

A Self-Help Guide for LGBT Older Adults and their Caregivers & Loved Ones: Preventing, Recognizing, and Addressing Elder Abuse

Are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults any more likely than non-LGBT adults to experience elder abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation? We still do not have data that can answer that question, but we do know that between 2% and 10% of all older adults experience abuse, and that LGBT older adults have additional specific vulnerabilities.ⁱ This article will cover:

- The major types of elder abuse, including those specific to LGBT older adults;
- What LGBT people can do to try to prevent being victimized;
- Signs that family and friends need to watch for that may indicate someone is being victimized; and
- Where and how to seek help if you or someone you care about has been victimized.

Types of elder abuse

Most people picture an abused elder with bruises, burns, or broken bones. In fact, physical abuse makes up only a small part of what's considered elder abuse. The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) defines the various components this wayⁱⁱ:

Physical abuse is defined as the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Physical abuse may include but is not limited to such acts of violence as striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, and burning. In addition, inappropriate use of drugs and physical restraints, force-feeding, and physical punishment of any kind also are examples of physical abuse.

Sexual abuse is defined as non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person. Sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent is also considered sexual abuse. It includes, but is not limited to, unwanted touching, all types of sexual assault or battery, such as rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, and sexually explicit photographing.

Emotional or psychological abuse is defined as the infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts. Emotional/psychological abuse includes but is not limited to verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, and harassment. In addition, treating an older person like an infant; isolating an elderly person from his/her family, friends, or regular activities; giving an older person the "silent treatment;" and enforced social isolation are examples of emotional/psychological abuse.

Neglect is defined as the refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person's obligations or duties to an elder. Neglect may also include failure of a person who has fiduciary responsibilities to provide care for an elder (e.g., pay for necessary home care services) or the failure on the part of an in-home service provider to provide necessary care. Neglect typically means the refusal or failure to provide an elderly person with such life necessities as food, water, clothing, shelter, personal hygiene, medicine, comfort, personal safety, and other essentials included in an implied or agreed-upon responsibility to an elder.

Abandonment is defined as the desertion of an elderly person by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for an elder, or by a person with physical custody of an elder.

Financial or material exploitation is defined as the illegal or improper use of an elder's funds, property, or assets. Examples include, but are not limited to, cashing an elderly person's checks without authorization or permission; forging an older person's signature; misusing or stealing an older person's money or possessions; coercing or deceiving an older person into signing any document (e.g., contracts or will); and the improper use of conservatorship, guardianship, or power of attorney.

All of these types of abuse can happen to an older person living in a community setting such as their own home or a shared living situation, or in an institutional setting such as a nursing home or assisted living facility.

In some jurisdictions, **self-neglect** – a situation in which the harm is not being caused by someone else -- is also considered a form of elder abuse.

Self-neglect is characterized as the behavior of an elderly person that threatens his/her own health or safety. Self-neglect generally manifests itself in an older person as a refusal or failure to provide himself/herself with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, personal hygiene, medication (when indicated), and safety precautions. The definition of self-neglect excludes a situation in which a mentally competent older person, who understands the consequences of his/her decisions, makes a conscious and voluntary decision to engage in acts that threaten his/her health or safety as a matter of personal choice.

Since the administrators and staff of a nursing home or assisted living facility assume responsibility for the well-being of a resident, only people who live in private homes can be considered self-neglecters. If an older person lives with someone else or even if there are people involved who are not living with the older person, the nature of their relationship would be taken into account when authorities try to determine if a given case is “neglect” (harm caused by someone not providing expected care) or “self-neglect.”

LGBT-specific tactics

For the most part, LGBT older adults experience the same types of abuse as non-LGBT elders. However, there are additional ways LGBT older adults can be victimized and more reasons why we may accept this victimization. These include:

- **Abuser threatens to “out” the older adult**

Despite many social and political advancements, discrimination, prejudice, and violence against LGBT people still exist. LGBT older adults in particular often feel safer keeping our sexual orientation and/or gender identity a secret. If someone does find out we are LGBT, that person may threaten to “out” us if we do not give them money, grant them sexual favors, or otherwise do what they want. We may feel that it is better to give in to the abuser than to risk whatever negative reactions we may face from people who learn they are LGBT. LGBT grandparents may be at particular risk if the abuser threatens to out us to our children, who may then cut off access to our grandchildren.

- **Abuser says authorities won’t believe the older adult**

Abusers often tell their LGBT older adult victims that they won’t be believed or something negative will happen to them if they try to report the abuse. If the victim is visible as LGBT or has to come out in order to report the abuse, fear of facing authorities’ prejudice or even violence may keep us silent.

- **Abuser gains control of finances and/or assets**

Most LGBT partnerships are not protected by marriage and/or community property laws, meaning that it is far easier for an abusive LGBT partner to gain and maintain control over all of a couple's finances and/or assets. This may mean the abused older person would literally be homeless and penniless if he or she left the abuser, or if seeking help led to the abuser being jailed or otherwise removed. Because of the federal Defense of Marriage Act, even married LGBT people are not entitled to access their ex-partner's Social Security benefits, as other long-married but now divorced ex-spouses are. These legal discriminations may force LGBT older adults to stay with abusive partners.

- **Victim fears “spending the rest of my life alone”**

Older LGBT adults typically have been told for decades that LGBT seniors “end up alone,” and ageism within the LGBT community can seem to confirm this gloomy prediction. The threat of spending the rest of one's life alone or never being touched again can be another way in which an abusive partner or caregiver keeps their victim close. This set of beliefs about what it means to grow old LGBT may also make single LGBT older adults particularly vulnerable to “sweetheart scammers,” people who become lovers with or sometimes even just friends with an older LGBT person specifically to gain access to their financial resources.

- **Victim may be easier to isolate**

It is extremely common for abusers to try to isolate their victims both so they become totally dependent on the abuser and so that no one else notices the abuse. Isolating an LGBT older adult may be easier than isolating a non-LGBT older adult because family members may already be estranged and because many LGBT older adults do not feel comfortable in settings that predominately cater to non-LGBT people such as senior centers and meal sites. Some LGBT older adults even avoid health care professionals, preferring to cope with injuries and diseases on their own rather than risk encountering discrimination or prejudice in a health care setting.

- **Abuser says, “This is what it means to be LGBT”**

Because there have been so few public models of healthy LGBT lives, it is still possible for LGBT people with limited experience in the LGBT community to be misled by abusers who claim that whatever they are doing is “what LGBT people do.” For example, an older person in their first same-sex relationship may believe it if their partner says that in LGBT relationships one is expected to be sexually available to the partner at all times.

- **Society says, “This is the best you can expect”**

“Internalized” homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia is what happens when an LGBT person believes the social message that being LGBT is not normal, lesser, a sin, or somehow not as good as being non-LGBT. When an LGBT older person has internalized these beliefs, he or she is far more likely to put up with being abused, neglected, or exploited because they feel they don't deserve anything better. People who have been previously abused – especially as children – are also far more likely to believe that being abused is normal and to be expected and accepted.

- **Victim has history of self-reliance, fears authorities**

Many LGBT older adults have experienced rejection from family members and disrespect (if not worse) from social institutions, leading us to develop a very strong belief in the virtues of self-reliance as a survival tactic in an often-hostile world. While a belief in self-reliance is common in older adults of every sexual orientation and gender identity, it may be heightened for us, since we also have additional reasons to fear involving officials or professionals who may discover their LGBT status or history. This, of course, is a set-up for self-neglect if we become frail and our physical and/or mental capacity simply is no longer sufficient to the task yet still resist seeking or accepting help.

Protecting yourself from elder abuse

Many people believe that they are far too smart to ever be victimized, particularly by a con artist. This is simply not true. Ponzi schemer Bernie Madoff fooled hundreds of very sophisticated investors and government officials for decades. Con artists can be professionals in every sense of that word, perfecting very sophisticated and effective methods of building and maintaining trust. Nevertheless, there are many measures you *can* take that will lower your chances of being abused, neglected, or exploited.

- **Get and stay actively involved**

Isolation is both a symptom and a risk factor for abuse. Even the most introverted human needs contact with others, a fact abusers know well. Abusers try to identify lonely and under-stimulated older adults because they are easier to befriend and manipulate. Lower your chances of being abused and increase your health and well-being in many ways by staying actively involved in activities with other people.

Unfortunately, as we age, many of us passively accept an ever-shrinking social circle. Maybe it was our more gregarious partner who constantly brought in a stream of new people, or maybe when we were younger we attracted others' attention through our good looks or professional position, but now? Some of us feel like meeting new people is simply beyond our capacity. If this is true for you, look for volunteer opportunities where you will be given a specific role to play: registering people at a meeting, calling homebound people on a regular basis, ushering theater-goers to their seats, re-stocking books at a library, or volunteering for your favorite non-profit or religious institution. Even better would be a position where you can share your hard-won experience, such as being on a speaker's bureau or helping staff an LGBT youth program. Anything that gets you out on a regular basis (or brings you into regular contact with others through the phone or internet if you are homebound) is good. Just don't put all your eggs in one basket by letting one person become your whole world. Make sure you see others and they see you, and that you always feel like there are multiple people you can talk to.

If you live somewhere where you can have a pet, consider getting a dog (if you can exercise him or her) or a cat. Studies have shown that while animals cannot substitute for human contact, they can provide enormous levels of companionship and satisfaction.

- **Don't live with a person who has a history of violent or abusive behavior**

This one is very hard, particularly for people who feel financially and/or morally obligated to share living space with family or friends who are having a hard time, but studies consistently show that living with someone who abuses substances, is financially dependent on the older adult, and/or is mentally ill increases an older adult's risk of being abused at home. Risk also increases if the older adult themselves uses substances. Try to get treatment if you or someone else in your household needs it, and search hard for alternatives if you are living with someone who is violent or abusive (in the meantime, develop a safety plan – you can find guidance at <http://gmdvp.org/domestic-violence/safety-planning/>). No one should live in fear at home.

- **Do not give others access to your finances**

It can be very convenient to give someone else your debit card or share a checking account with them, but doing so is very risky. Even the most loving person may be tempted to take a "loan" if all they have to do is walk up to an ATM or sign a check. In addition, adding someone to an account gives them legal rights, sometimes including the right to drain the account completely. If you need help managing your finances, seek professional help. This could be in the form of a professional financial manager (see <http://www.aarpmp.org/> to find out about a program that AARP runs in many stages) or a qualified elder law lawyer (see <http://www.naela.org/> for referrals), who can advise you on the possible down sides of any financial step you are considering. Do not be fooled into thinking that you do not have enough money for anyone to be interested in stealing from you; there are far more people who are looking for opportunities to steal the smallest Social Security check than there are people who are trying to fleece millionaires.

- **Do plan for incapacity, but do it carefully**

Everyone should try to pick a completely trustworthy individual or two and give them a durable power of attorney for health care and/or finances that is only to be used if you become unable to make decisions for yourself. The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging at www.lgbtagingcenter.org has a number of videos and publications that can help you figure out what kind of documents you ought to have.

Do not put someone else's name on titles to your home or other property, or make decisions based on advice given to you by someone else's lawyer, without consulting your own lawyer. Many, many older adults have been surprised to find that things they did to make their loved one's lives easier (like avoiding probate) can actually be used against them. It is possible to take care of others while also protecting yourself, and hiring your own qualified lawyer (see <http://www.naela.org/> for referrals) can save you much anguish and cash down the road. If you can't afford a lawyer, see if a local LGBT community center, SAGE, or other program can help you find a low or no-cost lawyer who can at least give you an hour's worth of advice and spare you from taking a dangerous step.

- **Practice safe dating**

If you date, get up to speed with the latest thinking about keeping yourself safe in a world where abusers and exploiters have learned to use dating sites. One of the most comprehensive (and transgender-inclusive) safe dating tip sheets is available at <http://www.avp.org/documents/SafeDating.pdf>

- **Be wary of new friends with financial problems**

"Sweetheart scammers" are people who look for lonely older adults to befriend. After a period of time in which they pay a lot of attention to the older adult, they typically "reveal" that they have a medical problem, a sick child, a legal issue, or some other serious life problem that requires a significant "loan" or gift. If the story works and the older adult gives them the requested funds, they soon come back with another story and request, a pattern which will repeat as long as the older adult has funds. When the older adult is bankrupt, the new "friend" disappears. Sweetheart scammers may or may not become sexual with their new friend. Unfortunately, some older adults who are targeted by sweetheart scammers go to their graves denying that the person was only after their money. Do not be fooled; you are worth being loved for who you are, whether or not you give or "loan" money.

- **Thoroughly screen caregivers**

Although it is true that there are risks involved in letting people care for you at home, there are also very serious risks involved in *not* getting help if you need it. There are a growing number of people who feel perfectly fine about working with LGBT people and who will care for you with respect and even love. At the same time, do not be sweet-talked into hiring someone who hasn't been thoroughly checked out. Check their references, and consider doing the research and paying the fees to find out how to conduct criminal background checks in your state (or in whatever states your caregiver has lived in). An AARP article on choosing a home care worker can be found at http://www.aarp.org/relationships/caregiving/info-02-2010/choosing_a_home_care_worker.html

- **Be wary of stereotypes**

As LGBT people, we should be well aware of how dangerous stereotypes can be and steer clear of all of them! Unfortunately, human minds don't work that way; most of us simply accept stereotypes as "the truth." Stereotypes that can blind us to risks of elder abuse include:

- Women aren't violent or abusive
- Men can't be abused or sexually assaulted
- LGBT people are less deserving than non-LGBT people
- LGBT relationships are harder to find and maintain than non-LGBT relationships

If you are feeling unsure or unsafe in a relationship, pay attention! Everyone deserves to feel safe and cared for.

- **Ignore all unsolicited offers of money, jobs, and financial deals**

It's really very simple: people do not give away money to strangers they've contacted by email, mail, or telephone. However, con artists use all of these methods to try to *get* money *from* you. Consider getting caller ID and simply not picking up if it's from someone you don't know. Never give your Social Security number or credit card number to someone who has called you. Register your phone number with the National Do Not Call Registry by calling 1-888-382-1222 or going online to <https://donotcall.gov/>, to cut down on the number of telemarketing calls you get. To get off of many direct-mail marketers lists, register with the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service, which costs \$1.00. You can register at www.dmachoice.org or mail your request and fee to:

DMAchoice
Direct Marketing Association
P.O. Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

If you receive an email that appears to be from your credit card company or someone else with whom you do business, do *not* click on any links. Instead, place a phone call to the company and ask if they are trying to contact you. Most often, these emails are false, designed to get information from you and/or infect your computer with a virus, and it's just by chance that the sender picked a company you actually do business with. Be safe rather than sorry.

- **If you live in a facility, know and assert your rights**

Protections for nursing home residents and, to a lesser extent, residents of assisted living and other long-term care facilities, are really quite good. We have government-backed guarantees of respectful treatment, privacy, access to whatever visitors we want, and many other important rights. All nursing home residents also have the right to access an ombudsman, who is trained to be our advocate, helping us get what we are rightfully entitled to. Do not accept second-class or disrespectful treatment.

Protecting your friends from elder abuse

As noted above, it is not within anyone's ability to prevent *all* instances of elder abuse, but there is much we can do to help people prevent, stop, and recover from it.

- **Help older adults stay involved**

Isolation is a major risk factor for elder abuse as well as a result of it. If you know an older adult whose social circle or level of community involvement is shrinking significantly, be proactive. Increase your contact with them, ideally by taking them out for meals, shopping, or other public activities, but also through phone calls, home visits, and social media (if the person uses that or is willing to be taught how to). Perhaps more importantly, however, do everything you can to help the person engage in recurring activities that expose them to other people, such as joining clubs, attending social events, and volunteering. If the person has connections with a religious institution or social group, see if you can help arrange for friendly visitors; many organizations would be willing to try to link an individual with one or more regular visitors, even if they don't sponsor a formal friendly visitor program. If your city has a SAGE or LGBT Community Center, those are good places to start.

- **Don't take "no" for an answer forever**

People do decide to drop friends and social activities for good reasons, but there are at least two very serious reasons to be skeptical if an old friend starts consistently turning down your offers to connect, or starts avoiding you. One is depression -- a very serious, debilitating, and sometimes even fatal illness -- that can cause people to withdraw from the

world. Depression is common among self-neglecters, and treatable. If you suspect the person might be depressed, try to get them to a doctor, ideally with you at their side, to get assessed.

The other worrisome reason an older adult may “withdraw” from others is elder abuse. It is extremely common in situations where someone is abusing, neglecting, or exploiting an older adult to do everything they can to keep that older adult from seeing other people. Many times, the abuser will lie to the older adult, telling him or her that friends and family no longer *want* to see them, or telling them that other people are dangerous to them. Many abusers try to control who can talk to their victim by answering all calls, turning people away at the door (“she’s sleeping now; come back later”), and intercepting mail. If you wonder if you are being blocked from seeing an older person, ask yourself which you would rather live with for the rest of your life: making the person mad by insisting on seeing them face-to-face, or finding out later that you might have been able to stop something bad from happening? Keep coming back until you can see the person yourself and ask them privately if everything is ok and they really don’t want further contact with you.

- **Try to keep all topics on the table**

If it’s appropriate, talk about your own interpersonal problems, financial affairs, and other “sensitive” topics to let the older adult know that those are all subjects they can talk to you about. Encourage someone considering a major life change (such as moving in with someone) or financial move (such as making a personal loan) to seek advice from a qualified professional.

- **Help victims safety plan**

If the older adult reveals they are living with or partnered with someone who has been violent or threatening, talk with them about how they deserve to have a safe home and what some of their options are. Try to insist they think about developing a “safety plan” in case the violence escalates. You can find guidance at <http://gmdvp.org/domestic-violence/safety-planning/>. Encourage the person to call the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) to find out what resources are available to them in their community. (Shelters are available for female victims, with many shelters taking transwomen. Some programs will give male victims hotel vouchers for a limited number of shelter nights. Other resources and supports may be available, as well.)

Know that many abuse victims decide to stay with their abusers, and others leave and return multiple times. Try to remain patient and available to your abused friend (without becoming abused yourself). Continue to tell the person that everyone deserves to feel safe at home, and that you are worried about the situation.

- **Know the signs and be observant**

People who are being physically abused by someone nearly always “explain away” bruises, broken bones, and other injuries. If the LGBT older adult you care for seems to have a lot of these “accidents,” it’s time to start being more inquisitive. Less obvious possible signs of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation include:

- Physical or mental changes that might be due to overmedication or under utilization of prescribed drugs, particularly if there is someone living in or frequently visiting the home who might have access to the older person’s medications;
- A sudden change in the older person’s behavior;
- A marked deterioration in the older person’s appearance or housekeeping;
- A sudden negative change in the older adult’s financial status;
- Dehydration, malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, or untreated health problems;
- Hazardous, unsafe, unsanitary, or unclean living conditions;
- Unpaid bills or substandard care being provided even though adequate financial resources exist;
- New people or previously uninvolved relatives appearing in the older person’s life, particularly if they seem overly interested in the older person’s finances;
- Inappropriate and/or inadequate clothing; and

- Absent or “lost” medical aids like eyeglasses, hearing aids, and dentures.
- If the person is uncommunicative, unusual behaviors such as sucking, biting, rocking, or avoiding or acting fearful around a particular person may be a sign of abuse.

- **Be willing to “go with”**

LGBT people are often hesitant to approach law enforcement, government officials, and even health care professionals – for good reasons! Many of us have had negative experiences with these professionals, and asking them for help can be scary. If the LGBT older adult you care about is reluctant to seek help with a problem, offer to accompany them to the appointment. That may make all the difference.

- **Be resourceful**

When someone is being abused, neglected, or exploited or is experiencing other significant life problems, problem-solving abilities often go out the window. Otherwise competent adults may become seemingly unable to help themselves. If you sense this is happening, step in, power up your web browser and phone directory, and start making connections. Keep pursuing possibilities until you find someone who can help with whatever problem is at hand.

Getting help when you suspect abuse

There are many places to start looking for help if you or an older person you care for is being abused.

- **Adult protective services**

Every state has an adult protective services (APS), although they may be called by a different name. States determine for themselves who their APS will serve, so you will need to do some research to determine if you or the person you are seeking help for is eligible. Some states make people eligible based on age, while others require clients to have a certain level of physical and/or mental impairment to be eligible. Analyses of various aspects of state APS laws, including who is eligible and who is legally mandated to report suspected abuse, are available at

http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/Find_Help/APS/Analysis_State_Laws.aspx

APS reports can be anonymous, although callers will be asked to provide as much information as possible about the suspected abuse victim and their situation. To locate the APS hotline for your state, check <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area/> or contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or <http://www.eldercare.gov/>.

If what you report meets their criteria, APS should make an in—person visit to the suspected victim and interview him or her without potential abusers being present. If the abuse is found credible – and sometimes even if it’s not – the APS worker may offer service options to the older adult, who has the right to turn them down *if he or she is competent* to make their own decisions. If the older adult’s competency is questionable, the APS worker may take additional legal steps regardless of what the older adult wants.

Note that if you make a report about someone else, privacy laws will likely prevent APS from telling you much, if anything, about what they find or what actions they take in the case you’ve reported.

- **Long-term Care Ombudsman Programs**

The federal government mandates every state to have a long-term care ombudsman program (LTCOP). “Long-term care ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes and assisted living facilities. Ombudsmen provide information about how to find a facility and what to do to get quality care. They are trained to resolve problems. If you want, the ombudsman can assist you with complaints. However, unless you give the ombudsman permission to share your concerns, these matters are kept confidential. Under the federal Older Americans Act, every state is required to have an Ombudsman Program that addresses complaints and advocates for improvements

in the long-term care system.” (See more: <http://www.ltombudsman.org/about-ombudsmen>). Because ombudsmen are the resident’s advocate, they are typically a good place to turn to if you or someone you care about is having trouble in a nursing home or other facility covered by your state’s program. To find the LTCOP that is responsible for the facility in question, look for the poster in that facility or contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or <http://www.eldercare.gov/>.

- **Area agencies on aging**

The federal government’s Older Americans Act set up a national network of services that typically flow through a state office on aging to local, or area, agencies on aging. These, in turn, fund and oversee a wealth of services such as congregate meals, meals on wheels, senior centers, health promotion programs, recreation programs, and much more. Although the programs are typically open to anyone above a certain age, the system as a whole is supposed to target services and programs to those “in greatest social need,” which increasingly (but not yet officially nationwide) is defined to include LGBT older adults (read more about it here: <http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/resources/resource.cfm?r=544>). A few progressive area agencies on aging are offering programs specific to LGBT older adults, and many more are obtaining training in how to properly meet the needs of LGBT older adults within their general programs. The National Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or <http://www.eldercare.gov/> can link you to your local aging providers.

- **SAGE and other local LGBT older adults programs**

More than two dozen SAGE affiliates – Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders – are scattered throughout the country (you can see a list at <http://www.sageusa.org/advocacy/sagenet.cfm>). Other communities also have organizations or programs devoted to LGBT elders; you may want to check with your local LGBT Community Center to find out about the ones closest to you (a guide to LGBT Community Centers is available at <http://www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/find-a-center.aspx>). These programs are typically not set up to deal with abuse problems, but they can be very helpful in addressing isolation, which, as we’ve noted, is both a risk factor for and result of elder abuse. Nearly all provide a menu of social activities, and some will be able to help you find local LGBT-friendly service providers. Some programs offer formal friendly visitor programs, and others may be able to arrange home visits on a case-by-case basis.

- **Domestic violence and sexual assault programs**

The Violence Against Women Act, along with other federal, state, and local programs, underpins a nationwide network of services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. Providers’ level of knowledge about LGBT people in general, let alone LGBT elder abuse, is spotty. Especially hard to find is knowledge about and services for male victims. Nevertheless, if you or someone you love is experiencing abuse by a partner, it may be worthwhile to find out what is available in your area. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or <http://www.thehotline.org/>. The National Sexual Assault Hotline is 1-800-656-HOPE (4673), or <http://www.rainn.org/get-help/national-sexual-assault-hotline>.

- **Anti-violence programs**

A growing number of cities and states have anti-violence projects that specifically address the needs of LGBT and HIV+ victims, with a special focus on victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, hate crimes, and police misconduct. While these programs may not be especially sophisticated about aging issues, their knowledge of local providers’ attitudes toward LGBT people can help you find exactly the right service match for your need. A list of anti-violence programs is available at www.ncavp.org.

- **National Resource Center on LGBT Aging**

The federal government created the groundbreaking National Resource Center on LGBT Aging in 2010. Our online resource center at www.lgbtagingcenter.org is constantly growing, and includes both state-specific resources and dozens of publications addressed both to LGBT older adults and to the professionals and nonprofessionals who care about them.

Conclusion

Unfortunately in the U.S. there is a common belief that growing old means living in a constantly-shrinking personal world. This does not have to be true! Old age can be a time rich in relationships and activities. LGBT older adults in particular have a growing number of options for finding new friends and interests, even for those who are homebound. Staying actively involved with others is probably the best way to avoid elder abuse, as loneliness, depression, a lack of second opinions, and isolation produce conditions in which elder abusers thrive. If you think you or someone you care for is being abused, neglected, or exploited, get help.

ⁱ National Center on Elder Abuse (2005). "Elder Abuse Prevalence and Incidence Fact Sheet," available at http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/main_site/pdf/publication/FinalStatistics050331.pdf (accessed 11/24/2012).

ⁱⁱ National Center on Elder Abuse, "Major Types of Elder Abuse," http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/FAQ/Basics/Types_Of_Abuse.aspx (accessed 11/24/2012).