

Increased Risks of Elder Abuse among LGBTQ Community

Presented at

Maine Elder Abuse Summit

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Keck School of
Medicine of **USC**

NCEA
National Center on Elder Abuse

sage | Advocacy &
Services for
LGBT Elders
**National Resource Center
on LGBT Aging**

Panelists



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National Center on Elder Abuse

An information clearinghouse designed to improve the national response to elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Dedicated to engaging and empowering older adults so that they feel capable of advocating for themselves and their communities.

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The logo for SAGE, featuring the word "sage" in a blue, lowercase, serif font.

Advocacy & Services
for LGBT Elders

We refuse to be invisible

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Advocacy &
Services for
LGBT Elders

**National Resource Center
on LGBT Aging**

SAGE is the country's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults. Our [mission](#) is to lead in addressing issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) aging.

SAGE headquartered in New York City, offers a number of services throughout New York City including lead agency for the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging, and the first LGBT Senior Center. Additionally SAGE has 30 Affiliates across the country.

Polling Question

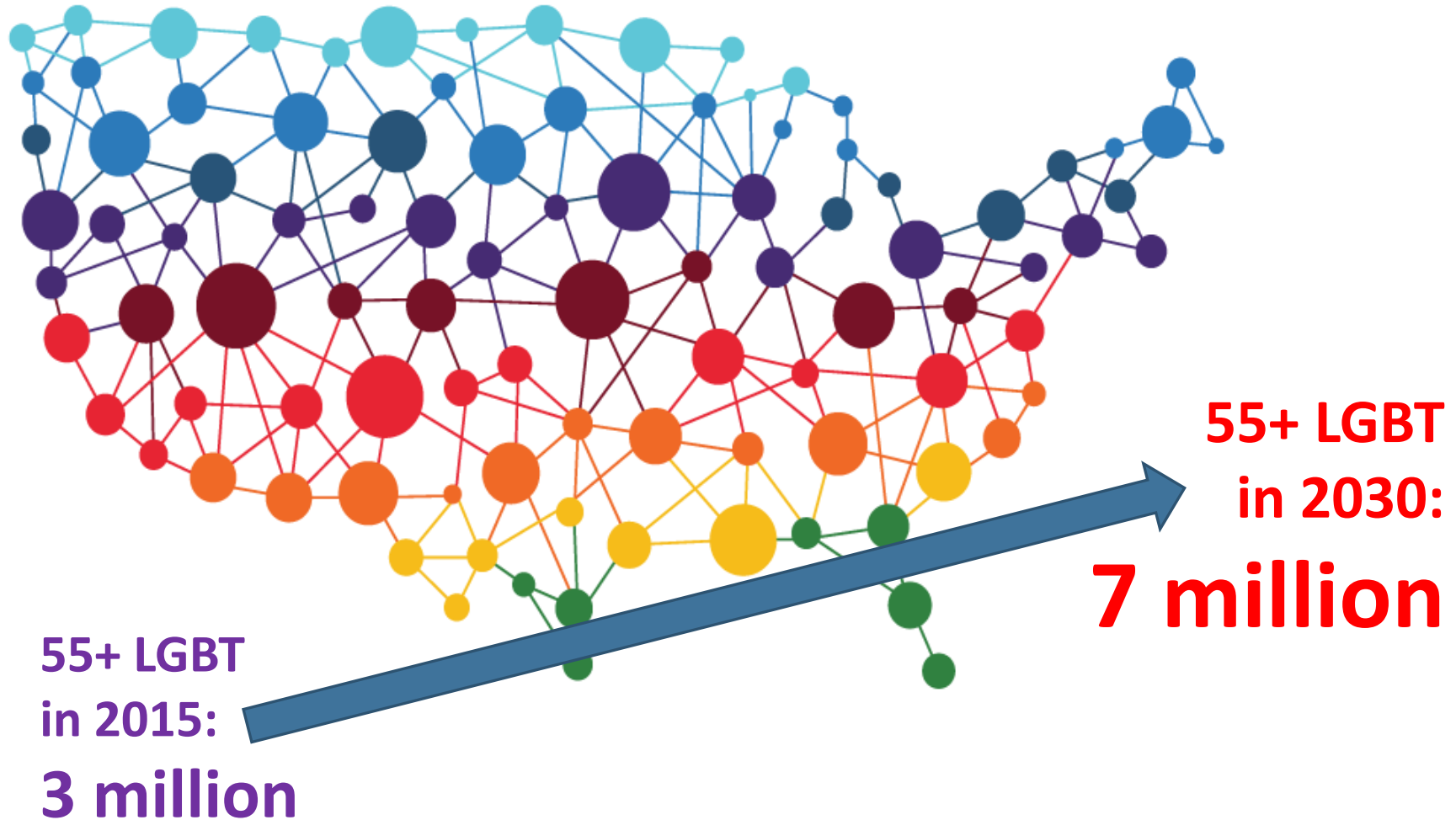
Have you worked with elder abuse victims who identify as LGBT older adults?

Answer Choices

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Unsure

U.S. Older Adult Population Growth: 2000-2030

35 million to **75** million = **20%** of the U.S. population



The Importance of LGBT Voices & Elder Justice

2011 Caring and Aging with Pride Study of 2,560 LGBT Older Adults age 50-94 found:

- 68% of had experienced verbal harassment
- 43% were threatened with violence

Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., Kim, H.-J., Emlert, C. A., Muraco, A., Erosheva, E. A., Hoy-Ellis, C. P., Goldsen, J., Petry, H. (2011). The Aging and Health Report: Disparities and Resilience among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults - Key Findings Fact Sheet. Seattle: Institute for Multigenerational Health.

Risk Factors for Elder Abuse

- Past history of victimization, discrimination and stigma
- Social Isolation
- Increased risk of mental health concerns
- Increased risk of substance abuse
- Self-reliance (as protective strength/may also decrease help seeking)

Issues Affecting Help Seeking

Threat of being "outed" as LGBT

Convinced Authorities won't believe them

Loss of financial support from the abusive person

Older LGBT person fears "living their life alone"

Older LGBT person has history of self-reliance and fears authorities

History of victimization and violence towards LGBT community leaves many to believe Abuse and Neglect is to be expected with nowhere to turn for help

Older?

LGBT?

**Need someone to
talk to?**

The SAGE Hotline is open 24/7 in English & Spanish:

877-360-LGBT

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Geriatrics Healthcare Collective (USC GHC)

The University of Southern California USC Geriatrics Healthcare Collective (USC GHC), partnering with the LA LGBT Center, seeks to improve the health outcomes of the culturally diverse older adults in Los Angeles.



Ability

Age

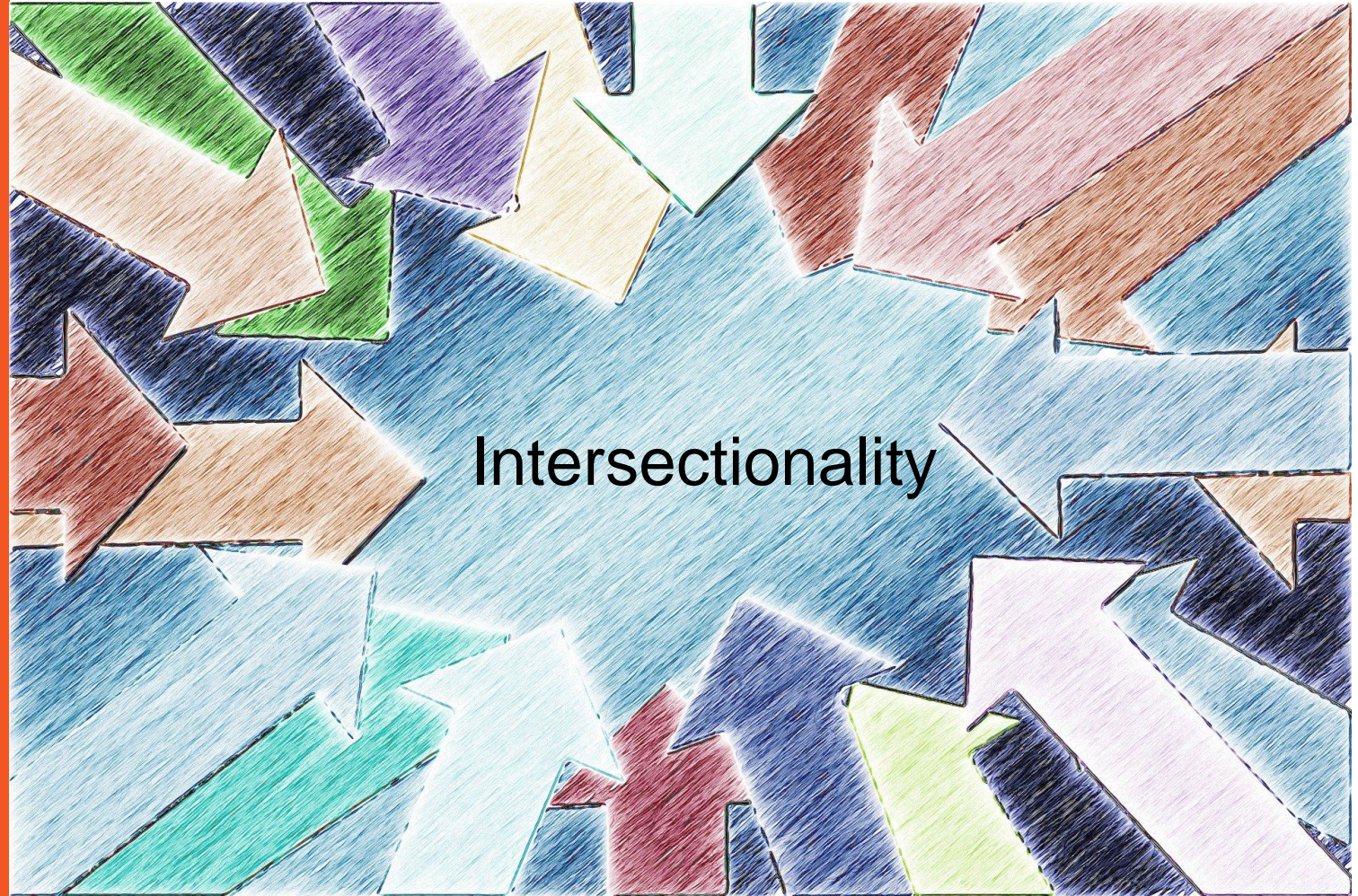
Class

Ethnicity

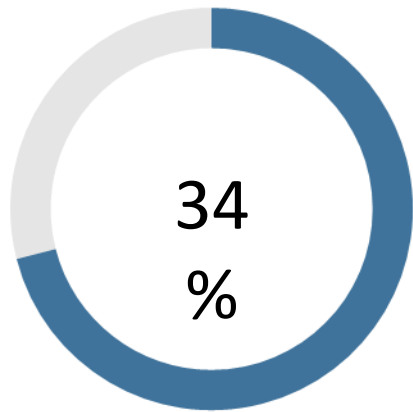
Gender/Gender
Identity

Race

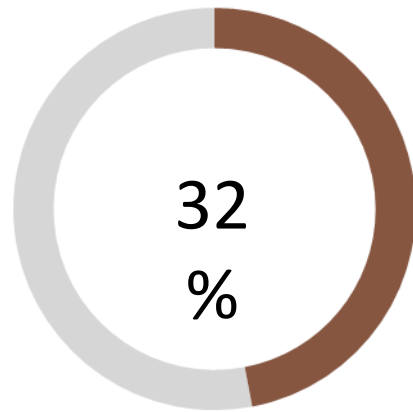
Sexual Orientation



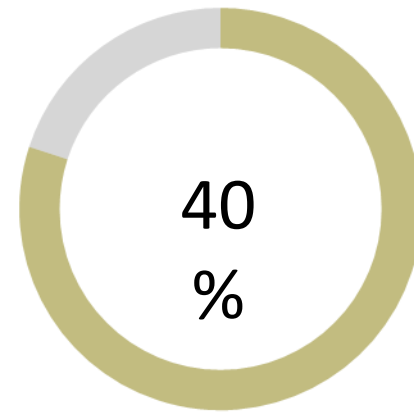
General Stats



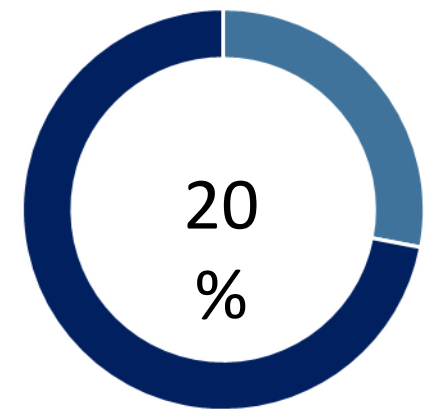
Live alone



Don't want to be alone



Have shrinking support networks



Seek dates online

Elder Abuse in the LGBT Community

Is elder abuse different in the LGBT Community?

Maybe it's not!

But perhaps greater risk due to greater vulnerability

- Less likely to be in a sustained relationship
- Less likely to be have extended family relationships
- Less likely to reach out for help
- More likely to have history of trauma

Most common types of abuse

Six Types of Elder Abuse Exist



Learn how signs of elder abuse differ from normal aging to prevent elder abuse before it happens.

Elder Abuse & COVID-19

All older adults encouraged to isolate at home

↑ isolation

↑ anxiety regarding getting COVID-19

↓ reports to APS initially, now a dramatic ↑

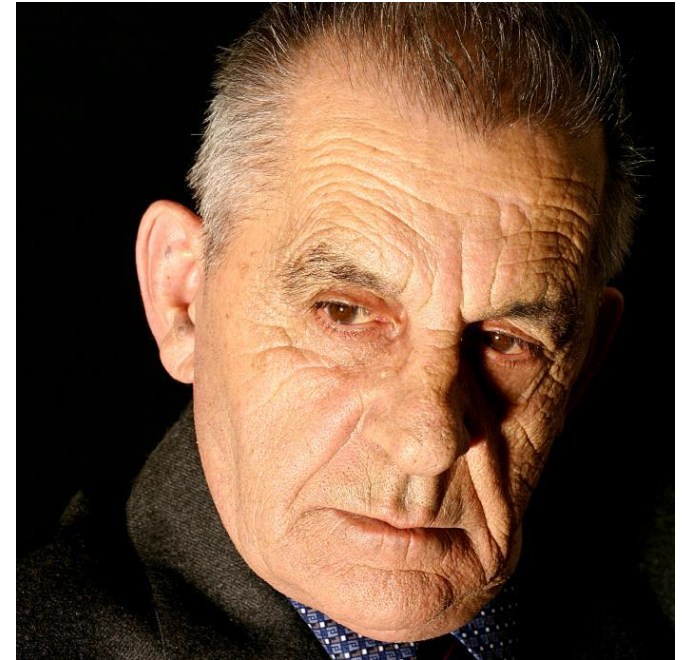
↓ access to many resources

↓ access to medical care

Sweetheart scam: Financial Abuse & Neglect

A 78-year-old man was found by police wandering in the street

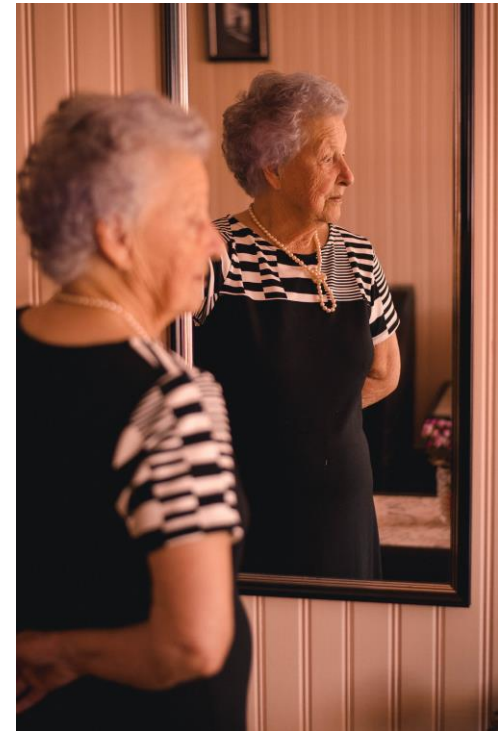
- Mr. Wilson is a retired accountant who had been in a 25-year relationship with his partner but never came out or identified as gay
- His partner passed away 2 years ago
- Shortly after a "new friend" Sam came into his life, moved into his home
- Mr. Wilson was diagnosed with dementia
- Sam denies that Mr. Wilson needs care and insists that he can make his own decisions
- Police investigation reveals that that Sam is now Mr. Wilson's legal domestic partner and has gotten Mr. Wilson to sign multiple documents gifting him funds from his accounts.



Emotional Abuse & Neglect:

88-year-old woman admitted to hospital with malnutrition and dehydration

- Marta and Lois lived together as a couple for most of their adult lives.
- Lois suffered a stroke and died suddenly leaving Marta alone.
- Marta's nephew Peter came to help out although he had never been supportive of the relationship between Marta and Lois.
- Marta struggled with her loss, talked about her grief often.
- Peter humiliated, insulted and threatened Marta with placement in a care home if she didn't stop whining about Lois
- Within a few months, Marta had become weak, stopped eating and was not getting out of bed.
- Peter was overheard in the ED berating and humiliating Marta



Responding to LGBT Victimization

- Increase your sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics
- Relationships may be more complex than they first appear
- Broaden the concept of “family”
- Recognize your own biases
- Listen more, assume less, consider personal circumstances

Principles of Trauma Informed Care

Safety

Trustworthiness & transparency

Peer support

Collaboration & mutuality

Empowerment & choice

Cultural, historical & gender issues

Including LGBT in Broader Elder Justice Work

- Implement policies inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- Have inclusive message – written and visual
- Provide LGBT cultural competency training for staff & volunteers
- Work with LGBT organizations for education & outreach

LGBT Elder Justice Focus

LGBT Older People Built the LGBT Community

It's Our Job to Ensure Everyone Can Enjoy It and Promote LGBT Elder Justice

Whether they protested in the streets, founded organizations, or just managed to survive times of social unrest, LGBT older people laid the groundwork for the progress all LGBT people now enjoy. Many, however, are not reaping the benefits because they have become isolated. This can create the risk of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It's time we fix those problems.



Here are **steps** LGBT organizations and professionals can take in support of LGBT older people

Create or support organizations, services, and events focused on LGBT older people. There are lots of resources to help you at <https://www.lgbtagingcenter.org>, including the free guide, "Age-Friendly Inclusive Services: A Practical Guide to Creating Welcoming LGBT Organizations." Use these programs to draw older people into community, educate them about available resources, teach them advocacy skills and new rights they may have not heard of, and help them have fun.

Create opportunities to engage and value LGBT older people. Isolation is a huge concern for LGBT older people, leaving them at risk for elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Organizations can help reduce isolation by fostering interpersonal connections whenever you can. Encourage older LGBT people to take a class, join a support group, attend a senior center (LGBT-specific or not), help out on a political campaign, or volunteer for their favorite cause. Recruit them for speaking engagements, join your Board of Directors or advisory committees, and invite them to volunteer at your events or in the office.

Design volunteer opportunities for LGBT older people. A great volunteer job is creating and running a check-in program in which LGBT older people are matched with each other and/or with younger adults for regular phone calls or Skype visits.

Make connections with mainstream aging organizations. Your local area agency on aging, adult protective services and long-term care ombudsman organizations can be strong partners in the prevention of LGBT elder abuse. Get on each other's mailing and event invitation lists. Invite them to a getting-to-know-you meeting, or set up formal cross-training. Scan their written materials and social media and pass along resources and news to your LGBT constituents.

Encourage them to plan ahead. You can be supportive by helping older people identify their social network, and find trustworthy people to rely on. Ideally they should consider creating a will, medical and financial powers of attorney, health care proxies, and advance directives. Both the **National Association of Elder Law Attorneys** (www.naela.org) and the **Center for Elder Rights Advocacy** (<http://legalhotlines.org>) can help you find a qualified lawyer.

Work with LGBT and supportive lawyers to host a legal clinic on National Health Care Directives Day. You will find all the support you need to organize a legal clinic at www.nhdd.org.

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LGBT Older People: Our Right to a Peaceful Life

Everyone has the right to live in contented peace, no matter their age or capacity. Unfortunately, our social structures are not as strong as they need to be. As a result, too many older people become isolated and at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This is particularly true for LGBT older people, who may have fewer biological relatives to lean on and who may feel safer staying out of or quiet in community settings. We are all entitled to live a life free of abuse. And there are individual and collective steps we can take to remodel and reconstruct the way we care for and support older people so that everyone stays connected to their community.

Here are **ten steps** to feel empowered and advocate for yourself to have the peaceful life you have worked and fought for.



1 Respect yourself.

Because of the social prejudices LGBT older people have had to live with, many of us believe that we don't deserve respect, love, happiness, or other good things. Not true! You survived those times and those voices, now it is time for you to be supported by the community and society you helped build. If you are in a relationship with someone who is being emotionally, physically, or financially abusive, seek support. Contact the **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs** for additional resources at <https://avp.org/ncavp>.

2 Stay connected to others.

This may take some effort, but it is well worth it. Not sure how to make new friends? Take a class, join a support group, attend a senior center (LGBT-specific or not), help out on a political campaign, or volunteer. If you have a telephone and/or computer, you don't even need to leave home to remain connected!

3 Be suspicious.

If you are hearing yourself think, "this is too good to be true," or "maybe I should get someone to look this document over before I sign it," pay attention! Never sign a legal or financial document without having it reviewed by someone you trust.

4 Pick trustworthy decision-makers for emergency situations.

Proactive choices backed by the proper paperwork can keep you surrounded by loving supporters and out of the hands of those with their own motives. Consider creating a will, medical and financial powers of attorney, health care proxies, and advance directives. Both the **National Association of Elder Law Attorneys** (www.naela.org) and the **Center for Elder Rights Advocacy** (<http://legalhotlines.org>) can help you find a qualified lawyer.

5 Be willing to ask for help.

Developing self-sufficiency helped many of us survive a hostile world. Unfortunately, that "I'll do it alone" stance is not always helpful as we age and develop new needs or limitations. Be willing to reach out for support. Contact your local **Area Agency on Aging** (you can get their contact information from <https://eldercare.acl.gov>) or by calling 1-800-677-1161 to learn about available help with housekeeping, meal preparation, personal care, transportation, and much more. Make sure to ask for and check references.

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Paying it Back: Promoting Justice for LGBT Communities of All Ages

It is said that it takes a village. Ideally, we need a **village of people** working together, supporting LGBT older people to experience the peace and fulfillment they worked so hard to earn. As a member of a village that has been built up around one or more LGBT older people, there are many things you can do to take part in building and maintaining the supportive structures that promote justice, while preventing and addressing isolation and elder abuse in LGBT communities.

It's up to all of us to reinforce the supports around older people. Here are five ways that you can act as a **pillar of support**.



1 Find more ways to connect. Isolation is one of the clearest risk factors for elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Visit or call as often as you can, and encourage the older people you know to take a class, join a support group, attend a senior center (LGBT-specific or not), help out on a political campaign, or volunteer in their community. If they cannot or do not want to leave home, do a simple internet search to find friendly visitor programs or other volunteer opportunities they can access from home.



2 Build self-esteem and healthy self-care habits. Every person in our community not only deserves respect, happiness and equal treatment, but also need these good things to live healthily. Because of the social prejudices LGBT older people have had to live with, many believe they do not deserve respect, love, happiness, or other good things. You can overcome this by being a source of support and community. Be free with your compliments, and talk about positive social advances frequently. Whenever it makes sense to do so, point out how they helped make the world the better place that they should now enjoy. Promote opportunities for intergenerational spaces that promote dialogue, understanding, and support across the generations.



3 Encourage them to plan ahead. You can be supportive by helping older people identify their social network, and find trustworthy people to rely on. Support older people in picking trustworthy decision-makers for emergency situations and help them complete the paperwork to protect those choices. Ideally they should consider creating a will, medical and financial powers of attorney, health care proxies, and advance directives. Both the **National Association of Elder Law Attorneys** (www.naela.org) and the **Center for Elder Rights Advocacy** (<http://legalhotlines.org>) can help you find a qualified lawyer. You can also work with LGBT and supportive lawyers to host a legal clinic on **National Health Care Directives Day** (www.nhdd.org).



4 Keep an open mind. Try to keep all topics on the table. If it is appropriate, talk about your concerns, financial security, and other "sensitive" topics to build a rapport, and let the older person know that those are all subjects they can freely discuss with you.

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Resources

SAGE: www.sageusa.org

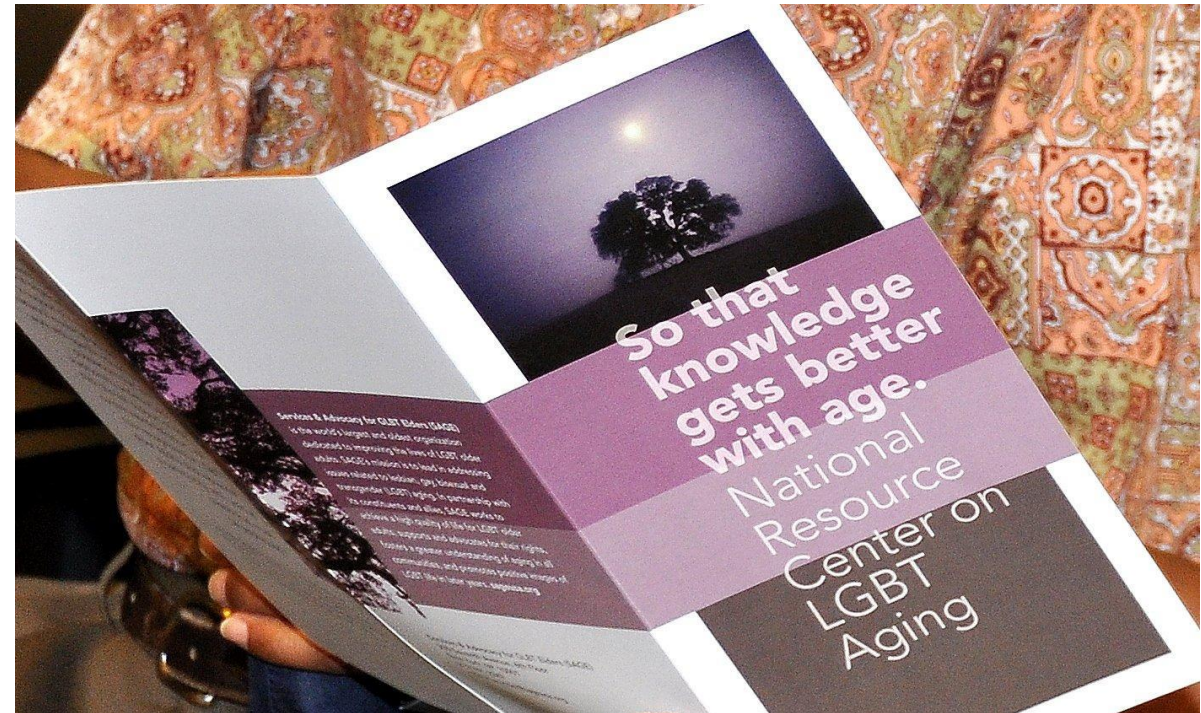
NCEA: <https://ncea.acl.gov/>

SAGECare: – www.sageusa.care
(Training & Credentialing Program)

National Resource Center on LGBT Aging:
www.lgbtagingcenter.org

FORGE- Empowering. Healing. Connecting:
<http://forge-forward.org/anti-violence>

National Coalition of Anti-violence programs
<https://avp.org/ncavp/>



Stay Connected

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