

Sexual expression, sexual health and disability

Barriers to accessing health services for
lesbian, bisexual and queer women with
disabilities

Presenter
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Acknowledgment of country

First Peoples Disability Network Australia



What is disability?

1 in 5 of Australians have a disability

We are all only temporally able-bodied. We will all age; our bodies & senses & minds will change;

Disability is 'the interaction between persons with impairments & attitudinal & environmental barriers that hinders their full & effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'

(UN General Assembly 2007)

Disability disadvantage

45% Australians with disability live on or below the poverty line. We are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia

- Employment – half that of people without disability
- Education – completed VCE 24% compared to 46%
- Housing – 2x's more pwds live in public housing, age-care or inappropriate accom, more likely to be homeless
- Transport – 1.2 million pwds reported difficulty
- Less social connections and community participation

(Disability and health inequalities in Australia, Vic Health 2012)

The disability community

Disabled people have been seen as one homogeneous group with disabled heterosexual men being viewed as representative of all disabled people (even in the disability rights movement)

Since the 90's (disability feminist) women have become increasingly vocal about our experience and needs

Disability is still largely viewed as a medical issue

We are part of a marginalised community which suffers discrimination, a host of disadvantages and minority stress

Very little research on sexuality and disability esp. women's and LGBTI even by our peer bodies

Women with disabilities

- More likely to be living in poverty
- Have a high level of unmet needs across disability levels and types, yet are less likely to receive appropriate services
- More likely to be homeless; overrepresented in all the risk factors
- 16% have secondary education
- More likely to be unemployed (46.8%)

(Australian Human Rights Commission 2014 report) (WWDA report)

Women with disabilities: Voices against Violence Report, 2014

Women with disabilities are assaulted, raped and abused at a rate at least two times greater than that of women who do not have a disability

90% women with an intellectual disability have been subjected to sexual abuse. More than two-thirds (68%) have been sexually abused by the age of 18

Types of violence

- Disability based violence- Violence targeting disability such as the denial of mobility and communication devices, withholding of food or medication, threats of institutionalisation
- Humiliation, harassment, forced sterilisation, denial of reproductive rights, neglect and restrictions to social networks
- Overseas studies found that women with disabilities are 40% more likely to be the victims of intimate partner violence 5 years into a relationship than women without disabilities and this increased to 85% likelihood at the 10 year point (Voices against Violence report, 2014)

Mental health

43% of people with a physical disability experienced symptoms of mental health disorder in the last 12 months (WDV Report Access to Health Services for Women with Disabilities)

LGBTI people with disability-living with simultaneous disadvantage

High rates of anxiety and depression not because of disability but resulting from living with minority stress (in much the same way LGBTI have high rates of anxiety and depression as a result of discrimination and not because we are queer)

Sexual health knowledge

- Inadequate sex education
- Pleasure and strength based sex education needed What we *can* and want do with our bodies
- Teaching sex education & healthy relationships is a protective factor from abuse
- Issues accessing spaces, venues, negative assumptions, less access to relationships or hot encounters

Health issues

- 55% of women with disabilities aged between 50-69 years have had a mammogram in the last two years compared with 76% of women without disability
- 14% women with intellectual disability aged 20–69 have had a pap smear compared with 71% of women without a disability
- More likely to be over weight and have concurrent health issues

(Disability and health inequalities in Australia, Vic Health 2012)

Barriers to health

- Access issues (transport, ramps, attitudes)
- Cost/poverty
- Less health knowledge
- Health information is not provided in a range of accessible formats

(WDV Report Access to Health Services for Women with Disabilities)

Additional barriers for Queer women with disability

Simultaneous disadvantage,
stigma/assumptions/homophobia

Women with disability are less likely to be
accessing service, more likely to be relying on
family members as a means of support

Built & attitudinal barriers accessing spaces,
transport and community- being viewed as a
less desirable sexual partner

Ways to make services more accessible & inclusive

A Proactive approach:

- Removing cost e.g. fees but also transport costs
- Access e.g. ramps, signage, examination tables, hoists
- Communicate directly to the person, check assumptions
- Longer appointments
- Listen to access requirements
- Don't focus on the disability if that is not the reason for presenting, think holistically, think socially. Let the person tell you what it means to them
- Work with other services

- Sometimes it's a 'healthy' response to discrimination to feel sad, the trick is working out when it becomes depression
- Don't expect the client to educate you. Listen. Listen. Listen
- See difference, respect it. Don't deny it.
- There are no easy answers-working towards social justice takes time
- What can you do? What do you do? Understand disability disadvantage, violence stats, Interrogate/reflect on your beliefs, biases or misconceptions

Similarities: Queer & Disability

Both identities are subject to marginality and discrimination

Both involve developing a positive sense of self, PRIDE, finding community, coming out

Consumer led action, self-advocacy & change!

Adopting a societal framework instead of an individual focus enables disability to be viewed more holistically

Disability acts like a beacon for the douchebags of the world but also for the interesting people. It allows me to see and experience life from differently. Marginality as opportunity, as both a privilege and a disadvantage

Disability Pride

‘You’ve got to declare yourself disabled and beautiful.’

Mat Fraser, 1998

‘Disability is not a brave struggle or “courage in the face of adversity.” Disability is an art. It’s an ingenious way to live.’

Neil Marcus, poet, performer

‘You get proud by practicing’

Laura Hershey

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Quippings Disability Unleashed

<https://www.facebook.com/quippings>

YouTube

<https://youtu.be/EE4ShBAx61I>

Disability resources

Defiant Lives Trailer

https://youtu.be/uI4eTd8xhIA?list=FLd0z3XEI4FsUIrVKIM_InWQ

Bearbrass Asylum Orchestra - Welcome

<https://youtu.be/ErycGb7yUZI>

The Last Taboo

<https://youtu.be/KLqMYIqI9Tw>

Sins Invalid

[https://youtu.be/FyIKAgLOLJc?](https://youtu.be/FyIKAgLOLJc?list=FLd0z3XEI4FsUIrVKIM_InWQ)

[list=FLd0z3XEI4FsUIrVKIM_InWQ](https://youtu.be/FyIKAgLOLJc?list=FLd0z3XEI4FsUIrVKIM_InWQ)

People With Disabilities Australia (lots of resources) <http://www.pwd.org.au>

Women with Disabilities Australia <http://wwda.org.au>

Women with Disabilities Victoria <http://www.wdv.org.au>

First People's Disability Network <http://fpdn.org.au>

Enabling Health: Taking action to improve the health of people with a disability-
Vic Health