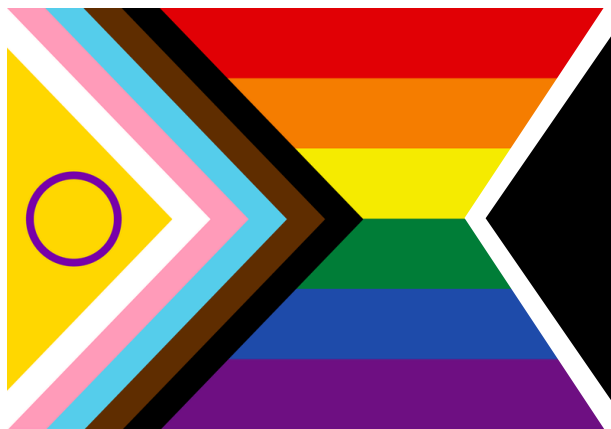




sagecare®
LGBTQ+ Aging Cultural Competency

Looking Back *on LGBTQ+ History*

As we celebrate LGBTQ+ History Month, we honor not only the victories of the LGBTQ+ rights movement but also the diverse individuals and communities whose courage made those victories possible.

»» 1920s

Early laws in the United States criminalized same-sex relationships and gender nonconformity. LGBTQ+ people often faced arrest, discrimination, and social exclusion.

»» 1930-1940s

Thousands of LGBTQ+ individuals were persecuted and imprisoned under the Nazi regime, with many sent to concentration camps. Their experiences were largely overlooked in post-war historical accounts.

»» 1950s

The "Lavender Scare" resulted in thousands of suspected LGBTQ+ federal employees losing their jobs. LGBTQ+ people were widely considered security risks despite a lack of evidence.

»» 1960s

Bayard Rustin, a key organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, contributed significantly to the Civil Rights Movement despite facing discrimination because he was gay. In 1969, the Stonewall Uprising became a catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

»» 1970s

The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973. LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations expanded nationwide, and the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights took place in 1979.

»» 1980s

The HIV/AIDS epidemic devastated LGBTQ+ communities, particularly gay and bisexual men. Activist organizations such as ACT UP pushed for increased research, treatment access, and public awareness while fighting stigma and discrimination.

»» 1990s

Visibility and advocacy efforts grew. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996, limiting federal recognition of same-sex marriages. At the same time, LGBTQ+ organizations expanded efforts to address inclusion across diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural communities.

»» 2000s

Landmark court decisions advanced LGBTQ+ rights. In 2003, *Lawrence v. Texas* invalidated laws criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships. Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage.

»» 2010s

Major milestones included the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in 2011, marriage equality nationwide through *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, and growing public recognition of transgender and nonbinary identities.

»» 2020s

The U.S. Supreme Court's *Bostock v. Clayton County* decision affirmed workplace protections for LGBTQ+ employees. Increased visibility of transgender and nonbinary individuals helped drive conversations about healthcare, education, safety, and inclusion. LGBTQ+ older adults continued advocating for affirming aging services, housing, and healthcare.

LGBTQ+ History Through an Intersectional Lens

Many important LGBTQ+ milestones were achieved through the leadership of people whose contributions have historically been overlooked.



»» Bayard Rustin

A gay Black civil rights leader and chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin's contributions were often minimized due to discrimination related to his sexual orientation.



»» Marsha P. Johnson & Sylvia Rivera

Transgender activists and advocates for homeless youth and marginalized LGBTQ+ communities who played important roles in the movement for LGBTQ+ justice.



»» Barbara Smith

A Black lesbian feminist whose work helped popularize intersectional approaches to social justice and community organizing.



»» Audre Lorde

A Black lesbian poet, writer, and activist who advocated for racial justice, gender equity, LGBTQ+ rights, and disability awareness.

Intersectionality Matters

No LGBTQ+ person has a single identity. Each individual's experiences are shaped by the combination of their identities, backgrounds, and life experiences.

For example, an LGBTQ+ older adult may also be:

- A person of color
- An immigrant or refugee
- A veteran
- A person with a disability
- Living with chronic health conditions
- A member of a faith community
- Living in a rural area
- A caregiver
- Living with limited financial resources

These intersecting identities can affect access to healthcare, housing, transportation, social support, employment, and culturally responsive services.



Why Intersectionality Matters for LGBTQ+ Older Adults

Many LGBTQ+ older adults have experienced multiple forms of discrimination throughout their lives. Some have faced barriers not only because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but also because of racism, ageism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, or other forms of bias.

LGBTQ+ Older Adults: A Continuing Civil Rights Issue

Today's LGBTQ+ older adults are the first generation to age openly in significant numbers. Many lived through periods when being LGBTQ+ could result in job loss, housing discrimination, family rejection, criminalization, or denial of healthcare.

Historical Experiences

Many LGBTQ+ older adults:

- Lived through the Lavender Scare and widespread workplace discrimination.
- Witnessed or participated in the Gay Liberation Movement following Stonewall.
- Lost partners, friends, and community members during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Delayed coming out due to fear of discrimination.
- Experienced barriers to marriage, inheritance rights, and family recognition for much of their lives.

Current Challenges

Research continues to show that LGBTQ+ older adults may face:

- Higher rates of social isolation and loneliness.
- Increased risk of discrimination in healthcare and long-term care settings.
- Greater likelihood of living alone without traditional family caregiving support.
- Fear of needing to "go back into the closet" when entering assisted living, nursing homes, or receiving home care services.
- Economic disparities resulting from decades of unequal treatment in employment, benefits, and legal protections.

Building Inclusive Aging Services

Organizations can help create affirming environments by:

- Providing LGBTQ+ cultural competency training.
- Using inclusive forms and language.
- Respecting names, pronouns, and chosen family relationships.
- Ensuring non-discrimination policies explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- Celebrating LGBTQ+ history and visibility year-round.
- Creating opportunities for LGBTQ+ older adults to share their stories and experiences.

LGBTQ+ History Month is about looking back. It is also about creating a future where every LGBTQ+ person can age with dignity, safety, and belonging.

Discussion Questions for LGBTQ+ History Month

Consider incorporating these reflection questions into programming:

1. How might LGBTQ+ older adults experience aging differently based on race, ethnicity, disability, religion, income, or geography?
2. What barriers might exist for LGBTQ+ elders who hold multiple marginalized identities?
3. How can our organization create a more welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ people from diverse backgrounds and experiences?
4. Whose stories are often missing when we talk about LGBTQ+ history?
5. How can we ensure that LGBTQ+ history includes the contributions of transgender people, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and older adults?



Key Priorities for the Future

- Expanding access to affirming healthcare, including transgender and nonbinary care.
- Increasing LGBTQ+ inclusive housing and long-term care options.
- Preserving LGBTQ+ history through storytelling, archives, and oral history projects.
- Strengthening support for LGBTQ+ older adults experiencing social isolation.
- Addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ+ people of color, immigrants, veterans, people with disabilities, and other historically marginalized communities
- Fostering intergenerational connections between LGBTQ+ youth and elders.
- Ensuring that all people can live, age, and receive care without fear of discrimination.

Programming Ideas

- Host an LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Storytelling Event.
- Invite transgender and nonbinary speakers to share lived experiences.
- Screen documentaries highlighting LGBTQ+ history and activism.
- Create a community oral history project.
- Feature LGBTQ+ elders who have witnessed major historical milestones.
- Partner with local LGBTQ+ organizations for educational workshops.
- Highlight LGBTQ+ authors, artists, musicians, and activists from diverse backgrounds.
- Organize a service project benefiting LGBTQ+ community organizations.
- Display educational posters about LGBTQ+ historical milestones.
- Facilitate discussions about LGBTQ+ inclusion in healthcare and aging services.

Conclusion

By 2030, millions of LGBTQ+ adults in the United States will be age 55 and older, making LGBTQ+ aging one of the most important emerging issues in healthcare, senior living, home care, hospice, and aging services. This growing population brings both opportunities and responsibilities for organizations committed to providing person-centered, affirming care.

Building an inclusive future means recognizing that LGBTQ+ people are not a single community with a single experience. By embracing intersectionality, organizations can better support the full diversity of LGBTQ+ older adults and help ensure that everyone can age with dignity, safety, belonging, and respect.

