

# Sexual HIV risk among gay, bisexual and queer transgender men: findings from interviews in Vancouver, Canada

What are Vancouver gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men's experiences of HIV risk, specifically with sexual behavior and dating, as well as access to HIV/STI and other healthcare?

## What is the importance of this study?

- Gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men are disproportionately affected by HIV in Canada, making up roughly half of all new and existing cases of HIV each year in British Columbia.
- Transgender men are often excluded from HIV/STI research and services for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM).
- Of the limited research on HIV risk for gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men, most has been conducted in the United States. This is the first study in British Columbia, where universal healthcare includes HIV testing and treatment.

## FACT BOX

HIV risk for study participants was shaped by a diversity of sexual behaviours including inconsistent condom use, seeking partners online, and accessing HIV/STI testing and other healthcare services despite facing transgender-specific barriers.

## How was this study conducted?

- Interviews were conducted with 11 gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men.
- Participants were recruited from the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) - Momentum Health Study, a large non-transgender specific cohort of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men.

## What are the key study findings?

- Gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men in the study described engaging in a diversity of sexual risk behaviours, including receptive genital and anal sex, and inconsistent condom use, with both transgender and non-transgender men.
- Generally, participants expressed their own risk of acquiring HIV as low, although they reported that worry about HIV acquisition was high.
- Participants described access to regular testing for HIV and other STIs, despite having to overcome transgender-specific challenges in accessing this type of service, such as health care providers using birth names, insisting on undesired pap testing, and making assumptions about their sexual practices.

## What do these findings mean?

- Contrary to a common misconception, transgender men are part of communities of gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men, and as such may be at elevated risk for HIV and other STIs compared to the general population.



- The presence and needs of gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men—both transgender-specific and those shared with non-transgender men—need to be addressed by clinicians and policy-makers in order to better reach trans gbMSM through HIV/STI prevention.
- Study results contribute to a growing understanding that sexual HIV risk and the factors that shape it for gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men may be similar across the U.S. and Canada, despite the substantially different healthcare systems and policy environments.
- It is important to note this was a small study of peer-recruited largely White, HIV-negative, sexually active, relatively well-resourced gay, bisexual, and queer transgender men. Findings may not be applicable to transgender men who differ geographically, in terms of social determinants of health, or in other jurisdictions.

### What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Innovative research from the BC-CfE and supportive evidence elsewhere has demonstrated that earlier treatment and expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention® strategy, or TasP®, which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP®, and the proportion of HIV-positive gbMSM with unsuppressed viral loads over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the gbMSM community in Vancouver.

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