

# Many Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Men Willing to Donate Blood if Eligible but Find Current Deferral Policy Discriminatory



## WHY RESEARCH MSM'S VIEWS ON THE CURRENT BLOOD DONATION POLICY?

- Researchers and activists have long called for changes to blood donation policies to end what is often described as a discriminatory ban for men who have sex with men (MSM).
- In 2016, in Canada, a man had to be abstinent from all sexual contact (anal or oral sex) with other men for at least 12 months in order to be eligible to donate blood.
- As of June 3, 2019, this period of abstinence or deferral was reduced to 3 months.
- Navigating through this policy relaxation, we wanted to better understand if gay, bisexual, queer and other MSM living in Canada were willing to donate blood if they were eligible.

## HOW DID WE RESEARCH THIS?

- We interviewed 39 gay, bisexual, queer, and other MSM who were HIV-negative living in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, all recruited from the Engage study.
- We talked with these men about their willingness to donate blood in the future if they were eligible under new blood donation policies.
- These interviews happened about 1-year before the policy was changed to the current 3-month deferral period.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- The majority of participants viewed MSM-specific blood donation policies as discriminatory.
- Most men considered themselves “low risk” for HIV and other STIs and thought they would be “safe” blood donors.
- Most participants indicated that they would be willing to donate blood if they were eligible, noting that it would give them a sense of personal satisfaction and pride to be able to help others.
- However, some men noted they were not interested in donating blood because it was not a high priority issue for them or because of the history of feeling discriminated against by a policy that was stigmatizing and not based on science.

### FOR THE FULL OPEN ACCESS PUBLICATION, PLEASE SEE:

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*I feel like it's really important. I feel like there's a lot that my donation can do for people.*

**(30S, TORONTO)**

*I would love to give blood if it's within my power, absolutely.*

**(20S, VANCOUVER)**

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS?

Our research findings have implications for the work of Canada's blood operators, Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec. Moving forward, these organizations should:

1. Our data suggest that many GBM may be willing to donate blood if they became eligible under existing or modified policies.
2. However, considerable repair work is required by Canada's blood operators to build trust with diverse GBM communities.
3. While the recent policy shift to a 3-month, time-based deferral for MSM represents a sign of progress for some of the men we interviewed, this change will not resolve the fundamental issue of perceived discrimination.
4. Our findings support the recommendations made to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health that the "Government of Canada end all discriminatory practices related to blood, organ and tissue donation for MSM and trans people and adopt donor screening policies that are evidence-based, gender neutral, and behaviour-based" (June 2019).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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*It used to be a lot more important, but I just feel excluded so why bother? But I've kind of given up on the fight with that. Yeah. It feels like, I don't know, I think I would still do it if it came up again but at this point, I don't think it's going to change*  
**(40S, VANCOUVER)**

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<https://rdcu.be/bG8wx>

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