

Building Connections



Improving access to care for
older gay, lesbian, bisexual
and transgender adults



A nonprofit independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

Basic Terms



Sex

Designation of a person at birth as either "male" or "female." This is based on their anatomy (reproductive organs) and/or their biology (hormones).

Gender

Socially constructed categories considered synonymous with sex. The traditional categories of man and woman are defined by stereotypical roles and behaviors.

Gender Identity

Refers to a person's innate, deeply-felt psychological identification as a man, woman or some other gender.

Gender Expression

Refers to the external manifestation of a person's gender identity, which may or may not conform to socially-defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Sexual Orientation

Refers to who people fall in love with and/or are attracted toward. People who are attracted to the same gender are gay or lesbian; people who are attracted to either gender are bisexual; people who are attracted to the other gender are heterosexual.

Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth (the sex listed on their birth certificate).

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth correspond (a person who is not transgender).

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/ Expression

are different parts of who we are. Trans people may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people may or may not be transgender.

This booklet offers information and suggestions to help providers create a supportive environment for older GLBT people. For further information, see this booklet's sources:

www.sageupstate.org

www.sageusa.org

www.lgbtagingcenter.org

www.lgbtmap.org

What do we know about older GLBT People?

More likely to be on their own



LGBT older people are twice as likely to live alone, twice as likely to be single, and 3 to 4 times less likely to have children to rely on for support.

Less likely to reach out to services that could help

Older GLBT people are not sure who to trust.

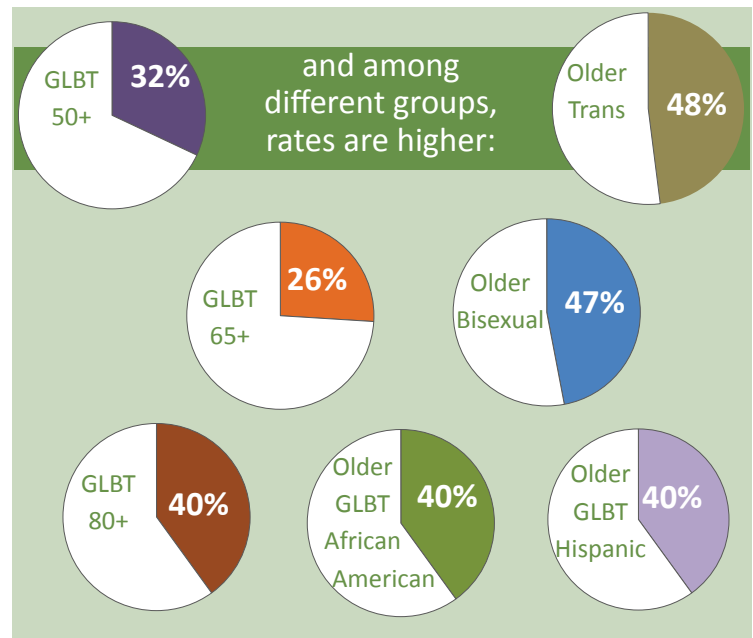


Financial insecurity

Discrimination over the life course combined with a lack of legal rights leads to economic insecurity as GLBT people age.



A third live in poverty . . .



Do you ask? Do you tell?

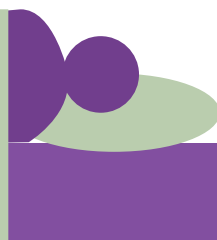


Providers may not ask about sexual orientation and gender identity, and older GLBT people may not tell, so this population remains invisible.

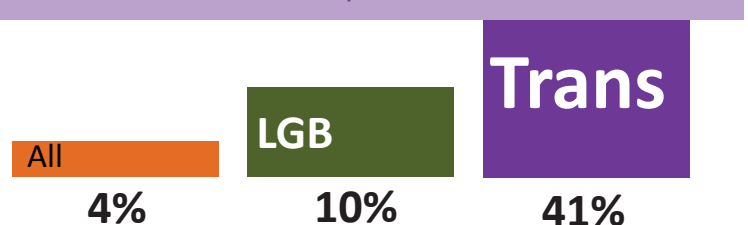
Facing hostility over the years leads to stress, which leads to risk behaviors like smoking and drinking. Suicide rates are higher, especially among Transgender older adults.

Delay of care

Failure to reach out means care is delayed. Conditions progress to advanced stages, lower survival rates.

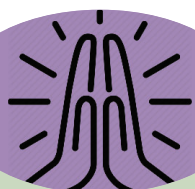


Rates of attempted suicide in US



If you're 70 and GLBT today . . .

Here's what life might have been like for you in earlier eras



**1957:
You're 10**

Within your faith, homosexuality is seen as a sin

Same-sex intimacy is a felony, so your parents tell you it's wrong

You may have heard GLBT being called "sick."

**1967:
You're 20**

Within your faith GLBT are sinners, and your family could disown you on this basis.

If you live in Illinois, same-sex intimacy has been decriminalized. It's still a felony everywhere else

You tell your doctor. At best you are labeled mentally ill. At worst you get shock treatments.

**1977:
You're 30**

Your faith may "love the sinner, hate the sin," but you're still the sinner.

In New York and 19 other states same-sex intimacy is no longer a crime (still a felony everywhere else).

Homosexuality is no longer considered a mental disorder but you've spent your 20s wondering if you were sick.

**1987:
You're 40**

Fred Phelps starts his "God hates fags" campaign, protesting at the funerals of people who died with AIDS

In more than half of the states of the union, same-sex intimacy is still a felony.

You've heard about the times when ambulances and doctors refused to touch patients who were dying of AIDS.

**1997:
You're 50**

Most faiths have some acceptance, and over the years many become openly supportive.

It's still a crime in many places 1997, but laws begin to be reversed. By 2003, the last state (Texas) does so.

Cultural competency trainings start for medical and social service providers. At first there is much reluctance, but the practice becomes more common over time.

Older GLBT people have lived through hostile eras

Someone who is an older adult today has experienced earlier times when there was far less acceptance of GLBT people. Many carry the memories of these earlier, hostile eras and this affects their decisions on how open to be and which places are safe.



You do know that boys can't marry boys and girls can't marry girls.

You can be arrested for same-sex dancing or wearing clothing for the other gender.

In San Francisco, Harvey Milk is becomes the first openly gay elected official. Next year he will be killed by another Supervisor who gets his a reduced sentence.

After 71,000 have the HIV Virus and 41,000 are dead, the President mentions AIDS for the first time this year.

In the early 90s Hawaii is the first state to recognize same sex domestic partnerships. Some states follow and others enact marriage bans. In 2003, Massachusetts becomes the first state to legalize marriage equality, and 13 years later in 2015 it becomes the law of the land. You're 68.



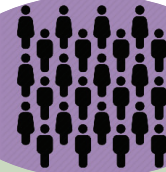
You might hear adults ridicule Christine Jorgenson's widely publicized sex reassignment surgery or the gay rights movement.

The Stonewall Uprising in NYC (thought to be the beginning of the modern GLBT Movement) will happen in 2 years.

"Gay and Lesbian" pride marches are held across the US to honor the Stonewall Uprising. Bisexual and transgender people's rights are not visibly included.

Most "Gay and Lesbian" rights groups finally include bisexual in their name, and begin to talk about recognizing transgender people.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people share the movement and work for change. Though there is much dialogue and growing public support, transgender people are still waiting for some of the freedoms that GLB people have won.



You have no role models to look up to. The only representations in the media are negative.

Most media representations portray GLBT characters who go crazy or die.

Well known actress and orange juice spokesperson Anita Bryant starts an organization to "Save the Children" from homosexuality.

You've probably lost many friends to AIDS. You may attend a funeral once a week.

In 1997, you're 50 and things are starting to get better. However, by the time GLBT people can get married, serve in the military, be safe from discrimination (in some places) and enjoy more freedoms, you will age another decade and then some.

How to create a supportive environment

Be visibly affirming

Post materials that are symbols of acceptance, like rainbow flags, pink triangles, or “ally” signs. In your promotional materials, try to illustrate the many faces of aging, including GLBT people.

If you don’t ask, your client may not tell. Use terms that will show you are “safe” and “open” to all types of people and relationships, like “partner” or “significant other,” or ask about who is important in the person’s life. If you make a mistake, simply apologize and move on -- don’t let that close the dialogue.

Use inclusive language

Ensure confidentiality

Let your client know what they say to you is confidential. Share your confidentiality policy so they know how and when personal information is shared.

If a person shares their sexual orientation/gender identity with you, don’t assume that they are out to everyone. Have a talk about the client’s family and friends -- who do they want this information shared with?

Protect openness

Provide safe space

Discussing a person’s identity in a private place may be the best option. If your forms don’t capture all gender identities and sexual orientations, let clients know it’s ok to leave questions blank and discuss these areas with you, “off the record.”



Respect a person's gender identity

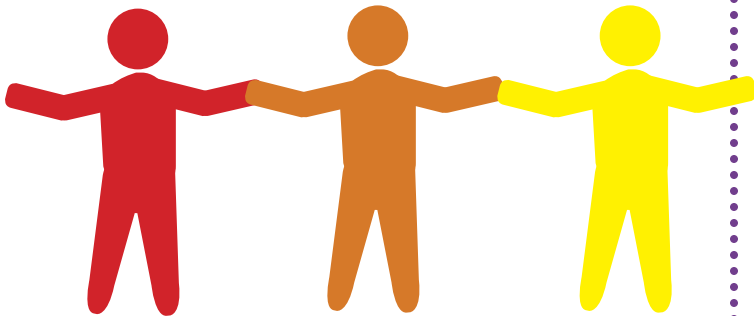
People should be treated as a member of their self-identified gender. Unless it is medically necessary to know, don't ask if they have had surgery or are using hormone therapy (they don't need to do these things to "confirm" their gender). Show respect through language and honoring every person's identity. Use the person's preferred name regardless of what is on their official identification card. Use the person's preferred pronouns. If you are unsure which pronouns to use, just ask.



Educate other clients

If clients interact with one another at your agency, this can affect your ability to make your agency a supportive environment for GLBT people. If another client raises a concern, take the opportunity to open a dialogue. Talk to them about basic terms, information on GLBT people, and perhaps have written materials available. Discuss what it feels like to be disrespected, drawing parallels to the resident's own experiences. Inviting a speaker in to discuss GLBT issues can help educate everyone in your facility.

Build relationships



Develop partnerships with local GLBT organizations and share their resources with clients and staff. Invite speakers to talk to clients and/or staff.

Institutionalize Change



**Everyone
Welcome
Here.**

Non-discrimination policies should be posted and well known and should include both gender identity and sexual orientation. Offer continuing training – for staff and clients. Offer gender neutral bathrooms, or post signs saying that people should use the restroom that best fits their gender identity or expression. This will let *everyone* know that restrooms should be a safe place.





Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders

Bringing older Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People together in
Cayuga, Cortland, Jefferson, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga and Oswego Counties

Wellness Programs Social Events Support Groups Education
Monthly Potlucks in Oswego, Syracuse, Utica

Program news, community info every Wednesday on our web site
Sign up for our newsletter and weekly email at www.sageupstate.org

Kim Dill
Executive Director
kdill@sageupstate.org

Leslie Lamb
Program Administrator
llamb@sageupstate.org

SAGE Upstate Center
431 E. Fayette St, Syracuse, NY 13202

315-478-1923
www.sageupstate.org

This booklet was produced by SAGE Upstate with the support of



A nonprofit independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association