

Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults

Top 10 Ways to Begin Creating LGBT Safety & Inclusivity for Aging Services



National Resource Center ON LGBT AGING

At the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging, we are frequently contacted by aging service providers who are interested in working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) older adults but are unsure of how to best serve and support them. Here are some suggestions for how to begin:

1. DO presume your agency has LGBT clients.

Aging service providers should always work from the premise that they have LGBT clients, even if no one has openly identified as LGBT.

2. DO ask your clients about their sexual orientations and gender identities in a safe & confidential manner.

Remember that while it is important to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity along with all of the other key components of care, LGBT people have significant histories of discrimination and stigma, which makes them far less willing to disclose these parts of their identities. **Ask the questions as you would any other factual question, but do not force anyone to answer. If a client looks uncomfortable, anxious, or refuses to answer, move on to the next question.**

3. DO create an opening for LGBT clients to talk about any family members of choice.

Ask open-ended questions such as, "Who do you consider family?" or "Who in your life is especially important?"

4. DO examine current programming to see if it can be modified for LGBT clients.

For example, when bringing in volunteer attorneys or financial advisors to help clients, be sure that they are using inclusive language and presenting information about particular issues that arise out of legal inequalities, such as different tax implications for same-sex couples, or the latest information on the tax deductibility of transgender-related surgery.

5. DO train staff in correct pronoun usage for transgender inclusion.

Staff should always know and use the pronoun that their clients prefer, even when the client is not within earshot.

These tips are excerpted from the SAGE/National Resource Center on LGBT Aging's publication: Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Creating Welcoming Agencies, available for download at lgbtagingcenter.org

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6. DO respect gender identity when providing sex-segregated services.

Where services (including shared rooms) are segregated by sex, assignments should be made based on the client's gender identity, not his/her sex assigned at birth.

7. DO review your policies and definitions of "family."

Make sure that they include a client's "family of choice"—friends, partners, and other people close to the individual—as well as "family of origin"—biological family members or those related by marriage or kinship.

8. DO promote diversity and inclusion.

Ensure that your agency or organization's board and leadership reflect diversity and inclusion of LGBT older people by race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status, among other characteristics.

9. DO create a welcoming environment.

Hang rainbow flags, rainbow-colored items, or Safe Zone signs around the agency to signify LGBT solidarity & acceptance.

10. DO promote cultural competency training.

Training all staff on how to identify and address the needs of LGBT older adults is key to making an agency inclusive. Staff members need to participate in training programs with trusted and credible trainers who will enhance knowledge and skills about LGBT older adults and their intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, and culture. To request a training, offered free-of-charge, visit lgbtagingcenter.org.

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