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Advocacy & Services
for LGBT Elders
We refuse to be invisible

COVID-19 & LGBTQ OLDER PEOPLE

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

Research from the [CDC](#) indicates older people are at a greater risk for severe illness due to COVID-19. There are currently 3 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Americans 50 years of age and older, with over 1.1 million that are 65 years and older. Having undergone a lifetime of systemic discrimination and in turn poorer health outcomes, older LGBTQ people are especially vulnerable. This vulnerability, alongside a lesser likelihood to reach out to healthcare providers, leads to unique challenges facing this community.

The HRC Foundation and [SAGE](#) are dedicated to supporting and working alongside partner organizations, members and the community at large to address the needs of older LGBTQ people during this unprecedented time.



LGBTQ ELDERS HAVE EXPERIENCED A LIFETIME OF DISCRIMINATION

Though LGBTQ Americans experience a greater level of societal acceptance, LGBTQ elders grew up in a world where their identity was socially unacceptable, diagnosed as pathology and criminalized. Having undergone a lifetime of interpersonal, institutional and systemic discrimination in housing, employment and health care, LGBTQ older people experience greater health disparities, social isolation and lack of support.

LGBTQ ELDERS MAY NOT HAVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED

LGBTQ older people are less likely to be partnered or have children. A survey of older LGBTQ people by [AARP](#) found that three in four respondents were concerned about having enough support from family and friends as they age. Without family members as advocates and caregivers, LGBTQ older people may be less likely to get the care they need.



LGBTQ ELDERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO SEEK LONG-TERM CARE SERVICES

With a lesser likelihood to have a support network, LGBTQ older people must often rely on long-term care services. Whether in-home services or residential care, 60% of LGBTQ respondents are concerned about discrimination and 40% are not comfortable being out to their provider. For some older LGBTQ elders, the fear of discrimination and stigma includes the risk of racial bias. Compared to white LGBTQ older people, [African-American and Latinx LGBTQ older people show greater concern](#) about being treated unfairly in long-term care.



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LGBTQ ELDERERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SOCIAL ISOLATION.

Public health efforts such as social distancing and quarantines are designed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Yet, these protective measures often mean further social isolation for LGBTQ elders. According to the Movement Advancement Project, [social isolation has a direct impact on health and well being of LGBTQ older people](#). LGBTQ older people living with HIV and rural LGBTQ elders are at a greater risk for the negative impacts of isolation.

LGBTQ ELDERERS ARE RESILIENT

Witnessing and undergoing community struggles such as the Stonewall riots and the AIDS crisis, LGBTQ older people are resilient. The support and actions of the LGBTQ community, allies, health professionals, neighbors and caregivers can continue to ensure the strength of LGBTQ elders.

ACTION STEPS TO SUPPORT LGBTQ OLDER PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

AS AN LGBTQ OLDER PERSON:

- + Your safety and health are important, practice social distancing as a precautionary method
- + Remember though you may be alone in your home there are others who are in support of you. If you need someone to speak to, call the SAGE Elder Hotline at 877-360-5428 day or night
- + If you are in need and unsure of next steps, [contact your local area agency on aging](#) to access potential resources such as delivered meals or transportation
- + If you must go shopping for essentials, check with your local businesses to see if they have designated shopping hours for older adults and the immunocompromised.
- + Connect with your local LGBTQ organization for resources in your area
- + Ensure you have designated a person of your choice as [medical power of attorney](#) in case you become unable to make decisions for yourself

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AS A CAREGIVER:

- + Wash your hands thoroughly and take any necessary precautions when providing care to an older person
- + [Contact your local area agency on aging](#) to connect your loved one with potential services and resources such as case management, delivered meals and wellness checks
- + If medical intervention is needed, search for LGBTQ-inclusive health care facilities through the [HEI hospital search tool](#)
- + Ensure an LGBTQ elder has completed advance directive documents such as a medical power of attorney

AS A COMMUNITY MEMBER:

- + Support a [local SAGE affiliate](#) or other LGBTQ aging group
- + Connect and check-in with older members of the LGBTQ community through social media, email or telephone
- + If you are healthy, willing and able, offer to run errands for older members of your community such as grocery shopping or trips to the pharmacy
- + If you know of an LGBTQ elder in a long-term care community, send a letter or make a phone call
- + Listen to older people directly for what they need and how you can help
- + Encourage long-term care communities to provide inclusive LGBTQ care by signing up for the [Long-Term Care Equality Index](#)