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Gay and  
Lesbian Legal  
Issues and  
HIV/AIDS

## The Links between HIV/AIDS and Homophobia

*This info sheet describes how HIV/AIDS and homophobia are inextricably linked in the public's mind. It reviews the implications of these links for people with HIV and for men who have sex with men.*

This is one of a series of nine info sheets on  
Gay and Lesbian Legal Issues and HIV/AIDS.

- A History of Discrimination (Info Sheet 1)
- The Links Between HIV/AIDS and Homophobia (Info Sheet 2)
- Gay Men, Lesbians, and the Law (Info Sheets 3 and 4)
- Impact of Stigma and Discrimination (Info Sheets 5, 6, 7 and 8)
- A Matter of Justice (Info Sheet 9)



### Gay – Got AIDS Yet?

— Toilet graffiti, men's bathroom, McGill University, Faculty of Law, 1994

*The link in people's minds between homosexuality and AIDS is so firmly established that discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS is inseparable from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.*

— Canadian AIDS Society, 1991

In the early days of the epidemic in North America, HIV/AIDS mostly affected gay men. As a result, there has been an enduring association between the stigma of HIV/AIDS and the stigma of homosexuality. The predominantly negative attitudes toward homosexuality have influenced people's attitudes and behaviour toward people with HIV in general, and gay and bisexual men in particular.

### Stigma Associated with Homosexuality Is Transferred to HIV/AIDS

People with HIV may be discriminated against because they are assumed to be homosexual. The link is so strong that even if gay men stopped getting HIV altogether, homophobic reactions to HIV issues and to people with HIV would endure. This means, in effect, that all people with HIV may encounter homophobic discrimination.

### Stigma Associated with HIV/AIDS Is Transferred to Homosexuality

Gay and bisexual men experience discrimination because they are assumed to be HIV-positive (“All gay men have AIDS and are infectious”) or to be the cause of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (“Gay men are to blame for AIDS”). From the beginning of the epidemic, HIV/AIDS was associated with gay men; AIDS was called the gay plague, gay cancer, and Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID). The epidemic has intensified and extended discrimination against gay men. Apart from discrimination on the basis of their sexual

orientation, gay men now have to fear being discriminated against because of HIV/AIDS, regardless of whether they themselves are HIV-positive.

### **Men Who Have Acquired HIV through Sex with Other Men Have Been the Objects of Considerable Blame and Little Sympathy**

Some people have expressed the view that gay men are to blame for their disease and that gay men with HIV/AIDS should pay for their own health care. Often, people with HIV/AIDS have been divided into two categories – the “guilty majority” of gay men and injection drug users, and the “innocent minority” of hemophiliacs or transfusion cases.

### **Double Disclosure**

For gay and bisexual men with HIV, disclosure of HIV status may entail disclosure of their sexual orientation, and the possibility of discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation as well as their HIV status.

### **Government (In)action**

The association between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality has affected how governments and institutions have reacted (or, more accurately, failed to react promptly, adequately, and consistently) to HIV/AIDS. (*See info sheet 5 for more details.*)

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The information in this series of info sheets is taken from *Gay and Lesbian Legal Issues and HIV/AIDS: Final Report*, prepared by John Fisher, Ralf Jürgens, Anne Vassal and Robert Hughes for the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Canadian AIDS Society. Copies of the report and info sheets are available on the Network website at [www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca) or through the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse (tel: 613 725-3434, email: [aids/sida@cpha.ca](mailto:aids/sida@cpha.ca)). Reproduction of this info sheet is encouraged. However, copies may not be sold, and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network must be cited as the source of this information. For further information, contact the Network (tel: 514 397-6828; fax: 514 397-8570; email: [info@aidslaw.ca](mailto:info@aidslaw.ca)). **Ce feuillet d'information est également disponible en français.**

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