



# LGBT Older Adults: Unique Issues and Healthcare Needs Webinar

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12:00 noon – 2:00 pm

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The LGBT Elder Initiative is committed to assuring that LGBT older adults have rights and opportunities to live vibrant, creative and mutually supportive lives. To achieve this vision, the mission of the LGBTEI is to foster and advocate for services and resources that are culturally competent, inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBT older adults.

# Why A Webinar on LGBT Older Adults

- Long overlooked and invisible in society at large, older LGBT people are beginning to emerge as a distinct community.
- 2012 was the 1<sup>st</sup> year our baby boomers turned 65—our society is going to see dramatic growth of this age demographic and with that, growth in the number of LGBT folks.
- While LGBT seniors share many of the same aging related issues as their hetero counterparts, they also confront special challenges as well. LGBT seniors may face discrimination due to their age as well as their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

# Why We Do What We Do...

- A 2010 study called *Ready To Serve*, found that staff training was key in building and understanding and addressing the unique needs of our LGBT older adults. The goal is to create environments that recognize the diversity and visibility of older LGBT people and where aging services professionals can provide quality care to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

# Why We Do What We Do...

- Having all been brought up in a society that privileges heterosexuality, we need to recognize that the bias this introduces is not automatically lost because we are in the human services field. It is up to us as individual practitioners to explore and challenge issues of homophobia and heterosexism whether they are our own or those of other people or other institutions/agencies.

# Dimensions of cultural sensitivity

- Cultural Awareness: being knowledgeable about what LGBT older adults typically experience when accessing, or thinking about, accessing services.
- Cultural Humility: no matter how much we learn about or become aware of a culture, each individual is the expert on their own experience.
- Cultural Responsiveness: learning new patterns of behavior and effectively applying them individually and within the organization's setting.

# Terminology

**LGBT:** Umbrella term often used to describe all sexual and gender minorities. May include “I”, “Q’s” and/or “A”. Diversity within each group.

- Race & ethnicity
- Socioeconomic status
- Geographic location
- Age – Decades of Aging

# Terminology

**Gay** – This term can refer to both males and females (e.g. the gay community), but is increasingly used to refer to men only, as someone who is physically and emotionally attracted to other males. A synonym for homosexual.

**Lesbian** - A female who is physically and emotionally attracted to other females. The term lesbian is derived from Lesbos, a Greek Island that was home to Sappho, a poet and teacher who loved other women.



# Terminology

**Bisexual** – a person who has the capacity for emotional, romantic and/or physical attraction to more than one sex or gender. That capacity for attraction may or may not manifest itself in terms of sexual behavior. Several myths exist about bisexuals (non-monogomous, confused, don't exist, etc.)

**Asexual** - A word describing someone who is not sexually attracted and/or romantically active with other persons.

**Heterosexual** – Someone who is primarily physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite sex. May also call themselves straight.

# Terminology

## **Sexual Orientation:**

- One's attraction or affection (physical, emotional, romantic) for another person, defined by the gender of that person.
- Terms may include: heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, in the life, queer, same gender loving, etc.
- Some individuals are very young when they become aware of their sexual orientation. However, awareness can arise at any time in lifecycle.
- Just as being right-handed, left-handed or ambidextrous, sexual orientation is not a choice. It has yet to be discovered precisely what determines sexual orientation.
- Sexual behavior may, or may not, aligned with sexual orientation.

# Terminology

## **Transgender :**

- One whose gender identity or expression differs from his or her birth gender.
- This term is often used as “umbrella” term to refer to anyone who crosses gender roles in one way or another. This can include transsexuals, drag queens / kings, cross-dressers, two-spirit persons, etc. (Also synonymous with “trans community” or “trans population.”)
- Transgender people may choose not to alter their bodies by means of hormones and/or surgery, focusing instead on expressing their gender through behavior/dress/appearance.
- Some transgender people choose to use hormones without sex reassignment surgery.

# Terminology

**Gender Identity** – The psychological awareness or sense of where one fits on the man-woman spectrum (trans, two-spirit, male, female, transexual, gender queer).

**Gender Expression** – The way in which one communicates their gender identity through appearance and behavior (butch, femme, masculine, feminine, androgynous).

**Gender Role** – That part of behavior that is influenced by society's expectation of what is gender-appropriate.

Gender is different from *sex* (*determined by chromosomes and anatomy*) and different from *sexual orientation*

# Terminology

**Heterosexism** - the pervasive assumption (expressed overtly and/or covertly) that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual and that heterosexuality is the only normal, natural sexual orientation. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, while giving advantages to heterosexual people. It is a subtle form of oppression that reinforces silence and invisibility for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

# Terminology

**Heterosexual Privilege** – the unrecognized and assumed privileges that people have if they are heterosexual. Examples: Holding hands or kissing in public without fearing threat; not questioning the normalcy of one's sexual orientation; raising children without fear that they will experience discrimination because of their parents' sexual orientation.

# Terminology

## **Homophobia / Biphobia / Transphobia:**

- Irrational fear, dislike or hatred of homosexuals / bisexuals/ transpeople, often exhibited as prejudice, discrimination, jokes, name-calling, exclusion, harassment, and acts of violence (known as “bashing” or “bullying”).
- LGBT people, especially those who have experienced a lot of homophobia in their lives, may internalize feelings of fear or shame, and suffer low self-worth or self-hatred. This is called “internalized homophobia.”
- Some heterosexuals may suffer discrimination because they do not necessarily fit in with socially accepted gender roles – for example, a boy who is called gay because he enjoys dancing.

# Unique Challenges and Issues

*Improving The Lives of LGBT Older Adults (2010)*

## ❖ Unique Challenges to Successful Aging:

1. Effects of stigma past and present
2. Need to rely upon “families of choice” for care and support
3. Unequal treatment under laws, programs, and services for older adults



# A Lifetime of Stigma

A LGBT older adult has experienced their identity or expression of love as :

- Psychiatric disorder (removed from DSM 1973)
- Criminal activity (sodomy laws, etc.)
- Threat to security and morale (DADT, ended 2011)
- Anti-family/immoral
- Largely closeted/disrupted lives
- Severed family connections
- Fear of accessing social support services

# Reliance on Family of Choice

- LGBT older adults more likely to be single and less likely to have children.
- Reliance on friends and partners (may also be in need of aging services).
- “Logical” v. “Biological” families (not included in definition of “family”).
- In US family members provide 80% of long term care.
- Stigma creates distance from parents, children, relatives.
- Social/Familial isolation linked to higher depression, isolation, and health disparities.

# Unequal treatment under laws

- Federal (and many state level) programs provide services for married heterosexual couples, not same sex partners.
- Do not recognize families of choice (FMLA).
- Excluded from social security/pension benefits.
- Payment of “inheritance tax” .
- No legal protection for “sexual orientation” (unless local municipality as enacted legislation).
- Many employers do not include SO and/or GI in non-discrimination statements.

# Caring and Aging with Pride

*The Aging and Health Report: Disparities and Resilience among LGBT Older Adults (2011)* – first national federally funded project to examine LGBT aging and health revealed significant health disparities, including disability, physical and mental distress, victimization, discrimination, and lack of access to supportive aging and health services.

Approximately 2,500 LGBT adults age 50 to 95 participated.

# Key Findings

- Nearly one-half of older adults have a disability; nearly one-third report depression.
- Almost two-thirds have been victimized three or more times.
- 13% have been denied healthcare or rec'd inferior care.
- More than 20% do not disclose their SO/GI to their doctor.
- About one-third do not have a will or durable power of attorney for healthcare.
- Needed services: senior housing, transportation, legal services, social events.

# Health Disparities

- LGBT adults are more likely to delay or not seek medical care.
- Lesbian and bisexual women are less likely to receive mammograms.
- Gay men are at an increased risk of HIV, Hepatitis, Anal Papilloma.
- LGBT adults are more likely to delay or not get need prescription medicine.
- Transgender individuals are at risk from hormone related issues and uncertainty of long term effects.

# Health Disparities

- Studies suggest higher levels of chronic and other health problems, including asthma, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, obesity, arthritis and certain illnesses such as cancer (Gay and Lesbian Aging: Research and Future Directions, 2006).
- LGBT adults more likely to receive health care services in emergency rooms
- Current healthcare system assumes patients are heterosexual (ie, intake forms, policies, etc.)
- Health information does not include “messages” that are inclusive for LGBT people and/or older LGBT folks (including language, printed materials, etc).

# Health Disparities – HIV/Aging

- People are living longer with HIV – dying from co-morbidities (heart disease, diabetes)
- Older Adults are becoming newly infected with HIV (sexual activity and/or drug use)
- Older Adults are getting diagnosed later in life (HIV symptoms may mimic health issues of aging)
- Layers of stigma (age, HIV, race, SO)
- Few prevention messages (primary/secondary)
- Older gay men more likely to experience isolation, loss of friends/family from AIDS epidemic.