

# LONG-TERM TRENDS IN AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN'S SEXUAL PRACTICES WITH MALE PARTNERS: A 25-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

## Authors:

Holt M<sup>1</sup>, Chan C<sup>2</sup>, Mao L<sup>1</sup>, MacGibbon J<sup>1</sup>, Smith AKJ<sup>1,3,4</sup>, Gray J<sup>5</sup>, Bavinton B<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney, <sup>2</sup> The Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney, <sup>3</sup> School of Population Health, Curtin University, <sup>4</sup> Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health, Curtin University, <sup>5</sup> Health Equity Matters

[300 words max.]

## Background:

The GBQ+ (formerly Gay) Community Periodic Surveys are repeated cross-sectional surveys of HIV/sexual health conducted in Australia since 1996. We reviewed long-term trends in gay and bisexual men's (GBM) sexual practices with casual male partners to assess implications for HIV and sexual health services.

## Methods:

We analysed trends in sex with casual male partners during 1998-2023, including the proportions of GBM (past 6 months) reporting no casual sex, sex but no anal intercourse ('sides'), consistent condom use, and any condomless sex. We also report trends in PrEP use. For GBM who had anal sex with casual partners, we report trends in participants being exclusively insertive ('tops'), exclusively receptive ('bottoms'), and 'versatile' in positioning. Trends were tested with logistic regression.

## Results:

191,230 survey responses were included. Median age was 34 yrs, 87.5% identified as gay, 8.0% as bisexual, and 8.6% were living with HIV. Between 1998 and 2023, the trends in casual sex were: no casual sex (35.0% to 38.3%,  $p<0.001$ ), no anal intercourse (32.0% to 10.2%,  $p<0.001$ ), consistent condom use (24.0% to 8.4%,  $p<0.001$ ), and any condomless sex (9.0% to 43.1%,  $p<0.001$ ). No anal sex peaked in 1999 (43.1%) and condomless sex in 2023. PrEP use increased from 2.6% in 2014 to 41.7% in 2023 ( $p<0.001$ ). For participants reporting casual anal intercourse ( $n=93,768$ ), trends in sexual position for 1998-2023 were: exclusive tops (28.8% to 22.4%,  $p=0.071$ ), exclusive bottoms (11.6% to 16.2%,  $p<0.001$ ), and versatile (59.6% to 61.3%,  $p=0.001$ ). The proportion of tops peaked in 1998 (28.8%), versatile in 2012 (67.0%), and bottoms in 2021 (19.9%).

## Conclusion:

GBM's practices with casual male partners have changed over time, with less anal and receptive sex prior to 2000, and more versatility in positioning before PrEP was introduced. As PrEP use increased, there have been increases in GBM reporting anal sex, condomless sex, and receptive intercourse.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Centre for Social Research in Health and the Kirby Institute receive funding from the Australian Government Department of Health. The GBQ+ Community Periodic

Surveys are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, state/territory health departments, and the National Health and Medical Research Council (GNT2002625). No pharmaceutical grants were received for this study.