

A man with a beard and a dark cap is smiling and looking to his left. He is wearing a brown button-down shirt. In the background, there is a field of tall sugarcane plants under a clear blue sky. The silhouettes of other people are visible in the distance.

**KEEP IT UP!**



**Labels don't matter...**

**Your health does**

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## Living in the real world!

No matter who you are or what you do, labels don't matter, your health does!

Some people are born and bred in regional Queensland, others choose to live here because of the close feeling of community, the peace, family connections and even job opportunities but there are many real challenges related to sexuality and sexual health particularly if you live in rural or regional areas of Queensland. Access to sexual health services and current, reliable sexual health information are some of the barriers to maintaining or improving your sexual health.

Other issues are the labels attached to us and macho attitudes towards seeking help, what to say when you do, and the fear that everyone will know when you've been to the doctor.

We hope this booklet will enable you to feel good about who you are and what you do in Queensland and most importantly help you to see that labels don't matter but your health does!

This pocket guide provides practical information and helpful tips for men who have sex with men on maintaining and improving sexual health, the importance of remaining connected to your community and being supported, no matter how you define your sexuality.

Living in regional Queensland can be challenging for men who have sex with men and if you're a member of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities it can be harder still. Research has shown that there are increased levels of homophobia and racism in rural and regional areas, as well as reduced access to community and support services.

It is important for your health and wellbeing to remain connected to your community and regardless of who you have sex with you should feel supported and accepted. You may not choose to disclose your identity to your friends and family but it's important to share in the life of your community.

Remember no matter how you chose to identify labels don't matter, your health does!

## Labels don't matter

In rural and regional Queensland men who have sex with men don't often use labels such as gay, bisexual or queer to identify themselves, as using these labels may not express all of who they are.

Diversity is about individual acceptance and respecting others. It is the understanding that you are unique and different. Diversity includes your sexual practices, preferences and identity. This means whoever you're into and however you identify, you should be accepted and respected by your community and importantly, by yourself.

Remember, you are not alone! You may be able to make connections with other men living in your own area or near-by towns, either in-person, through the internet or via telephone.

Therefore, when it comes to your health labels don't matter!

**Men's sexual health line:**  
**1800 155 141**

**Whoever you're into...**

**Keep It Up!**

## Enjoyable Sex

Living in a rural or regional area, it can be hard to feel good about your sexuality, particularly if you don't have anybody you can talk to. Sex is a very important and natural part of the way we connect with and express ourselves to others. It allows us to show a range of emotions from lust and passion to tenderness, trust and love. Sex is something that we should all enjoy and it should not have a negative impact on our health and wellbeing. The more you are able to value yourself, take your time and use your best judgement, the more enjoyable your sexual experiences are likely to be.

Not everyone likes condoms and sometimes not using them can be a demonstration of the trust and intimacy you feel towards someone special. Before deciding to lose the condoms, discuss your health including HIV status, with your sex partner. Discussing your past sexual activities and STI status are only the start of the conversation and decision making process that can lead to safe and enjoyable sex.

## Doing it Better

The human sexual repertoire ranges from mild to wild. Some people call themselves 'vanilla' because they like the same things that many people enjoy, while others have special things that set them off sexually. Whatever you desire; to achieve the most satisfying sexual experiences, it's important to discuss what you want with your partner(s), and agree on the things you will both enjoy.

One way of making things easier is to reduce the worry about Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs). The best way to do this is to assume that you and your sexual partners may not know if they have an STI and for you to take precautions with everyone. Making condom use your usual sex practice is still the best way to prevent HIV and most other STIs.

Some risks can be anticipated and reduced: always carry condoms and water based lube with you. If you meet someone at a beat you could take them somewhere else for sex. If either of you have an STI or HIV you can insist on condoms (it's your right too). For online encounters you can check if you have friends in common or meet them in a public setting.

## Sex Spaces

Opportunities for sex can happen anywhere and there are different risks related to the setting, the sex and the people you are doing it with. If you live in regional Queensland you may have to wait until you're in a bigger town or you may need to go to an on-line sex site to find sex. Larger centres and towns often have pubs, saunas or sex on premises venues where you can meet people who are also looking for a sexual encounter. The internet, beats, parks and personal ads in the local or regional magazines and papers can offer all types of encounters.

You may find sex partners at your local gay community group, event or sports club, but be careful in exploring with these people what you want to happen. Some risks to consider are discovery or being outed during sex and even physical violence. Always be aware of where you are and where you are going. If you don't know the person or place, let a trusted friend know where you are going and make arrangements to call them when you expect to be home or leave a note. If it feels unsafe to you, it probably is and sex isn't worth the risk. Turn the opportunity down and think again about ways to find satisfying sex another time.

## Looking after your sexual health

If you are having sex then you should be having regular sexual health checks. **Not all STIs show symptoms and therefore it's possible to be infected or to pass on the infection without knowing it!** Sexual health checks are easy, confidential and are available from your local sexual health clinic or General Practitioner (GP). Tests are recommended every 12 months. If you are having sex with more than 1 partner, or you have recently had sex without a condom or the condom broke then you should be testing on a more regular basis. There are sexual health clinics in most major centres in Queensland and it's a confidential and free service.

**Sexual health checks** detect Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs). The health professional will begin by assessing your sexual history to determine what tests to perform so it's important to be honest. **And remember, sexual health checks are confidential!** An examination is performed to detect any signs of an STI.


**What ever you're into...**

**Keep It Up!**

**Getting regular STI checks...**

**Keep it up!**

Not all STIs show symptoms so you may be asked to give a urine sample or swabs may be taken from inside your anus and/or throat. You may need to specifically ask for a blood test to detect HIV, syphilis and hepatitis A, B or C. For more information on talking to your GP see the "Talking to your GP" page.



The table following lists some of the more common STIs including their transmission, symptoms and consequences. More detailed information is available from your GP, QAHC office, Sexual Health Clinic or

[www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth)  
[www.thedramadownunder.info](http://www.thedramadownunder.info)



**If you find you have an STI** you will need treatment and you should suggest to all the people you have recently had sex with that they get tested too. If you need help to do this you should talk to your GP or phone your local QAHC worker for help and advice.

Some STIs are easily treated, requiring nothing more than a course of antibiotics. HOWEVER, not all STIs are treatable and the presence of some may increase the risk of HIV transmission. Therefore if you're sexually active it's important to always practise safe sex and have regular sexual health checks.

HIV-Positive men need to be particularly vigilant about STIs. This is because some STIs act differently in people with HIV. HIV makes some STIs more difficult to treat, and some STIs can accelerate the progress of HIV.

**Playing safely...**

**Keep It Up!**

**[www.gotest.org.au](http://www.gotest.org.au)**

**STI****SIGNS & SYMPTOMS****TRANSMISSION****CONSEQUENCES****Chlamydia**

Stinging sensation when urinating, discharge from the penis. Symptoms usually appear within a week but can take up to 3 weeks. But usually no symptoms.

Passed on through oral, vaginal or anal sex without a condom.

Can cause inflammation of the testicles, leading to infertility. Can make it easier to transmit or acquire HIV.

**Gonorrhoea**

Stinging sensation when urinating, discharge from the penis. Pain during bowel movements. Sore throat and possible eye infections. Symptoms usually appear 1 week after exposure.

Passed on through oral, vaginal or anal sex without a condom.

Can cause painful testicles leading to infertility. Can make it easier to transmit or acquire HIV.

**Syphilis**

After 3 weeks one or more painless sores may appear on the body, usually around the penis, anus or throat. A few weeks and up to a few months later a rash may appear. Other sores may also appear and you may feel generally unwell as if you have a bad cold.

Passed on through oral, vaginal or anal sex without a condom.

If untreated it can damage internal organ such as the heart, brain and bones (including teeth). In serious cases Syphilis may cause death. Can make it easier to transmit or acquire HIV.

**HIV**

Symptoms may not show! Seroconversion illness may include flu like symptoms, night sweats or rash within weeks of infection.

Passed on when infected blood or sexual fluids enter the blood stream.

Can shorten your life span and if left untreated HIV can lead to AIDS and ultimately death. Other possible consequences are lifetime medical and treatment regimes and disclosure issues such as possible social stigma and discrimination.

**Testing the parts you use!**  
**Keep It Up!**

**Men's sexual health line:**  
**1800 155 141**

STI	SIGNS & SYMPTOMS	TRANSMISSION	CONSEQUENCES
<b>Herpes</b>	Herpes may cause tingling, blisters or sores. Type 1 usually occurs around the mouth and Type 2 usually occurs around the penis, vagina or anus.	Direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected area (mouth, nose, penis, vagina or anus) even if there is no obvious sore.	Herpes may reoccur at any time particularly during times of stress or where HIV is present. Can make it easier to transmit or acquire HIV.
<b>Warts (HPV)</b>	Small bumpy sores around the penis or testicles, and in or outside of the anus.	Direct skin-to-skin contact including vaginal or anal intercourse.	Persistent medical treatment and potential cancer in the infected area/s.
<b>Hepatitis A &amp; B</b>	Symptoms are similar for both Hep A & Hep B and may include yellowing of the skin (jaundice), nausea or stomach pain, flu like symptoms, loss of appetite, tiredness or abdominal pain.	Hep A is transmitted through oral-faecal transmission. Hep B is transmitted through blood, sex or kissing.	Cirrhosis (scarring of the liver tissue), liver cancer, decreased liver function leading to very poor health.
<b>Hepatitis C (HCV)</b>	Symptoms may include yellowing of the skin (jaundice), nausea or stomach pain.	Can occur during sex when blood is present, such as anal sex.	Serious damage to the liver leading to liver failure and potential death.
<b>Pubic Lice (Crabs) and Scabies</b>	Can cause intense itching. Close inspection should show tiny brown lice and/or white eggs attached to pubic hair.	Passed on through close physical contact including shared clothes, bedding and towels.	Self-treatments are available at pharmacies. To prevent re-occurrence wash everything that has come in contact, in warm soapy water. Anyone in close physical contact should also be treated. Re-treat after 7 days.

**Getting regular STI checks...  
Keep it up!**

**Men's sexual health line:  
1800 155 141**

## Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)


If you or your partner have been exposed to HIV, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is medication which may prevent a person from becoming HIV positive.

HIV takes a few days to become established in the body. PEP helps the body's immune system to stop the virus from replicating in infected cells. These originally infected cells then die without producing new copies of the virus.

PEP must be taken as soon as possible and definitely no later than 72 hours after exposure to HIV. The sooner treatment is started, the more likely it is to work. PEP is a month long course of HIV medication. They need to be taken strictly according to their dosing schedules. Sometimes drugs used for PEP have unpleasant side-effects including nausea, diarrhoea, but these are temporary.

PEP is available from every hospital with a pharmacy. The hospitals all have starter kits. This includes three days of medications which should be taken while a full course of PEP is ordered from a larger hospital. It is recommended to take written information (i.e. a brochure or similar) about PEP when presenting to the Emergency Department, and inform the staff that that this is a 'medical emergency'.

When asking for PEP, the doctor or nurse will ask what happened to make you think it's needed. They're not being judgemental they simply need to know what happened so they can determine how likely it is that HIV exposure has happened.



For more information on PEP visit  
[www.getpep.info](http://www.getpep.info)

**Talking HIV status...**

**Keep It Up!**

**Accepting HIV positive partners...**

**Keep It Up!**

## Talking to your GP

Seeing a General Practitioner (GP) may not be a regular occurrence for many men. GPs are not always nearby and appointments are sometimes difficult to organise. If you've had the same GP for some time, it may be difficult for you to raise intimate matters. You may be concerned that information you share will get out to your family and neighbours, but remember your information is confidential. Sexual health checks should be done regularly. The more sexual partners, the more frequent the need for testing!

GPs are required to treat patients' information in confidence. If your GP doesn't know about your sex practices they can't help you with advice on how to keep as healthy as you possibly can. You could ask your GP how they record personal information and even request they don't write it in your patient notes if you are concerned about possible disclosure in the local community.

If you don't feel comfortable accessing your local GP, it's OK to access health care in a town nearby, that way you don't have to worry about explaining health care visits if you run into someone you know in the waiting room. **Having an alternative reason such as "I just need to have my cholesterol checked" can help too.**

When you do go to see a GP, think about the things you would like to discuss with them before you get there and what advice, tests or procedures you might like from them. Sex is sometimes embarrassing to discuss and it may be better to use more formal terms such as the ones we have used in this booklet. However you tell them, it's important that you do, so that they can take a full sexual history. You should tell them the type of sexual practices and the genders of your sex partners so they can examine you appropriately and decide on the right tests.



**Labels don't matter...**  
**Your Health does**

**Men's sexual health line:**  
**1800 155 141** 19

## Making Friends, Finding Community

Friends and community are about connections. While you can't always choose your family you can choose how much they know about you and who you socialise with. Remember, someone who truly knows and accepts you can support you better than someone who makes assumptions about you.

A small community of supportive friends is important for your health, and in allowing you to contribute to society as a whole. These are the people who care about you, not the labels applied to you. Keeping good friends is good for your health so keep it up!

**If you would like further information around any of the topics covered please refer to the contact list at the end of this pocket guide.**

## Contacts

### Sexual Health Clinics

[www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth)

Brisbane

(07) 3837 5611

Cairns

(07) 4050 6205

Gold Coast

(07) 5576 9033

Logan

(07) 3240 5881

Mackay

(07) 4968 3919

Mt Isa

(07) 4744 4805

Redcliffe/Caboolture

(07) 3897 6300

Rockhampton

(07) 4920 5555

Sunshine Coast

(07) 5470 5244

Townsville

(07) 4778 9600

Toowoomba

(07) 4616 6446

West Moreton/Ipswich

(07) 3817 2428

Wide Bay

(07) 4150 2754

### Queensland Positive People

A peer-based advocacy organisation committed to promoting self-determination & empowerment for all people living with HIV/AIDS in Queensland.

1800 636 241

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

**Looking after your mates...**

**Keep It Up!**

**Still using condoms...**

**Keep it up!**

**Open Doors Youth Service**  
Supporting Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual and Transgender  
young people  
(07) 3257 7660  
[www.opendoors.net.au](http://www.opendoors.net.au)

**Positive Directions**  
A state wide care  
coordination, information  
and referral service for  
People Living With HIV/  
AIDS in Queensland.  
[www.positivedirections.org.au](http://www.positivedirections.org.au)

Brisbane  
(07) 3900 8000

Cairns  
(07) 4051 1028

Gold Coast  
(07) 5576 8366

Sunshine Coast  
(07) 5441 1222

Townsville  
(07) 4721 1384

**Lifeline**  
131 114  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Relationships Australia**  
1300 364 277  
[www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)

**GLWA Telephone  
Counselling**  
1800 184 527

**Beyond Blue**  
1300 224 636  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)



## The Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC)

Promoting the health of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Queensland. QAHC is engaged in the areas of LGBT Health, Sexual Health, Indigenous Health and fosters community capacity building and development.

Our vision is a Queensland where all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people achieve the best possible health and wellbeing and participate fully in the life of communities, free from stigma and discrimination.

### Regional Websites

QAHC Regional:  
[www.qahc.org.au/regional](http://www.qahc.org.au/regional)

Sunshine Coast: [www.gaysunshinecoast.com.au](http://www.gaysunshinecoast.com.au)

Capricorn Coast:  
[www.gayrocky.com](http://www.gayrocky.com)

Townsville: [www.gaytownsville.com.au](http://www.gaytownsville.com.au)

Fraser Coast & Wide Bay:  
[www.fraserays.com](http://www.fraserays.com)

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Whoever you're into...

Keep It Up!

QAHC: 1800 177 434



## **Qld Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC)**

1800 177 434 (free call), (07) 3017 1777

30 Helen Street, Newstead, 4006

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

## **QAHC Regional**

### **SE Queensland**

(Gold Coast,  
Logan,  
Toowoomba  
and Caboolture)  
(07) 3017 1777  
30 Helen Street,  
Newstead, 4006  
[gc@qahc.org.au](mailto:gc@qahc.org.au)

### **Central Coast**

(Sunshine  
Coast to  
Rockhampton)  
(07) 5451 1118  
10 Pikki Street,  
Maroochydore,  
4558  
[ssc@qahc.org.au](mailto:ssc@qahc.org.au)

### **North**

### **Queensland**

(Mackay to  
Cairns)  
(07) 4041 5451  
290 Draper St,  
Cairns, 4870  
[cns@qahc.org.au](mailto:cns@qahc.org.au)

### **QAHC A & TSI**

#### **2 Spirits**

[www.qahc.org.au/atsi](http://www.qahc.org.au/atsi)

(South Queensland)

(07) 3017 1777

30 Helen Street, Newstead, 4006

(North Queensland)

(07) 4041 5451

290 Draper Street, Cairns, 4870

**Labels don't matter... Your health does**