Developing LGBT-inclusive Long-term Care Services and Supports

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Identifying long-term care (LTC) services and supports (LTCSS) that are welcoming and inclusive to older LGBT people has long been a priority for LGBT organizations and advocacy groups. SAGE estimates 3 million LGBT older adults live in communities large and small across the country. That number will continue to grow as the overall older population grows. Just as the population grows, so does the need for quality LTCSS. Reports by SAGE and the Movement Advancement Project report that LGBT people are less likely to have children and they may also have strained or fractured relationships with their relatives due to ongoing stigma regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. The lack of family supports leads many older LGBT people to question who will be there to provide caregiving supports as they age. One answer is an increased reliance on LTCSS. However, it may be surprising to learn that with this disproportionate need for care, LGBT people are actually less likely than their non-LGBT peers to seek assistance from LTCSS. The tendency to not use such supports is often due to a lifetime of experiences with LGBT discrimination, stigma, and harassment within the services and supports sector.

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Recognition of the need for LTCSS coupled with the tendency for LGBT people to delay seeking support reinforce the importance of developing LTCSS systems that are LGBT-welcoming. Volunteers and professionals working in the aging network play an important role in helping to identify and refer older LGBT people and those living with disabilities to LGBT-welcoming LTCSS. Following are resources to share as well as best practices that organizations can implement and encourage other LTCSS organizations to adopt in support of serving older LGBT people:

- **Review organizational policies and procedures.**

A first step for any organization is to ensure that organizational policies and practices are inclusive of LGBT communities. To learn more about creating LGBT-welcoming organizations, see the guide Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Creating Welcoming Agencies.

SMPs and SHIPs can help by ensuring ensuring agency policies, practices, and intake forms are LGBT-inclusive and LGBT-welcoming.

- **Review and update intake forms.**

Providing the opportunity to share relevant information related to sexual orientation and gender identity is a way to demonstrate respect and inclusiveness. For assistance with creating LGBT-inclusive intake forms, see the guide Inclusive Questions for Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Collecting Data on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

- **Provide cultural competency training to staff and volunteers.**

LGBT cultural competency training equips staff to identify and address the needs of LGBT older adults. It also builds trust between your organization and the LGBT community. SAGECare is an example of a training, consulting, and credentialing program that works with LTCSS organizations to improve LGBT cultural competence. SAGECare also serves as a resource hub with an up-to-date listing of SAGECare Credential LTCSS. To explore this resource, visit www.sageusa.care.

- **Develop LGBT-welcoming LTC residential supports.**

LGBT older adults report a strong desire to live in LGBT-welcoming long-term care residential communities. However, many communities do not have residential communities that identify as being LGBT-welcoming. To help meet this need, SAGE and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation have developed the Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI). The LEI assists long-term care retirement communities, assisted living communities, and skilled living communities in becoming more LGBT-welcoming. The LEI provides a self-assessment, education, technical assistance, and other resources to support LTC residential communities in their journey to support LGBT equity in LTC. LTC residential communities can get started with the LEI today by signing the Commitment to Caring Campaign at www.theLEI.org.

- **Partner with local LGBT organizations.**

  Reach out to LGBT organizations in your community and offer to partner on programs and outreach events such as resource fairs or LGBT Pride celebrations (typically in June). There are SAGE affiliates and LGBT community centers across the country that may be perfect partners for building collaborative relationships. The guide Strengthen Your State and Local Aging Plan: A Practical Guide for Expanding the Inclusion of LGBT Older Adults provides additional tips and resources for bringing local partners into your planning process.

The resources and best practices presented here serve as a starting point for communities interested in developing LGBT-welcoming LTCSS. Often it only takes one organization to step up in a community and show a commitment to LGBT inclusion for others to follow. SAGE's National Resource Center on LGBT Aging is available for technical assistance and consultation for organizations interested in expanding their outreach and inclusiveness of LTCSS. Additional resources and support are available at www.lgbtagingcenter.org.

Editor's Note: *The SHIP and SMP resource libraries contain fact sheets, webinar recordings, and PowerPoint presentations from SAGE that specifically address meeting the needs of the LGBT Medicare-eligible population. Log in at www.shiptacenter.org and conduct a keyword search for the term "SAGE." Log in at www.smpresource.org and conduct an advanced search with "SAGE" as the origin.*