

Creating a welcoming environment

Welcoming is not a passive activity. Management is responsible for the creation of a safe and friendly environment for LGBT older adults.

This includes the following suggestions:

Feel: The overall environment gives a sense of being safe and affirming:

- ❖ LGBT residents and their families and friends identity is acknowledged, affirmed and respected
- ❖ There is recognition of resident's family rights, and reminders that the environment is a safe place
- ❖ Discrimination is not tolerated in policy and in practice

See: In the physical environment, evidence of positive signs and symbols displayed throughout:

- ❖ Written materials, images, artwork, etc. that is welcoming and inclusive of LGBT persons
- ❖ LGBT literature and materials (brochures, magazines, or newspapers) in common areas

Hear: The language heard within the environment reflects:

- ❖ A broad definition of family to include 'family of choice'
- ❖ Staff and volunteers are comfortable and knowledgeable of inclusive language and it is reflected in their day-to-day discussions

Being proactive on all fronts sets a tone for all residents, that everyone is treated with respect and value.

Resources

Information:

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Older Adults and Congregate Housing Environments – Final Report: Summary

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Training Manual

Community Contacts:

🚩 **OUTSaskatoon**
320 21st St W, Saskatoon, SK
Phone: 306-665-1224
<http://www.outsaskatoon.ca>

Can provide information on resources available and training programs

🚩 **Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission**
8th Floor, Sturdy Stone Building
122-3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon SK S7K 2H6
E-mail: shrc@gov.sk.ca
Phone: (306) 933-5952
Toll free: 1-800-667-9249

Can provide support and advice on the legal aspects of providing service to the LGBT individual

🚩 **Saskatoon Council on Aging**
2020 College Drive
Saskatoon Sask. S7N 5W7
www.scoa.ca
Phone: 3066-652-2255

Information on Older Adult programs and services

Lesbian, Gay men, Bisexual, Transgender Older Adults: Enhancing Congregate Housing



Positive Aging for All

Understanding the LGBT older adult

Effects of Social Stigma and Prejudice

Many LGBT older adults are concerned about stigmatization and discriminatory treatment by professionals. A history of systemic discrimination means they may avoid using support services and opt to stay invisible. This impacts their health and well being as they may not give full histories of their health and history and may not share intimate details.

Familles of Choice

LGBT older adults are more likely to be single, childless or estranged from their biological family. Same-sex partners play a significant role. If there is no partner, LGBT older adults often rely on connections with friends and community members for social support. These relations provide support, advocacy and strengthen. They must be respected.

Increased Isolation

Fear of being 'outed' within the congregate environment may lead to the LGBT older adult becoming isolated and invisible to others. They may avoid social events and adopt "stories" to hide their orientation.

Bullying and violence

In some cases, LGBT older adults may be subject to verbal or physical attacks by other residents. Immediate intervention is necessary to ensure their safety and well being.

Myths and stereotypes of LGBT older adults in congregate care

We are not critical of congregate care environments, as most are supportive, though many simply are not aware of the needs of the LGBT older adult.

'We don't have any LGBT people at the moment'

This is not true! What is true is that LGBT older adults are fearful of staff, management or residents finding out that they are LGBT. The unintentional result is to force LGBT older adults into the closet. They are afraid because no effort is made to help them feel safe and welcome, and no one stands up to protect them from abuse and discriminatory treatment.

'We treat everyone the same'

Equality does not mean sameness. By throwing up a blanket of sameness, LGBT older adults are left feeling that management does not understand that they do have different lives and experiences. It makes them feel unwelcomed. It also means they live within an environment promoting heterosexual relationships.

'A person's choice is their business and we don't need to know'

LGBT older adults want to share and to be open. They cannot be themselves if staff and other residents are unaware. This may result in inappropriate care and programming or services that do not meet their needs.

Putting it in perspective

Year	Landmark Event	Age a 75 year old was at the time
1969	Canada decriminalizes homosexuality	29
1973	The American Psychiatric Association declares that homosexuality is not a psychiatric disorder	33
1978	Canada lifts immigration ban on homosexual men	37
1992	Canada lifts ban on homosexuals in the Canadian Forces	52
1993	Saskatchewan protects sexual orientation in the human rights code	53
1996	Canadian Human Rights Act amended to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.	56
2004	Saskatchewan allow marrying by same-sex couples	64