

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

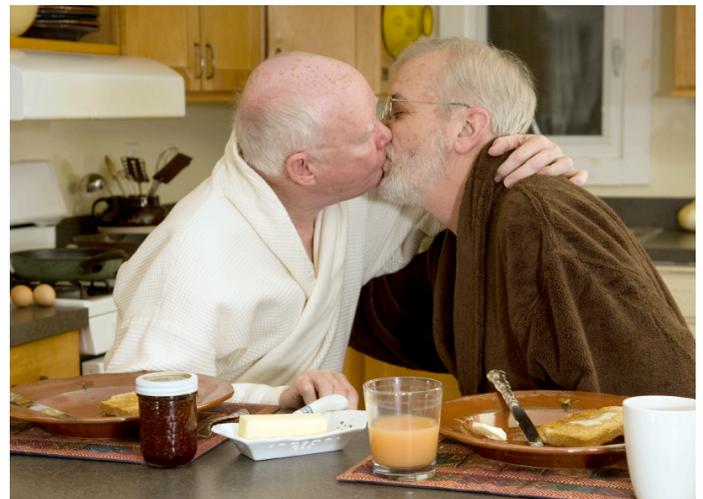
## Sex after cancer: the hidden population

**Professor Jane Ussher and Associate Professor Janette Perz from the Centre for Health Research, along with Professor Suzanne Chambers from Griffith University and Associate Professor Ian Latini from Baylor College of Medicine have been awarded Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia funding to investigate sexual wellbeing and quality of life among gay and bisexual men who have had prostate cancer. The project will address the imbalance that has seen previous research in this field concentrated on heterosexual men.**

'Sexuality and intimacy are important aspects of an individual's quality of life, with changes to sexual functioning, relationships and sense of self reported to be among the most negative influences on the wellbeing of men with prostate cancer,' says Professor Ussher. 'However, previous research has focused on heterosexual men, with gay and bisexual men with prostate cancer described as a "hidden population".'

Researchers have examined the effects of prostate cancer on heterosexual men's psychological and emotional health, sense of masculinity and sexual rehabilitation, but the experience of gay and bisexual men is rarely acknowledged. Pilot research has identified anxieties about erectile dysfunction, changes in sexual practices and concern about future sexual relationships, but these findings are incidental, from a larger heterosexual study.

In collaboration with the Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group (ANZUP), this project will use a range of methods, including surveys and in-depth interviews with gay and bisexual cancer survivors and their partners, to examine changes to sexual practices and identity and the relationships between sexual changes and quality of life. This study will help to establish baseline indicators for use in a future large-scale international study.



Of the more than 19,000 cases of prostate cancer reported in Australia in 2007, it is estimated that 3-5 per cent were gay or bisexual men. This would suggest that between 600 and 1000 Australian gay men are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year. Gay men have a 17 per cent chance of being diagnosed with prostate cancer and 31 per cent of gay couples are at risk of one partner receiving a prostate cancer diagnosis.

It cannot be assumed gay and bisexual men could, or should, have to get by using the services on offer to heterosexual men. This research is urgently needed to inform the development of appropriate health education and promotion programs, and to help in the design of targeted psychosocial care and support for improved quality of life after surviving prostate cancer.

**Project Title:** Sexual Wellbeing and Quality of Life after Prostate Cancer for Gay and Bisexual Men and their Partners

**Funding has been set at:** \$288,013

**Contact Details:** [j.ussher@uws.edu.au](mailto:j.ussher@uws.edu.au)

<http://www.uws.edu.au/centreforhealthresearch/home>

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