



Tender Loving Research



# Research Chair in Gay Men's Health

Chris Hnain, Max Charest, Paul MacPherson, Pip Puvendren, Elliott Faller

Research breakthroughs at The Ottawa Hospital mean better care and life-saving medicine. Every day we look beyond the laboratory and see the results of what we do – better care, lives saved, suffering stopped. We relentlessly pursue answers to the world's most challenging health-care problems and we do so with knowledge, experience and care. Our research is fuelled by a passion to create made-in-Ottawa solutions for a healthier world.

[Join our campaign and let's give the world a little Tender Loving Research.](#)

## Health concerns

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, gay men make up 2.6 percent of the population. This means between 20,000 and 30,000 gay men live in the Ottawa region – all of whom will access the health-care system at some point in their lives.

When gay men do access the health-care system, they frequently encounter stigma, inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation on the part of health-care providers. Over their lifetime, the relationship between gay men and the health-care system becomes a hurdle many would rather avoid, even when it has a negative impact on their health.

A critical failure is that medical training includes very little about sexual minority health. In fact, the average time that the majority of medical schools in North America devote to sexual minority health is about five hours, dispersed over the four-year program. This lack of training means it is unlikely that the majority of doctors and nurses have the comfort level and skills to inquire about patients' sexual orientation or are aware of the multiple health challenges faced by gay men.

At the same time, a large percentage of gay men choose not to disclose their sexual orientation to their health-care providers. As a result, only common health conditions are addressed, while mental health, sexual health, HIV infection, and other health issues relevant to gay men are overlooked. Gay men have higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, and suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

Many of the health-care issues of gay men stem from them not prioritizing their own health, often because of the perception that the medical system won't meet their needs. Addressing the social determinants of health is key to helping gay men engage in their own health care, and helping health-care providers become more attuned to the unique life challenges that gay men face.

“We want to take a comprehensive view of gay men's health. We want to understand how gay men interact with the health-care system and address the factors that prevent them from receiving the care they deserve.”

Dr. Paul MacPherson  
Physician/Scientist,  
Chronic Disease Program



MADE -IN-OTTAWA RESEARCH FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

THE OTTAWA HOSPITAL FOUNDATION  
737 PARKDALE AVENUE – 1ST FLOOR, BOX 610, OTTAWA ON. K1Y 1J8  
TEL: 613-761-4295 FAX: 613-761-5014  
WWW.OHFOUNDATION.CA  
CHARITABLE REGISTRATION NO.: 86904 2747 RR0001

## Surveying gay men's health

Most studies on conditions affecting gay men's health have been done in the United States and focus on men living in large urban centres. As Canadian data were sparse, Dr. Paul MacPherson and his research team at The Ottawa Hospital recently conducted a survey of 674 men who have sex with men, between 18 and 83, living in the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), the eastern Ontario region served by The Ottawa Hospital.

The survey found that 16 to 20 percent of gay men scored as depressed or anxious, and 30 percent reported a lifetime history of depression. This is three times the general population average of 10 percent. There are also disparities in health-care delivery between gay men living in downtown cores and those living outside the city. The further out of the city, the less likely gay men are to be 'out' to their health-care provider. Therefore, gay men in rural areas may be less likely to be tested for HIV, and less likely to seek mental health support.

The survey confirmed this population is often socially marginalized, with unique health-care needs that are not being addressed or met by the health-care system. As the Champlain LHIN could be considered a microcosm for how gay men function in urban cities and smaller centres, it makes The Ottawa Hospital an ideal place to conduct research in gay men's health.

## Delivering better health care to gay men

Understanding how gay men navigate social stigma as a sexual minority, how this impacts their physical and mental health, and how they remain resilient in the face of these challenges are unanswered questions that are essential to addressing their health-care needs.

The Ottawa Hospital is establishing a Research Chair in Gay Men's Health to create a comprehensive health-care agenda that will help improve access to, and delivery of gay-relevant health care. A top researcher will be recruited to lead a multi-disciplinary team in examining ways to improve gay men's health by coordinating clinical research in epidemiology, psychology, and other branches of medicine.

### Your support will:

- Advance a more comprehensive view of gay men's physical and sexual health
- Determine appropriate and relevant screening tools and treatments for addressing depression among gay men
- Ensure gay men have access to accurate information on new HIV prevention strategies
- Develop training and education for health-care providers in eastern Ontario, so they can offer positive support surrounding gay men's sexual health and sexual satisfaction
- Improve the health of gay men and their interaction with the health-care system through research, clinical program development, and community engagement

**Men in Ottawa will be the first to benefit, but the reach of the network developed through this research chair will extend well beyond eastern Ontario.**

## How you can help

With your support, The Ottawa Hospital Foundation is raising **\$1 million** to establish a Research Chair in Gay Men's Health that is critically needed. It is our hope that the anticipated outpouring of community support will allow us to reach an even greater goal and establish an endowed Research Chair in Gay Men's Health, which would require a **\$3 million** investment.

For more information or to offer your support, please contact Margot Lefebvre, Development Officer, marlefebvre@toh.ca, or by phone 613-798-5555, ext. 19819



"Health care starts with communication. Yet, both doctors and patients tell me they struggle with communicating even when they are open and accepting of their sexuality. If we can bridge that gap, gay men will have better access to the health care they need, when they need it."

Dr. Mark Kaluziński  
Physician, Mental Health

"The gay population has unique health needs that are not being met. Gay men are victims of violence on the basis of sexual orientation, have higher suicide rates, and higher rates of addictions and mental health issues. These impact directly on and are detrimental to these men's health. The medical community needs an awareness of gay men's health issues."

Barry Deeprise  
Gay activist, patient



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