

LGBT Older Adults: *A Population at Risk*



RISK FACTORS

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults face serious challenges as they age.

9 out of 10 LGBT older adults have no children to help care for them as compared to 2 out of 10 heterosexual older adults. Furthermore, LGBT older adults have often been ostracized from an extended network of family members based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT older adults tend to form extended friend networks or “chosen families” that they rely on to help care for them at times of need. Unlike heterosexual family structures that are intergenerational, chosen families tend to be comprised of peers who are, as they age, facing the same care challenges.

7 out of 10 LGBT older adults live alone as compared to 3 out of 10 heterosexual older adults. The social isolation of living alone, compounded by the fears of allowing homecare, chore-service, and other lay and professional staff into one’s home create a significant barrier for care. LGBT older adults often feel they have no one to call in times of need. In addition, they feel especially vulnerable in the hands of strangers coming into their homes who may mistreat them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The transgender community in particular is significantly less likely to even call for help in order to avoid mistreatment or disrespect.

LGBT older adults are nearly 3 times as likely to live in poverty as heterosexual older adults. There are a number of factors contributing to this factor: LGBT people still face tremendous discrimination in the workplace including being able to be legally fired for their sexual orientation or gender identity. When they do have jobs, they make less than their heterosexual counterparts and are penalized with fewer employment perks, such as healthcare benefits for their partners. Barring legal marriage, there are a few legal contracts available to help protect one’s assets, but not enough LGBT adults have the necessary measures in place. Additionally, LGBT seniors in long-term relationships who attempt to access Medicaid benefits may risk impoverishing their partner in order to qualify.

A SNAPSHOT OF MICHIGAN’S LGBT OLDER ADULT POPULATION

While there are no reliable census bureau statistics on the number of LGBT people living in Michigan, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force make a compelling argument for calculating a percentage of the population that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) and places that figure at about 5%-10%. Erring on the conservative side at just 5% and based on Michigan’s 2010 Census Bureau statistics that means there are currently 68,077 LGBT people aged 65 and up living in Michigan. Another 62,600 are 55-64 years

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SOLUTIONS

The LGBT Older Adult Coalition has identified a number of strategies designed to create a safe care network for LGBT older adults living in Michigan:

1. Reduce isolation for LGBT older adults by strengthening community supports through social connection, social activities and buddy systems in partnership with both LGBT organizations and mainstream aging organizations.
 - a. **Social & Support Groups at Affirmations** | www.GoAffirmations.org
 - b. **The Detroit Elder Project – KICK** | email Cornelius Wilson belcrest5440@yahoo.com
2. Advocate on behalf of LGBT older adults in healthcare, housing, and legal affairs | www.lgbtolderadults.com
 - a. **LGBT Patient Rights Guide**
 - b. **LGBT Older Adults Housing Guide**
 - c. **Residents’ Rights and the LGBT Community: Know Your Rights as a Nursing Home Resident**
 - d. **Guardian Standards of Practice**
3. Improve and increase LGBT culturally competent health and residential care by providing competency training and creating a referral network of trained providers in Michigan | www.lgbtolderadults.com
 - a. **SE Michigan Rainbow Resource Guide for Older Adults**
 - b. **Guide to Asking Questions about Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**
 - c. **All Ally’s Guide to Issues Facing LGBT Americans**
 - d. **Improving the Lives of Transgender Older Adults: Recommendations for Policy and Practice**
 - e. **Collaboration Pilot with Metro Detroit Area Agencies on Aging**
 - f. **Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults**
4. Provide and make critical information accessible to LGBT older adults via workshops and resource guides so they are better able to manage their own affairs.
 - a. **4th Annual LGBT Older Adult Summit** | Cornelius Wilson, belcrest5440@yahoo.com



THE LGBT OLDER ADULT COALITION | www.lgbtolderadults.com

Visit our website for more information about meetings and trainings