

Community Report: Findings from the Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative Online Survey of Gay, Bisexual, Queer and other Men who have Sex with Men

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CONTENTS

The Calgary Men’s Wellness Initiative.....1

Introduction1

Age3

Sex.....3

Gender Identity.....3

Sexual Orientation3

Disclosure.....3

Relationship Status4

Education4

Employment.....4

Income4

Country of Origin.....4

Citizenship.....4

Ethnicity4

Sex5

Gender of Sexual Partners5

Number of Sexual Partners.....5

Interactions with Sexual Partners.....6

Meeting Sexual Partners.....7

Self-Perception of HIV risk7

Uptake of Risk Reduction Strategies.....8

PrEP8

Last Tested for HIV & STIs?9

Obstacles or Barriers to HIV/STI Testing.....10

HIV Testing Motivations.....11

Suicide, Experiences of Abuse and Violence12

Suicidal Ideation and Attempts.....12

Experiences of Abuse and Violence13

Uptake and Experience of Health Services14

Frequency of Accessing Health Services14

Out to Family Doctor.....14

Comfort with Healthcare Providers..... 14

Perceptions of Healthcare Providers’ Knowledge 15

Satisfaction with Healthcare Service Access 15

Service Needs16

Service Needs 16

Acknowledgements.....17

Suggested Citation17

Contact.....17

What is the Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative?

The Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative is a community coalition which was established in 2012 with a mandate to better understand the issues, gaps, and barriers encountered by gay, bisexual, queer and other men who have sex with men (GBQMSM) when accessing health services in Calgary, Alberta.

The Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative has broad membership from many Calgary based community organizations, academic institutions, government agencies, and the general public. Leadership on the coalition has been provided by a small number of organizations including Mount Royal University - Department of Child Studies and Social Work, The SHARP Foundation, Alberta Health Services, HIV Community Link, and the Calgary Sexual Health Centre.

Since 2012, members of the initiative have secured funding and initiated work on several projects including a literature review on emerging strategies in GBQMSM health promotion, an environmental scan of health services for men who have sex with men in North America, and a community needs assessment that investigated the health of men who have sex with men and the services available to assist and improve their health. All documents and publications produced by the CMWI are freely available to the community through the initiative website:

<http://www.calgarymenswellness.com/>

Introduction

Gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men, including trans men continue to experience health inequities associated with the social context of stigma and discrimination. Despite these health disparities, most research on GBQMSM in Alberta has focused on HIV prevention and treatment. Recognizing this gap, the Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative developed a community-based, mixed-methods research project in collaboration with Mount Royal University researchers and key community stakeholders. A research subcommittee comprised of community service providers and researchers was formed to guide all aspects of the project, including the development of the research questions, methodology, data collection tools, and the interpretation of the findings.

In 2015, an online survey was launched to gather information about Calgary and area GBQMSM, their health and wellness needs, and the gaps and barriers they encounter when accessing health services. The survey featured both open and closed ended questions and was designed with broad input from community members and service providers. The survey questions focused on several themes including: sexual behaviour, sexual health, risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the uptake of risk reduction strategies, and respondents' experiences of health care services. Between March and August 2015, 552 GBQMSM living in Calgary responded to the survey and, of those, almost 75% completed the full questionnaire.

In the Spring of 2016, a community forum was held and the research findings were presented to interested community members and professionals involved in the provision of health and wellness services to GBQMSM in Calgary. Additionally, members of the research subcommittee offered several presentations to community agencies and service providers in Calgary.

In completing this project, The Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative recognized a need for community-based research that generates localized knowledge about GBQMSM health and wellness, and which considers the Calgary context. Relevant research of this nature is required to inform a local response to health inequities and contribute to program and service planning. In this report, we selected data that we hope will be helpful to AIDS service organizations, community agencies, and other health and social service providers as they plan and implement programs that address wellness for GBQMSM in Calgary.

1 Demographics

This section outlines the survey respondents' demographic information. The majority of respondents were between 20 and 39 years of age and self-identified as gay men, though there were also many other ways that respondents identified their genders and/or sexual orientations.

Age

How old are you?

16 - 19	5%
20 - 29	40%
30 - 39	27%
40 - 49	15%
50 - 59	9%
60+	4%

Sex

What was your sex assigned at birth?

Male	96%
Female	4%

Gender Identity

How do you identify your gender?

Man	94%
Trans Man/FTM	2%
Genderqueer or Non-Binary Trans Person	1%
Two Spirit	1%
Other	2%

*other self-identified genders included "trans masculine," "demidude," and "differently gendered"

Sexual Orientation

How do you define your sexual orientation?

Gay	89%
Bisexual	10%
Straight	2%
Queer	6%
Questioning	3%
Two-Spirited	1%
Other	3%

*other self-identified sexual orientations included "asexual" and "pansexual"

Disclosure

Who have you told that you are a GBQMSM?

Family	81%
Friends	92%
Co-Workers	75%
Nobody	6%

Relationship Status

What is your relationship status? Choose all that apply.

Single	50%
Relationship with a man	43%
Relationship with a woman	4%
Polyamorous or Open Relationship	8%

Education

What is your level of education?

Less than High School	2%
High School	8%
Some Post-Secondary	20%
Post-Secondary	50%
Graduate Education	20%

Employment

What is your current employment status? Check all that apply.

Unemployed	8%
Employed Full-Time	60%
Employed Part-Time	14%
Self-Employed	12%
Student	14%
Retired	3%

Income

What is your individual annual income before taxes?

\$0-14,999	13%
\$15,000-29,000	14%
\$30,000-59,000	27%
\$60,000-89,000	20%
\$90,000+	26%

Country of Origin

Were you born in Canada?

Yes	85%
No	15%

Citizenship

What is your current immigration status?

Canadian Citizen	92%
Permanent Resident	6%
Temporary Work permit	1%
Temporary Student Visa	0.5%
Other	0.5%

Ethnicity

How do you identify?

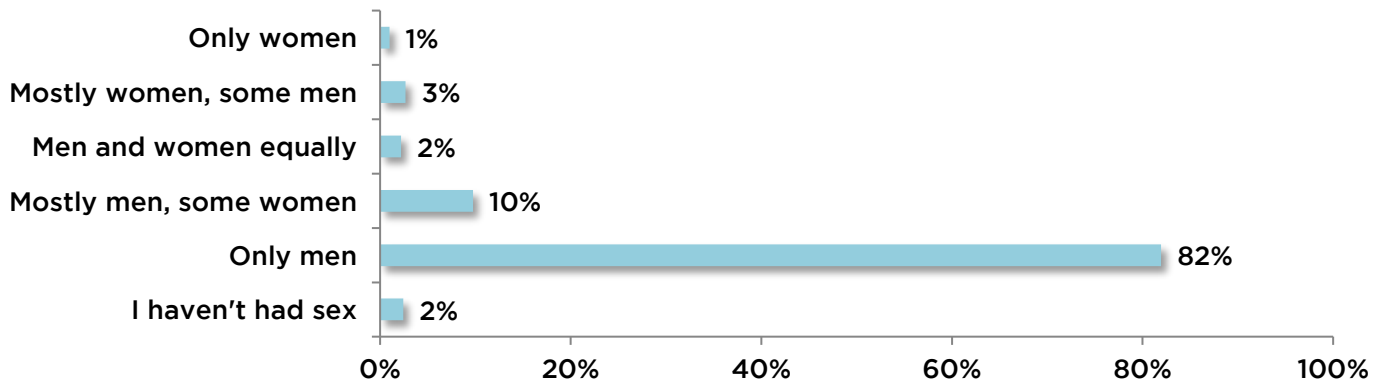
North American	53.55%
British	29.19%
Other Western European	10.66%
Eastern European	7.61%
French	7.36%
Southeast Asian	7.36%
Other	7.11%
Scandinavian	4.82%
First Nations, Inuit, or Metis	4.06%
Latin American	3.81%
South Asian	2.54%
Middle Eastern	2.03%

2 Sex

This section describes the sexual activity of the survey's respondents, as well as their utilization of sexual HIV risk reduction strategies and the respondents' uptake of HIV and STI testing services.

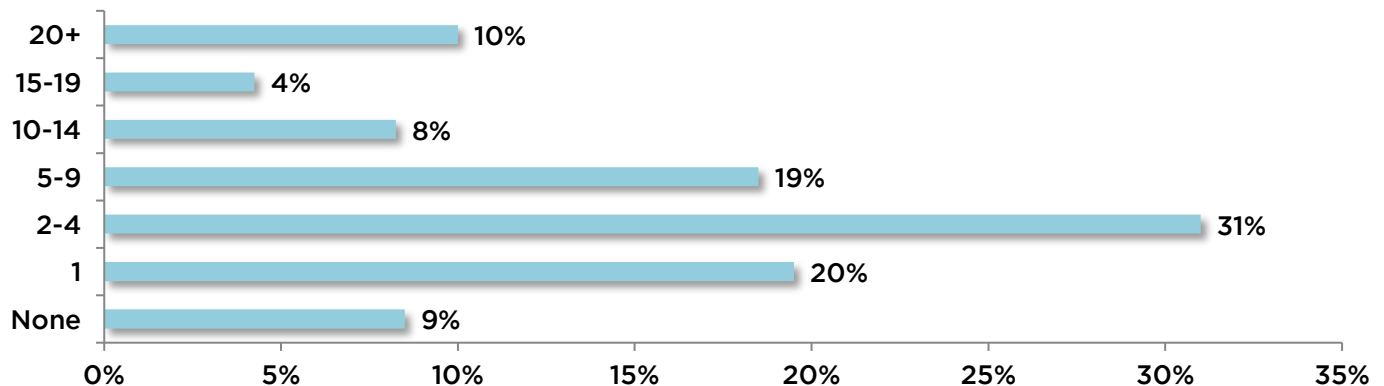
Gender of Sexual Partners

In the past 5 years, which of these best describes your sexual partners?



Number of Sexual Partners

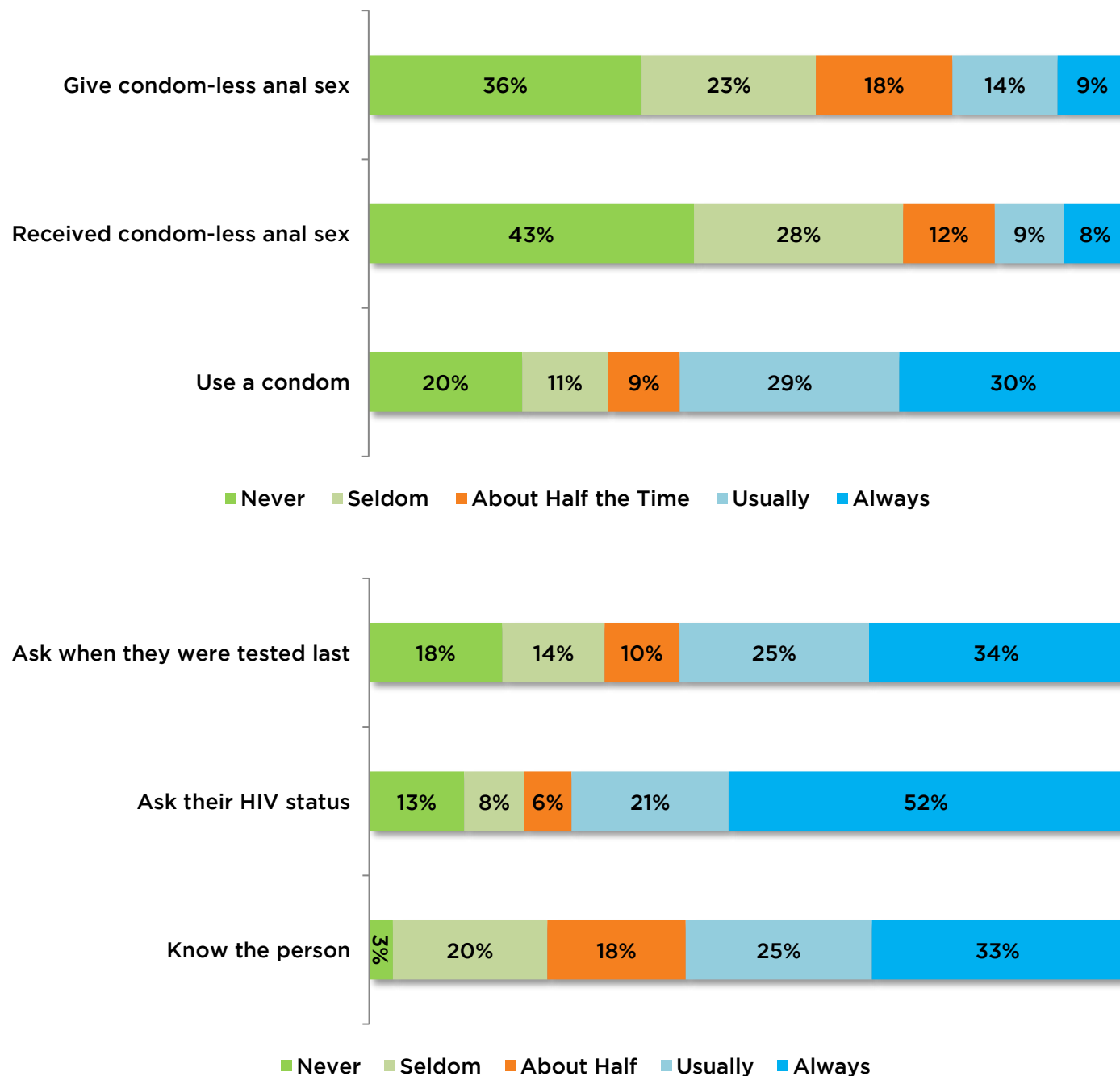
In the past 12 months, about how many partners have you had penetrative sex with?



In the online survey, 22% of respondents from Calgary identified having anal sex with 10 or more partners. Research has suggested that a high number of sexual partners is indicative of the need for frequent HIV and STI testing and access to HIV rapid testing.

Interactions with Sexual Partners

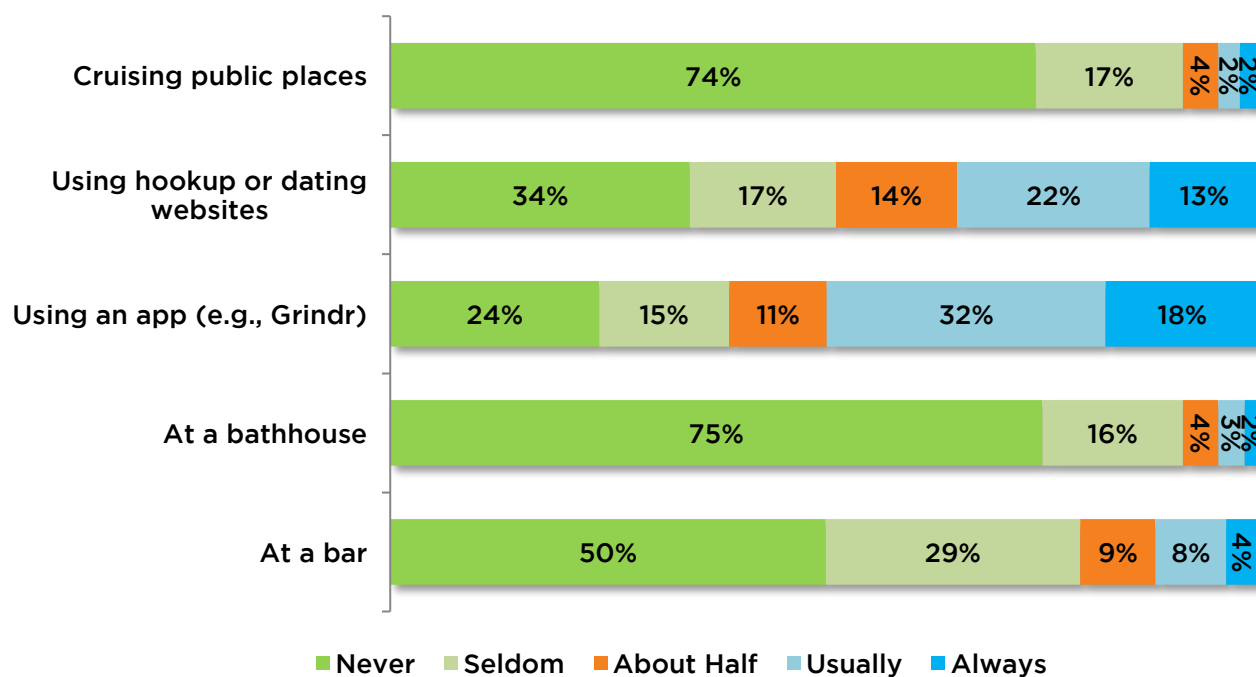
With those partners, how often did you:



Condom use is an effective indicator of risk for HIV and STIs. In earlier surveys, Alberta has been noted as having higher condomless anal intercourse rates than in other Canadian regions. In Calgary, although the majority of respondents rated their HIV risk as low (see page 7), up to 40% reported using condoms 50% of the time or less with a male partner compared to 31% nationally.

Meet those partners:

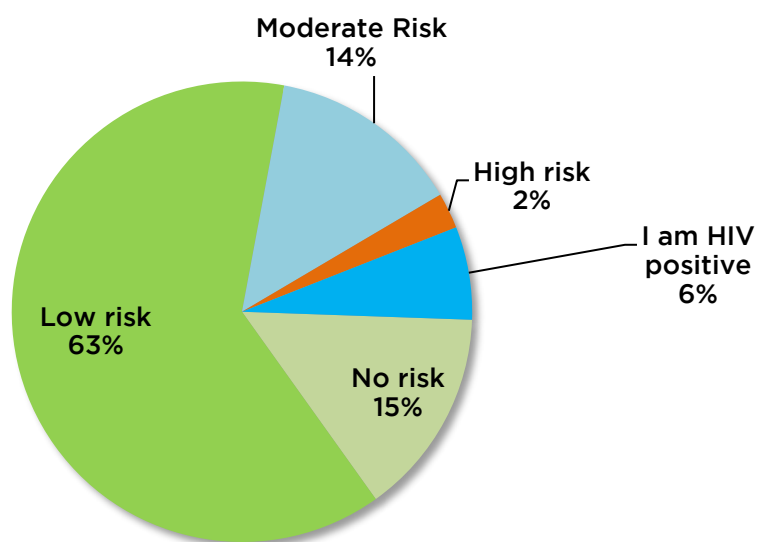
With those partners, how often did you meet them at the following:



Use of social media has transformed sexual cultures for many GBQMSM. Calgary respondents indicated that they use websites (49%) and apps (61%) most frequently to meet sexual partners as opposed to physical settings such as bars and bathhouses.

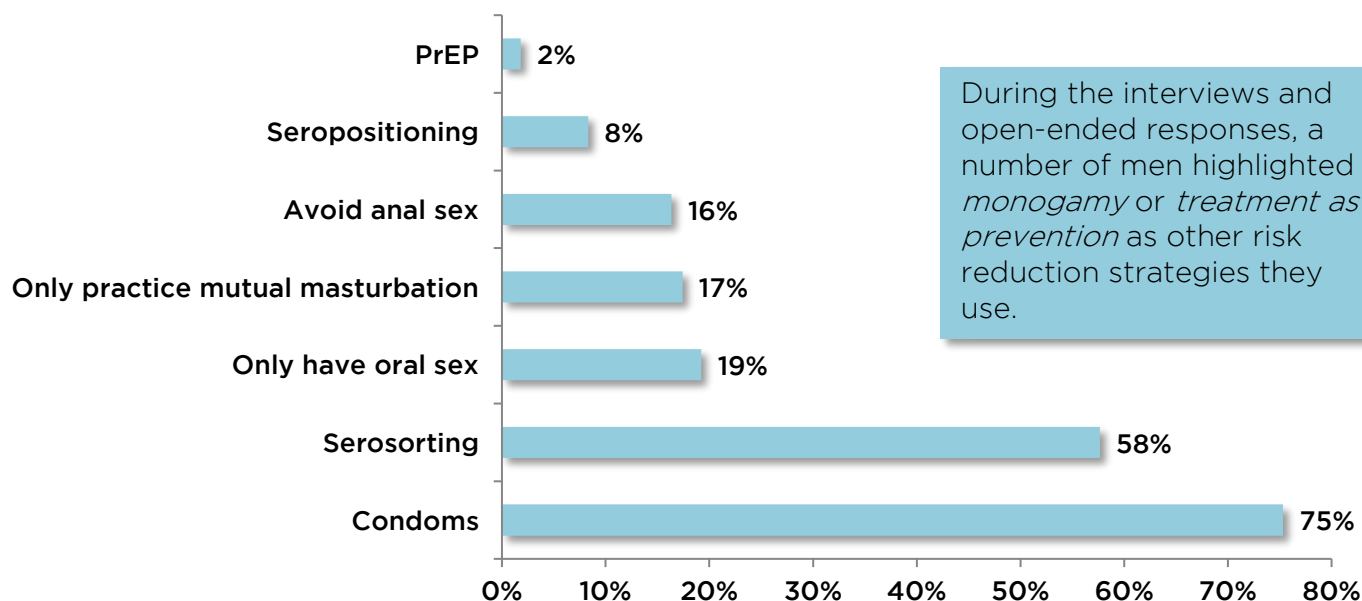
Self-Perception of HIV risk

How would you rate your own personal risk of contracting HIV?



Uptake of Risk Reduction Strategies

What, if any, risk reduction strategies do you use when having sex with a man?



Biomedical approaches to risk reduction are rapidly changing the landscape of HIV prevention for GBQMSM in Canadian communities. Although treatment as prevention (TasP) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) are increasingly available to GBQMSM, a large majority of respondents reported using mostly behavioral strategies to manage their HIV/STI risk. Condom use remains the most reported form of risk reduction for GBQMSM in Calgary.

PrEP

Have you ever taken PrEP?

Yes	9%
No	91%

If readily available, would you use PrEP as a risk reduction strategy?

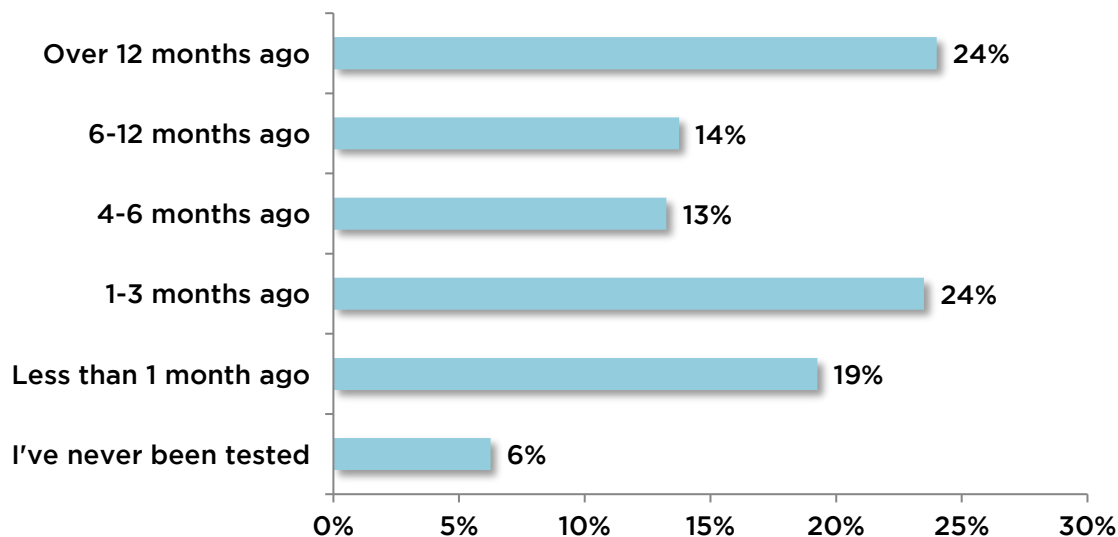
Yes	52%
No	16%
Don't Know	32%

*participants who disclosed their HIV-positive status were omitted from these results

Several Canadian surveys have found that gay and bisexual men outside of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal tend to be less informed about condom alternatives such as PrEP. In the 2015 Sex Now study, approximately 43% of Calgary respondents indicated that they were not previously aware of PrEP. Nevertheless, while very few respondents in this study reported taking PrEP, the majority indicated that they would be interested in using it as a risk reduction strategy if it were more readily available.

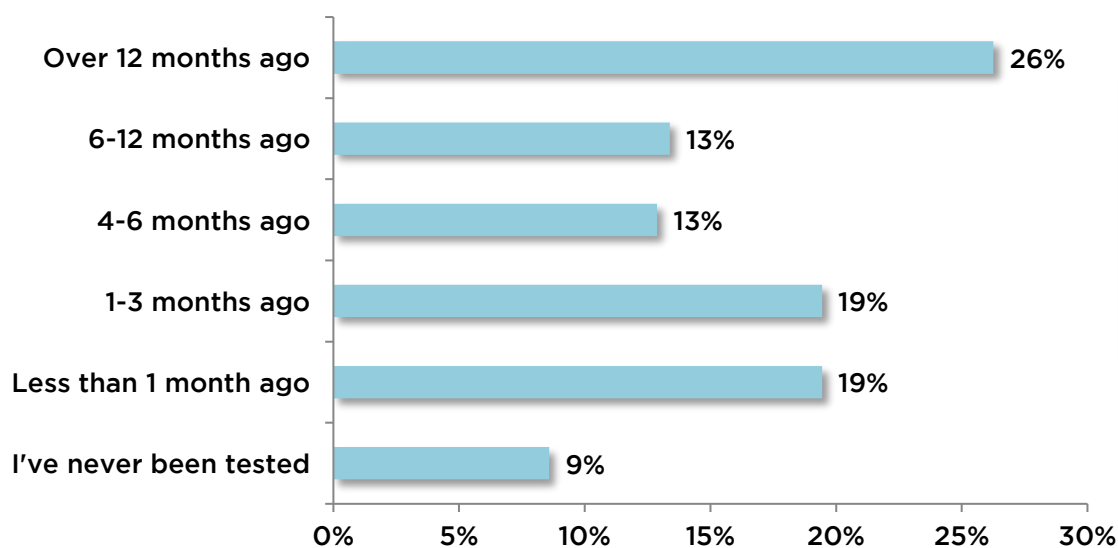
Last Tested for HIV & STIs?

When were you last tested for STIs?



70% of participants have been tested for STIs in the last 12 months.

When were you last tested for HIV?

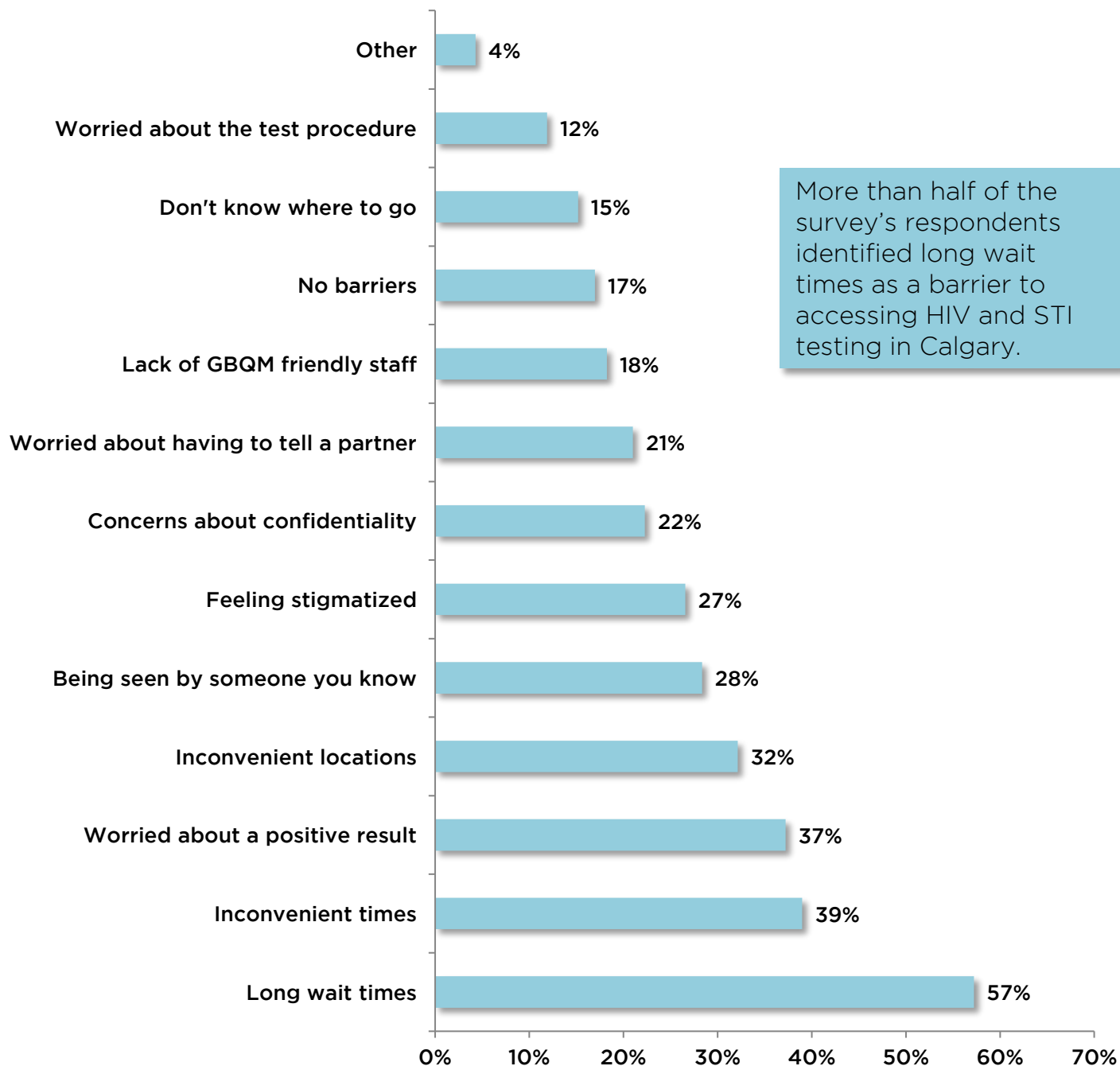


65% of participants have been tested for HIV in the last 12 months.

Testing for HIV annually is an important health maintenance strategy for sexually active men and the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that all sexually active people get tested at least once every 12 months. In national studies 48.8% of gay and bisexual men reported testing for HIV in the last 12 months while the number who have never had a test averaged about 35%. In Calgary, a large majority of respondents reported meeting this annual testing standard.

Obstacles or Barriers to HIV/STI Testing

Have you experienced any of these obstacles or barriers to getting tested?



HIV Testing Motivations

What would motivate you to get an HIV test during the next year?

If I was involved in risky sex	73%
If it was part of a check-up	70%
If I had a new partner or relationship	67%
If I had symptoms after risky sex	59%
If I could get my result in less than an hour	53%
If I could get tested at a clinic for GBQMSM	35%
If I received a reminder e-mail or text	23%
Other	6%

*participants who disclosed their HIV-positive status were omitted from these results.

Other responses included: "If I had a doctor," "If I could make an appointment and not have to wait at a clinic for a long time," "If the wait for the test was under 1 hour," "If the clinics were closer. In Calgary it's a 45 minute drive downtown," and "If I could get a test at a clinic set up just for queer and trans folks."

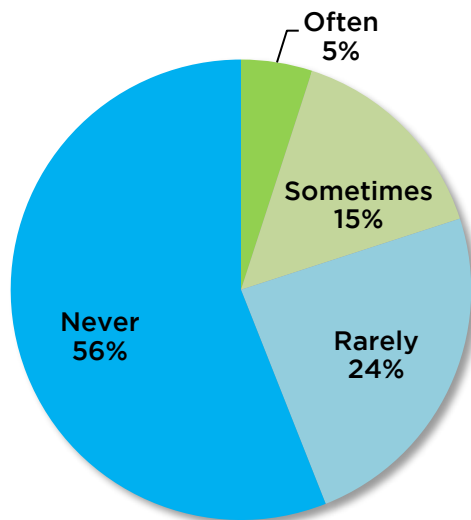
Access to Point of Care HIV and STI testing services is an important health need for sexually active GBQMSM in Calgary. Respondents indicated that improvements in testing locations and hours of service, and a reduction in wait times are required in order to encourage increased testing rates. Providing testing services in a GBQMSM friendly environment and the provision of Point of Care rapid testing would motivate more GBQMSM in Calgary to test on a regular basis and could contribute to lower rates of HIV and STIs.

3 Suicide, Experiences of Abuse and Violence

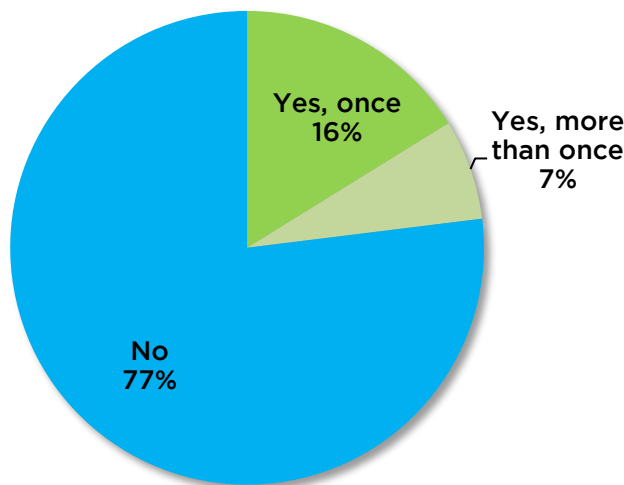
This section describes the proportion of the survey’s respondents who have thought about or attempted suicide, as well as the proportion of respondents who disclosed that they have had negative experiences related to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

Suicidal Ideation and Attempts

In the past 12 months, how often have you thought of suicide?



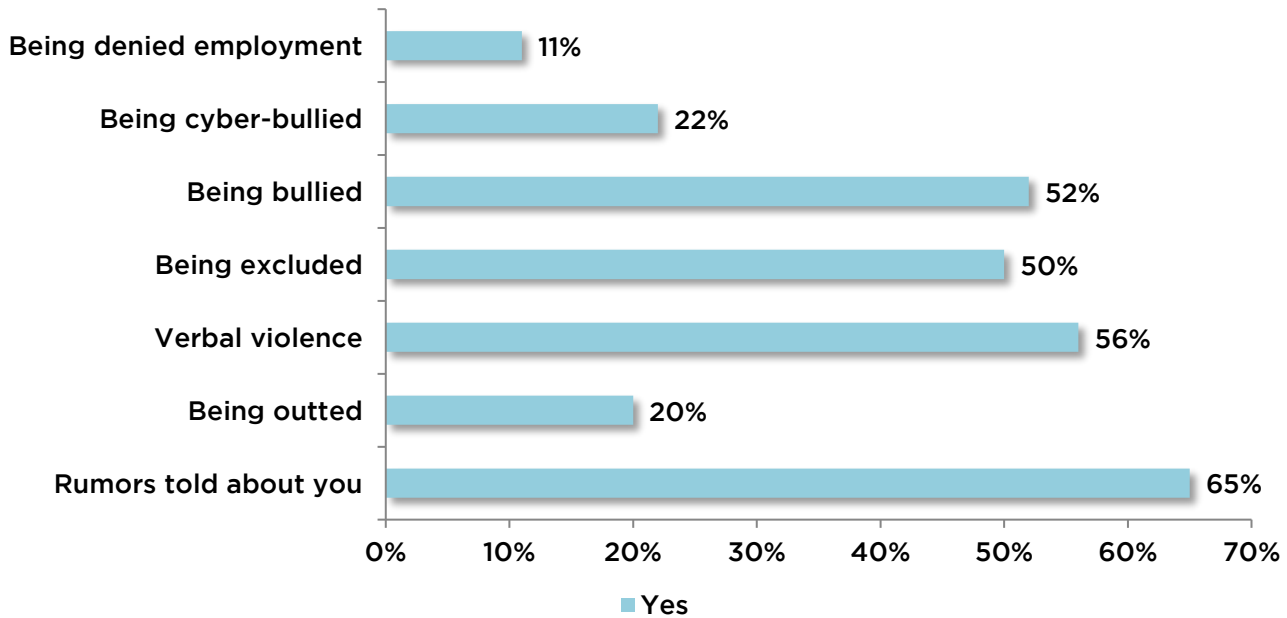
Have you ever attempted suicide?



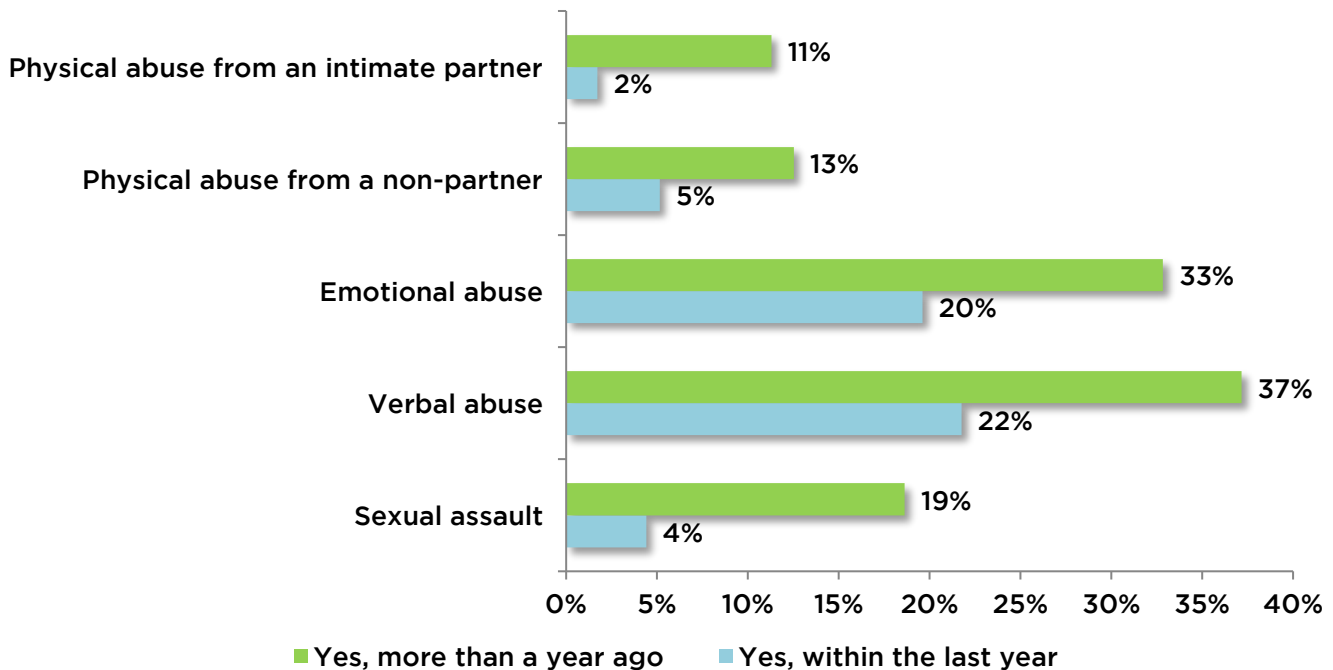
SUICIDE, EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE & VIOLENCE

Experiences of Abuse and Violence

Have you ever experienced any of the following because you are GBQMSM:



Have you ever experienced any of the following:



Research suggests that having a history of mental illness and abuse may be connected to risk and vulnerability for HIV among GBQMSM. Survey respondents in Calgary reported higher than average rates of suicidal ideation, intimate partner violence and sexual assault; important issues for health care providers to understand and address in this city.

4 Uptake and Experience of Health Services

This section describes where and how frequently the survey’s respondents are accessing health services. This section also outlines the proportion of GBQMSM who have had negative experiences with healthcare providers and the proportion who are concerned about negative experiences with healthcare providers.

Frequency of accessing health services

In the last 12 months, how many times have you accessed health services?

Never	10%
1-2	34%
3-5	33%
6-10 times	14%
10+	9%

Where do you usually go for health care services?

My family doctor	78%
A walk-in clinic	50%
An emergency care centre	24%
Hospital Emergency Room	16%
Alternative therapists	13%
Mental health professional	14%
Other	5%

Have you visited your family doctor in the past year?

Yes	68%
No	15%
I don't have a family doctor	18%

Out to family doctor

Does your family doctor know that you have sex with men?

Yes	72%
No	28%

How important is it to you that your service provider is also a GBQMSM?

Not important	51%
Somewhat important	36%
Important	8%
Very important	6%

Comfort with healthcare providers

Are you comfortable discussing your sexual health with your doctor?

Yes	71%
No	29%

UPTAKE AND EXPERIENCE OF HEALTH SERVICES

In Calgary, how comfortable do you feel discussing _____ with your healthcare provider?

	Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Comfortable
HIV	7%	20%	26%	48%
General Health	3%	11%	30%	56%

How concerned are you that a healthcare provider will:

	Very Concerned	Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not at all Concerned
Out you	6%	10%	20%	64%
Mistreat you	9%	13%	26%	51%
Judge you	9%	17%	31%	43%

To your knowledge, in the last 12 months has a healthcare provider:

	Yes	No
Outted you	2%	98%
Judged you	10%	90%
Refused to treat you	1%	99%
Treated you poorly	5%	95%

Perceptions of healthcare providers' knowledge

In your experience, how informed are healthcare providers regarding:

	Uninformed	Somewhat uninformed	Somewhat informed	Well informed
General health of GBQMSM	8%	24%	49%	19%
Sexual health of GBQMSM	9%	23%	50%	18%

Satisfaction with healthcare service access

How satisfied are you with your access to health services?

Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied
4%	12%	46%	38%

GBQMSM in Calgary report a high degree of satisfaction with their health care providers; findings that are consistent with other national studies. Nevertheless a majority of respondents are at least somewhat concerned that they will be judged or mistreated by health care providers and approximately 30% feel that their health care providers are uninformed about their sexual health.

5 Service Needs

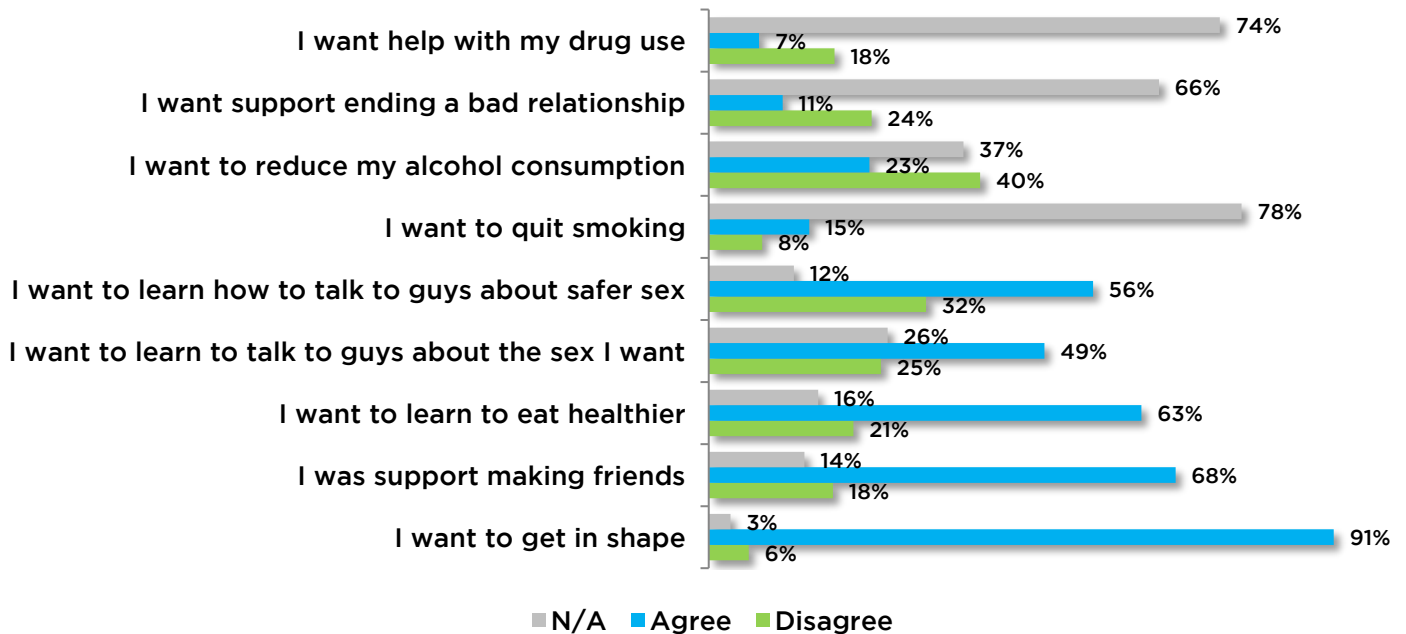
This section describes services and supports that GBQMSM identified as community needs.

Service needs

What types of services would you be interested in?

Professional Counselling	39%
In-person peer support	29%
LGBTQ mental health services	34%
Social groups (not sports)	48%
Sports groups	38%
LGBTQ health clinic	51%
STI testing	51%
HIV testing	40%
Community health centre	33%

Do you agree with the following:



Acknowledgements:

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- Mount Royal University.

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