

## **Navigating Limited Access to Benefits**

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During times of uncertainty, it is important for older LGBTQ+ people to be their best advocates. Being proactive about addressing issues can make a difference.

Older LGBTQ+ people are already less likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to have access to safety nets that can provide needed support. When systems that manage and distribute needed benefits feel unstable or are affected by outside forces, individuals across the country are at risk, particularly marginalized groups like older LGBTQ+ people. Access to benefits can be limited by funding cuts, government shutdowns, natural disasters, and more.

Navigating limited access to benefits can be difficult for LGBTQ+ elders due to fear of discrimination and harassment that prevent them from engaging with health and aging providers. Below are a few tips and resources you can use to develop your personalized plan for navigating limited access to benefits during uncertain times.

### **Navigating and securing available resources:**

- **Stay connected**

Choose a contact person or people to stay in touch with while navigating limited access to benefits. Consider having a conversation to discuss how your experiences might be similar and to offer support if news or services become available.

- **Explore community food pantries**

Home delivered meals (commonly referred to as Meals on Wheels) through your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) might be at high risk of service disruption during a government shutdown or major funding cuts. Consider locating a community food pantry in your area for access to meals or food supplies. Find your local food bank here: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>.

- o Once you find a pantry, contact them directly to confirm their hours of operation and eligibility. Some food banks and pantries may require proof of income, such as a tax return or pay stubs, to verify need, while others like free food markets may have no income guidelines.

- **Locate a Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program**

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is designed to:

- o Provide low-income seniors with access to locally grown fruits, vegetables, honey and herbs.
- o Increase the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities through farmers markets, roadside stands, and community supported agricultural programs.

To find out more about this program and locate a participating farmers market, visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfmnp/program-contacts>.

- **Register with a local Special Needs Registry**

Many city and county governments have a Special Needs Registry where older adults and people with special needs can sign up to be contacted for safety and well-being checks by emergency personnel during times of disaster and other emergency situations. If you feel that a well-being check is necessary for you or your loved one, consider registering with your local Special Needs Registry.

- **Find a local senior center or community center**

You can search for your local center here: <https://eldercare.acl.gov/home>. You can also search online for "senior centers or community centers near me" or your city's name. Check your local government's website (often found with the .gov domain) as your city, town, or county government has a list of public facilities, including senior centers and community centers.

- **Connect with a faith-based community if desired**

If you already belong to a faith-based community, consider reaching out to ask if they have resources for community members who are navigating limited access to benefits.

- o If you are looking for a faith-based community, explore the Family Acceptance Project's list of Faith-Based Resources: <https://lgbtqfamilyacceptance.org/faith-based-resources/>.
- o The local Unitarian Universalist congregation in your area might have a better understanding of local inclusive faith communities of all kinds.
- o The National LGBTQ+ Task Force also has a short list of Partners in Faith and Spirituality: <https://www.thetaskforce.org/programs/queering-faith/partners/>.

- **Use the 211 helpline**

This confidential service can connect you with local service programs and resources. You can call 211 to find help with a wide range of needs, such as food, housing, and utility assistance. Dial 2-1-1 for free, 24/7 assistance from a local service provider; text your zip code to 898-211 to receive information via text message; visit the 211 website <https://www.211.org/> to search for resources in your area; or email [help@211info.org](mailto:help@211info.org).

- **If you need emotional support, reach out to the 988 Lifeline**

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7. Your conversations are free and confidential. Call 9-8-8, explore the 988 Lifeline website <https://988lifeline.org/>, or use the text/chat feature. [SAGECare](#) helped to build the 988 LGBTQ+ inclusive trainings with a particular emphasis on the needs of transgender older adults.

- **Contact mutual aid groups**

Find Mutual Aid Networks and other community self-support projects near you. Reach out to these groups directly via the map on <https://www.mutualaidhub.org/> to get involved, offer resources, or submit needs requests.

- **Connect with your local library**

Explore resources at your local library by reaching out to a local librarian or visiting your local library's website.

- **Reach out to your elected representative**

Check if your elected representatives have a Resource Guide on their website or call your elected representative. You can locate your elected representatives at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.

You are not alone in navigating the landscape of limited benefits. People across the country are uncertain about how they will access the services they rely on. SAGE is here to support you by offering the following resources:

- **Local resources:** SAGECollab is our national network of partner organizations. Search by state to find trusted LGBTQ+ resources in your area: <https://www.sageusa.org/advocacy-partnerships/partnerships/sagecollab/>. You can also identify local LGBTQ+ community centers through our partner, CenterLink: <https://www.lgbtqcenters.org/LGBTCenters>.
- **Financial health:** SAGECents is our free financial wellness app geared toward the needs of older LGBTQ+ people. This digital resource helps individuals save, plan for or manage your retirement funds, reduce debt, improve your credit

score, find resources, and more. Sign up today: <https://www.sageusa.org/find-support/virtual/sagecents/>.

- **Community:** SAGEYou is a vibrant LGBTQ+ community at your fingertips. This free online hub has an array of virtual programs that you can access wherever you are. The SAGEYou resource library has information and guidance around LGBTQ+ aging-related topics. Sign up today: <https://sageyou.org/>.

We hope that during times of uncertainty older LGBTQ+ people can continue to stay connected to local resources and the larger SAGE community.