

# Potential Approaches to work with Senior Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Queenslanders



Queensland Association  
for Healthy Communities

Research indicates that LGBT seniors:

- are increasing in numbers along with the rest of the ageing population and with more people being out about their sexuality or gender identity
- are worried about the treatment they will receive from aged care services, especially lack of recognition of their same sex partner;
- are absent from aged care/seniors policy, programs and discussions;
- have little knowledge of aged care services; and
- have less support available from children and other family members and rely more on friends, their partner and service providers.

## Awareness Raising

Representation of LGBT seniors is practically absent from both mainstream and LGBT media. The issues for this group are poorly understood and little discussed. Invisibility perpetuates stigma, discrimination and heterosexism among older people, the LGBT community and aged care services. Therefore awareness raising interventions would be required to draw attention to the needs and experiences of LGBT seniors and their carers.

## Information & Skills Development

Knowledge of existing aged care and carers services is low amongst LGBT people. Information produced by the aged care sector is not routinely distributed through LGBT community channels. Lack of recognition of same sex partners causes difficulties and disadvantage across a range of health, legal, financial and service areas.

### Key actions could include:

- campaigns in gay, mainstream and seniors media
- outreach to gay venues and events
- liaison with gay community social groups
- community forums
- internet presence at sites used by LGBT people
- awareness raising campaigns within aged care services

### Key actions could include:

- ensuring existing seniors information (printed and electronic) is available and distributed to LGBT people
- producing culturally specific information (e.g. HIV in older age, long term effects of hormones, breast, cervical and prostate cancers)
- guide to legal issues for same sex couples, including enduring powers of attorney, advanced health directives, wills and superannuation
- peer education, through outreach, workshops and use of 'diffusion of innovation'

## Services for LGBT Seniors

While for many issues LGBT seniors will be able to access mainstream aged care services (assuming training and development as outlined below), there are some issues which warrant a specific LGBT approach. Many LGBT seniors feel isolated in aged care facilities, especially when they can not be open about their sexuality or gender identity. There are also special considerations for older people living with HIV and transgender people.

### ✓ Key actions could include:

- funding for an LGBT ageing development worker within the LGBT health sector
- projects to reduce social isolation among LGBT seniors (e.g. social support groups)
- home visiting or buddying programs within the LGBT community
- intergeneration work between LGBT seniors and young LGBT people, especially those coming out
- engaging LGBT seniors in voluntary and community activities, especially within the LGBT community
- recognising and honouring the contributions made (and being made) by LGBT seniors, especially to gay liberation and the response to HIV
- respite services for LGBT carers

## Research

While there is a small, but growing body of mainly community initiated research into the needs of LGBT seniors, there is still a lack of mainstream research into this area.

### ✓ Key actions could include:

- including questions on sexual orientation and gender identity in all mainstream aged care/seniors research projects
- reviewing monitoring information/minimum data sets collected from aged care services, with a view to collecting client data on sexuality and gender identity
- commissioning specific research (with an emphasis on qualitative research) into the needs and experiences of LGBT seniors
- undertaking a feasibility study into the establishment of LGBT specific retirement villages or nursing homes
- ensuring generic and LGBT specific interventions are evaluated for their acceptability and effectiveness with LGBT people



## Training & Development

LGBT seniors should expect to be able to receive a culturally appropriate and competent service from mainstream aged care service providers. However feedback from LGBT people is that this doesn't always happen and service providers say they need assistance in developing their competence in this area.



### Key actions could include:

- LGBT awareness in-service training for aged care services and referral points (e.g. GPs) which is monitored by the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency
- an audit of current policy and practices to eradicate discrimination against LGBT people in aged care
- producing information resources on LGBT identities and ageing
- development of self-audits, policy and other supports for services around LGBT clients
- requiring aged care services to report on how they are ensuring their service is culturally appropriate to LGBT people, and how they make this known

## Representative Structures

There are many local, state and federal structures for representing the needs and views of older people and aged care service providers. However few of these structures reach out and include LGBT seniors. There is an overall lack of diversity within older people's organisations.



### Key actions could include:

- targeted recruitment of LGBT seniors into representative structures
- support for LGBT specific networks
- inclusion of diversity or LGBT categories in seniors awards schemes

## Advocacy & Public Policy

LGBT people are largely absent from health policy and programs, including in the aged care field. This makes it difficult for front-line workers to meet the specific needs of LGBT people and hinders LGBT community groups engaging fully and successfully with the aged care sector.

## Current Capacity

At present in Queensland, there are no LGBT specific aged care workers or resources. LGBT community organisations are not currently funded to do work in the aged care field (or any field outside of HIV and youth). This severely limits the ability to advocate for, drive and/or implement the actions outlined above.

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## Key actions could include:

- amendment of the Aged Care Act (and any related legislation) to ensure that people in same-sex relationships are not treated differently to people in opposite-sex relationships when accessing aged care facilities
- amendment of the Commonwealth Charter of Residents Rights to explicitly recognise LGBT people
- listing LGBT people as a special needs population in aged care policy and programs
- recognition of sexuality and gender identity in operation guidelines and/or consumer rights statements for programs including:
  - Home and Community Care (HACC) Program
  - Extended Aged Care At Home (EACH) Program
  - Aged Care Advocacy Services
  - Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT)
- commonwealth funding for an LGBT ageing advocacy worker in each state & territory funded through the Aged Care Advocacy Services program
- supporting LGBT organisations or individuals to take part in consultations, steering groups, advisory committees, interagencies, peak bodies etc.
- providing an option for LGBT people to approach an LGBT organisation to assist them in accessing a mainstream service (entry point) and/or providing feedback and making a complaint



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