

THE FAMILIES WE BUILD

Aging and Care in LGBTQ+ Communities



**Supporting chosen families through planning,
advocacy, and affirming care.**

WHAT IS CHOSEN FAMILY?

Building Networks of Love, Support, and Care

Many LGBTQ+ older adults age within networks of chosen families rather than traditional legal or biological family structures. These relationships are often built on trust, shared identity, and years of mutual care, especially for individuals who have experienced rejection or distance from their families of origin.

A chosen family can become a powerful source of emotional support, advocacy, companionship, and daily caregiving. These relationships often develop over decades and reflect the resilience and community care that have long existed within LGBTQ+ communities.



Unlike traditional family structures, chosen families are intentionally built through love, trust, and mutual support. For many LGBTQ+ elders, these are the people who know them best and stand beside them through life's challenges.

Why Chosen Family Matters

Chosen family caregivers often understand an older adult's:

- Chosen name and pronouns
- Personal values
- Medical preferences
- Daily routines
- Identity and lived experiences
- Sources of comfort and support

This type of affirming care can help preserve dignity, independence, and overall wellbeing.

CHALLENGES WITHIN CURRENT SYSTEMS

Healthcare, housing, and legal systems are still largely structured around biological or legally recognized family relationships. Because of this, chosen family caregivers may face unexpected barriers when trying to help someone they love.

In emergency situations, hospitals or care facilities may defer to a legal next of kin even if that person is not actively involved in the elder's life. This can leave both the older adult and their caregiver feeling powerless during an already stressful time.

Common Challenges

- ✓ Limited access to medical information
- ✓ Inability to make healthcare decisions
- ✓ Difficulty advocating during emergencies
- ✓ Exclusion from care planning
- ✓ Limited recognition in housing or long-term care settings



The Strength of Chosen Family

Despite these challenges, chosen family caregivers often provide uniquely affirming care because they understand an elder's identity, history, and preferences in ways others may not.

Their support extends beyond practical caregiving. It creates a sense of belonging, safety, and respect that can have a profound impact on an elder's quality of life.



"Affirming care respects not only a person's medical needs, but also their identity, relationships, and lived experiences."

PROTECTING YOUR CHOSEN FAMILY

Planning ahead can help ensure the people you trust are able to support and advocate for you when it matters most. Because chosen family relationships are not always legally recognized, taking a few proactive steps today can help prevent confusion or barriers during a medical emergency or other crisis.

Put Your Wishes in Writing

One of the most important ways to protect your chosen family is by completing legal documents that clearly identify who should be involved in your care and decision-making.

Consider Completing:

- ✓ **Medical Power of Attorney**
Allows you to designate someone you trust to make healthcare decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so.
- ✓ **Advance Healthcare Directive**
Documents your healthcare wishes and helps ensure your preferences are respected.
- ✓ **HIPAA Authorization**
Allows healthcare providers to share important medical information with the person you choose.
- ✓ **Emergency Contact Information**
Make sure your healthcare providers and loved ones know who should be contacted first in an emergency.

Without these documents, even your most trusted caregiver may not be able to receive information or advocate for you when you need them most.

Start the Conversation Early

Legal planning is only one part of preparing for the future. Open, honest conversations help everyone understand expectations before a crisis occurs.

These conversations may feel difficult at first, but they can help reduce stress, prevent misunderstandings, and strengthen the support you have in place.

Consider talking about:

- ✓ Your healthcare wishes
- ✓ Daily caregiving needs
- ✓ Financial responsibilities
- ✓ Living arrangements
- ✓ Emergency planning
- ✓ Personal boundaries
- ✓ What each person is realistically able to provide

Planning ahead isn't just about paperwork. It's about protecting your voice, your choices, and the people who know and care for you best.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Looking Ahead

Chosen family caregiving reflects the resilience, compassion, and community care that have long been part of LGBTQ+ communities. While systems do not always recognize these relationships, thoughtful planning, clear communication, and legal preparation can help ensure your wishes are honored and the people you trust most are able to stand beside you.

Every person deserves to age with dignity, support, and the freedom to define who family is.

Additional Resources

LGBTQ+ Advance Care Planning Toolkit

Practical guidance for documenting healthcare wishes, appointing trusted decision-makers, and planning for future care.

Three Types of Programs Offered to Dementia Caregivers

Learn about programs that provide education, support, and resources for caregivers.

Family Caregiving in Diverse Communities – Full Report

Explore research and best practices for providing inclusive and affirming care across diverse communities.

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