



# FACTS ON LGBTQ+ AGING

**sage** | Advocacy &  
Services for  
LGBTQ+ Elders  
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## LGBTQ+ Older People

**LGBTQ+ older people are a diverse and widespread population, residing in every area of the country.**

While the lack of a national probability study makes it impossible to determine the exact number of LGBTQ+ elders in the United States, estimates suggest that nearly 3 million people aged 50 and over currently identify as LGBTQ+, a number projected to rise to around 7 million as the aging population grows.<sup>1,2</sup>

LGBTQ+ older people face unique challenges as we age. LGBTQ+ elders are...

**2x**

as likely to  
live alone<sup>3</sup>

**5x**

less likely to have  
been married<sup>4</sup>

**2x**

less likely to  
have children<sup>5</sup>

**MORE** likely to face poverty<sup>6</sup> and  
homelessness,<sup>7</sup> and to have  
poor physical and mental health<sup>8</sup>

## Caregiving

Caregiving can be a rewarding but sometimes challenging experience. Because LGBTQ+ older people tend to rely on families of choice,<sup>9</sup> their care networks are often structured differently than those of their non-LGBTQ+ peers. LGBTQ+ people face unique obstacles in both giving and receiving care, from healthcare laws that privilege biological families to a lack of resources for LGBTQ+-specific needs.

**Nearly a third of older LGBTQ+ caregivers provide care to a friend.<sup>10</sup>**

**LGBTQ+ people become caregivers at a higher rate than the general population, and make up 8% of caregivers in the United States.<sup>11</sup>**

**LGBTQ+ caregivers 50 and older are at a greater risk for social isolation, which has been linked to higher rates of stress and negative health outcomes.<sup>12</sup>**

## Cultural Competency

LGBTQ+ elders who experienced discrimination were more likely to say they are concerned about accessing critical services as they age, such as medical care, long-term care, and caregiving support.<sup>14</sup> After decades of experiencing discrimination and harassment, many simply assume they will not be welcome in these environments.

**LGBTQ+ people are over 2.5 times as likely to report avoiding medical care due to fear of discrimination when compared with non-LGBTQ+ people.<sup>15,16</sup>**

**Nearly 1 in 4 transgender people report having to teach their health care provider about transgender issues in order to receive appropriate care, and 15% report being asked invasive or unnecessary questions unrelated to the health care they are seeking at the time.<sup>17</sup>**

**64% of LGBTQ+ older people are concerned about their ability to access needed services as they age, and 87% are concerned about finding LGBTQ+ inclusive long-term care.<sup>18</sup>**



## Discrimination

LGBTQ+ older people came of age at a time when simply being openly LGBTQ+ could get them arrested, fired, or worse. As such, they have experienced discrimination based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identity on many fronts. Moreover, they've lived through many years in which this discrimination was condoned and even encouraged by society in the form of laws, policies, and cultural norms. Nearly three quarters of LGBTQ+ elders report at least one instance of victimization over their lifetime, such as threats, harassment, physical, or sexual assault.<sup>19</sup>

**Of those that reported experiences of victimization at three times or more in their lifetime, 1 in 3 reported being verbally insulted, and 1 in 5 reported threats of violence, and nearly 1 in 6 report physical or sexual violence.<sup>20</sup>**

**Nearly half (45%) of LGBTQ+ older people report experiencing discrimination, including instances of discrimination in housing and/or employment.<sup>21</sup>**

**Nearly half of LGBTQ+ elders state they experienced discrimination in their daily lives.<sup>22</sup> In another survey, 84% reported experiencing day-to-day derogatory comments or stereotyping.<sup>23</sup>**

**Research has shown that repeated experiences of discrimination can lead to long-term negative health outcomes.<sup>24</sup>**

## Health Care

Ongoing experiences of discrimination and prejudice often lead to what is commonly referred to as *Minority Stress*,<sup>25</sup> and it has been well documented that such experiences can profoundly impact both mental and physical health.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, LGBTQ+ older people experience significant health disparities:

**Research has repeatedly shown that LGBTQ+ older people have higher rates of chronic illness, poor physical health, and mental distress.<sup>27</sup>**

**In a national survey, LGBTQ+ people were more likely to report a disability. 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ people reported a disability, compared with 1 in 4 non LGBTQ+ people. Transgender people were more likely to report a disability overall, with a little over half reporting a disability.<sup>28</sup>**

**A national survey of transgender people found that in 2022, 24% did not see a doctor that year due to fear of mistreatment, and 28% did not see a doctor due to the cost.<sup>29</sup>**

**1 in 3 LGBTQ+ individuals with a serious illness reported that they received insensitive treatment from their health care providers due to their LGBTQ+ identity.<sup>30</sup>**



## HIV/AIDS

HIV disproportionately impacts the LGBTQ+ community, and LGBTQ+ older people are no exception. Among those impacted with HIV in the LGBTQ+ community, BIPOC and transgender individuals are disproportionately impacted.<sup>32</sup> Thirty years ago, the idea that someone with HIV would live decades was unimaginable; now people with HIV are living well into their golden years.

**54%**  
**of all Americans living with HIV are over 50 years old.<sup>33</sup>**

**In 2022, nearly 16% of new HIV diagnoses were people aged 50 and up.<sup>34</sup>**

**Researchers estimate up to 50% of patients with HIV have an HIV associated neurocognitive disorder, which can impact memory, motor skills, and other aspects of cognitive function, as well as cause depression or psychological distress.<sup>35</sup>**

**Nearly half (48%) of all Ryan White HIV/AIDS program clients in 2022 were 50 and older.<sup>36</sup>**

**Older people are more likely than their younger counterparts to be diagnosed at a late-stage of HIV. A third of people aged 55 and older who were diagnosed with HIV were diagnosed at late-stage infection.<sup>37</sup>**



## Social Isolation

Social connectedness is an important factor in healthy aging, impacting happiness, health and even lifespan.<sup>38</sup> But LGBTQ+ older people, who are more likely to live alone and have smaller social networks,<sup>39</sup> are particularly vulnerable to social isolation.

**45% of LGBTQ+ elders report feeling a lack of companionship and 48% report feeling socially isolated. Rates are higher among transgender elders for lack of companionship (56%) and social isolation (63%).<sup>40</sup>**

Research has shown that loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk for heart disease, stroke, dementia, and premature death from all causes. The impacts on physical health are thought to be just as detrimental as obesity, smoking, or physical inactivity.<sup>41</sup>

**25% of SAGE care management clients in New York City report having no one to call in case of an emergency.<sup>42</sup>**



**Transgender people and people of color were more likely to say they were involved in advocacy, organizing, and mutual aid when compared with all LGBTQ+ elders.<sup>43</sup>**

## Housing

Appropriate housing is a cornerstone of wellness, and a major concern for many older people. Unfortunately, bias and discrimination can make it more difficult for LGBTQ+ older people to find housing that is safe, affordable, and conducive to aging well.

**In a matched-pair test across 10 states, 48% of same-sex couples experienced adverse treatment when seeking senior housing.<sup>44</sup>**

**Nearly one-quarter (23%) of transgender individuals report having experienced some form of housing discrimination in the past year.<sup>45</sup>**

**18 states and 4 territories have no explicit laws prohibiting housing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.<sup>46</sup>**

## Financial Security

Discrimination can negatively impact an individual's opportunities in education, employment, housing stability and much more. All of this leads to decreased financial stability and less (if any) accumulation of wealth. Many LGBTQ+ older people have experienced these inequities throughout their lifetime, and the cumulative effects are clear:

**In general, LGBTQ+ people are poorer and have fewer financial resources than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. This disparity is more pronounced among transgender elders, as well as Black, Latinx, and multiracial LGBTQ+ elders.<sup>47,48</sup>**

**71% of LGBTQ+ older people reported experiencing some form of discrimination in employment at least once in their lifetime, likely impacting overall earnings and social security payments.<sup>49</sup>**

**Over one third (36%) of LGBTQ+ elders live below 200% of the federal poverty level.<sup>50</sup>**

**LGBTQ+ older people are more likely to rely on SNAP benefits than non-LGBTQ+ older people, making them more vulnerable to financial and food insecurity with federal cuts to these programs.<sup>51</sup>**

## Wellness

Mental and emotional wellbeing are critical aspects of wellness and healthy aging. LGBTQ+ elders face disparities in psychological, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing, likely due to experiences of discrimination across the lifespan. In the same way that Minority Stress impacts physical health, it can also take a toll on mental health.

Despite higher rates of anxiety and depression than non-LGBTQ+ older people, LGBTQ+ older people are nearly three times more likely to forego needed mental healthcare, including mental health services and medication likely due to an experience of discrimination in their lifetime.<sup>52, 53</sup>

4 out of 5 LGBTQ+ elders report that anti-LGBTQ+ policies somewhat or greatly diminish their sense of safety and security. Transgender participants indicated a greater degree of disturbance caused by anti-LGBTQ+ policies.<sup>54</sup>

39% of LGBTQ+ elders have had suicidal thoughts,<sup>55</sup> and 2 of every 5 transgender people have actually attempted suicide in their lifetime.<sup>56</sup>

A national survey found that LGBTQ+ people over 45 reported subjective cognitive decline, at a higher rate than non-LGBTQ+ people. Findings suggest that higher rates of depression contribute to greater prevalence of cognitive decline.<sup>57</sup>



Despite disparities in wellness, LGBTQ+ elders report engaging in activities that bolster emotional and social wellbeing, with 43% reporting participation in advocacy, 62% volunteering for religious organizations, and 56% engaging in at least one physical activity a week.<sup>58</sup>

**Despite all of these challenges, LGBTQ+ older people are living vibrant, full lives throughout every part of the country and around the world.**

In a recent survey, nearly half of LGBTQ+ elders said they have very good or excellent quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness.<sup>59</sup> Carrying on an inspiring legacy of activism, many LGBTQ+ elders continue to engage in advocacy, organizing and mutual aid in later life.<sup>60</sup>

They were the pioneers who stood up and pushed back at the Stonewall uprising, and the caregivers who stood by friends and loved ones through the height of the AIDS epidemic. They are models of resilience, celebrating their identities while persevering through adversity and helping to bring about incredible change for all LGBTQ+ people over just a few short decades.



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