



Gay and Graying

Presented by

Foster Sommerlad
Education & Training Coordinator

Resource Center
www.myresourcecenter.org
2701 Reagan St | Dallas, TX 75219
Office 214-528-0144 | Direct 214-540-4457 | Fax 214-522-4604

The Need for LGBT Awareness

"There's a moment when that person decides to share his life or hide it again depending on what you say, and that particular moment can decide how the rest of their life is going to be."

- from Gen Silent

The Need for LGBT Awareness

With knowledge, we can

- ✓ challenge ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination.
- ✓ create a welcoming and safe environment.
- ✓ provide culturally competent care.

Unique Experience of LGBT Seniors

- Social stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and violence based on their sexual orientation.
- Labeled criminals, sinners, and/or mentally ill.
- The resulting fear has disrupted lives and put LGBT seniors at greater risk for physical and mental illnesses.
- Effects from a lifetime of stigma and discrimination include:

Social isolation
Depression and anxiety
Poverty
Chronic illness

Delayed care-seeking
Poor nutrition
Premature mortality
and more . . .

Context

Heterosexism

- The mind-set that heterosexuality is the only "natural" or superior sexual orientation.
- Society's "default setting."
- Pervades societal customs and institutions.
- Creates misinformation and misconceptions.



Addressing Assumptions/Misconceptions

- Assumptions create barriers to services.
- They may unintentionally exclude LGBT elders or others.
- Be willing to examine your assumptions and labels and see each person as someone with unique needs and concerns.
- Challenge your staff to do the same.

• *What are your assumptions/misconceptions?*

Addressing Assumptions/Misconceptions

- **DO** presume your agency has LGBT patients/residents.
- **DO NOT** assume you can identify LGBT people by appearance, experience, or any external characteristic.
- **DO** remember that a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity are only two aspects of his/her overall identity and life experience.

Addressing Assumptions/Misconceptions

- **DO** ask your clients about their sexual orientation and gender identity in a **safe and confidential manner**.

(Keep in mind: many LGBT seniors have experiences of discrimination and stigma and may be reluctant or unwilling to disclose this information. Do not force an answer. If someone appears uncomfortable or anxious, move on to the next question.)

- **DO NOT** assume that "treating everyone the same" is effective or will make LGBT seniors feel safe or welcomed.

Language Matters

- Words lead to thoughts
- Thoughts lead to action

HANDOUT

Language Matters

Queer

Historically, a derogatory term for LGBT individuals. It is being claimed again as a term of empowerment by some in the community. Not universally accepted; be careful if you use it.

Sexual Orientation

(not "Sexual Preference") One's enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or spiritual attraction to another person.

Transgender

One whose gender identity does not match their biological designation (gender assigned at birth). It is not another way of saying "gay."

Language Matters

Problematic terms and alternatives:

~~Sexual preference~~

Sexual Orientation

~~Homosexual~~

Gay/Lesbian

~~Transvestite~~

Transgender

~~Transsexual~~

Transgender

~~Sex change~~

Transition

Language Matters

- Words lead to thoughts
- Thoughts lead to action



- Be familiar with the terms
 - Use the terms
- Encourage others to use them

First Impressions

First impressions go a long way.

Do your marketing materials feature only opposite-sex couples, or do they also include same-sex couples and other self-identified LGBT people?

Do your marketing materials feature photos older adults of color and other diverse populations?

Does your agency feature any LGBT community events, programs, or organizations on your bulletin boards or other materials.

First Impressions

- Hang images of LGBT older adults in your lobby and other high-traffic areas.
- Post your agency's non-discrimination policy on your Web site, all print materials, and in your lobby. Make your policy available to patients/residents and employees.
- If possible, have single-stall, gender-neutral restrooms available for patients/residents and employees.
- Make available information about local LGBT resources, and include books and publications with LGBT content, characters, and authors in your library or bookshelves.

Lasting Change Starts with Everyone

- Personnel at every level has a role in ensuring that your agency's culture and mission are inclusive and welcoming.
- Continually provide diversity awareness training for staff and clients which includes LGBT issues and concerns. Include your board of directors and management in this training.
- Recruit LGBT employees. Place ads in LGBT publications and work through local LGBT organizations to find competent staff.
- Consider designating one staff person to be responsible for monitoring your agency's efforts to reach LGBT and other diverse older adults.

Creating a welcoming environment involves all staff and volunteers, not just supervisors.

Inclusion Is An Ongoing Process

Continually review and assess if your agency is responding to the needs of your LGBT clients.

- Communicate with your LGBT clients about how they feel your agency is working with the diversity in your agency.
- Consider forming a group of staff and clients that can provide ongoing feedback.
- Create and distribute surveys for both staff and clients to capture data about the needs and experiences within your agency.

Your clients are best suited to offer tangible ways that services and programs can be tailored to their needs.

Gay and Graying

Providing culturally-informed care to LGBT clients is fundamentally no different from providing patient-centered care to any other group. Understanding clients' histories and modifying policies and behaviors to honor their experiences will result in more effective care and increase trust among clients towards those providing that care.