



# Understanding the Challenges Facing LGBT Older Adults

SAGE Metro Portland a program of Friendly House



# Introductions

- **SAGE (Advocacy and Services 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 and trainings
- Advocacy for LGBT friendly senior housing
- Social events and activities, biannual Expo
- Case management, Options Counseling and I&R services



# Terms

- **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 gender they were assigned at birth*



## Terms

- **Sexual Orientation:** who you are attracted to
- **Gender Identity:** who you know yourself to be
- **Gender Expression:** how you present yourself



# Other Terms to Know

## **Queer:**

*Historically a negative term, 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.*

## **Non-binary / Gender Non-Conforming / Gender Fluid**

*A person whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female*

## **2 Spirit**

*A person who has both a masculine and a feminine spirit; is used by some First Nations people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity.*

## **Cisgender**

*A person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth*



## Other Terms to Know

### **Homosexual:**

An outdated clinical, medical term that is no longer the preferred word used to describe LGBT people. Use LGBT instead.

### **Closeted (or “in the closet”):**

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 publicly, their sexual identity is often described as “**out.**”

# Other Terms to Know

## **Lifestyle:**

A 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

## **Sexual Preference:**

Inaccurate term which implies that people choose their sexual orientation; every sexual orientation is an aspect of one's identity

## **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

# Challenges LGBT people face as they age





# Barriers to Healthy Aging

## **Double Invisibility:**

- LGBT older adults are often over-looked in LGBT communities which are often more aware of youth issues.
- Some providers of healthcare often feel the treatment of all should be the same.
- Intake forms often use language associated with heterosexuals, i.e., husband/wife, male/female and other types of messaging which automatically and unintentionally excludes the LGBT older adult population.



# Barriers to Healthy Aging

## **Historic Prejudice:**

- In their youth LGBT older adults were labeled, criminals, mentally ill, perverts.
- They may have been evicted, fired, disowned, or institutionalized in a time when they had no recourse.
- These elders have had to be secretive about their sexual orientation and gender identity to avoid discrimination.



# Barriers to Healthy Aging

## Financial Barriers

- 9.1 % of lesbian couples and 4.9 % of gay couples live in poverty compared with 4.6 % of elder heterosexual couples.

Factors contributing to poverty for LGBT older adults include:

- Employment discrimination.
- Barriers in Social Security, Medicare, and pension and retirement plans that deny same-sex couples key retirement benefits afforded to the broader population.



# Barriers to Healthy Aging

## **Discrimination by Service Providers**

- There is documented evidence of neglect and abuse of LGBT older adults by their hired caregivers.
- Intake forms often prevent LGBT people from answering questions honestly by using only heterosexual and binary terminology.
- 1 in 5 transgender older adults report being outright turned away for care by healthcare providers.
- LGBT people may believe they will not get adequate care if they reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity.



## Barriers to Healthy Aging: **Social Isolation**

- 53% report loneliness.
- LGBT older adults are twice as likely to be single and to live alone.
- They are three to four times as likely to be childless.
- 40% of LGBT baby boomers have considered suicide.
- 31% suffer from depression.
- They are less likely to feel welcome in the places where many older people socialize, such as senior centers, volunteer centers and places of worship



## Barriers to Healthy Aging: Discrimination in Housing

- 48% of LGBT older adults face discrimination in housing.
- LGBT older adults who choose to or must live in senior housing environments will be moving in with their heterosexual peers who also grew up in an era of prevalent homophobia.
- Only 22% of LGBT elders report being able to discuss their sexual identity with their senior housing providers.
- They are even less likely to share their identity with fellow residents.



# Barriers to Healthy Aging

## **AARP Reports that:**

- 76% of older LGBT Americans worry about having adequate family and/or social supports to rely on.
- 88% want long-term care providers who are trained in LGBT care.
- 60% are concerned about verbal or physical harassment in long-term care facilities
- 85% want long-term care providers who are LGBT themselves

# Key Challenges for Transgender Older Adults

## Health Care and Social Services

- Lack of cultural and clinical awareness regarding the growing number of transgender people and their health needs.
- Few aging services providers receive cultural sensitivity trainings around transgender issues.
- Few aging services providers conduct outreach specific to transgender communities.
- Provider bias may lead transgender older adults to avoid or delay seeking needed health care or social services, increasing the probability of a future crisis.



## Key Challenges for Transgender Older Adults

### **Medically Necessary Health Care**

- Medically necessary care related to gender transition is often arbitrarily excluded from public and private insurance
- These exclusions are often used to deny coverage for preventive and other medical care transgender older adults need.
- Many insurers only cover medical care based on a person's legal gender.
- Many care providers are not knowledgeable about clinical practices regarding the physical needs of transgender people.



## Key Challenges for Transgender Older Adults

### **Other Challenges**

- Vulnerability as targets of violence
- Few programs are designed for the transgender community
- Documentation issues, e.g., driver's license, passport, birth certificate
- Privacy issues, especially when revealing personal information



## Best Practices: Forms

- Use inclusive terminology on intake forms, e.g., Spouse or Partner along with Husband/Wife.
- If sexual orientation is included, offer options such as Straight, LGBT, Non-Binary, Transgender, Other (and allow clients to specify).
- Ask what the client would like to be called.
- Include a broader definition of family.
- By knowing a client's sexual and gender identity, you can provide a higher level of care and services.



# What does the Future Hold for Transgender Elders?

- 13 states and Washington, DC ban insurance exclusions for Transgender health care and provide Transgender inclusive health care for state employees.
- Medicare currently covers sex reassignment surgery
- There is greater visibility for Transgender issues.
- Transgender people are self-identifying at younger ages.

# THE SAGE NATIONAL LGBT ELDER HOTLINE

operated by the  
GLBT National Help Center

NO MATTER WHERE THEY  
LIVE, LGBT elders now have a place  
to call when they need peer counseling,  
information and local resources.

LAUNCHING  
NOVEMBER 1ST 2016



## LGBT VOLUNTEERS

are trained to speak with LGBT older  
people about relationship concerns,  
bullying, workplace issues, HIV/AIDS,  
anxiety, safer-sex information and more!

Learn about volunteering at [sageusa.org/hotline](http://sageusa.org/hotline).

CALL TOLL-FREE

# 1-888-234-SAGE

## HOURS

Mon-Fri: 4pm-Midnight ET

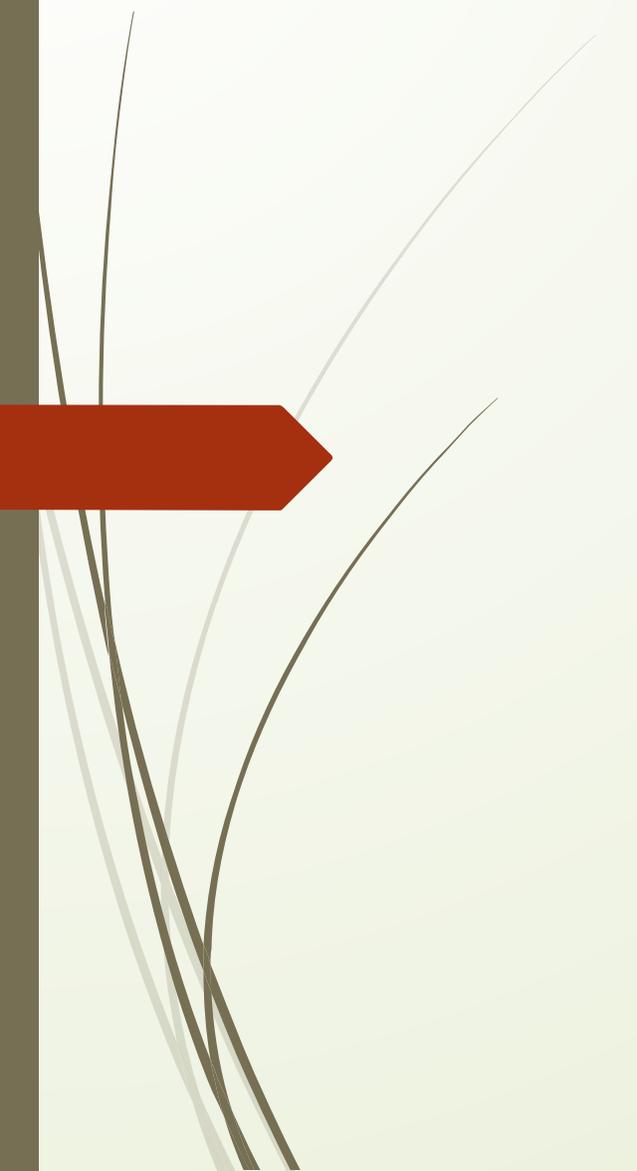
Sat: Noon-5pm ET

Se habla Español.

Free and confidential.

sage<sup>SM</sup>





Questions?

# Local Resources - Oregon

- SAGE Metro Portland [www.friendlyhouseinc.org](http://www.friendlyhouseinc.org) (503)224-2640  
[SAGE@friendlyhouseinc.org](mailto:SAGE@friendlyhouseinc.org)
- Q Center: \*eRa\* program: [pdxqcenter.org/programs/senior-services/](http://pdxqcenter.org/programs/senior-services/) 503-234-7837
- Oregon Long-Term Care Ombudsman  
<http://www.oregon.gov/ltco/Pages/index.aspx>
- Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs  
Nathaniel Boehme, Statewide Veterans' Services, LGBTQ Veterans' Services  
Coordinator  
[nathaniel.Boehme@state.or.us](mailto:nathaniel.Boehme@state.or.us)  
<https://www.oregon.gov/ODVA/pages/LGBTQ-Veterans.aspx>
- Let's Kick ASS (AIDS Survivors' Syndrome)  
<http://letskickasspdx.org/we-are/>
- Welcoming Congregations  
<http://welcomingcongregations.org>

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