

Why an LGBT elder network?



Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender elders tend to age in isolation for a variety of reasons:

- Many LGBT elders who were previously “out” think that when they need services they have to go back into the closet to be eligible for them.
- Many of them are estranged from their families of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression and have no one to help them in old age.
- Many gay men, especially, are alone because they have lost their families of choice (partners and networks of supportive friends) to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Many single LGBT people have outlived their contemporaries and are hesitant or afraid to ask others for help.
- The current generation of elders experienced virulent discrimination as younger adults that required them to hide their orientation or gender identity or risk violence or loss of employment.
- Despite the myth about gay people having large disposable incomes, many LGBT seniors were unemployed or underemployed during their working years and have small or no savings to fall back on.
- Partnered gay people, even if they are married here in Massachusetts, do not qualify for survivor benefits from Social Security because of the federal Defense of Marriage Act.
- The mainstream elder community has not typically welcomed people who are LGBT to programs at senior centers or meals sites. The same is generally true for long-term care facilities.
- Many agencies and institutions that work with elders are unprepared to incorporate LGBT seniors into their client base because of lack of training or lingering prejudice on the parts of administrators and staffs.

By contrast, the next generation of LGBT retirees that belongs to the so-called baby boom generation is more accustomed to acceptance.

- At 80 million strong, the baby boom generation counts anywhere from 1.6 million to 8 million LGBT people.
- Gay boomers are not as reticent about their sexual orientation or gender identity and expect social acceptance and respect in old age.
- Members of the boomer generation are accustomed to getting what they are entitled to and advocate vigorously for themselves.
- Same sex marriage is allowed in five states. A few others have laws that allow gay people to register their long-term partnerships with the state through civil unions or domestic partnerships. LGBT elders whose relationships have been

legally recognized in these ways expect them to be respected by providers of aging services.

Sources: LGBT Aging Project (www.lgbtagingproject.org); “Out and aging: the MetLife study of lesbian and gay baby boomers,” MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2006; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (www.thetaskforce.org/issues/aging); “The Coming GLBT Senior Boom,” by Sean Cahill, The Gay & Lesbian Review (www.glreview.com/issues/14.1/14.1-cahill.php)