



IDENTIFYING AND REFERRING LGBT CAREGIVERS

TIPS FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

LGBT-identified caregivers make up 9% of the 34 million Americans providing unpaid care to adults over the age of 50.¹ Despite being more likely to provide care, LGBT caregivers continue to go ‘under the radar’ of healthcare service providers. This is partially due to a lack of understanding about what caregiving looks like in the LGBT community, who the people in this category typically are, and what services they need. **As a health care professional, your ability to identify and refer caregivers to appropriate services can make a marked impact on the overall health of your patients who are providing or receiving caregiving assistance.**



Caregiving in Context

Caregiving is the act of providing physical, psychological, and/or emotional assistance to another person, typically for an extended period of time.

The vast majority of older adults wish to age in place,² and to make this possible millions of Americans provide unpaid care to older adults in their families or social circles. This care may include such things as medication management, meal preparation, transportation, and assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs).

While the majority of caregivers describe their experience as positive, research shows that there are negative impacts on their physical and emotional health.^{1,3} The stress and burden of caregiving, coupled with existing health disparities among the LGBT population, can exacerbate poor health outcomes.⁴



Why LGBT Caregivers?

85% of caregivers in the US are caring for relatives.¹ LGBT older adults are 3-4 times less likely to have children and twice as likely to be single than their non-LGBT peers,⁵ and may be estranged from their families of origin. Therefore they often lack the support that others have from family members. Instead they typically rely on *families of choice* for care, made up of friends, partners, ex-partners, and community members. The caregiving relationships within these groups may not be obvious, so they may be less likely to be identified as caregivers and connected to caregiver support services.

A *family of choice* refers to one’s created family unit made up of non-kin such as friends, partners, ex-partners, and community members.

Many caregivers, LGBT or not, do not recognize their status as a ‘caregiver.’ This may be especially true of those caring for long-term partners or friends. As you may know, caregivers typically fall into this role without any formalized training or resources. That’s why it’s important for professionals in health care and social service settings to recognize and offer support to caregivers.

As health care professionals it is crucial to not only identify the presenting condition but to treat the patient as a whole. Taking the extra step to ask questions related to caregiving and relationships can lead to a greater understanding of an LGBT patient’s needs and support systems. When a caregiver is adequately supported, it improves health outcomes for both the caregiver AND the care recipient.⁶



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Action Steps for Identifying & Referring LGBT Caregivers

CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

- Provide visual cues that your practice is LGBT-welcoming (i.e. LGBT-specific resources in waiting area, inclusive non-discrimination policy prominently displayed, rainbow sticker in visible location, etc.).
- Include sexual orientation and gender identity among demographic questions.
- Utilize gender-inclusive language, such as partner/spouse in place of husband or wife.
- Ensure that staff at all levels are trained on LGBT health and the importance of LGBT culturally-sensitive care.

IDENTIFY AND BUILD RAPPORT

- Approach interactions with empathy, open-mindedness, and lack of judgment.
- Ask your patients if they are providing care for someone.
- Ask your patients who they rely on for care.
- Recognize that a caregiver could be anyone in a person's life, including a friend, neighbor, or ex-partner, and that the caregiver and care recipient may be reluctant to disclose the relationship between them.
- Notice who is bringing your patient to appointments. That person is likely providing additional care and support, and serving as your patient's caregiver.

REFER AND DIRECT TO RESOURCES

- Help caregivers to recognize that they are caregivers and could benefit from caregiving resources.
- Thank them for the valuable role they play in the care recipient's life.
- Offer information, such as the *LGBT Caregiving Fact Sheet* from the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging at tiny.cc/lgbtcaregiving.
- Inform the caregiver that many programs and services exist to support them in their caregiving role. Local programs for caregivers of all ages can be found using the ElderCare Locator at eldercare.gov.
- Refer the caregiver to lgbtagingcenter.org/caregiving for additional resources.

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¹ *Caregiving in the U.S., 2015*, National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP

² *The 2015 United States of Aging Survey*, National Council on Aging

³ *Spouses, Adult Children, and Children-in-Law as Caregivers of Older Adults*, Psychology and Aging

⁴ *Chronically Ill Midlife and Older Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals and Their Informal Caregivers*, Sexuality and Research and Social Policy

⁵ *Improving the Lives of LGBT Older Adults*, Movement Advancement Project & SAGE

⁶ *Family Caregiver Well-Being is Important to Care Recipient Health*, American Psychological Association