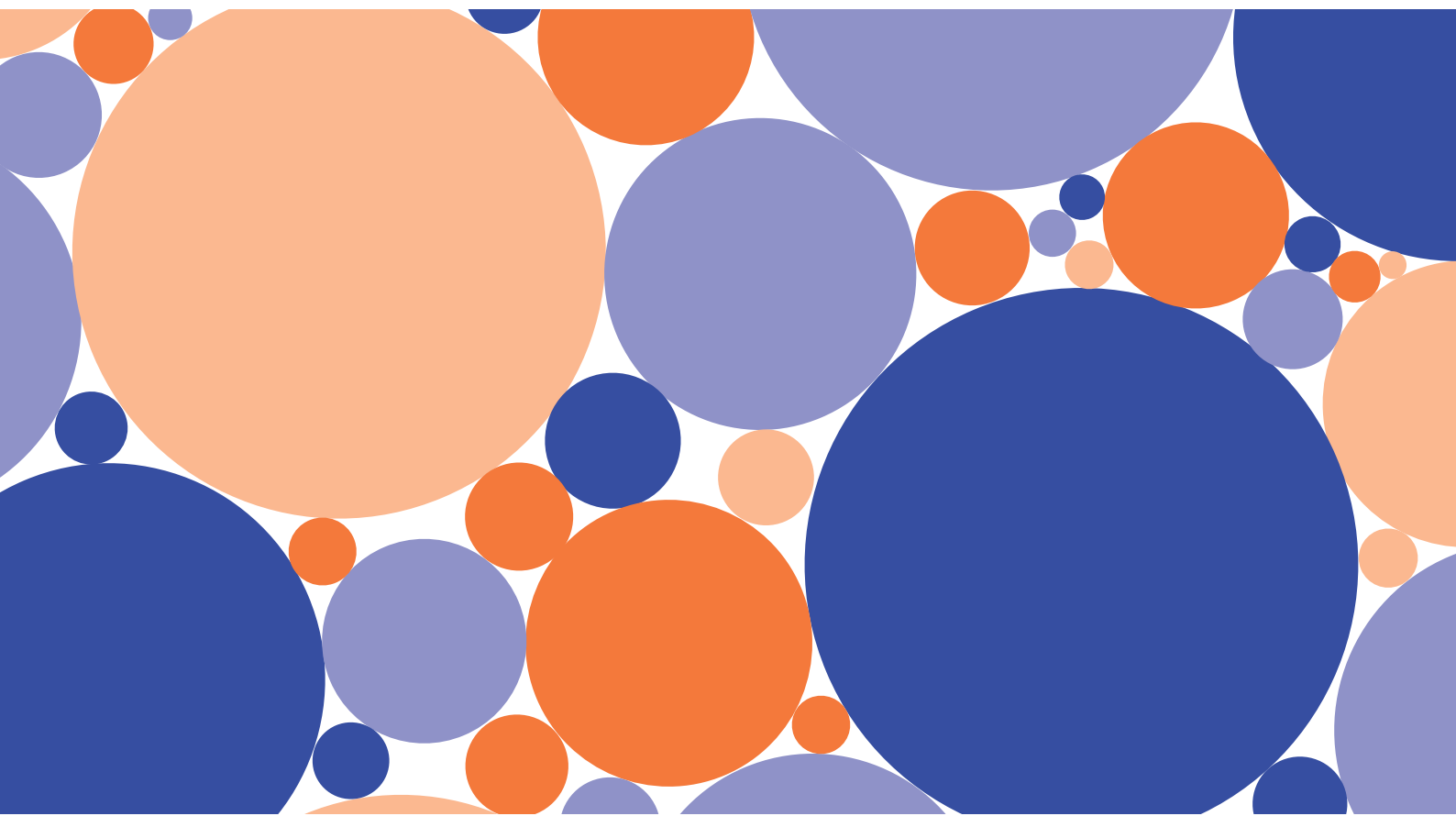


Briefing 3

Young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people





(a) Specific issues for young LGB people

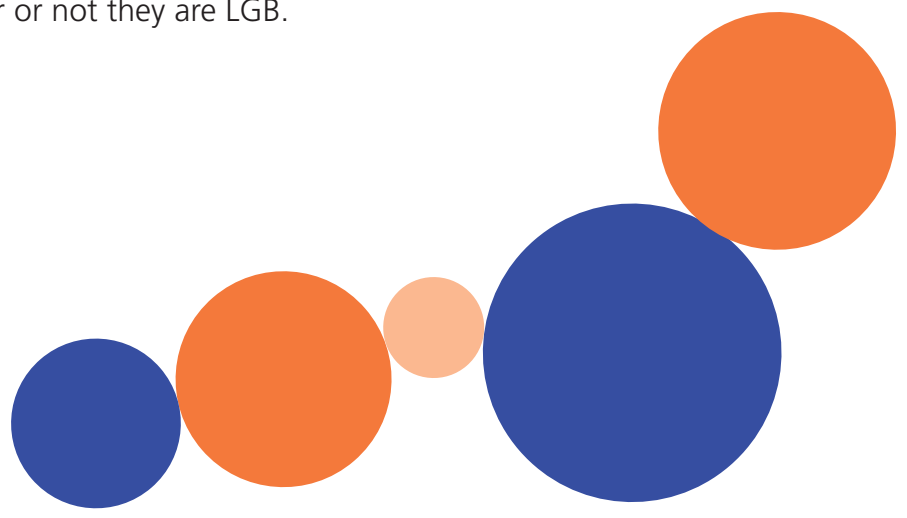
Young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people can be vulnerable to a number of health risks because of people's reactions to their identity. They may also feel stigmatised; there are very few role models for young LGB people, and many conclude that society will not approve of them.

Many young people know they are lesbian, gay or bisexual by the age of 11 or 12, or have feelings of being different.¹ However, some do not come out to someone else until they are 15 or 16. This period (11–16 years old) has been described as the **isolation years** and is the most crucial for targeting support and information.

Homophobic bullying is an increasing problem in schools; the word 'gay' is the most frequent term of abuse in playgrounds. Evidence suggests that LGB young people, and those perceived to be LGB, may be more at risk of bullying.² Between 30% and 50% of young people in secondary schools attracted to people of the same sex will have directly experienced homophobic bullying, compared with 10–20% of young people who have experienced general bullying.³

ChildLine⁴ estimates that around 2,700 young people access their services each year to talk about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying. The most common problems talked about were homophobic bullying and fear of telling their parents about their sexual orientation. Furthermore, young people with LGB parents sometimes experience bullying.

These problems are exacerbated if an adult dismisses their sexual orientation. Some young people report that adults, including health and social care workers, try and 'solve the problem' by claiming that the young person is too young to know whether or not they are LGB.






(b) What are young LGB people's health needs?

Mental health

Experiences of homophobic bullying, as well as not having someone to talk to, can have an impact on young LGB people's mental health.

- Young LGB people are at increased risk of mental health problems.⁵
- Depression was the most common mental health problem.⁶
- Young LGB people are more likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers.⁷
- Increased suicide risk is associated with:
 - identifying as gay or bisexual at a younger age;
 - boys (or girls) who do not conform to gender stereotypes;
 - conflict with parents or peers about their sexual orientation;
 - not coming out;
 - being told by other adults that their feelings are transitory or just a phase; and
 - leaving home because of negative attitudes to their sexual orientation.

Healthy lifestyles

- Lesbian and bisexual girls are more likely to smoke than their heterosexual peers.^{8,9}
 - Illicit drugs (eg methamphetamine) may be an increased risk for some young gay and bisexual men.¹⁰
 - Lesbian and bisexual girls are more likely to have consumed alcohol in the past month.¹⁰
 - Lesbian and bisexual girls are one and a half times more likely to have engaged in binge drinking in the past year.¹⁰
 - Lesbian and bisexual girls are nearly three times as likely to have consumed a first alcoholic drink before age 12.¹⁰
- 



Violence and victimisation

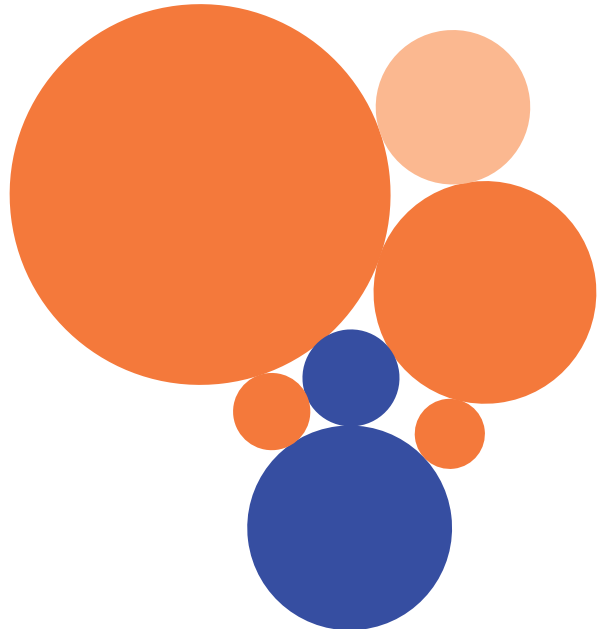
- Perceptions of discrimination and experiences of victimisation are associated with psychological distress.¹¹
- Young LGB people are at risk of violence and victimisation. They are more likely to face verbal abuse, isolation, teasing and physical assault both in schools and on the streets:¹²
 - 78% of those under the age of 18 had experienced verbal abuse;¹³
 - 23% had been attacked by other pupils.¹³

Sexual behaviour and the risk of HIV

Young gay men are becoming sexually active from the age of 14 and may not be aware of health risks from unprotected sex. They may also not have the assertiveness to practise safer sex by using a condom.

The Department of Health funds the Terrence Higgins Trust through its CHAPS (Community HIV and AIDS Prevention strategy) programme to address younger gay and bisexual men; further details are available at: www.ygm.org.uk

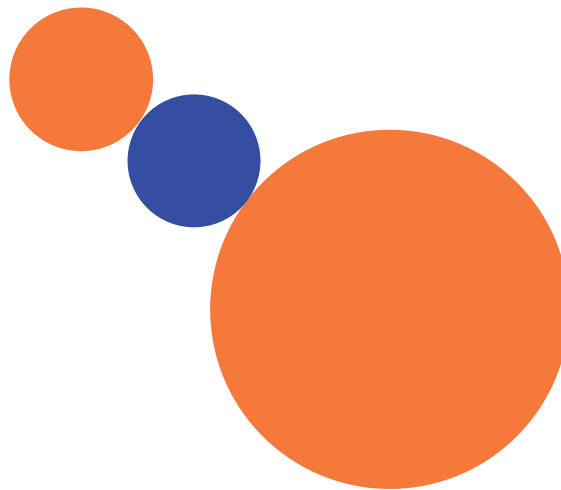
All schools should have a sex and relationship education (SRE) policy. The Department for Children, Schools and Families' *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*¹⁴ is clear that schools should make sure that the needs of all pupils, whatever their developing sexuality, are met in the SRE programmes. SRE should also cover safer sex, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

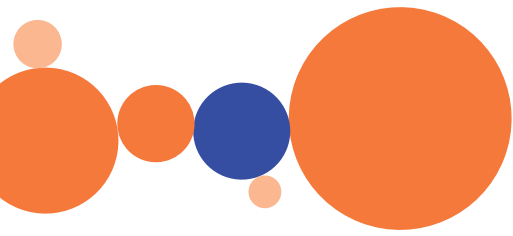


(c) Communicating and engaging with young LGB people

As few as 13% of young people have disclosed their sexual orientation to their healthcare provider.¹⁵

Young people who come out are often told by adults that their sexual orientation is 'just a passing phase'. When they have come out to a health professional, some have reported being dismissed or ridiculed. There are reports that some healthcare professionals have informed parents about a young person's sexual orientation without their consent. If a young LGB person's first experience with healthcare professionals is not positive, it may discourage future engagement with services in adult life. Young LGB people may have concerns about confidentiality; they will have health information needs and will need help with access to other services and community resources.





(d) Evidence and statistics

Mental health

In comparison with their heterosexual counterparts, young LGB people are:

- four times more likely to suffer major depression;⁵
- three times more likely to be assessed with generalised anxiety disorder.⁵

Young gay and bisexual men are:

- seven times more likely to have attempted suicide;⁷
- three times more likely to have suicidal intent.⁷

Healthy lifestyles

In comparison with heterosexual young women, lesbian and bisexual girls are:

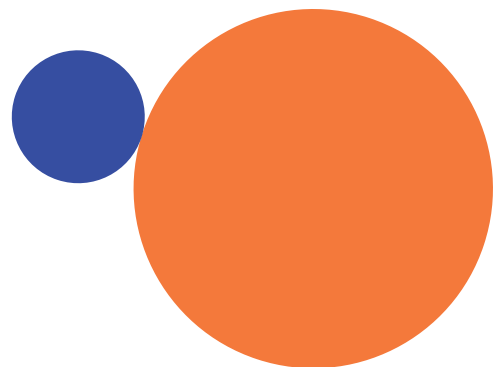
- almost 10 times more likely to smoke at least weekly;⁸
- twice as likely to have consumed alcohol in the past month.¹⁰

Young gay and bisexual men:

- may be more likely to use recreational drugs.¹⁶

Violence and victimisation

- LGB young people are at increased risk of verbal and physical abuse.¹¹



(e) Policy/legislation

Responding to and preventing homophobic bullying in schools (2007)

Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Safe to Learn (2007)

This initiative was launched by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It offers help in tackling homophobic bullying in schools.

Youth Matters: Next Steps (2006)

This policy includes a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that young people have access to a range of positive activities. The proposal 'something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to' needs to be relevant for young LGB and trans people.

National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (2004)

The mental health and psychological wellbeing of children and young people, Standard 9:

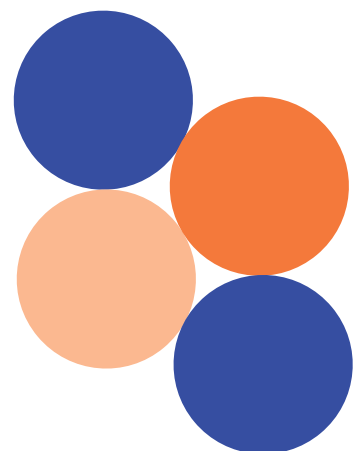
'Access to CAMHS [child and adolescent mental health services] should be available to all children and young people regardless of their age, gender, race, religion, ability, class, culture, ethnicity or sexuality.'

Every Child Matters (2003)

Strategies for tackling homophobic bullying are necessary to achieve the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

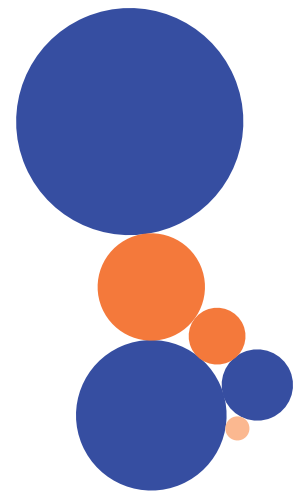
Sexual Offences Act 2000

The age of consent for gay men was lowered to 16: this is now the same as for heterosexuals.



Implications for service providers

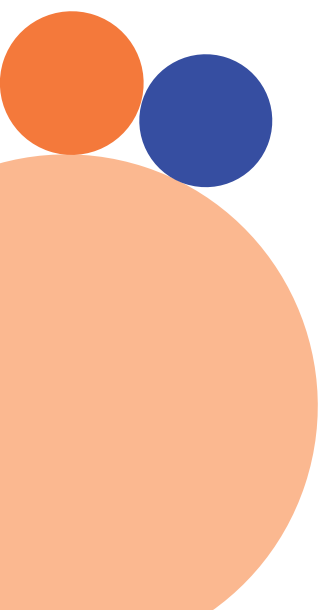
- Healthcare providers need to be aware of issues such as confidentiality and be able to provide relevant information for young LGB people.
- Healthcare providers need to understand how heterosexism and homophobia can contribute to mental health difficulties for young LGB people.
- Healthcare providers need skills to enable them to facilitate disclosure by young LGB people.
- Healthcare providers need to understand the increased risk of suicide and self-harm among young LGB people.
- Health promotion material that addresses issues surrounding the coming out process should be available in GP surgeries, for both young LGB people and their families and friends.
- GP surgeries should display resources and provide contact details for support organisations for young LGB people.



Implications for service commissioners and Health and Wellbeing Partnerships

The *NHS operating framework 2007/08* emphasises NHS commitment to equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.¹⁷ In the priorities for health and services, the document requires primary care trusts to use needs assessment to identify and address the specific needs of different groups in the population, including LGB people.

- Service commissioners need to be aware of the specific health risks for young LGB people so that they can commission appropriate services.
- Specific training and resources need to be available to support healthcare providers in delivering services for young LGB people.
- Health and Wellbeing Partnerships should consider the need for support and personal development opportunities for local young LGB people.
- Links and resources should be provided to assist professionals in signposting other services.



(f) Links and resources

For health professionals

Care Services Improvement Partnership

Knowledge Community (type 'LGBT' into the search box for relevant information).

<http://kc.csip.org.uk>

For young LGBT service users

Allsorts

Allsorts is a project based in Brighton to support young people who are LGBT or unsure of their sexual orientation.

www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/index.htm

Avert

Information for young LGBT people.

www.avert.org/youngindex.htm

Breakout Youth Project

An LGBT project based in Southampton for young people aged 15–25.

Tel: 02380 223344

Centre for HIV and Sexual Health

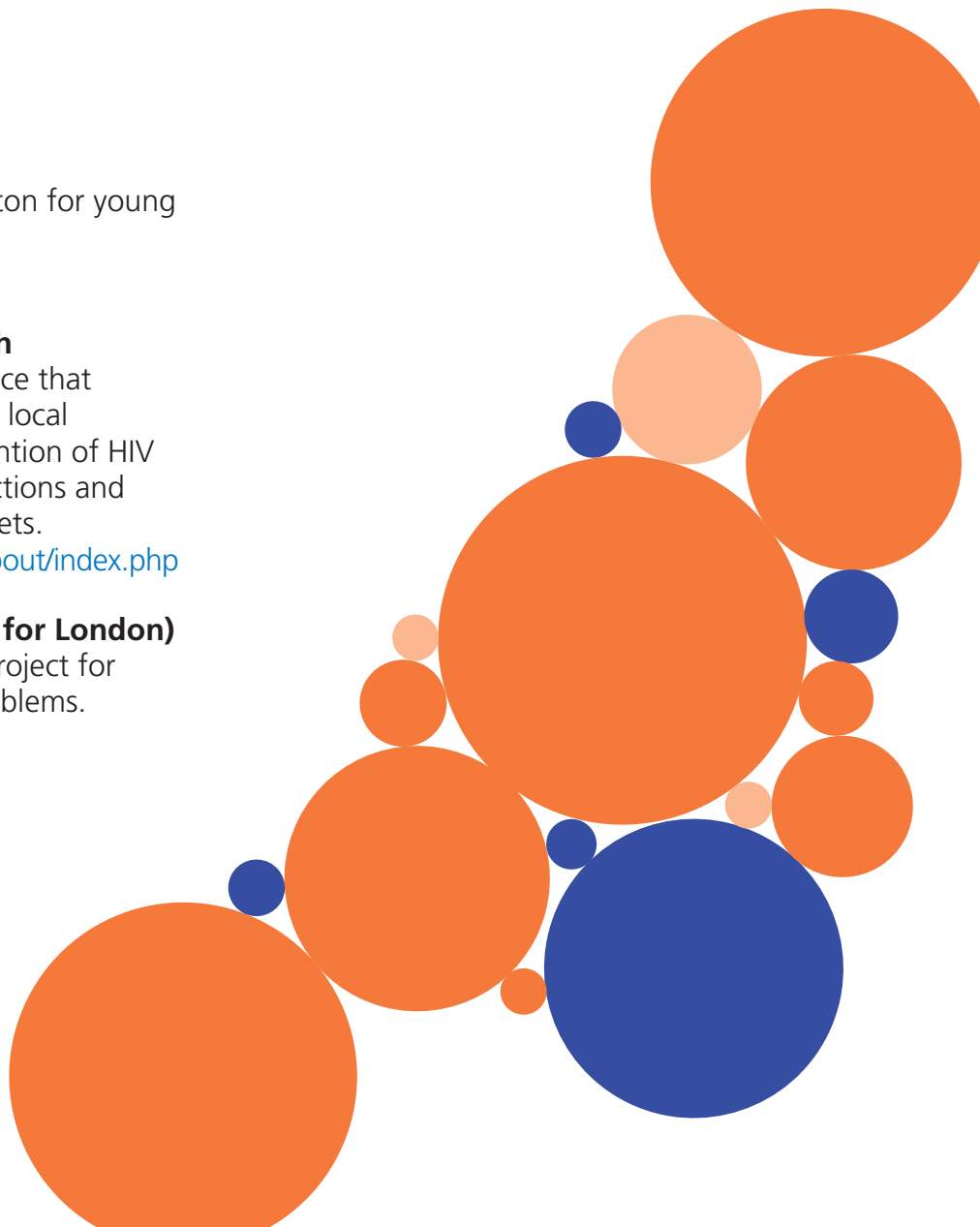
The centre is a Sheffield-based service that operates nationally as well as in the local community. Its work includes prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and provision of sex and education leaflets.

www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/about/index.php

DASL (Drug and Alcohol Service for London)

This service has a lesbian and gay project for young people with drug misuse problems.

www.alcoholast.org.uk



Freestyle

Freestyle exists to support young LGBT people to get a better deal from services in London. It provides online service details, news, information and good practice guidelines.

www.freestylelondon.org.uk

Gay and Lesbian Youth in Calderdale

GALYIC is a group designed to support LGB and trans young people aged 25 years or under.

www.galyic.org.uk

MosaicYouth

A project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and questioning youth in London. This is a free service based in Brent offering advice, support and one-to-one sessions to people aged 25 or under.

www.mosaicyouth.org.uk

Stonewall

Stonewall's Education for All campaign provides a list of agencies and resources for young people.

www.stonewall.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust

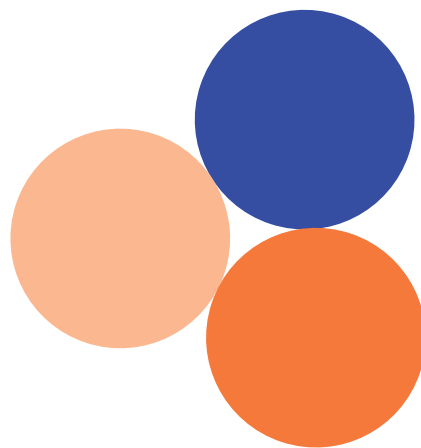
Website for younger gay and bisexual men.

www.ygm.org.uk/home

The UK alliance of LGBT young people

The Queer Youth Network is the UK's alliance of LGBT young people, run by youth for youth.

www.queeryouth.org.uk





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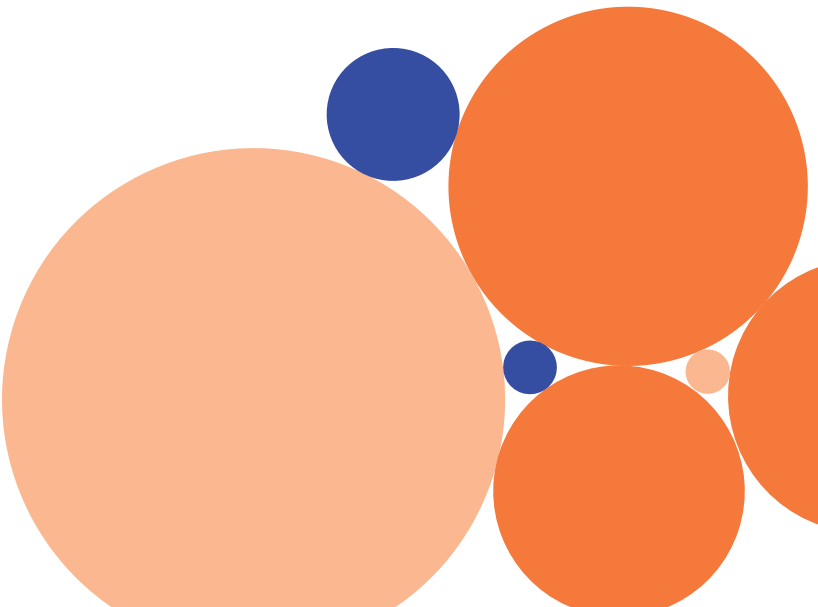
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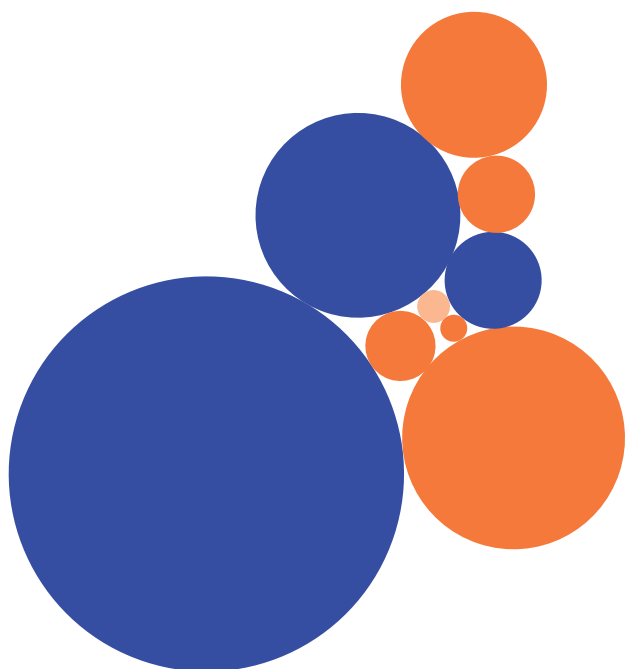
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