

# Coping With Cancer as a Gay or Bisexual Man

**Gay and bisexual men face additional health care challenges compared to their heterosexual peers. These include health care disparities, increased risk for specific cancers and negative medical experiences. This fact sheet covers:**

- Health care disparities
- Issues with support
- Additional cancer risks
- Advice about coming out



## Health Care Disparities for Gay and Bisexual Men

Gay and bisexual men may face discrimination and harassment in medical care settings. When appropriate care and treatment are difficult to obtain, negative results become more likely. When check-ups and screenings are delayed, cancer can be found in later stages, when it is harder to treat. Some of what can impact care includes:

- **Lower rates of coverage.** Health insurance policies do not always cover unmarried partners. This affects everything from access to care, costs and legal rights like visitation.
- **Discrimination.** Health care providers may show bias against gay and bisexual men. These interactions can make care unpleasant or even dangerous.
- **Negative experiences with health care providers.** Some men to avoid or delay medical care due to fear or discomfort.



## A Lack of Support

Many gay and bisexual men are not married, partnered or living with a significant other. In addition, many gay and bisexual men have been rejected by or have limited contact with their biological families. These situations can result in having to cope with cancer and treatment alone or with support mainly from friends or others in their general community.

Awareness, self-advocacy and new networks can help promote the healthiest outcomes possible. CancerCare oncology social workers can help in many ways with free support services – call 800 813 HOPE (4673).



## Increased Cancer Risks

Gay and bisexual men face a greater risk of certain cancers or impacts to treatment.

- **Stress-based cancer.** Cigarette smoking is nearly double the rate of the general population and alcohol and drug consumption are also higher. These contribute to lung, colon, head and neck, esophageal and anal cancers.
- **Sex-related cancer.** The human papillomavirus (HPV) does not only affect women, and can lead to anal cancer as well as head and neck cancer. Few physicians screen for these forms of cancer.
- **Treatment concerns.** Some men may put off treatment that may lead to erectile dysfunction or sexual change because of impacts to their sense of self, well-being and relationship with partners.

Whether you have a cancer diagnosis or have other concerns, keep these heightened risks in mind. Openness with your health care team can lead to better outcomes.



## Coming Out to Your Healthcare Provider

At some point, you may wish to tell members of your health care team about your sexual orientation. This is a highly personal choice. Your comfort and safety should be priorities.

Communicating your identity along with partner status can lead to a sense of comfort. Your nurses and doctors can use this information to better help you. It can also allow you to focus your energies on your treatment instead of hiding aspects of who you are.

Do not be afraid to seek a second opinion in order to find a better fit, especially if you feel uncomfortable, fearful or discriminated against.

### CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include resource navigation, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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