

DNA

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SEXIEST MEN alive '25

The year of "slutty little glasses", zaddys, twinks and twunks, heroes, trailblazers and young guns, the genetically blessed, the creatively talented, swimwear models with swagger, and wide-eyed Hollywood hunks.

+ YOU ARE LOVED

How do we help save the lives of gay, bi, trans and queer men?

#308

You Are Loved

Suicide, addiction, and accidental drug overdoses are claiming the lives of gay, bi, trans and queer men at an alarming rate in LGBTQIA+ communities around the world. Gay men are more likely to die prematurely from suicide and drug-related deaths than straight men.

In 2024, a British non-profit organisation, You Are Loved, was launched, hoping to reverse this disturbing trend, and help those going through the grieving process after the death of a loved one.

Founder Marc Svensson spoke to DNA about why he felt "an overwhelming need to act", and three gay men, impacted by the issues, tell their personal stories.

Feature MARC ANDREWS


You Are Loved Founder, Marc Svensson.

DNA: What was the catalyst for founding You Are Loved?
Marc Svensson: After 20 years in London, 12 of those immersed in studying and working as a social psychologist focused on LGBTQ+ mental health, I've witnessed far too many instances of poor mental health, addiction and sudden, premature loss within our community. In recent years, things have felt especially dire. In the past two years alone, I know of 22 gay or queer men who have died by suicide or accidental drug overdose.

What's going on? What's contributing to this situation?
There are several factors. There are the lingering impacts of the pandemic and lockdowns, and the general turbulence of the world right now. But these tragedies are far more common in the LGBTQ+ community than in the general population. I felt an overwhelming need to act, and that led me to found You Are Loved to try to make a meaningful difference and help prevent more lives from being lost. My own age group, the forties, is where both suicide and drug-related deaths peak.

Since the advent of PrEP, there's been a shift in gay men's health care away from HIV/AIDS and STI management to mental health. Is You Are Loved part of that evolution?
Absolutely. Since the introduction of PrEP, we've seen a noticeable shift among HIV/AIDS charities and organisations. Many are now placing a much greater emphasis on mental health and overall well-being, which is necessary and encouraging. While there's still work to be done around HIV prevention and eliminating the stigma that persists, the reality is that today, far more gay, bi, and queer men lose their lives to suicide and drug-related causes than to HIV/AIDS. Our mission is to address these urgent mental health challenges head-on, supporting our community in ways that reflect the current realities we face.

Have you personally been affected?
I haven't lost any close friends but I've lost count of the number of acquaintances and people I've known from the scene over the years who are no longer with us. It's heartbreaking. On a more personal level, several good friends of mine have struggled with drug addiction and mental health challenges, so I've witnessed firsthand just how tough and dangerous that road can be. These experiences have given me a deep understanding of the pain and complexity behind these issues.

Do you think that suicide and drug-related deaths are somewhat hidden in our community, like a shameful secret?
Absolutely. These deaths are highly stigmatised, both within our community and the wider world. Part of that comes from the perception that suicide and drug-related deaths are somehow "self-inflicted", which only deepens the shame and silence around them. This urgently needs to change, and that's exactly what drives the work we do at You Are Loved.

These tragedies are happening at alarming rates, especially in big cities like London or Sydney. Yet there's a tendency to normalise them or treat them as an unfortunate but inevitable part of our world. We are determined to challenge that narrative. We're shining a light on these issues, raising awareness,

creating safe spaces and providing tools so we can talk openly, support each other and heal together. A core part of our mission is to break down the sense of "othering" – to stop seeing these deaths as something that happens to "other people" or "other parts" of the community. The reality is that so many of us will struggle with mental health or substance misuse at some point in our lives. It's time we acknowledge that, support one another and work together to end the stigma.

> "Today, far more gay men lose their lives to suicide and drug-related causes than to HIV/AIDS.

You're also working with police and government agencies to improve how they report deaths, correct?.

Yes. When we launched You Are Loved, one of our priorities was to gather evidence on the high rates of suicide and drug-related deaths in our community. That step was crucial. Without solid data to show the scale of this epidemic, it's almost impossible to advocate for the resources and funding we need to address it. At the time, there was no existing data, since neither sexual orientation nor gender identity is recorded on UK death certificates, or in most countries, for that matter.

What has changed now?

In April this year, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a ground-breaking report linking suicide statistics for England and Wales with sexual orientation data from the 2021 census. Unsurprisingly, the findings were stark. LGBTQ+ people are 2.2 times more likely to die by suicide than the general population. Now we're working to see if a similar analysis can be done for drug-related deaths and sexual orientation. This is challenging because GHB/GBL – a drug primarily used within the gay/bi/queer community, and responsible for many accidental overdoses – isn't routinely tested for in suspected drug-related deaths. Changing toxicology testing standards is tough, but it's a challenge we will tackle.

Suicide and drug-related deaths are often grouped together, but how different are the two issues?

We've intentionally discussed suicide and drug-related deaths together because they often share many of the same root causes – stigma, shame, discrimination, loneliness and isolation. These underlying factors create a common thread, but it's also important to recognise there are distinct differences between the two. The reasons someone may choose to end their life are incredibly diverse and complex. They can range from biological and hormonal imbalances that lead to severe depression, to traumatic life experiences that make someone feel that death is a preferable option to continuing to live.



Davide shows off his You Are Loved T-shirt.

Understanding and appreciating this complexity is crucial. When we look at the higher suicide rates among gay, bi and queer men, compared to straight men, the driving forces are often the stigma, shame and discrimination that come with being part of a minority group.

What about in the chemsex scene?

Drug use, misuse and addiction in our community can often be traced back, at least in part, to those same societal pressures. That's the common denominator. Poorer mental health, born out of stigma and discrimination, leads to both higher suicide rates and higher rates of drug misuse, as some people turn to substances to cope or self-medicate.

It's also important to say not all drug use is problematic. Many gay men use recreational drugs simply to have fun, relax, or lower their inhibitions with friends, just as many people do with alcohol, which is also a drug. The issue isn't drug use in itself, but the context and reasons behind it, especially when it's used as a way to manage pain or mental health struggles.

What has been the response of the LGBTQ+ community to You Are Loved?

Because the cause resonates with so many across the breadth and width of the community, the response has been incredible and keeps >>



UDAY'S STORY

MOEZ/ADOBESTOCK

Real estate manager Uday on how he recovered after his partner's suicide.

DNA: What were the circumstances of your partner's death?
Uday: In 2009, my then partner of almost four years, Jonathan, took his life in our bed, in our home, while I was abroad.
That must have been very hard. How did that affect you?
The immediate aftermath of Jonathan's suicide was a complete emotional paralysis. I remember feeling simultaneously numb and overwhelmed. My sister picked me up from the airport, and those first days were a blur of phone calls, bureaucratic procedures and an overwhelming sense of unreality.

People would ask questions and I'd find myself repeating details mechanically, feeling completely detached from my own experience.

The guilt was suffocating. Even though his sister and my friends repeatedly told me it wasn't my fault, it was hard to shake the feeling that I could have done something more. The last conversation we had – where I suggested we might end our relationship – played on repeat in my mind. Was this my fault? Could I have prevented this? These questions haunted me.
Could an organisation like You Are Loved have helped you at the time?
It would have been so helpful because it is specific to gay men. At the time, the support groups I attended in London seemed somewhat impersonal and irrelevant to my situation. I wasn't comfortable talking honestly about details of my and Jonathan's life together because I would have to explain too many things about gay relationships to people there who didn't understand.

My conditioning left me fearful of homophobia within these very heterosexual and occasionally religious groups.
What does You Are Loved offer?
It offers support tailored to the needs of queer men. The support groups are open forums where you don't have to explain anything and are free to be yourself. In addition, You Are Loved can direct people to therapists and other professionals who will understand queer men's specific issues.
You've now helped raised money for You Are Loved.
I have been involved, largely in fundraising, and through my family's charitable foundation. I am proud to say we were the first to support You Are Loved in a big way.

> "You can find a way back to happiness.

What advice would you give to anyone who has gone through what you have?
Professional support is important, but it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. The first therapist might not be right. The first support group might feel wrong, but that doesn't mean all therapy is useless. It means finding the right approach for you.

You can find a way back to happiness. That doesn't mean the grief is gone, just that the burden becomes easier to bear. I embraced healing and allowed myself to be happy, to love again. To anyone who is going through something similar, I hope you can find the same support.



The You Are Loved merch delivers a welcome message.

>> building. Most people know someone who has died in this way, and so many people are eager to volunteer or get involved. I'm not the only one who feels passionately about addressing this issue.

That said, we encountered some resistance when our grant application to a local London borough Pride fund was rejected. They reasoned that addressing high suicide rates and drug-related deaths in the LGBTQ+ community wasn't "relevant" to Pride, which they felt should focus on celebration and the history of the LGBTQ+ movement.

What about the wider community?

The response from the mainstream media has been positive so far. I took part in an ITVX news documentary about the risks of chemsex earlier in the year, which has been viewed on YouTube over 121,000 times. The BBC covered the launch of our new directory last month, both on the BBC London news and in an article.

You set up the Ask Bobby LGBTQ+ directory as part of You Are Loved. How does that help the community?

One of the factors that can contribute to increased drug use and declining mental health in our community is the environment in which we socialise and build relationships. The party scene has long been a central part of gay culture, and for many, it's the default way to make friends and connect. It's not for everyone and can leave some feeling lonely or isolated, even in a crowd. >>


Marc and husband Luca.

Ask Bobby
You Are Loved recently set up, Ask Bobby, a free LGBTQ+ directory for community and support. The directory is named after the late dancer/TV personality, Robin Windsor, who passed away suddenly in February 2024. Robin's close friends called him Bobby.

"We named the directory in his honour, because when the world felt heavy, Robin was the person many turned to," says Marc.

>> Ask Bobby is designed to help queer people discover alternative ways to socialise and build meaningful connections beyond the party scene.

There are many incredible LGBTQ+ organisations, grassroots initiatives, and social groups across the UK, but often people don't know where to find them, especially when they're struggling or feeling alone. Our directory changes that by making these resources easy to access. In addition to highlighting community initiatives, Ask Bobby also features mental health and drug misuse support organisations, so people can quickly find the right help when they need it most. It's about creating more pathways to connection.

The organisation was set up to target gay, bi and queer men, but is there a need to expand that remit?

We began by focusing on the GBQ community because the statistics are so stark. Suicide rates are three times higher in men than in women, and deaths linked to chemsex-related drugs predominantly affect GBQ men. We planned to expand our reach to include queer women and trans people by partnering with organisations that already have expertise in those areas.

With the recent surge in hostility towards the trans community, driven by both US and UK governments, a small but vocal group of LGB people are turning their backs on queer and trans folks, so it felt even more urgent to make our stance clear. We are here for the entire LGBTQ+ community because these deaths are not limited to any one group. They affect all of us. Our mission is to support and uplift every part of our community without exception.

Bereavement support groups are also an intrinsic part of You Are Loved.

A death from suicide or drugs is always deeply traumatic for those left behind, and the stigma surrounding these kinds of losses can make grieving even more complicated and isolating.

For queer people, the idea of attending a general bereavement support group can be daunting. They may worry about having to explain the specifics of their loss or fear being judged by others who don't share the same context or experiences. That's why we created queer-specific bereavement support groups at You Are Loved. They offer a free, weekly space led by therapists who specialise in both bereavement and LGBTQ+ issues. Our sessions provide a non-judgmental, safe environment where people can share their grief, connect with others, and find solidarity and support as they navigate the healing process together.

> "Asking for support isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of courage and the first step towards healing.

Where do you see your organisation heading in the future?

A year from now, I see You Are Loved as the >>

OWAIN'S STORY

Owain was so disillusioned by the chemsex scene, he set up his own Big Gay Out organisation.



BEN REASON

DNA: How have you been affected by suicide and/or the chemsex scene?
Owain: When I first started going out in London in 2007, I made friends with a guy I ended up dating. He led a wild party life and was friends with many of the party scene regulars. Within a few months of meeting, one of his closest friends, a trans woman, committed suicide. I attended her funeral, and it was a stark wake-up call. When I was navigating my identity and finding my place on the gay scene in London, I dabbled with drugs. It was part of the nightlife, a way to enhance experiences, or perhaps, looking back, a way to connect in an uninhibited way. Thankfully, I pulled back from that edge, but I saw others who didn't, or who struggled profoundly with it. There was a constant undercurrent of unspoken pain and a feeling that if you weren't "on it" you might be missing out, or worse, not be accepted.

> My coping mechanism was to self-medicate!

How did you deal with this at the time?
There wasn't much conversation about mental health or drug use beyond a certain superficiality. My coping mechanism was to simply ignore it and self-medicate. I've been inclined towards unhealthy relationships with things – sex addiction, work addiction, drinking too much at times. Looking back, I see a young man trying his best with the tools he had but fundamentally lacking the broader support systems that are slowly starting to emerge now.

You started your own org in London, Big Gay Out. What's that?
Having gone through my own journey and seeing these persistent gaps for genuine, positive connections, I felt compelled to create something different. Big Gay Out (BGO) was born from that need. We're a community specifically for gay, bi, trans, and queer men who want fun, connection and friendship beyond the party scene. We achieve this by running a wide variety of social events – everything from climbing, pottery, yoga, cinema, hiking and brunches to board games, museum visits and creative workshops. We host "real-talk" discussions. Big Gay Out is proud to be one of the organisations listed on You Are Loved's Ask Bobby directory, further signposting our community to those seeking healthier connections. We've built a strong 500-plus member base, have a packed calendar of diverse events, and are dedicated to deepening the connections within our existing community in London. It's an exciting time!



Owain and members of the extended Big Gay Out organisation.

Are there plans to expand Big Gay Out in other regions or territories?
Absolutely! The need for genuine, health-positive community spaces is not unique to London – it's a global need within the LGBTQ+ community. We believe the core principles of fun, connection and friendship beyond the party scene are universally beneficial.

What have been some of the most important things you've learned since setting up Big Gay Out?
The power of authentic connection. It sounds simple, but in a world increasingly driven by digital interactions, people are truly hungry for real-life, meaningful engagement. I also learned the importance of leading with values. Because BGO is built on kindness, compassion and inclusivity, those values attract the right people and repel the energy we don't want.

Another learning is patience and perseverance. Building community takes time and consistent effort, but the rewards are immeasurable.

Finally, understanding you can't be everything to everyone, but you can be everything to the people who truly resonate with your mission. I believe that by focusing on genuine care, inclusivity and providing spaces for authentic connection, we can build stronger, healthier and happier LGBTQ+ communities around the world.

> People are truly hungry for real-life, meaningful engagement...

What advice would you give to anyone else who has gone through what you have?
Firstly, you are not alone. What you feel, what you've experienced... so many of us have walked a similar path.

Seek out genuine connection. Tools like Ask Bobby are now there to help you find precisely the healthier communities and support initiatives you need, like Big Gay Out.

Be kind to yourself. The journey of self-acceptance and healing is rarely linear. Acknowledge your struggles without judgment.

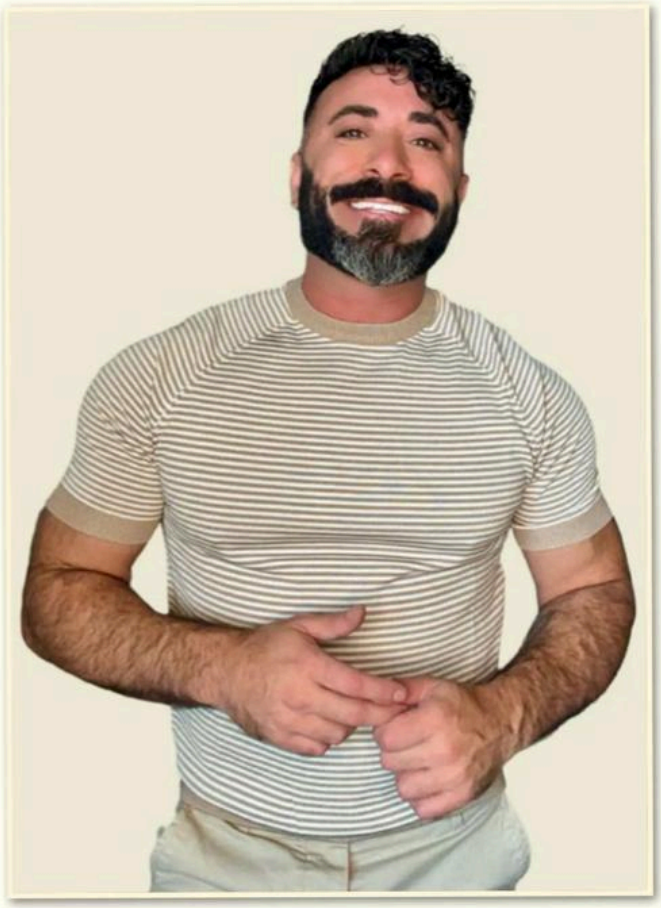
Dare to create what's missing. If you can't find the community or support you need, you have the power within you to start building it. Even small steps make a difference.

Your vulnerability is a strength. Sharing your story, when you're ready, can be the most powerful way to connect with others and reduce stigma.

biggayout.org

DAVIDE'S STORY

Davide channelled his grief into helping others through bereavement groups.



DNA: You lost your ex-partner and best friend, Robin Windsor. Can you tell us about what happened?

Davide: Losing Robin has been the hardest thing I've ever had to face. There isn't a day that I don't think of him. I still hear his voice, his laugh. He spoke publicly about his mental health struggles, but you never think it will come to this. Losing him shattered something fundamental in me. His death wasn't just grief, it was a kind of unravelling. It forced me to confront things I'd been avoiding around my own mental health.

How did you deal with losing Robin initially?

Badly, at first. I defaulted to denial, isolation, shame and pretending I was fine. I pushed people away. I hid my struggles behind smiles and kept myself busy.

Eventually, I started to reach out, and therapy helped. Opening up to friends helped. Having more honest conversations helped. It wasn't about fixing everything overnight; it was about learning to live in the grey, to sit with discomfort and accept that healing isn't linear. It was around that time that Marc Svensson of You Are Loved reached out. He shared his vision for the organisation, and I knew immediately I wanted to be involved. I wanted to be part of something that actively addresses these problems and helps save lives.

So many of us have been affected by these issues.

It's difficult *not* to be affected. Almost every other week, it feels like we hear of someone we know, or someone we were once acquainted with, who has died from accidental drug misuse or suicide. It's getting to the point where you can't help but wonder – who's next?

What did the chemsex scene mean for you?

It's been part of my life on and off. It's tied up in ADHD, neurodiversity and childhood imprinting around sex, shame and secrecy. In the past, I fell into patterns of chasing connection through it, usually at the cost of my own well-being. It's been a cycle of relief and regret, hyperfocus and shame. A few years ago, I started doing the work to understand why I kept going back and, slowly, I've changed those patterns.

How would having an organisation like You Are Loved have helped you at the time?

It would've helped me feel less alone, especially during the grieving process. Their bereavement sessions connect you with others going through the same thing. In those darkest moments, you convince yourself no one else feels this way.

The Ask Bobby directory, named in memory of Robin, connects people to resources, groups, and support. It's a hand on your back when you feel like you're falling. For anyone navigating grief, chemsex recovery, or suicidal thoughts, it's a reminder – you are not broken, you are not alone, and you are still worthy of love.



Davide launching the Ask Bobby website, named in memory of his friend.

> "You can't help but wonder – who's next?

What advice would you give to someone going through what you have?

Don't rush to be "better". Grief, addiction and shame don't follow neat timelines. Be patient. Surround yourself with people who remind you of who you are, not just who you were at your lowest. Try to break the cycles that led you astray. Healing isn't always loud or dramatic – sometimes it's just about quietly showing up for yourself every day.

>> UK's #1 online resource for queer people seeking support, community and information about mental health. Whether you're searching for a local queer board game group, harm reduction advice about drugs, or a therapist who truly understands LGBTQ+ experiences, you'll be able to find it all through our platform. We'll also be running weekly, in-person peer support groups and community discussion sessions, not just in London, but across the UK.

Looking ahead five years, our vision is to take this global. We've already received requests to set up similar structures in Australia, Malta and Spain. We want to create a world where queer people everywhere have access to the support, resources, and sense of belonging they deserve.

Is there a way to get government agencies involved, financially or otherwise?

Yes. Our organisation is built around four main pillars: the community and support directory, peer support groups, community conversation events and RCL (Research, Campaigning and Lobbying). Through the RCL pillar, we collaborate with various stakeholders to collect data highlighting the rates of sudden, premature deaths in our community. We are also helping develop LGBTQ+ mental health and chemsex needs assessments, and lobbying the government to provide more funding and resources for NGOs focused on prevention-oriented, community-based solutions like ours.

How much of your time does You Are Loved take up?

Honestly, You Are Loved takes up all my time and then some! There's so much to do, with countless ideas, research projects and campaigns we're eager to launch. Right now, we don't have the time or resources to do everything. On top of that, I'm in the final stages of writing my PhD thesis, something that's taken nearly a decade to complete alongside running LGBTQ+ mental health start-ups. It's a lot to juggle, but I'm not complaining. My passion for this work keeps me going, and I genuinely believe we can make a difference. That sense of purpose makes every challenge worthwhile.

Has this project been a challenge for your own mental health?

I won't sugarcoat it, yes. One of my defining traits, which I see as both a strength and a weakness, is my naïve optimism when diving into new projects. I tend to underestimate how much work is involved. That habit can put a lot of pressure on my own well-being. With You Are Loved, there's an added layer of difficulty because of the serious and often traumatic issues we're tackling.

Since launching, many people have reached out to me for support with their own or a loved one's mental health or addiction struggles. While this is precisely what the organisation is here for, and I find it deeply fulfilling to help, it's difficult not to be affected by it. Being able to offer support and empathy without absorbing too much of the pain and trauma that's shared with me is a delicate balance.

How do you relax, unwind and enjoy life?

I can't say I've perfected the art of relaxation just yet! But human connection is what brings me the most joy and fulfilment. Beyond my partner, I'm lucky to have an incredible network of friends whom I love dearly. Being surrounded by laughter, good conversation, and genuine connection is what keeps me grounded and happy.

My partner, Luca, is incredible and has been a dedicated supporter of everything we're doing, not least because we're living on his salary while I build You Are Loved. With over 20 years of experience in the fashion industry, he's generously volunteering his spare time to lead our merchandise department. I couldn't have done this without his support.

What truly makes me feel loved is people. I'm naturally social and extroverted, so my husband, family, and friends mean the absolute world to me. I find a deep sense of love and connection in those spontaneous moments and conversations with people I don't know – those unexpected interactions with strangers in unusual places. Relationships don't have to be long-lasting to be meaningful. Sometimes, a single conversation with a stranger can leave you feeling loved and appreciated. Those moments can stick with you for years.

> “The more we talk, the less power shame and silence have over us.

So, for people who are struggling, what are the first steps?

My advice is to reach out for help. One of the most significant barriers to reaching out is the fear that those closest to you will see you differently; that your struggles will come to define how your loved ones perceive you. This fear is rooted in the stigma that surrounds mental health challenges and addiction. You don't have to tell everyone, but sharing your burden with even one trusted person can make a world of difference. If you don't feel you have someone in your immediate circle who would understand, remember there are resources and organisations specifically set up to support people just like you.

The only way we can break down this stigma is by being honest with each other, talking and sharing our experiences and struggles. The more we talk, the less power shame and silence have over us.

Most importantly, know you are not alone. Many others have walked a similar path and are ready to help if you reach out. Asking for support isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of courage and the first step towards healing. •

Are Drugs The Cause Or The Symptom?

The recent death of two *Drag Race UK* personalities, The Vivienne and AJ Bediako, drew the mainstream media and political attention to urgent issues within our community.

"While these tragedies can spark important conversations, meaningful action from decision-makers has historically been lacking, says Marc. "For example, rather than investing in effective harm reduction strategies, the typical political response has been to reclassify drugs into more severe categories. We saw this with cannabis in 2015 and GHB in 2021. There is now renewed debate in parliament about moving ketamine from a Class B to a Class A drug, yet there's little evidence that reclassifying drugs reduces usage or saves lives."

Discover You Are Loved

Visit youare-loved.com for their latest initiatives and programs.
Follow them on Instagram @youareloved.cic

You Are Loved relies on donations, grants, and merchandise sales to keep its work going. Branded T-shirts, caps and tote bags are on sale to raise funds and spread the word. Donate or buy merch at youare-loved.com.

If This Story Has Raised Issues For You...

Lifeline.org.au
T: 13 11 14 for 24/7 crisis support.

Beyondblue.org.au
T: 1300 22 4636

Qlife.org.au
T: 1800 184 527

Trans Hub
transhub.org.au

Search "Queer and LGBTQI+ community support services in Australia" at www.ABC.net.au

USA Telehealth
lgbtqtherapyspace.com/

The Trevor Project
thetrevorproject.org/get-help/

UK
mind.org.uk/