

# Opening the Window

A GUIDE TO LESBIAN HEALTH



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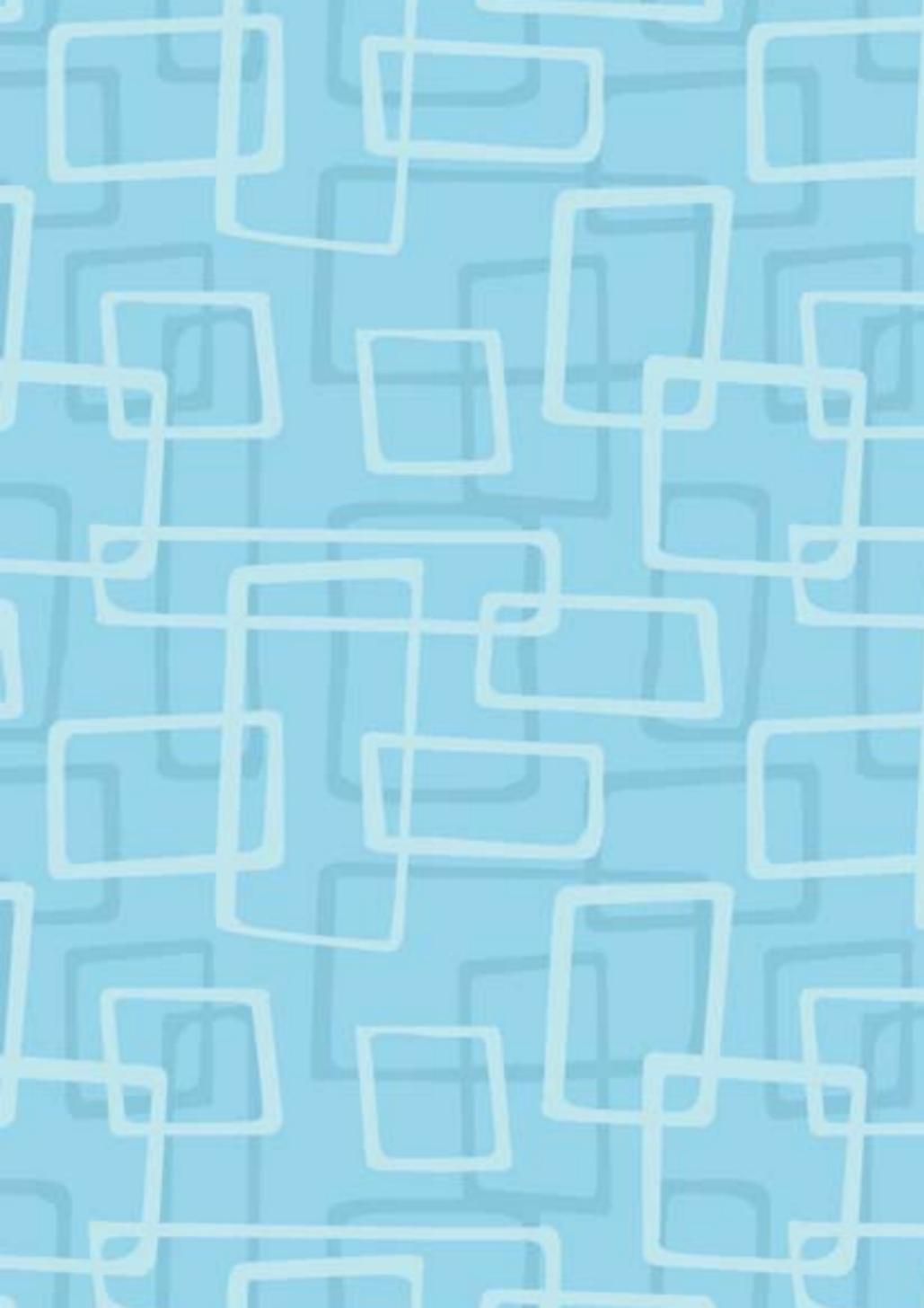
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# OPENING THE WINDOW - A GUIDE TO LESBIAN HEALTH

Welcome to “Opening the Window - A Guide to Lesbian Health”. This booklet provides information on some of the things you might like to think about when looking for health care providers, planning ahead, as well as tips on maintaining your health, and some useful contact numbers.

Being a lesbian means different things to each of us. There is great diversity and richness within the lesbian experience. Lesbians are of all ages, cultural backgrounds, belief systems and abilities; we define our identities, communities, families and support systems in many ways. Each of us defines our health in different ways too, and what’s important might change over time.

In this light, we recognise there is no single formula to feeling well and happy, but we hope the guide can contribute to you feeling good! You may find that some of the information in this guide is not relevant to you or you may find that there’s information not included that you need. If this is the case, please use the referral list at the back of this booklet to make contact with people or services you’re looking for.

# ACCESSING HEALTHCARE

As lesbians, we have the right to quality health care that meets our needs – as we define them - and recognises how we experience health. There are lots of different ways we can and do look after ourselves – through what we've learned, through our support networks, by chatting with other people such as family, friends and partners, and by consulting health care providers.

Taking an active role in looking after our health can help us make more informed choices that lead to better health outcomes.

## Health Care Provider:

*A general term used to refer to a qualified person working with people to improve or monitor their health. This could include general practitioners (GP's), nurses, specialists, counsellors, social workers, traditional chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners, naturopaths, psychologists, caseworkers, physiotherapists – in fact, anyone who can have specialist input into helping you feel healthy, happy and on top of things.*

*They can work in a range of settings, such as a private practice, community health centre, women's health centre or hospital.*

Accessing health services can be difficult for lesbians, for a number of reasons, such as:

- ✧ *feeling unsure about “coming out” to health care providers*
- ✧ *fear of discrimination and assumptions about our sexuality, behaviours and needs*
- ✧ *concerns about the level of knowledge and understanding of lesbian health issues*
- ✧ *concerns about lack of confidentiality*
- ✧ *feeling confused about sexuality*
- ✧ *conflict between different parts of ourselves - such as sexual, cultural and religious identities*
- ✧ *geographical, social or cultural isolation*



Past experiences of discrimination, homophobia or feeling invisible as a lesbian can mean that we might not seek information, treatment or assistance when we need it. Or it might be that we walk away with information that's not quite what we were looking for.

## SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU OPEN THE WINDOW ON LESBIAN HEALTH -

### 1. Healthcare is about teamwork.

It's important to feel comfortable taking an active role in making decisions about your health and wellbeing. Often, we need the input of different people to address specific issues we might be facing. Health care providers have specialised knowledge and can offer support and ideas on a range of options to restore or work towards better health.

Remember:

- ✧ *to recognise that your participation and experience is valuable in making the best decisions for you*
- ✧ *to spend some time developing rapport and trust with your health care providers so that you feel comfortable discussing your options and making decisions*
- ✧ *to ask questions. If there's something you don't understand when you're at an appointment, or something you want more information about, ask questions that will help you feel clearer. It may be about a test or procedure, side effects, medication, a body part, or a word you don't understand.*
- ✧ *to ask about all the options available to you in your particular situation. Don't feel pressured to make decisions quickly – take your time. Collect information from various sources such as from other people, other services, reliable websites or brochures.*

- ✧ *to explain any financial limitations, and religious or cultural beliefs that are important in how your decisions are made.*
- ✧ *if it's hard to ask questions at the time, write down some notes for yourself and find the information you need after your appointment. This is not always easy, especially when there are communication or language barriers, cultural issues or decisions to be made quickly.*
- ✧ *if it's difficult to translate your questions from your first language, you could ask someone to come with you to help you, or contact the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) for assistance, 13450.*
- ✧ *to take the responsibility to give health care providers information that might be relevant to your care. Let them know if you're taking prescription medication or over the counter medicine, traditional herbal medicine, using tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, or if you're seeing other health care providers.*
- ✧ *once you have information and support, and you've considered all the options, take action and follow through. Looking after your health and wellbeing is important!*



## 2. PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

### *Identify what it is you are looking for*

Before you do anything, have a think about what questions you have about your health and wellbeing. Has something changed in your body? Is it about your sexual health? Are things feeling unmanageable? Is your relationship not going too well?

Your decisions on where to go next may be different depending on the circumstances. For instance, are you looking for a one-off visit, short term care, or a longer term coordinated health care plan?

Thinking about what you need will give you an excellent reference point to help you work out the best health care provider/s for you and where to start looking.

### *Find out who or what is available*

Get on that grapevine and talk to other people about who offers a good service. To find out what's available, you could call a women's health centre or community health centre, or check out a community newspaper or magazine. There are lesbian (or sometimes gay and lesbian) social and support groups in lots of areas – maybe contact these groups for ideas and suggestions. They are usually listed in gay and lesbian community press. Some services produce pamphlets that can be useful in outlining what's available.



When looking for what's available, don't be afraid to check the credentials of a health care provider or health service. You could look at:

- ✧ *health knowledge, skills, qualifications and areas of expertise*
- ✧ *knowledge of, and ease with, women/lesbians as clients*

You might like to consider the importance of other factors such as:

- ✧ *gender*
- ✧ *cultural background*
- ✧ *the language they use*
- ✧ *literature displayed in their waiting rooms*
- ✧ *approach in working with people of diverse language, cultural and economic backgrounds*
- ✧ *the cost involved*
  - *do they bulk bill? What is the payment schedule? Is it flexible?*
- ✧ *the location of the practice*
  - *is it close to public transport or parking?*
- ✧ *the availability of appointment times*
  - *how long before you can see someone?*

Some lesbians request the name of a health care provider who is openly a lesbian. Others find that this is not important for the kind of service they're looking for. It might be good to ask yourself how important and relevant this might be for

you. Lesbians can experience discrimination within professional lives too – you can offer your support by being mindful to respect the privacy of health care providers in the same manner that you would like your privacy respected. Finding good health care providers is about professionalism, openness, sensitivity and knowledge.

Be mindful too that you may not find someone who fits **all** your desired qualities or characteristics, especially in areas where there are limited services. Don't let this mean that you delay or avoid a visit to a health care provider. Rather, factor this in to your planning before the visit.

### *Did you know...*

*Women's health centres are community based women's health services, run by women, for women. There are centres across NSW, offering a wide range of services in a holistic framework of health and wellbeing, for low or no cost. Contact Women's Health NSW on (02) 9560 0866 for your nearest centre, or look under 'W' in the phone book.*

## Coming out

Sometimes it can be hard to be open about being a lesbian – for lots of reasons. But being able to paint an accurate picture of what’s going on can increase the opportunity for the most appropriate and beneficial health care response. Some lesbians feel safer not talking about their sexuality or may fear inferior treatment if they do talk about sexuality...others feel it is very important to talk openly about this part of themselves and their life.

Coming out is a personal journey. Think about how coming out or not coming out will impact on the overall management of your health. How relevant is it in each situation? There is no right or wrong answer– it’s about comfort and confidence. Talk to someone you trust about the pro’s and con’s of coming out in certain situations. If there are times when you’re not comfortable seeing your usual health care provider (maybe they’ve been your family doctor for a long time, or they are well known within your community and you would feel less nervous with someone else), look around for alternatives. But see someone.

How open do you feel you can be about your partner/s, your family, and your support networks, and your lifestyle? How relevant is it to the specific service you’re after? Maybe it’s not an issue. If you don’t feel comfortable talking openly, try to think up responses to questions that are as close to your current situation as possible. As you build up a good rapport with your health care provider, you may feel comfortable speaking more openly.

Some lesbians find it useful to be direct with their health care worker about their sexuality, and take note of verbal and non-verbal responses. Some lesbians ask “Are you comfortable dealing with my health needs as a lesbian? If you’re not, do you know someone you can refer me to?”

## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS -

Lots of lesbians can recall being asked questions that assume heterosexuality, so you may want to prepare some answers for common questions you might be asked. Here are a few suggestions...

*Q: Do you have a boyfriend?*

*A: No, I have a girlfriend.*

*A: No, I see women.*

*A. I don't have a partner at the moment.*

*A. No.*

*Q: Do you use contraception/are you on the Pill?*

*A: No, I'm not sexually active with men.*

*A: No, it's not necessary.*

*A: Yes, to regulate my cycle.*

*Q: You're a lesbian! What do you do!?!?*

*A: Are you asking me what I do with a partner sexually? Is that relevant at the moment?*

*A: What exactly do you need to know?*

*Q: Why would you need a pap smear?*

*A: Because lesbians need pap smears too.*

*A: Because all women who have ever had sex need a pap smear.*

*A: Because it's an important part of looking after my health.*

*A: Because lesbians are just as likely to have pre-cancerous cervical changes as heterosexual and bisexual women.*

## *Identify support people*

Sometimes it can be really difficult thinking about what we need to do to take care of ourselves, and it's good to have someone else around. Who makes you feel strong and positive, or holds your hand when life's a bit scary? Involving a supportive partner or friend in the process may be a good idea. Ask them to spend a bit of extra time with you. Think about taking someone with you to appointments. They can be a travel buddy, someone to bounce ideas around with, to help think of questions, to stay with you in consultations, or even take notes for you.



## Know your rights

Health records are confidential documents, and information regarding your health and health care should not be disclosed without your knowledge and consent (agreement or permission). You can always ask who has access to your files.

There is an exception in legal matters where health records containing information relevant to a court case and files can be subpoenaed (they must be provided to the court). You should, however, have knowledge and support during this process if it were ever to occur.

You can play an active role in deciding what information is recorded in your health records. If you'd like to know how your personal and health information is recorded, it's probably a good idea to discuss this early on. Decide whether you would like your sexual orientation and partner/s details recorded and who you would like to have contacted in case of emergency. Sometimes it can be hard to make these decisions on the spot, so take some time to think it through and discuss it with those who you will list as next of kin. NSW Health Department policy states that same sex partners will be offered the same visiting rights as other couples in a public hospital setting.

Under the NSW Freedom of Information Act (1989), everyone has the right to see their own health files and you can make an application to have access. If information in your file is incomplete, inaccurate or out of date, you can apply to have this rectified.

Remember, in all areas of looking after your health, you are entitled to seek a second opinion, or more if you feel it is necessary. Take some time to make decisions before proceeding with treatment or intervention. You can stop a consultation or interaction at any time if you are unhappy or uncomfortable. You can seek services elsewhere, make a complaint or give a compliment. If you're nervous, take a friend along for support.

## TIPS FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT

- ★ *Make a complaint when you're in the situation. Name the problem, state your feelings and discuss it with the person/s involved. e.g. 'I feel really uncomfortable with what you are saying/your behaviour', and state what you would like to see happen to rectify the problem.*
- ★ *Approach the person or service yourself or through an advocate. An advocate is a support person – someone you know who is confident and can help you address the problem. It could be a friend, a community worker or social worker to discuss your complaint in the days following your interaction.*
- ★ *Put your concerns in writing, making sure to keep a copy of all correspondence.*
- ★ *In a hospital setting, contact the Nursing Unit Manager, Social Worker or Consumer Advocate/Patient Representative. You can find these details through the hospital main office.*

- ★ *Contact the Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB) - 1800 670 812 - if you feel you have been discriminated against. The ADB administers anti-discrimination laws in NSW, and it is illegal to discriminate in specific settings on the basis of age, race, gender, marital status, disability, being lesbian, homosexual and/or transgender. It is also illegal to discriminate on the basis of who you are related to, or who you associate with.*
- ★ *Contact the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) - 1800 043 159 - which is an independent body, set up to examine complaints about health care services.*





# MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH

A visit to a health care provider is as much about taking care of yourself and feeling good as it is about treatment for illness. Find a good doctor or other health care provider before you're in crisis. It's easier to start building strong relationships with your health care providers and to be open about your needs and sexuality when you're feeling confident and on top of things.

## OPENING THE WINDOW ON SOME OF THOSE TRICKY HEALTH ISSUES

### Pap tests

Pap tests are recommended every two years for women with no signs or symptoms, and lesbians need them too. A pap test is a simple procedure that detects changes in the cells of the cervix. Early detection is important to pick up warning signs that can be treated, however, not all changes are an indicator of cancer. Lesbians don't seem to have pap tests as often as recommended, because of factors such as misinformation, difficulties finding a suitable health care provider, or negative experiences in the past. But regular testing is a concrete way you can be proactive in looking after yourself.

Some women can feel nervous or uncomfortable having a pap smear, but it shouldn't be painful. Talk this through with your provider. You may like to ask them to explain the process before it begins. Tell them how you are feeling – this creates the opportunity for an environment where you can feel as comfortable as possible.

Remember too that pap tests are not a complete sexual health check. If you would like to arrange a full sexual health screen, you could request this at the same appointment.



A pelvic examination is often conducted at the same time as a pap smear, and is another important part of your regular health care. Pelvis exams are helpful for initially detecting abnormalities in the internal organs such as fibroids (benign, or non-cancerous, and usually harmless growths in the wall of the uterus) and cysts.

## Breast Check Ups

It's a good idea to get regular breast check ups, and to learn to conduct breast self-examination. Early detection of any changes is the best way to make sure everything's okay, and early intervention is essential if something is wrong. If something is unusual, it's best to visit a doctor. You can ask to be shown how to do a breast check during a check-up, or call the NSW Cancer Council's Helpline on 13 11 20 for information and support on any aspect of cancer.

A women may be at higher risk of breast cancer if her mother or sister developed breast cancer, if she has never had a child or if she had her first child after the age of 30, or if menopause finished in her late 50s. There is some suggestion that lesbians display many of the other risk factors associated with breast cancer, such as less regular check-ups, less likelihood of having used oral contraceptives, higher alcohol consumption and higher body mass index. Obviously this differs from person to person but it's important to be aware of breast cancer as an issue.

A mammogram every two years is recommended for women over 50. They are free through Breast Screen NSW. Call 13 20 50.

## Sexual Health

Sexuality and expressions of sexuality often involve sex – so, it's important to remember that lesbians have sexual health needs too. We are at risk of vaginal and sexually transmissible infections (STIs), the same as any sexually active woman. Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a vaginal infection that is the most common cause of vaginal symptoms, and seems to be more prevalent in women who have sex with women. BV can be easily treated with an antibiotic or it may resolve itself.

Herpes, genital warts, Hepatitis B and other infections can be transmitted between women during sex. Gonorrhoea and chlamydia can also be transmitted if sharing sex toys. Hepatitis A is a risk if there's been contact with faeces, such as during anal sex or rimming (mouth to anus contact). If you have had unprotected sex, shared sex juices or notice genital symptoms such as redness, itchiness, or changes in discharge or odour, talk to your doctor or a sexual health centre. Recurring infections such as thrush, BV and cystitis may also require specialist attention. It is important to have any changes checked out - don't let embarrassment stand in the way of a healthy body and mind. Find a health care provider you can relate to and have a check up.



Sexual health centres can provide you with a free, confidential, comprehensive sexual health screen. There are centres across NSW – call Sydney Sexual Health for your nearest centre on (02) 9382 7440 or 1800 451 624, or look under ‘S’ in the phone book.

## HIV

Lesbians also need to be aware of HIV, and whilst the risk of transmission during sex between women is relatively low, it is possible. Risk increases in sexual practices where blood is involved, like during menstruation or adventurous sexual practices, small cuts/abrasions in the mouth, on the fingers or in the vagina. Some lesbians may continue to have sex with men, or have partners who are sexually active with men, and some of these men may have been exposed to HIV. So safe sex with male partners is important too. For more information contact ACON, (02) 9206 2000 or 1800 063060.

## Safe Sex

Latex gloves, latex dams, condoms and water-based lubricant (lube) are a few of the things available to use to reduce the risk of passing on an infection. Latex provides a physical barrier to stop infection moving from one person to another.

Lube is used because it's lovely and slippery and reduces the risk of abrasions or opportunities for bugs that cause infections to move into the blood system. It also reduces the risk of latex breaking.

You can get free gloves, dams, condoms and lube from ACON, women's health centres and sexual health centres. You can

buy condoms, lube and gloves from supermarkets and chemists too.

Lesbian sex can be exciting and varied, limited only by imagination. Some lesbians may choose not to be sexually active while some lesbians are very active; we all have very different ways we relate sexually. It can also be quite nerve-racking if we think we're 'not doing it right' or don't even know where to start, or if there are difficulties like not enjoying certain activities, differences in desire, relationship problems or pain. This is all part of sexual health too. Talking about sex and intimacy can be hard and often women aren't encouraged to talk openly about what we do. But starting this dialogue can bring a greater understanding and clear up any miscommunication. Knowing more about what you and your lover/s find pleasurable and sexy can only add to your sex life.



Counsellors at sexual health centres can give you ideas on how to talk about sexual health with partners. You might have a friend you could talk to who can listen and give you a few ideas for approaching these subjects. It's important too that sex is between consenting adults and is not coercive (forced) – listening to what sexual partners want and don't want, and noting body language, is essential to strong, healthy sexual relationships. Sydney Sexual Health Centre - 1800 451 624 (for your nearest sexual health centre). Lesbians who are sex workers may want to contact SWOP (Sex Workers Outreach Project) for information and support - (02) 9319 4866.

## Parenting

Lesbians are parents, co-parents, carers and members of families. These are important reasons for finding health care providers you feel comfortable with, who value your input, your family, who welcome a partner or support person in discussion and decisions, and with whom you can be open about your sexuality.

Decisions regarding becoming a parent or co-parent may raise particular questions or issues about access to assisted reproductive technology (ART), negotiation with sperm donors, and legal issues. For further information contact Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre – (02) 9560 3011.

## Alcohol, Smoking and Other Drugs

There is research to indicate that lesbians smoke more than other women, and may have different patterns of alcohol and other drug use. This can affect physical, mental, social and financial health and wellbeing.

Check out information available about smoking, alcohol and other types of drugs, how they interact and how to minimise drug-related harms so that you can make informed decisions. The negative effects of smoking are well documented, as are those of alcohol misuse, and information is available on many kinds of legal and illegal drugs.



If you inject drugs, always have plenty of clean (sterile, single use) equipment handy (fits, tourniquets, swabs, spoons, waters, filters) - regardless of how often you inject. Sharing injecting equipment poses a risk of infection with HIV, Hep C (HCV) and Hep B (HBV), along with other blood borne diseases. Understanding and using safe injecting practices is vital. A Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) or HIV service can provide information and most of the gear you might need. ACON has a NSP located in every branch. Call (02)9206 2000 for more information.

Check it out with your GP, a women's health centre, the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) or other service provider you trust. ADIS – 1800 803806.

## Gambling

Some women find that gambling can become a problem and sometimes it can be associated with alcohol and other drug use. G-Line is a phone service specifically set up to offer information and support to people who find gambling is

impacting negatively on their lives. G-Line is a 24 hour service 1800 633 635.

## Relationships

Breaking up with partners or lovers can be hard. It can be even harder when there are children involved. Sometimes you might need a bit of space to figure things out or time to just be by yourself. You might find putting some limits around phone, e-mail or face-to-face contact for a while gives you a little bit of space to think things through. You may want to consider talking things through with a counsellor.

For some lesbians “coming out” can place a huge strain on relationships with parents, siblings and friends. It’s important to talk these issues through with someone.



Try calling the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service (GLCS) - 1800 184 527 - or counselling teams available through a women's health centre, ACON, community health centre or Sexual health centre.

## Violence

All lesbians have the right to live safely, free from violence and abuse in our relationships, communities, and within wider society. Violence against lesbians can take the form of ongoing harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse and/or physical assault. Domestic violence also occurs within lesbian relationships. Violence or threats of violence can change our decision-making abilities, our judgements and how we deal with things. It is not always easy to acknowledge situations of violence and it can be difficult to deal with. The reality and impact of violence cannot be underestimated. Although you may feel isolated, there are people who can offer support.



The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) can take a report of what has happened and talk to you about your options. If you would like to talk to the police, there are Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLOs) and Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLOs) who you can ask for. You are also entitled to ask to speak with a female officer if you prefer. You might like to talk to a counsellor or social worker too - contact a Women's Health Centre, DV line (24 hour) 1800 656 463, ACON's counselling team 9206 2000 or the AVP on 1800 805 379.

*Violence and abuse can take many forms.*

*It includes, but is not limited to:*

- Physical:** punching, hitting, pushing, threats of physical harm, use of a weapon
- Emotional:** criticising, ridiculing, degrading, creating fear, stalking, threatening to 'out' you
- Sexual:** forced sex or specific sexual acts
- Social:** controlling who you see, access to info, groups and organisations
- Property:** destroying personal items, breaking furniture, hurting pets

*Violence is a crime. In any situation if you fear for your safety – call 000.*

*If you have a mobile phone, dial 112 – this number overrides any locks on the phone and connects you to emergency services.*

## Emotional and Mental Health

How we're feeling about ourselves, our relationships and life in general is an important part of our overall health and wellbeing. Things like coming to terms with sexuality, coming out to family, friends and work colleagues, and experiences of discrimination can become an additional burden. Stress can make it harder to concentrate, change our sleeping patterns and affect our work and relationships. This is where coping skills come in, so touch base, chill out, allow yourself the time and space, alone or with someone else, to work through your thoughts and feelings. This may help you to find ways to manage when things are difficult.

Feeling sad or worried, or experiencing distress or grief, are very normal responses to certain life events. However, if these start to become overwhelming and affect how well you are functioning, it's important to talk to someone. Depression, anxiety or problematic substance use impact on our emotional wellbeing. Health care providers can help identify and manage mental health concerns or mental illness, by offering information, medication or referral(s) for counselling/therapy. Remember to consider your options.

If you're feeling unsafe being by yourself when it's all too much, it's important to let someone know – have the numbers of people you trust near the phone, or call the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service on 1800 184 527, ACON's counselling team on (02) 9206 2000, Kids Helpline 1800 551 800, Lifeline on 131114. Mental health teams are usually based at your local community health centre and can be found in the phone directory.

## PLANNING AHEAD

A will, power of attorney, and an enduring guardianship are important ways you can plan ahead when thinking about your health and wellbeing, and what you might like to have in place in the case of serious illness or death.

### Wills

A will is a legal document that lets you say what happens to your money, property and belongings after you die. A will lets you choose relatives, friends or organisations that you want to leave your things to and can also let you say what kind of funeral you want. Everyone over 18 can make a will.

Although same sex relationships are now recognised in NSW in some areas of law, including inheritance, a will can save a lot of stress in situations where there may be tensions between family members regarding partner recognition. You should also remember that a partner will not automatically inherit, depending on matters such as how long you have co-habitated (lived together). If you have a will then these questions should not arise.

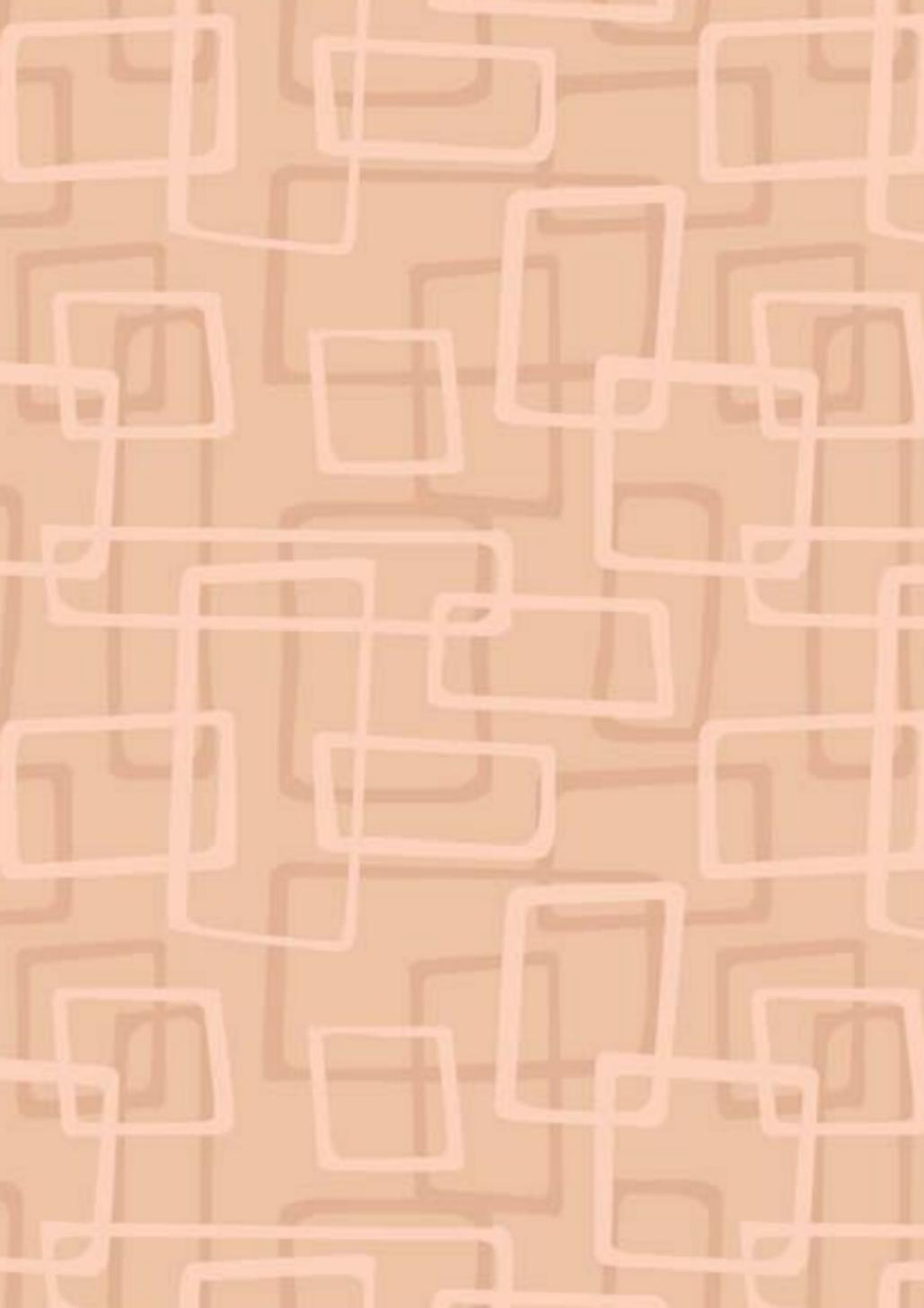
There are particular things to remember when writing a will to make sure it's a legal document. These are explained in will kits which can be purchased from Post Offices, or contact your local Community Legal Centre or a solicitor if you are in any doubt about drafting your will.

## Power of Attorney

A power of attorney is a document you sign to give someone else the right to do things in your name, like manage your money and your business affairs, pay your bills and generally look after things for you. No one has the right to act for you unless you give them permission. It can only be used for financial and property matters and has effect immediately when it is signed. You might consider making a Power of Attorney if it is likely you may go into hospital, or become too sick to look after your money or bills. You should consider making a Power of Attorney while you are well so that you do not have to be concerned when you are ill. You can simply ask your attorney not to use the power until you do get ill. You should take great care to choose someone you can trust and who is responsible and able to deal with your finances - someone who will do what you would want. For more information, contact your local Community Legal Centre or a solicitor.

## Enduring Guardianship

An enduring guardian is someone you choose to make health and medical decisions on your behalf when you're not capable of doing this for yourself. An enduring guardian cannot make decisions for you when you are capable of doing so. A decision about your health will always be your own decision until you get to a point where you are incapable of making a decision. Contact the Guardianship Tribunal for further information on enduring guardianship on (02) 9555 8500 or toll free 1800 463 928, or contact your local Community Legal Centre or a solicitor.



# USEFUL NUMBERS

## ACON Sydney

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9206 2000

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9206 2084

Freecall \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 063 060

Counselling \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 647 750

[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)

### Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Project (ACON) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9206 2114

### AVP - Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence

Project (ACON) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9206 2066

Freecall \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 805 379

Alcohol and Other Drugs Project \_\_\_\_\_ 9206 2000



## ACON Branches

### Western Sydney

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9204 2400

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9204 2405

### Illawarra

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 4226 1163

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 4296 7077

### Hunter

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 4927 6808

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 4927 6808

### *Mid North Coast Outreach*

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 6584 0943

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 6584 0943

### *Northern Rivers*

General \_\_\_\_\_ 02 6622 1555

Lesbian Health \_\_\_\_\_ 02 6622 1555

### *SWOP - Sex Workers Outreach Project*

(ACON) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9319 4866

[www.swop.org.au](http://www.swop.org.au)



### *Counselling services*

ACON's Counselling team \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9206 2000

### *Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service*

(4pm-midnight) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9207 2800

1800 184 527

[www.glcsnsw.org.au](http://www.glcsnsw.org.au)

Lifeline (24 hours) \_\_\_\_\_ 13 1114

Kids Helpline \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 551 800

NSW Rape Crisis \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 424 017

### *Dympna House (Child Sexual Assault*

support + resource centre) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9797 6733

1800 654 119

DV Line (24 hours) \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 656 463

## *Other health services*

### *Alcohol and Drug*

*Information Service (ADIS) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9361 8000*  
*1800 422 599*

*G-Line (Gambling info and support – 24 hours) \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 633 635*

### *NSW Users and AIDS*

*Association (NUAA) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9557 1476*  
*1800 644 413*

*Sydney Sexual Health Centre \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9382 7440*  
*(for your nearest sexual health centre) \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 451 624*

*Women's Health NSW \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9560 0866*  
*(for your nearest women's health centre) \_\_ [www.whnsw.org.au](http://www.whnsw.org.au)*



## *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender*

### *Access Plus Spanning identities*

*(GLBT people with disabilities) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9319 6622*  
*TTY 02 9318 2138*

### *Gay and Lesbian Legal*

*Rights Service (Wednesday nights) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9332 1966*

### *Parents and Friends of*

*Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9294 1002*

### *Police Gay and Lesbian*

*Liaison Officers \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9281 0000*

The Gender Centre \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9569 2366  
[www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)

Twenty10 gay and lesbian  
youth support \_\_\_\_\_ 02 8585 6300  
1800 65 2010  
[www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)



## Advocacy and Support

Translating and Interpreting  
Service (TIS) \_\_\_\_\_ 131 450

Immigrant Women's Speakout \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9635 8022

Women's Legal Resources Centre \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9749 5533

Women's Information and  
Referral Service \_\_\_\_\_ 1800 817 227  
(TTY) 1800 673 304

Anti-Discrimination Board \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9268 5555  
1800 670 812  
[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb)

### Health Care Complaints

Commission (HCCC) \_\_\_\_\_ 02 9219 7444  
1800 043 159  
TTY 02 9219 7555  
<http://hccc.nsw.gov.au>

Feminist Bookshop \_\_\_\_\_ (02) 9810 2666

Some services have Multicultural and Indigenous Liaison Officers – ask if they are available to talk to you.



*Thank you to all the people who took part in the process of creating “Opening the Window - A guide to lesbian health”, particularly Jen Rudland.*

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