

LIFE AFTER A MAJOR MEDICAL EVENT

A guide for LGBTQ+ people navigating
recovery, healing, and support.



HEALING TAKES TIME



“Recovery doesn’t end when you leave the hospital. Healing often continues for months or even years.”

Whether you had surgery, a stroke, a heart attack, or another serious health event, the road to recovery is rarely a straight line. For LGBTQ+ older adults, healing can come with unique challenges—from finding affirming care to leaning on chosen family for support. This guide is here to help you understand what to expect, plan for what comes next, and connect with people and resources that respect who you are.



Hospital



Home



Recovery



Everyday Life



WHAT RECOVERY CAN LOOK LIKE



For older adults, recovering from a major medical event—whether planned or unplanned, such as cancer treatment, heart attack, stroke, or another serious health crisis—is often **more complex and long lasting** than people expect.

Leaving the hospital is **not the end of recovery**. It is the beginning of **anewphase** that can take months or even years.

Healing is not always linear, and that's okay.

Many elders experience a mix of good days and difficult days, which can be **physically and emotionally exhausting**.



Fatigue

It is very common to feel deeply tired after a major health event. This is not laziness—it is your body using energy to heal. Rest is an important part of getting better, and it is okay to take things slowly.



Mental Health

Recovery can bring feelings of sadness, frustration, anxiety, or grief. These emotions are a normal response to a difficult experience. Talking to someone you trust—a friend, counselor, or support group—can help.

Healing takes time—and every person's recovery looks different.

FINDING LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING CARE



Recovering from a major medical event is about more than physical healing. Having a caregiver who respects and affirms your identity can make a meaningful difference in your recovery and overall well-being.

WHY AFFIRMING CARE MATTERS

LGBTQ+ affirming caregivers—whether friends, biological or chosen family members, or professional providers—play a critical role in helping older adults feel safe, respected, and understood throughout their recovery. Having a care partner who recognizes and supports your identity and cultural needs is an important part of healing.

Many LGBTQ+ older adults have faced a lifetime of discrimination in healthcare settings, which can lead to mistrust or reluctance to seek help. Finding affirming care can help create a safer, more supportive recovery experience.

Look for caregivers and providers who demonstrate:

- Cultural responsiveness

- Inclusive practices

- Clear nondiscrimination policies

- Respect for your identity, relationships, and lived experiences

FINDING SUPPORT & HELPFUL RESOURCES



Trusted resources, such as SAGECare's "Find a Provider" directory, can help connect LGBTQ+ older adults and their families with vetted, LGBTQ+-friendly services in their communities.

Resources to support you in planning for a major medical event:



[Create Your Care Plan: Preparing for Medical Procedures – SAGE](#)



[Inclusive Homecare Readiness Checklist](#)



[Advance Care Planning Toolkit: LGBTQ Aging Center](#)



[My Personal Directions for Quality Living: LGBTQ Aging Center](#)

REMEMBER

While it may not always be possible to find an explicitly LGBTQ+ identified caregiver, having a care partner who is respectful, open, and willing to understand and support a person's identity and cultural needs remains essential.



SAGE is grateful to SAGE Intern Dulce Valenzuela, a University of Colorado Boulder student pursuing a dual degree in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology and Women and Gender Studies with a focus on advancing healthcare equity, for her contributions to this article.