

Advocating for LGBTQ+ Protections in Health Care Settings

Consumer Resource

sage | Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ+ Elders
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LGBTQ+ older adults still face many barriers in healthcare, including discrimination, a lack of LGBTQ+ knowledgeable providers, and not enough access to care that affirms who they are. LGBTQ+ older adults¹ face significant health disparities compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.²

- LGBTQ+ people also have fears of experiencing medical neglect, mistreatment, and discrimination in adult day care, long-term care, residential aged care, palliative care, and end-of-life care facilities.³
- LGBTQ+ older adults' lack of access to LGBTQ+ affirmation and age-friendliness in healthcare environments contributes to health disparities by discouraging utilization of health services.⁴

In some settings, conversations about health equity and inclusion may be more difficult to navigate; in these cases, it may be helpful to emphasize how inclusive care improves health outcomes, satisfaction, and overall system efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

A value-based care approach to healthcare involves individuals in decision-making about their care.⁵ It can feel burdensome to have to advocate for yourself, but you deserve high-quality, culturally competent care. Asking the following questions may help LGBTQ+ individuals access and advocate for more inclusive healthcare delivery:

1. How are your providers trained in cultural humility and LGBTQ+ affirming care?
2. What role do community health workers, social workers, case managers, and peer support specialists play in promoting health literacy in the LGBTQ+ community?
3. How do you ensure care reflects my identity and lived experiences?
4. How do you protect privacy for LGBTQ+ community members using virtual care?
5. How do you collect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data respectfully and securely?
6. Do you use inclusive intake forms that allow for preferred name, sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronoun fields?
7. What steps do you take to make care accessible and reach LGBTQ+ community members in rural or underserved areas?
8. Do you have a nondiscrimination policy, and does it include sexual orientation and gender identity?
9. Do you translate LGBTQ+ health information into different languages?
10. Does your board include LGBTQ+ voices in decision-making?
11. Do you partner with LGBTQ+ community organizations for outreach or feedback?

12. How do you gather input from the LGBTQ+ community for strategic planning?
13. How do you prevent burnout among staff who serve marginalized communities?

Your Role in Policy Change

Advancing health equity for the LGBTQ+ community is a collaborative effort between people with lived experiences, community partners, health leaders, and public officials. You are not only a recipient of care—you are also a driver of change. Sharing your experiences and engaging in advocacy with providers, health systems, or policymakers helps build more inclusive and responsive healthcare.

You can act now by contacting your elected officials and advocating for policies that support inclusive, culturally competent care for older LGBTQ+ community members. The following suggestions outline concrete policy asks that LGBTQ+ advocates like yourself can make to your elected representatives:

- Advocate for the Equality Act and policies that require health care staff in care settings to be trained in preventing and eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Advocate for city, county, or state-level LGBTQ+ and HIV Long Term Care Bills of Rights. Explore SAGE's toolkit for more information.
- At the federal level, urge your U.S. Senators and Representatives to demand that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) delay the Interim Final Rule (IFR) to HR 1 and redraft it with a lawful, workable definition of "serious or complex medical condition" that covers people living with HIV under Medicaid. See the Action Alert from AIDS United.

- Get involved with the Seven Days in June campaign, which aims to establish a civic expectation that health must be treated as a core governing responsibility, regardless of ideology or party. Sign up for updates on future health campaigns here.

As the policy landscape continues to evolve, join SAGE's Action Squad to receive information and tangible steps for moving your local community and our country towards more inclusive policies. For the latest information and additional resources, please visit The Pfizer Multicultural Health Equity Collective (The Collective)'s website, which aims to close gaps in care and access impacting historically underserved and underrepresented communities while addressing drivers of health inequities in healthcare, including systemic racism.

Your voice is needed now more than ever to advocate for LGBTQ+ older people accessing needed aging services in their communities. Advocacy can involve sharing your lived experience as a volunteer or representative for the LGBTQ+ community:

- Get involved with your local Aging Advisory Council or governor's, city's, or mayor's commission on aging (or equivalent).
 - Attend public hearings hosted by the State Units on Aging and local Area Agency on Aging.
 - Provide recommendations on the development of Area Plans on Aging and State Plans on Aging or submit public comments on these plans.
 - Ask your State Unit on Aging to include LGBTQ+ older people as a population of Greatest Social Need in its state plan, if not already included.
- Petition your healthcare providers to seek out credentialing through SAGECare or other LGBTQ+ aging and person-centered care training.
- Get involved by joining a community advisory board with a local aging organization near you.

- Contact your local Aging Network or Age-Friendly Community to become a volunteer. Other aging-related volunteer opportunities may also be found through AARP's Age-Friendly Communities or community-led initiatives. LGBTQ+ inclusive volunteerism is an essential step in creating welcoming Aging Networks for LGBTQ+ older people and their caregivers.

It can feel burdensome to advocate for yourself, ask your provider questions, and engage in local community advocacy, but you deserve high quality, culturally competent care, and you can be an integral part of structural change.

Join us in advancing LGBTQ+ health equity by engaging with your healthcare providers, speaking up about your needs, and working with community partners and leaders to advocate for a healthcare system where everyone is seen, heard, and respected.

At SAGE, we envision a world where LGBTQ+ elders are valued, have limitless opportunities, and thrive. Since 1978, we have led the way in advocating for policies, services, and resources that empower LGBTQ+ elders to live openly and authentically. Our dedicated team members work nationally and globally to protect our rights, build health and longevity, and preserve the vibrancy of our community as we age. Each one of us has a place to create a bright and vibrant future for the LGBTQ+ community as each one of us lights the way for the next generation to follow. Learn more at www.sageusa.org.

1 Fredriksen Goldsen & de Vries, 2019

2 Hash & Rogers, 2017

3 Cloyes & Candrian, 2021; Elk et al., 2018

4 Nowakowski et al., 2019; Pereira et al., 2019

5 Pfizer, Inc, 2025