community members and service users at Trade. Trade is the local LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing charity, and we are committed to working constructively with local health providers to ensure that their services are appropriate, inclusive, and accessible for LGBTQ+ people and we are ready to provide advice, guidance and training to this end.”

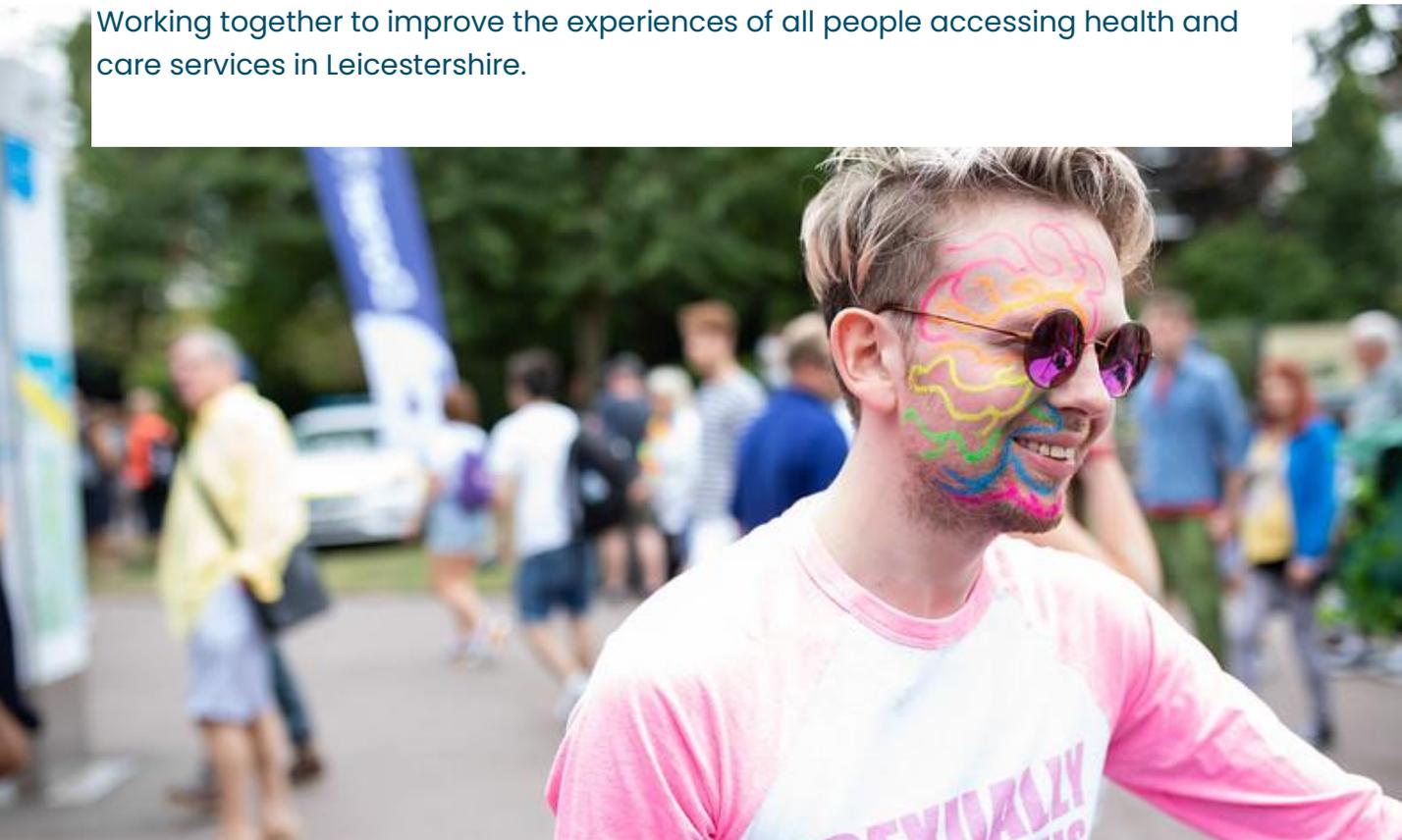
Response from Alice McGee, Chief People Officer and lead for inclusion at the Integrated Care Board (ICB)

“The ICB welcomes this comprehensive research which resonates what we hear from the community, Trade Sexual Health and Leicester Citizens Campaign. It is good to see that we are getting it right for our communities but also welcome the feedback that this isn’t always the case. The recommendations are recognised by the ICB and there is a programme of work and a commitment to implement these with Healthwatch, Trade Sexual Health, the VCSE sector and our communities.”

Next steps

We will be sharing our findings with the relevant organisations, the local authorities and partner agencies.

We will continue to reach out and listen to the views of the LGBTQ+ community. Working together to improve the experiences of all people accessing health and care services in Leicestershire.



Equality monitoring

Where do you live?

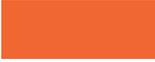
Leicester City		27
Blaby		8
Charnwood		12
Harborough		7
Hinckley & Bosworth		11
Melton		3
North West Leicestershire		5
Oadby & Wigston		2
Prefer not to say		5

What is your age group?

16-17 years		0
18-24 years		16
25-34 years		25
35-44 years		17
45-54 years		10
55-64 years		10
65 or older		2

Prefer not to say		0
-------------------	--	---

How do you identify your sexual orientation? (Select all that apply)

Lesbian		16
Gay		24
Bisexual		21
Pansexual		5
Queer		15
Straight / Heterosexual		5
Asexual/Aromantic		3
Prefer to self-identify		4
Prefer not to say		3

What is your current gender identity?

Male		35
Female		37
Non-binary		7
Prefer not to say		1
Something else		1

Is your current gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

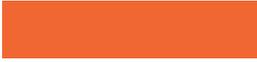
Yes		61
No		17
Not Sure / don't know		0

Prefer not to say		1
-------------------	---	---

What is your ethnicity?

Arab		1
Asian/Asian British: Any other Asian/Asian British background		2
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi		0
Asian/Asian British: Chinese		0
Asian/Asian British: Indian		3
Asian/Asian: Pakistan		0
Black/Black British: African		1
Black/Black British: Any other Black/Black British background		0
Black/Black British: Caribbean		1
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic backgrounds: Asian and White		1
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups: Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups background		2
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups: Black African and White		0
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White		0
White: Any other White background		7
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh		59
White: Gypsy/Traveller/Irish Traveller		0
White: Irish		3
White: Roma		0
Any other ethnic group		1
Prefer not to say		0

Do you have a disability?

Yes		27
No		47
Prefer not to say		6

healthwatch
Leicester

healthwatch
Leicestershire

Healthwatch Leicester
Healthwatch Leicestershire

9 Newarke Street
Leicester
LE1 5SN

www.healthwatchll.com

☎ 0116 257 4999

✉ enquiries@healthwatchll.com

✂ @HealthwatchLeic

📘 HealthwatchLL

📷 HealthwatchLL

Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire is looked after and managed by Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL).

Voluntary Action LeicesterShire is the trading name of Voluntary Action Leicester registered charity (No. 509300) Company Limited by Guarantee (No. 1357513) Registered in England and Wales.

