

How prepared are gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (GBMSM) in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland for DoxyPEP?

About the Project

Sexually Transmitted Infection prevention methods have shifted in recent years with a rapid increase in the use of prophylactic pharmaceutical interventions and significant decreases in condom use.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has become widely used by many GBMSM and is now freely available to most GBMSM requesting it. However, PrEP offers no protection over common STIs like chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhoea and as condom usage has declined so most of these STIs have increased with disproportionately higher rates in GBMSM from minoritized ethnic backgrounds. Recent data also show considerable inequity in PrEP access on the basis of geography and ethnicity amongst GBMSM. PrEP use is significantly lower in regions like Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland compared to areas like London and Manchester, and lower for GBMSM from minoritized ethnic groups. Iain Williamson first-authored a paper on the local context of 'readiness' for PrEP in Critical Public Health co-created with Trade Sexual Health in 2019.

A new development in STI prevention is DoxyPEP where an antibiotic called doxycycline, (traditionally been used to treat common STIs) is taken before or shortly after condom-less sex to prevent STIs. Some clinics in the UK are making Doxy PEP available to those considered high risk and evidence shows that many men are accessing it on-line. For social, health economics and public health reasons it seems very likely that DoxyPEP availability and usage will increase significantly supported by agencies like British Association for Sexual Health and HIV. Knowledge, understanding and adherence will be critical for effective and safe use. As one of the most diverse but deprived cities in the United Kingdom Leicester has a GBMSM community with distinct needs but retains excellent community-based organisations like Trade Sexual Health and the LGBT Centre. There is also local and outreach provision to support GBMSM with sexual health and psychological well-being in LLR satellite towns like Oakham, Coalville and Melton Mowbray where there are different demographics including significant pockets of deprivation.

This project has been co-created and is supported by researchers from De Montfort University, the University of Leicester, and partners at Trade Sexual Health. The successful candidate for this project will be enrolled at De Montfort University.

Project Aims

The placement provides a balance of university and community-based experience so that the candidate understands medical, public health and psycho-social dimensions of DoxyPEP use and can apply these to the specificities of the LLR landscape for GBMSM from diverse backgrounds.

The candidate will visit various LGBTQ+ and GBMSM agencies in city and shires to understand the local context of sexual health and well-being promotion and gauge knowledge, views and experiences with DoxyPEP with a particular focus on thoughts and feelings about the wider deployment of DoxyPEP and both advantages and concerns around this.

The combination of components is critical in making sure the knowledge created is appropriately sensitive to the context of LLR and the student has a good understanding of how features of the local landscape converge and diverge with the wider picture nationally and internationally.

Supervisory Team

1. Lead Academic Supervisor: Professor Iain Williamson(De Montfort University)
2. Academic Co-Supervisor(s): Dr Rebecca Barnes(University of Leicester)
3. Community Supervisor(s): Dr Gavin Brown(Trade Sexual Health(Trade Sexual Health))

What will the successful candidate be doing ?

- A scoping review of English-language grey and academic research of qualitative and quantitative literature on DoxyPEP.
- Outreach work with GBMSM and LGBTQ+ agencies in Leicester city and Leicestershire and Rutland and collection of comprehensive field notes.
- Producing a summary presentation of the review and field work findings to be presented to the supervisory team and other potential community stakeholders.

Key Details

Host University:	De Montfort University
Start date:	Monday 06 October 2025
Funding offer:	Tax-free bursary of £1,300 (paid in 2 parts, in arrears)
Working hours	Part-time (11-14 hrs per week).
Working Style:	Primarily in-person at host university. Flexible working supported. Working pattern to be agreed between successful candidate and lead supervisor.

Competencies

Collaboratory Core Competencies		
Category	Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Comprehension and evaluation	Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.	A / I
	Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.	A / I
	Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.	A / I
	Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.	I
	Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.	I
Social and emotional	Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.	A
	Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.	A
	Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.	A / I
	Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.	A / I
	Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.	A / I
	Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.	A / I
Preparedness and potential for success	Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.	A
	High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.	A / I
	Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.	A / I
	Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.	A / I
	Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.	A / I
Community Context	Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.	A
	Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.	A / I
	Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.	A / I
	Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.	A / I

Competencies

Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Good understanding of current practices in LGBT+ sexual health promotion both regionally and nationally.	A / I	Demonstrates understanding of and commitment to working practices that promote and deliver sustainability.	A / I
Able to engage in a professional, compassionate and empathetic manner with individuals from diverse LGBT+ communities.	A / I	Ability to work in a flexible manner including occasional out of office hours activities.	A / I
Ability to show both discretion and confidence in discussing sexual health related issues.	A / I	Ability to work in a reflective manner, consciously examining your own thinking and practices.	A / I
A genuine curiosity about how people connect through everyday cultural practices—like storytelling, celebration, food, or music and how public spaces can reflect and support diverse communities. Ideal for someone who cares about local voices, inclusion, and how places like the Generator Hall can bring people together in meaningful ways.	A / I		

References for Further Reading

- <https://www.sexualhealth.cnwl.nhs.uk/prep/doxy-pep/>
- Coukan, F., Sullivan, A., Mitchell, H., Jaffer, S., Williams, A., Saunders, J., ... & Ward, H. (2024). Impact of national commissioning of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) on equity of access in England: a PrEP-to-need ratio investigation. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 100(3), 166-172. <https://researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk/en/publications/impact-of-national-commissioning-of-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep>
- Kohli, M. & Medland, N. & Fifer, Helen & Saunders, J. (2022). BASHH Updated Position Statement on Doxycycline as Prophylaxis for Sexually Transmitted Infections. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*. 98. 10.1136/sextrans-2022-055425. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35414633/> Kohli, M., Reeves, I., & Waters, L. (2024). Homophobia in the provision of sexual health care in the UK. *The Lancet HIV*, 11(2), e125-e130. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018\(23\)00302-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018(23)00302-8/fulltext)
- Meyerowitz, E. A., Liang, R., Bishop, D., & Mullis, C. E. (2024). Put a little doxy-PEP in your step: Using doxycycline to prevent chlamydia, syphilis, and gonorrhea infections. *PLoS pathogens*, 20(9), e1012575. <https://journals.plos.org/plospathogens/article?id=10.1371/journal.ppat.1012575>