



# Compassion with Pride: Ensuring LGBTQ+ Inclusive, Affirming Person-Centered Aging

*A Playbook for Inclusive Care, Advocacy,  
and Community Engagement*

# Introduction

Aging is a journey every one of us takes, but for LGBTQ+ elders, that journey often comes with additional hurdles. More than 3 million older LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. face higher rates of isolation, discrimination, and barriers to care. Many live with the persistent fear of being forced back into the closet just when they need support the most.

These challenges don't just affect health outcomes; they affect dignity, belonging, and the right to age authentically. As policies shift and protections come under threat, the need to advocate, educate, and act has never been greater.

This playbook, *Compassion with Pride*, was created to help individuals, organizations, and communities ensure that LGBTQ+ elders are treated with dignity, respect, and care. It blends advocacy, training, history, data, and celebration to provide both inspiration and practical action steps.

Whether you are a caregiver, a service provider, a policymaker, or an ally, you have the power to make aging services inclusive, affirming, and safe.

Together, we can build a future where no elder is invisible and where aging is experienced with the same pride that has carried LGBTQ+ communities through decades of resilience.



*Many live with the persistent fear of being **forced back into the closet** just when they need support the most.*



## The Landscape of LGBTQ+ Aging

Today, more than 3 million LGBTQ+ older adults live in the United States, and that number is projected to rise to 7 million by 2030. Yet, many remain unseen in traditional aging services. Research shows that LGBTQ+ elders face higher rates of social isolation, financial insecurity, and health disparities compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers.

### Isolation & Loneliness

- 45% of LGBTQ+ older adults report a lack of companionship.
- 48% feel socially isolated.

### Healthcare Gaps

- 40% of LGBTQ+ adults 45+ say their providers don't know their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Nearly 1 in 5 delayed seeking care in the past year.
- 1 in 4 trans people report having to educate their provider on trans health issues.

### Economic Insecurity

- Many LGBTQ+ elders live below 200% of the federal poverty level and rely on SNAP and other benefits.
- A lifetime of employment discrimination means reduced earnings, retirement savings, and benefits.

### HIV & Chronic Illness

- 54% of Americans living with HIV are over age 50 and face elevated risks for diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and other chronic conditions.

*LGBTQ+ elders face **higher rates** of **social isolation, financial insecurity, and health disparities***

# A Historical Context of Progress & Trauma

LGBTQ+ elders carry a living history of both progress and persecution:

1920s  
-  
1950s

Homosexuality was criminalized; LGBTQ+ people were targeted by police, fired from their jobs, and pathologized.

Thousands were killed in Nazi concentration camps.

In the U.S., LGBTQ+ people were dismissed from government service during the “Lavender Scare.”

1950s  
-  
1960s

Many states strengthened or introduced new “sexual psychopath” laws that allowed LGBTQ+ people, especially gay men and trans women, to be incarcerated indefinitely and without due process.

1969

1969: The Stonewall Riots catalyzed the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

1973

The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders.

1980s

The HIV/AIDS crisis decimated communities amid stigma, discrimination, and government inaction.



# A Historical Context of Progress & Trauma

LGBTQ+ elders carry a living history of both progress and persecution:

1990s

A wave of anti-LGBTQ+ ballot initiatives passed or appeared across multiple states, such as Colorado's Amendment 2 (1992), aiming to prohibit protections for LGBTQ+ people and reinforce discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

1990s  
-  
2000s

Growing recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, yet many policies still excluded families of choice.

2015

The Supreme Court affirmed marriage equality nationwide.

Present

Protections for LGBTQ+ elders (in healthcare, housing, and services) remain contested in many states and communities.

*These milestones remind us that **progress is never guaranteed.** Without intentional, affirming systems of care, LGBTQ+ elders risk traumatization, invisibility, and exclusion at a vulnerable time of life.*



# Barriers and Fears

These realities underscore the urgent need for affirming, person-centered, and trauma-informed systems of care.

## Social Isolation

- LGBTQ+ elders are more likely to live alone and less likely to have children or traditional family support.
- They experience up to 3x higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to heterosexual peers.
- Trans elders report even higher rates of isolation and lack of companionship.

## Discrimination in Healthcare and Long-Term Care

- Misgendering, refusal of service, and microaggressions cause many elders to avoid care.
- 24% of transgender people report avoiding medical care due to fear of mistreatment.
- In long-term care, elders may be pressured (directly or indirectly) to hide their identity or relationships.
- LGBTQ+ older adults lack access to consistent preventative care due to a variety of reasons, including financial insecurity, fear of discrimination, and some providers lack of knowledge in care around LGBTQ+ needs.



*In long-term care, elders may be pressured (directly or indirectly) to **hide their identity or relationships.***

# Barriers and Fears

These realities underscore the urgent need for affirming, person-centered, and trauma-informed systems of care.

## Economic Insecurity

- Decades of discrimination in employment, housing, and benefits leave many LGBTQ+ elders with fewer assets and less retirement security.
- Unequal access to spousal benefits, survivor benefits, and family caregiving support compounds the risk.

## Fear of Going Back into the Closet

- Many elders worry they will have to hide their identity in senior housing or long-term care.
- 41% of LGBTQ+ older adults, and 58% of transgender and nonbinary elders, worry about having to hide who they are in senior housing or care settings.

## Fear of Going Back into the Closet

- Especially in rural or politically hostile areas, LGBTQ+ elders may have few, if any, affirming options for housing, healthcare, or community programs.
- Many providers lack trauma-informed, culturally competent training.

*41% of LGBTQ+ older adults, and 58% of transgender and nonbinary elders, worry about having to **hide who they are** in senior housing or care settings.*



# Pathways to Inclusive Care

There are clear steps organizations and individuals can take to transform services for LGBTQ+ elders.

## Embrace Cultural Competency and Person-Centered Care

- Use training programs such as SAGECare to provide structured education on:
  - LGBTQ+ terminology and identities.
  - Historical trauma and resilience.
  - Affirming communication (names, pronouns, relationships).
- Integrate person-centered care principles:
  - Ask elders how they define family.
  - Honor chosen names and pronouns in all records and interactions.
  - Center each person's goals, values, and life story in care planning.

## Create Affirming Environments

- Conduct environmental assessments of your physical and virtual spaces:
  - Display visible signs of inclusion (rainbow/trans flags, affirming posters).
  - Ensure gender-neutral and accessible restrooms where possible.
  - Offer inclusive reading materials, imagery, and programming.
- Update intake and assessment forms:
  - Include options for gender identity, pronouns, sexual orientation, and family-of-choice.
  - Explain why you are collecting this information and how it will be used safely.



# Pathways to Inclusive Care

## Build Inclusive Policies and Accountability

- Adopt explicit non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- Embed these policies in:
  - Resident/participant handbooks.
  - Staff code of conduct and HR policies.
  - Vendor and partner standards.
- Create clear reporting and accountability mechanisms for bias, harassment, or discrimination.

## Train All Staff, Not Just Leadership

- Offer ongoing training for:
  - Clinical staff (nurses, physicians, therapists).
  - Direct care workers (CNAs, home health aides, and personal care attendants).
  - Non-clinical staff (drivers, kitchen staff, reception, housekeeping).
  - Volunteers, board members, and leadership.
- Integrate trauma-informed principles:
  - Safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.
  - Awareness of historical trauma and intersectional identities.



# Pathways to Inclusive Care

## Foster Community Partnerships

### Collaborate with:

- Local LGBTQ+ centers (via SAGECollab or CenterLink).
- State equality organizations (via the Equality Federation).
- HIV and transgender-serving organizations.
- Aging networks, Area Agencies on Aging, and Ombudsman programs.

Co-host programs, cross-refer clients, and share staff training opportunities. Allow LGBTQ+ organizations to use physical space for meetings or events. This fosters a sense of trust that will create a partnership between you and your community.

## Connect Inclusion to Quality and Sustainability

### Recognize that LGBTQ+ inclusion:

- Improves resident and patient experience.
- Strengthens metrics like HEDIS, CAHPS, and CMS star ratings.
- Aligns with tools such as the Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI) and Healthcare Equality Index (HEI).
- Taps into significant LGBTQ+ economic and social contributions, including an estimated \$4.7 trillion in global LGBTQ+ purchasing power.

## Advocate Beyond Your Walls

### Connect internal practice change to external policy advocacy:

- Support local, state, and federal policies that protect LGBTQ+ elders in healthcare, housing, and services.
- Participate in campaigns and coalitions that center LGBTQ+ aging.

## Resources

*CenterLink*

<https://www.lgbtqcenters.org/>

*Equality Federation*

<https://www.equalityfederation.org/>

*Long-Term Care Equality Index*

<https://thelei.org/>

*National Resource Center on LGBTQ+ Aging*

<https://lgbtagingcenter.org/>

# Advocacy & Community Engagement

Inclusive aging is not just about services; it's about power, voice, and visibility. Advocacy and community engagement should be both strategic and joyful.



## Policy & Systems Advocacy

### Contact Representatives

- Urge protection and expansion of LGBTQ+ aging rights, including non-discrimination protections, access to affirming care, and protections in Medicare, Medicaid, and housing.
- Thank representatives who support and advocate for LGBTQ+ elders.

### Join Action Networks

- Engage with SAGE's Action Squad and similar groups to respond quickly to urgent issues.

### Support Inclusive Policies Locally

- Encourage aging services providers, hospitals, and housing agencies to adopt affirming policies and public commitments.

### Leverage Campaigns and Hashtags

- Participate in campaigns like **#CompassionWithPride** to raise visibility for LGBTQ+ elders.



## Joyful & Visible Community Programming

Advocacy should also celebrate LGBTQ+ elders' resilience, creativity, and leadership:

- Storytelling workshops (e.g., "My Pride Journey").
- Intergenerational "Ask Me Anything" circles with youth.
- Interactive LGBTQ+ history timelines and displays.
- Pride parades or mini marches, drag bingo, dance parties.
- Rainbow crafting events and art shows.
- Friendship walks and social clubs to reduce isolation.
- Inclusive Care Pledge Walls where staff, residents, and community members sign public commitments to inclusion.
- Integrating the LGBTQ+ experience or narrative into existing programming, such as book clubs and movie nights, without fanfare – illustrating that LGBTQ+ experiences are part of the fabric of universal experience.

These events can be tailored for Pride Month, LGBT History Month, Transgender Day of Visibility, and other key dates but should also extend year-round.

# Tools & Resources

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## Core LGBTQ+ Resources

### SAGEYou

A virtual hub for LGBTQ+ people and allies offering community, programs, and information.

### SAGECare Training & Credentialing

Cultural competency training for aging services providers. Tools for policy review, staff education, and organizational transformation.

### Advocacy Tools

Action alerts, letter templates, and campaign materials from organizations like SAGE, HRC, Lambda Legal, ACLU, Justice in Aging, and others.

## Housing & Policy Tools

### Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI)

Assesses and supports inclusive practices in long-term care communities.

### Healthcare Equality Index (HEI)

Evaluates inclusive hospital and healthcare policies.

### State Equality Index & Municipal Equality Index

Provide snapshots of protections and risks in different states and cities.

## Safety, Legal, and Financial Tools

### Mental Health & Crisis Support

- 988 Lifeline (option 3) for LGBTQ+ support
- Trans Lifeline
- LGBT National Senior Hotline 888-234-7243
- Legal Empowerment
- Lambda Legal and ACLU “Know Your Rights” guides
- Transgender Law Center resources
- Advance Care Planning Toolkits (healthcare proxies, powers of attorney, and living wills)

### Financial and Identity Support

- SAGECents digital financial wellness platform
- Point of Pride and other funds for gender-affirming care and support
- ID-affirmation resources from organizations like Advocates for Trans Equality (A4TE)

### Safety from Abuse and Fraud

- Anti-Violence Project hotlines
- Senior Medicare Patrol for fraud prevention
- Cybersecurity resources from groups like LGBT Tech

# Programming Guides & Checklists



## Fact & Tips Sheets

Access to dozens of fact & tip sheets to empower your staff, including:

- Monthly resource guides for social media marketing
- Guides on selecting training programs for your team
- Updated statistics on the LGBTQ+ community, with a focus on adults aged 55+



## LGBT History Month Guide

Programming ideas such as:

- Book clubs and film screenings
- Art exhibitions and historical walls
- Drag bingo, dance parties, and friendship walks



## Pride Programming Guide

A comprehensive guide adapted for programming coordinators to plan inclusive events, with helpful tips like:

- Weekly themes, event ideas, and bonus activities
- Resources for planning respectful and joyful activities
- A Quick Use Checklist

# How You Can Make a Difference

Everyone, individuals, organizations, and communities, has a role in ensuring LGBTQ+ elders age with authenticity, safety, and pride.



## Individuals

### Educate Yourself

- Learn about LGBTQ+ aging issues using resources from SAGE and partner organizations.

### Speak Up

- Challenge bias, discrimination, and erasure when you see it.
- Share stories and amplify LGBTQ+ elder voices.

### Volunteer & Connect

- Support LGBTQ+ centers, friendly visitor programs, hotlines, or virtual programs.
- Offer rides, tech support, or companionship when possible.



## Communities & Systems

### Host Elder-Focused Pride and History Events

- Center LGBTQ+ elders' stories and leadership.

### Build Intergenerational Programs

- Pair elders with youth for mentor/mentee, pen pal, or storytelling projects.

### Partner for Power

- Join forces with advocacy groups, ombudsman programs, and aging networks.

### Promote Inclusion in Civic Life

- Ensure LGBTQ+ elders are visible and represented in councils, boards, and advisory groups.



## Organizations

### Commit to Training and Credentialing

- Pursue SAGECare or similar LGBTQ+ cultural competency programs.

### Audit and Update Policies

- Review non-discrimination, visitation, roommate, and intake policies for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

### Create Affirming Environments

- Signal inclusion through visuals, language, and programming.
- Normalize pronoun sharing and respect for chosen names.

### Measure and Improve

- Track equity and inclusion in satisfaction surveys, quality metrics, and outcomes.
- Celebrate progress and share what's working.

# Conclusion

The journey of aging should never mean hiding who we are. Yet, too many LGBTQ+ elders face the prospect of isolation, discrimination, or invisibility at the very time they deserve support, safety, and celebration.

By integrating advocacy, education, cultural competency, history, and joy, we can build a future where LGBTQ+ elders live with dignity and pride, where every care setting is a place of safety and affirmation, not fear.

**What happens next depends on us.**



## Take the Pledge

Commit personally and organizationally to LGBTQ+ inclusive, affirming aging.



## Get Trained

Advocate for SAGECare or comparable training in your workplace, networks, and community.



## Transform Your Space

Audit your policies, environment, and practices to make concrete changes.



## Raise Your Voice

Contact representatives, join advocacy campaigns like **#CompassionWithPride**, and support policies that protect LGBTQ+ elders.



## Celebrate & Advocate Year-Round

Don't limit inclusion to Pride Month or one event. Integrate LGBTQ+ elders into every season of programming, planning, and policy.



## American Society on Aging (ASA)

The American Society on Aging is the leading multidisciplinary professional association advancing education, advocacy, and leadership development in the field of aging. Founded in 1954, ASA champions equity, anti-ageism, and inclusive aging practices while convening one of the largest national communities of aging-sector professionals.

## SAGE

SAGE is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ older people through advocacy, community programs, housing, and national partnerships. Its work spans direct services, policy change, and building inclusive aging systems nationwide.

## SAGECare

SAGECare delivers LGBTQ+ aging cultural competency training and credentialing to long-term care, healthcare, and aging-services providers across the U.S. and internationally. It equips professionals with practical tools and strategies to create safe, inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ older adults.

- Membership of **5,000+ professionals** across healthcare, policy, social services, research, business, and technology.
- Mission centers on uniting and empowering the aging services community with a **focus on equity and anti-ageism**.
- Recent Initiative: Implementation of ASA's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan, a new multi-year roadmap focused on equity, anti-ageism, systemic reform, and strengthening the aging field amid demographic change.

- Operates LGBTQ+-welcoming housing and multiple SAGE Centers in NYC, with continued national affiliate growth.
- Maintains and expands the **National Resource Center on LGBTQ+ Aging**, the first federal center of its kind.
- Amplifies LGBTQ+ elder advocacy and visibility via storytelling archives, national campaigns, and community-led initiatives.

- Trained **60,000+ providers** and credentialed more than **300 agencies**, establishing a nationwide standard in LGBTQ+ cultural competency.
- Offers staff, leadership, and policy training through consulting, virtual learning, and in-person education.
- **Strengthens agencies' public visibility** through credential seals, marketing assets, and inclusion in SAGECare's national directory.