

Understanding the Challenges Facing LGBT Older Adults



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Introductions

- SAGE (Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders) Metro Portland
 - A program of Friendly House, and an affiliate of SAGE, that works with and for LGBT older adults.
 - Educational outreach
 - Advocacy for LGBT friendly senior housing
 - Social events

Terms



Terms

- **LGBT**
 - L = Lesbian
 - G = Gay
 - B = Bisexual
 - T = Transgender
- **GLBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA, etc**

- **Lesbian**, a woman whose primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women.
- **Gay**, a word used to describe anyone, mainly men, who have primary physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to someone of the same sex.

- **Bisexual**, an individual who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women.
- **Transgender**, an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Other Terms to Know

- **Ally**, a person who acts in support for a group that faces injustice or discrimination. A straight ally is a person who supports and fights for equality on behalf of LGBT people.
- **Homosexual**, an outdated clinical, medical term that is no longer the preferred word used to describe LGBT people.
- **Queer**, historically a negative term, it is now being used by some LGBT people – mostly youth– to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted within the LGBT community, especially among older adults.

Other Terms to Know

- **Lifestyle**, term used to refer to LGBT lives, generally considered offensive to LGBT people. Just as there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one LGBT lifestyle.
- **Closeted** (or “**in the closet**”), describes a person who does not share with others, or only shares with a few safe people, their sexual identity. A person who does share both privately and publically their sexual identity is often described as “out.”

In conclusion...

LGBT

The challenges LGBT people face as they age



Barriers to healthy aging

- Double invisibility
- Historic prejudice
- Financial barriers
- Discrimination by care/service providers
- Social isolation
- Care giving
- Housing

“Keeping a Secret”

Gay & Grey Elder Panel



Best Practices: Moving forward to create inclusive and open agencies



Best Practices

- Avoid Assumptions
 - Do not assume any person is straight
 - You can't tell who is gay
 - LGBT people may have different life experiences
- Inclusive Language
 - Ask people questions in open ended ways
 - i.e. Who is in your support system, do you have a current partner? What pronoun do you prefer?

Best Practices

- Confidentiality
 - Allow people to “come out” in their own time
 - Do not share sexual identity of client with other staff, unless client has allowed you to
- Intake Forms
 - Usually send the first message of how inclusive your agency is
 - Allow clients to self-identify, disclose what they are comfortable with, yet not if they are not comfortable.

Best Practices

- By knowing someone's sexual identity you can provide a higher level of care and services
 - It is impossible to treat everyone the same and provide equal services
 - By treating everyone the same LGBT people will feel silenced and unwelcomed
 - By treating everyone the same it ignores the unique challenges LGBT older adults are faced with

Best Practices

- **LGBT Social Programming**
 - Work LGBT themed events into existing structure of celebrating holidays or cultures
 - Have LGBT books and movies as options
- **Post LGBT Resources and Events Flyers**
 - Portland Gay Yellow Pages, Just Out, PQ Monthly
 - Flyers for Gay & Grey events
 - PFLAG flyers
- **Promotional Material**
 - Use photos of LGBT couples and individuals
 - Outreach to the LGBT community
 - PQ Monthly, Just Out, Gay & Grey events

Best Practices

- Train staff at all levels
- Designated a staff person to be a LGBT ambassador
 - Display Ally/Rainbow materials
- Have formal policy to follow up on complaints between residents or clients
 - This perhaps may be more common, yet often overlooked



Resources - National

- National Resource Center on LGBT Aging
 - www.lgbtagingcenter.org
 - (212)741-2247
- SAGE (Services and Advocacy for LGBT Elders)
 - www.sageusa.org
 - (212)741-2247

Resources - Oregon

- SAGE Metro Portland
 - www.friendlyhouseinc.org
 - (503)224-2640
 - SAGE@friendlyhouseinc.org

Questions?

