



**News from Louis Letourneau.**

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*[Louis Letourneau](#) looks at the big changes to life insurance policies.*

This year 2005 is turning out to be a very good year for us – not only is [Civil Partnership](#) just weeks away, but the long-standing discrimination that we have faced for years when applying for [life insurance](#) is, at long last, coming to end.

In my [article](#) a year ago, I talked about the issues facing gay men applying for life insurance – intrusive and highly personal questions being asked by life insurance providers, requests for [HIV](#) tests and, in some cases, higher premiums imposed based solely on our sexuality. The [Association of British Insurers](#) announced new guidelines last year, and the really good news is that these must be adopted by the life insurance plan providers by 30 September 2005. The new guidelines bring an end to discrimination, the so-called and much-loathed lifestyle questionnaire, automatic requirement for HIV testing and the assumption that if you are cabin crew, you must get a shag in every stopover.

In future, all applicants, male and female, single or married, will be asked whether or not they have been exposed to the risk of HIV infection, whether from unsafe sex, injecting a non-prescriptive drug, treatment with a blood product or blood transfusion, or surgery undertaken in certain countries. Answering “no” to the question that you haven’t been exposed to the risk of HIV infection should mean an end of the matter, with no more questions asked. Answering “yes” however, will still mean going for an HIV test.

The issue will be how you answer – what is unsafe sex, and can you recall if you’ve had unsafe sex within the past 5 years. Can you imagine sitting in front of a bank manager or mortgage advisor with your partner when he or she gets around to asking the question, and maybe having something come up that you’d rather your partner didn’t know about? What do you do? Answer truthfully and risk the showdown, or lie and invalidate the policy? The previous questions might have been discriminatory, but at least your partner knew you were gay. Perhaps heterosexuals will now begin to realise what we’ve been going through all these years – already articles are appearing that show that the questions aren’t liked.

In theory, the world of joint life plans will now be open to us, something in the past that has been taboo if lifestyle questionnaires and HIV tests were to be avoided. In some cases, joint life plans will be appropriate but just because they’re available, don’t assume automatically they will be best for you. There are other issues to be considered.

There is such a wide range of choice available now as to where you can buy life insurance, including via the internet or by phone directly from a provider - or when you go grocery shopping to Tesco or Asda. However, don’t assume that all providers are the same in their attitude – only time will tell how the life insurance industry will react to the enforced changes.

You might be surprised by the nature of the questions asked. How comfortable are you discussing the intimate details of your sex life with your bank manager or a life office representative? Are you willing to tell them how many STD's you've had in the last 5 years, when even your doctor doesn't know these details? Shouldn't you talk to the [experts](#) instead?

There's no such thing as a free lunch. Some providers might look cheap, but that's because they often don't give any advice. Can you be sure you're buying the right product for your needs? They don't care if you end up with a mortgage protection plan when you really need a level plan. Will they guide you through the plan that's best for you, the impact of [Civil Partnership](#), the use of flexible trust wording, etc, etc. Of course they won't, because often they can't, but we and other firms of [independent financial advisers](#), will. The simple message is, as always, get advice from the specialists.

The next few months will be very interesting. Are we now to just forgive all those life insurance companies which have previously been so homophobic, and support them with our business because they've had changes forced on them? I think not. The market might be completely open, but I, for one, will find it hard to forgive and forget that easily. Price just isn't everything.

**Louis Letourneau, MA** is an experienced independent financial adviser (IFA), specialist in financial planning and wealth management. He founded Rainbow Finance in 1995 and has consistently challenged financial companies and Government on their attitudes to gays, lesbians and same sex couples and was instrumental in the Inland Revenue to changing its guidance notes to recognise unmarried couples in pension benefits. His work has also resulted in life insurance companies starting to relax the discriminatory underwriting criteria toward gay men and people living with HIV. He was a founder of the Rainbow Research Project which surveys and educates private pension schemes in how they recognise unmarried couples on death benefits. He was also a founder member of the Stonewall Immigration Group (which campaigned for Immigration rights for same-sex couples, achieving a significant victory in April 1997) and helped set up the gaypartners.org initiative with gay.com in early 2001, campaigning for same-sex partnership rights. He speaks regularly on national and local radio.

For further advice on [Wills](#), [Life Assurance](#), [Tax](#), [Investments](#), [Pensions](#) and [Civil Partnerships](#), contact Isis Financial Planners:

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