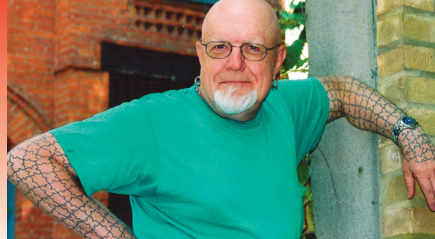


WHO ARE OLDER LGBT PEOPLE?



Long overlooked and invisible in society at large, older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender (LGBT) people are beginning to emerge as a distinct community. While LGBT seniors share many of the same aging-related issues as their heterosexual counterparts, they also confront special challenges as well. LGBT seniors may face social discrimination due to their age as well as their sexual orientation or gender identity. Older LGBT people often experience homophobia or transphobia when trying to access health care or elder care services, and they also frequently confront age discrimination within LGBT community organizations.

LGBT SENIORS ARE RESILIENT...

The experiences of marginalization and oppression have led many older LGBT people to develop strengths and resiliencies that have enabled them to survive and thrive. These include “passing” as heterosexual to avoid negative experiences, creating a “family of choice” to provide care and nurturing relationships and building strong support networks.

LGBT SENIORS ARE DIVERSE...

Despite media and societal stereotypes, older LGBT people come from diverse cultural backgrounds with regards to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, age, sexual orientation, religion or political affiliation.

Older LGBT people are present in all occupational categories and live in all types of communities: rural, suburban and urban. Some LGBT seniors are newcomers to Canada and some are from families who have been here for generations.



ONLINE RESOURCES

LGBT Aging Issues Network (LGAIN)

A constituent group of the American Society of Aging that provides an extensive list of LGBT aging resources.

www.asaging.org/LAIN

Gay & Lesbian Aging Research Project

A Canadian study exploring access and equity issues for gay and lesbian seniors.

www.mcgill.ca/interaction/aging

GLBTQ Education - Older GLBT People

A comprehensive website featuring links to LGBT aging resources.

www.youth-suicide.com/gay-bisexual/links9a.htm

Rainbow Health Ontario

A province-wide program providing LGBT health information, consultation, training, research and policy services.

www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca

Toronto Senior Pride Network

A network of service providers committed to addressing LGBT aging issues.

www.the519.org/spn

Ottawa Senior Pride Network

A network of service providers, LGBT community organizations, and LGBT community members 50+ years.

www.ospn-rfao.ca

Transgender Aging Network

A resource and support network for transgender elders and for professionals interested in transgender aging.

www.forge-forward.org/tan

OPENING THE CLOSET ON AGING



WORKING WITH OLDER LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSSEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE



SENIOR
PRIDE
NETWORK

LGBT AGING ISSUES

There is limited research that examines the experiences of older LGBT people, but the research that does exist has identified several key issues:

MANAGING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Many older LGBT people have to cope with the impact of a life-long exposure to stigma. During their lifespan, homosexuality was defined as both a crime and a mental disorder (as well, many trans people still live with the stigma of the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder), and early life experiences often included harassment, verbal and physical assaults. They may have been imprisoned or had treatment imposed on them. Their relationships were not legally recognized until recently, and many older LGBT people have spent much of their lives hiding their sexuality or gender identity.

HOUSING

LGBT seniors may experience homophobic attitudes and discrimination from other residents in retirement communities and assisted- living facilities. Older LGBT people who live in nursing homes often receive substandard care from providers who are not knowledgeable or sensitive to their needs. Transgender and transsexual people can be particularly vulnerable when their personal care is dependent on a provider who is uncomfortable or transphobic and face challenges of fitting into services where there is a division between males and females.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Many LGBT seniors experience rejection from their families of origin when they come out later in life, and they are often estranged from former spouses and children. LGBT seniors are more likely to live alone and without family ties, they are more likely to rely on close friends for social support. Older LGBT people who are partnered often face unequal treatment in hospital visitation, residential facilities, health decision making and nursing care policies, which further decreases their access to support.



SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation is prevalent among older LGBT people. Some LGBT seniors have internalized society's discomfort and hatred of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and many remain closeted and do not seek services or support. Many older LGBT people fear discrimination and animosity at senior s' agencies, in nursing homes and from health care providers and do not know where to go for help. Opportunities to meet with other older LGBT people for social and cultural interaction are limited, and there are usually few programs, activities and events geared to the interests of LGB seniors, programming aimed specifically at trans seniors is non-existent.

It is important for service providers to learn more about these unique challenges of older LGBT people, and to develop policies and programs to address them.

Be an Ally....

TIPS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Develop an organizational culture that includes sexual orientation and gender identity issues in your programs and services
- Create an empowering environment that celebrates the diversity and visibility of older LGBT people
- Provide training and educational opportunities for staff, volunteers and family members to learn about the lives and experiences of older LGBT people
- Develop an awareness of LGBT relationships, supportive networks and local community resources
- Create organizational policies and procedures that recognize and support both LGBT clients and staff
- Use inclusive language and images of older LGBT people in your program and educational materials
- Include LGBT communities, venues and events in your outreach activities to inform older LGBT people about your services