

# LGBT+ Older Adult Virtual Social Groups

A toolkit to create safe social spaces online

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# **LGBT+ Older Adults**

## **Virtual Social Groups:**

### **A toolkit to create safe social spaces online**

## **Purpose**

This toolkit provides resources to connect with isolated LGBT+ older adults through virtual social support groups, including strategies to create your own group, anticipate challenges, and implement solutions.

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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who explained their programs and discussed community implementation.

## About Us

The AIDS Network is a community based AIDS service organization that responds to the impact of HIV in the Halton, Haldimand, Norfolk, Brant and Hamilton areas. The organization's programs focus on reducing HIV transmission and supporting those living with HIV.

## Language

For the sake of clarity and for the purpose of this resource, LGBT+ will be used throughout and should be understood to be inclusive of the many gender/sexual identities that make up these diverse communities.

Please see Egale resource on language:

<https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Egales-Glossary-of-Terms.pdf>

This term 'queer' is not used in this document - some in the LGBT+ community have reclaimed the word, but it is not appropriate in this context since it was often used pejoratively to describe people in the community who are now older.

The age definition of 'older adult' is contested in existing literature and resources. In this document, the term may apply to anyone who identifies as being in their later years.

# Context

People in the LGBT+ community experience criminalization, moral-based discrimination and mental health pathologizing labels from an early age. The stigma and oppression of atavistic Canadian laws and attitudes [1] continue to confront community members as they enter their later years [4][5].

The fear of stigma and discrimination means that some people never felt safe to outwardly identify as LGBT+. Others who do identify as LGBT+ are subjected to a lifetime of estrangement, trauma, and grief [1]. With the passage of time, many people in the LGBT+ community choose to remain or become invisible to avoid various forms of harassment, intimidation, and discrimination [3].

## Why social groups?

Older adults in the LGBT+ community are less likely to have children and adequate support networks [1]. LGBT+ older adults may also be estranged from families of origin and lack related social opportunities [4]. Associated isolation increases their susceptibility to negative health outcomes [4], including mental health problems, physical health problems, increased stress, memory loss, and suicide [3].

Social support for LGBT+ older adults is considered an important intervention to improve well-being and decrease negative health outcomes [3].

Myth:  
older adults do  
not need social  
support

Fact:  
social groups  
can decrease  
loneliness and  
increase  
connection

# Why focus on LGBT+ older adults?

Specific services often do not exist for older adults in the LGBT+ community, even though they are more likely to experience loneliness and have smaller social support networks than other older adults [3]. Some LGBT+ older adults also may not be aware of the few resources and supports available given their social isolation [2].

A social support group that focuses on getting people in your region together will be beneficial for the overall health and well-being of the LGBT+ older adults in the area.

Providing a safe space for LGBT+ older adults to be able to be themselves, chat with other older adults and discuss issues specific to older adults will foster social connection and opportunities to address practical concerns.

## Why virtual groups?

Online meetings are a good solution for LGBT+ older adults who may have difficulty accessing in-person supports due to unfavourable transportation, weather, geography, and health and mobility issues [2]. Technology-based options may also mitigate stigma and fear which could pose barriers and access.

### *Virtual Resources*

- <https://egale.ca/awareness/video-chatting-tips-for-lgbtqi2s-older-people/>
- <https://egale.ca/awareness/tips-to-video-chat-with-the-lgbtqi2s-older-person-in-your-life/>

# Virtual options

- We suggest using **Zoom** as a remote meeting platform.

## Pros:

The service offers online training for facilitators  
Facilitators can create a recurring link (see 'Create a poster' below)  
The 'Waiting Room' feature ensures participant privacy

## Cons

A paid subscription is required for sessions 40 minutes or longer  
\*paid subscription is for person hosting, NOT for participants

Zoom guide for new user:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BEPQsfUg2M>

- An alternative platform is **Jitsi Meet**.

## Pros:

Free to use and easy to navigate

## Cons:

Less brand recognition could deter some participants

- An alternative platform is **Facebook Rooms**.

## Pros:

Free to use and easy to navigate

## Cons:

Requires an account which eliminates privacy

Myth:  
older adults are  
not online

Fact:  
older adults  
use a variety of  
technology devices  
and platforms

# Create an advisory committee!

Step 1 — Reach out to the LGBT+ older adults in the community

Step 2 — Initiate a virtual advisory meeting to discuss the proposed group  
(request 2-3 sessions over one month)

Step 3 — Request and plan quarterly meetings to continue engagement  
and maintain momentum

Step 4 — Solicit feedback regarding meeting frequency, date and time

# Create a poster!

## LGBT+ Older Adult Social Group!



YOUR NAME from AGENCY NAME  
invites you to a MONTHLY group!

Where: Online!

When: First Tuesday of the Month at noon

How: email you@youremail for the link!

Cost: free

Include visual LGBT+ indicator.

Define target audience... for example, you may focus on 'older gay men'.

Indicate your name and affiliation.

Require people to request the group link to avoid unwanted guests.

Create a recurring link—this allows you to send an email to each person just once and avoids extra work and confusion!

## Device access

You may want to add tips to your poster for device access depending on the location it will be seen.

- In Long Term Care or Retirement Homes:  
"Ask your Recreation Therapist for access to a device".
- In existing social programs or LGBT+ programs:  
"Check our your local library for free internet/device access".

# Promoting a social group

## ***Long Term Care Homes***

- Find your local Care Homes and contact the Recreation Therapist.
- Email/mail or drop off your poster.
- Problem solve device access with the Recreation Therapist.

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ltc/home-finder.aspx>

Tips for Long Term Care staff

<https://clri-ltc.ca/lgbtq/>

## ***Retirement Homes***

- Find your local Homes and contact the Recreation Therapist.
- Email/mail or drop off your poster.
- Problem solve device access with the Recreation Therapist.

<https://www.rhra.ca/en/retirement-home-database/>

## ***Existing Social Programs***

- Search your city or county website for 'older adult' and 'seniors' leisure/activity programs.
- Contact program staff to request they post your poster.

## ***LGBT+ Programs***

- Contact/seek out local LGBT+ programs in your area and nearby areas
- Reach out to request promotion for your group.

## ***Other Community Members***

- Ask folks on your advisory committee to spread the word!
- Ask people you know to spread the word about the group.



# Running a Social Group

- Provide the date, time and group norms when people request information and ask if they have questions or concerns.
- If someone does not attend the group, reach out to problem-solve any barriers and invite them back.
- When group begins, review group norms (see suggested norms in bubble).
- Invite people to introduce themselves at the start of the group and suggest topics for discussion.
- Prepare some topics to talk about if people are developing comfort.

## Suggested Group Norms:

Camera off is OK! - some people are not on devices that have cameras or do not yet feel safe to be on camera.

Allow everyone time to talk.

Suggest hand raising if people are talking over one another.

Try to arrive on time.

## Fun Topics

Local events (e.g. Pride)  
Local LGBT+ issues  
Older Adult views on a local topic  
People's hobbies



# Ongoing Support

- Once you have picked a program date/time, keep consistent while you wait for word to spread. Try to pick a date/time that will not require cancellations for events such as long weekends.
- Continue to engage with your advisory committee on a regular basis to ask for ideas/support.
- Consider supporting the group to become peer-led and unaffiliated with an agency. Support group members to do this.
- Consider inviting a guest speaker on occasion.
- Consider creating a second group if you have lots of participants.

Reach out to partners (Recreation Therapists, Program Managers and LGBT+ groups) every 3-4 months to ensure that your posters are up-to-date and posted (and to ensure that staff continue to be aware of the program).

Ask participants if activities in the community are desired or possible. (e.g. meetings for a picnic in the summer or coffee in the fall).

# References

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