

ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF LGBTQ OLDER PEOPLE

In Partnership with  Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ Elders 

MEI STANDARD
Part III (BONUS) — City Provides Services to LGBTQ Elders
2 POINTS

This section grants credit to a city for (1) directly providing services targeted to LGBTQ older people, (2) funding organizations that provide these services, or (3) providing other meaningful types of support (such as in-kind support, subsidized use of city facilities, etc.) to community organizations that provide services or resources targeted to LGBTQ older people.

Municipalities play a critical role in delivering services to older people across the country. While some LGBTQ older people are living vibrant, full lives across the United States, many often remain invisible and may not seek services due to fear of, and experiences with, discrimination.

Additionally, those who seek services may not be out as LGBTQ. Estimates indicate that today there are nearly 3 million people over the age of 55 who identify as LGBTQ and that number is expected to double by 2030. Additionally, research shows LGBTQ couples reside in 93% of all counties across the country. This means that in communities large and small, city

employees more than likely already serve or will soon serve LGBTQ older people.

But older LGBTQ people are resilient and—with the support of city laws, policies, and services that address their unique needs and experiences—will continue to thrive and make valuable contributions to their communities.

LGBTQ older people face unique challenges as they age. They are:



2X as likely to be **single & live alone.**



Four times less likely to **have children.**



Far more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to have faced discrimination and **social marginalization.**



More likely, therefore, to face poverty & homelessness and **have poor physical & mental health.**

UNIQUE CHALLENGES
Social Isolation

Accessing safe, friendly services can be difficult for LGBTQ older people who do not live in major cities. Social connectedness keeps older people healthy and helps them live longer. LGBTQ older people, however, are twice as likely to live alone, making them vulnerable to social isolation. Older people living with HIV also face high rates of isolation, which has been shown to negatively impact health and well-being—particularly cognitive function.

Housing
Older LGBTQ couples often experience discrimination when seeking rental housing and housing geared towards aging populations such as 55+ residential communities or long-term care facilities. If and when they are admitted into an older people housing development or facility, they are frequently discriminated against by property managers, staff, other residents, or service providers, making their living situation extremely difficult or even life-threatening. Moreover, these factors combined with other forms of discrimination greatly increase the risk of older LGBTQ Americans experiencing homelessness.

Financial Security
LGBTQ people—particularly LGBTQ people of color and transgender individuals—suffer large economic disparities compared to non-LGBTQ individuals due to many factors, including systemic discrimination in employment, education, and other areas of life. LGBTQ older Americans are no exception. Compounded discrimination exacerbates LGBTQ older Americans' risk of financial insecurity. For instance, transgender older people are more likely to experience financial barriers than cisgender older people, regardless of age, income, and education. Studies have shown that nearly half of transgender older people live at or below two-hundred percent of the federal poverty level.

Health Care
LGBTQ older people experience mental and physical illness more frequently than their non-LGBTQ counterparts, but are less likely to reach out to providers, senior centers, meal programs, and other public programs for fear of sexual orientation or gender identity-based discrimination and harassment. Moreover, older LGBTQ Americans are often subjected to culturally incompetent or even neglectful health care. They may even be denied health care altogether.

HIV and AIDS
HIV and AIDS disproportionately affect the LGBTQ community in general, and the number of LGBTQ older people impacted is on the rise. People 50 and older account for 15 percent of all new HIV or AIDS diagnoses. Medical advancements in HIV treatment has allowed people living with this condition to enjoy life well into their 70s, 80s, and 90s. Today, half of all Americans living with HIV are over 50 years old.

WHAT CAN CITIES DO?

As the LGBTQ older adult population grows, many municipalities are starting to consider their needs and incorporate their perspectives in the planning and provision of services. By making some simple changes, LGBTQ populations can be brought to the table as aging services and programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated.

Incorporate Targeted Resources and Programming into City Services.

The first step a city can take to begin addressing the needs of older LGBTQ residents and visitors is reviewing the general services it already provides and assessing whether there are components of each that are specifically targeted to meet the needs of LGBTQ older adults (discussed above). If a city does not provide a vital service—like housing assistance for LGBTQ older people—and has the means to do so, it should work to create those services as expeditiously as possible. Cities that directly provide services targeted to LGBTQ older adults will receive credit in Part III (BONUS) - City Provides Services to LGBTQ Elders.

Support Community Organizations that Provide Targeted Services

If a city is unable to directly provide services to older LGBTQ citizens, it should provide support to community organizations that have targeted services or resources for LGBTQ older people. City support for these organizations need not take the form of city funding or grants. Municipalities can support community organizations that offer programming or resources specifically for LGBTQ older people through in-kind support like complementary use of city facilities and donated staff time for volunteer activities. Cities that support third-party organizations that provide services targeted to LGBTQ older adults also qualify for credit in Part III (BONUS) — City Provides Services to LGBTQ Elders.

Legislative and Policy Initiatives

Municipalities should also update laws and policies to be more inclusive of their LGBTQ older adult population. Examples of specific measures cities can take to address the needs of its LGBTQ aging population are outlined below.

- Establish a Commission on LGBTQ Aging to study the issues that exist for LGBTQ older residents, make policy and legislative recommendations, and work to effectuate their implementation.
- Designate LGBTQ older people as a target population in city aging programs.
- Create an LGBTQ-inclusive local aging plans.
- Ensure that all city-owned or city-funded long-term care facilities have non-discrimination policies inclusive of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, and source of income alongside other protected characteristics.

- Develop a city long-term care facility LGBTQ Residents’ Bill of Rights informing residents of their rights, the facility’s non-discrimination policies, and its complaint process.
- Mandate LGBTQ cultural competency training for long-term care workers and aging providers of city and city-funded facilities.
- Create and implement a plan to educate all city agency staff who work with LGBTQ older adults on the unique needs and disparities of LGBTQ older people.
- Ensure that LGBTQ older people are included in local data collection efforts.

(Note: The above measures are currently not considered for credit in Part III (BONUS) - City Provides Services to LGBTQ Elders but may be considered for credit in Part V — Leadership on LGBTQ Equality.)

CONCLUSION

As LGBTQ people age, the set of challenges they face changes and in many cases, exacerbates. Municipalities can do more to address the needs of this community in many ways that need not be cost or resource intensive. By embedding LGBTQ-aging-friendly policies in everyday municipal workings, cities begin to ensure that their aging services are reaching the most vulnerable people in their community, including LGBTQ older people. Additionally, municipalities can immediately begin to address the unique needs of LGBTQ older adults by directly providing targeted services and resources or supporting community organizations that do.

RESOURCES FROM SAGE’S NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER ON LGBT AGING:

Strengthen Your State and Local Aging Plan: A Practical Guide for Expanding the Inclusion of LGBT Older Adults lays out the challenges LGBTQ older people face and provides examples of how communities large and small have increased efforts to better serve this population.

Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Creating Welcoming Agencies outlines steps city agencies can take to make their services more inclusive of and welcoming to LGBTQ older people.

AVAILABLE AT **LGBTAGINGCENTER.ORG**

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