

As I get older, will the problems get worse?

Gay men in the 50Plus Research Project

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"In the 80s people expected the worst. In the 90s there was hope, followed by euphoria. Now...there are unforeseeable problems arising with long term survival. Life is not predictable for anybody, but this added uncertainty...makes decisions such as age of retirement, provisions for the future etc more difficult"

(Gay man, 50Plus)

What's the UK data?

- More people with HIV over 50 than ever before (8722 in 2007)
- Set to double over next five years
- Newly diagnosed life expectancy rising into 70s
- 50Plus surveyed 325 MSM with HIV over 50 within 420 older PWHIV overall
- Range from long term survivors to newly diagnosed
- Oldest MSM respondent in survey aged 78

50 Plus

Top concerns expressed by older gay PWHIV

- Financial difficulties – poorer and more likely to be on benefits
- Being unable to care for myself
- Inability to get proper healthcare
- Mental health including depression
- Social stigma/discrimination, especially in health and social care

Financial difficulty

- "My options for earning are poor now. As I get older, I foresee it will be almost impossible to find paid work. "
- *"Somehow, the category 'Financial difficulty' doesn't begin to address the unending stress of permanent financial anxiety"*
- "The specific worry that my current and future benefits are always under threat, and the insecurity that situation creates"
- *"Lack of funds for my old age, since I was diagnosed in 1985 I regarded this as a death warrant and ceased to make any pension provisions."*

Health and self care

- "My main concern is for how long I can continue with my medication... as I get older will the problems get worse?"
- *"The worry that, if I needed to be cared for, even for a short period, I could lose control over taking my ARVs."*
- "I am getting medical conditions that I thought would come much later in life. I wonder what is going to go "broke" next."
- *"Are there any gay care homes?"*
- "The thought of ending up in a straight residential / nursing home fills me with dread. Would be like going into the closet and then having HIV to contend with on top."

Health and social services concerns

- "Whenever I have a problem not directly related to my CD4 count or viral load, then I am referred to my GP, but my GP... refers me back to the HIV clinic as they tend to see all problems in the context of my HIV. I end up being piggy in the middle."
- *"Our local authority does not think HIV is prevalent in its community. Therefore no trained staff allocated to our needs exist or facilities available."*
- "Medical care and support are excellent at present - but can this be maintained for decades to come? Will future politicians/governments decide to cut HIV health care?"

Mental health

- *"I am particularly concerned about mental impairment, and early onset of dementia"*
- "Not knowing what the long-term effects of medication and HIV might be on my health"
- *"HIV has severe emotional links, causing me sleeplessness, worry and the feeling of utter destruction."*
- "If health and social care could be integrated in some kind of one stop shop and we also had access to peer led support groups where we can discuss things with each other, we might not end up running the risk of falling into depression or severe mental health crises."

Social stigma

- "Currently, the main problem is totally unsuitable home care e.g. untrained, unprofessional, prejudiced carers."
- *"I also fear that in case I need to be cared for, the carer would be as ill-informed and prejudiced about HIV as the rest of the general public."*
- "I don't want to feel discriminated against in my old age because of my status"
- HIV is not the only stigma... age is stigmatised in gay communities
- *"Also old and wrinkly is not a good look"*

What help did older gay men want?

- Information about HIV and health issues for older people (75%)
- Social care (64%)
- Social support and networking (58%)
- Physical therapy (57%)
- Counselling/emotional support (48%)
- Financial advice and debt management (38%)
- Employment advice (26%)

Find out more

50Plus Project – www.tht.org.uk/50plus

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