

Reducing Unfair Treatment and Improving the Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

There are 10 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adults in the United States.¹ This includes 2.7 million adults that are 50+ years old. LGBT people have to deal with discrimination, violence, and are denied their right to fair and equal treatment. Allowing discrimination creates an “Us vs Them” thinking pattern that is harmful to society. Research has shown discrimination or unfair treatment is connected to more harmful health problems. This includes poorer mental health.^{2,3} This brief provides information on LGBT health. It also suggests that a national law is necessary to reshape society so LGBT people are fully and equally included in our communities.

WHAT'S THE BACKGROUND?

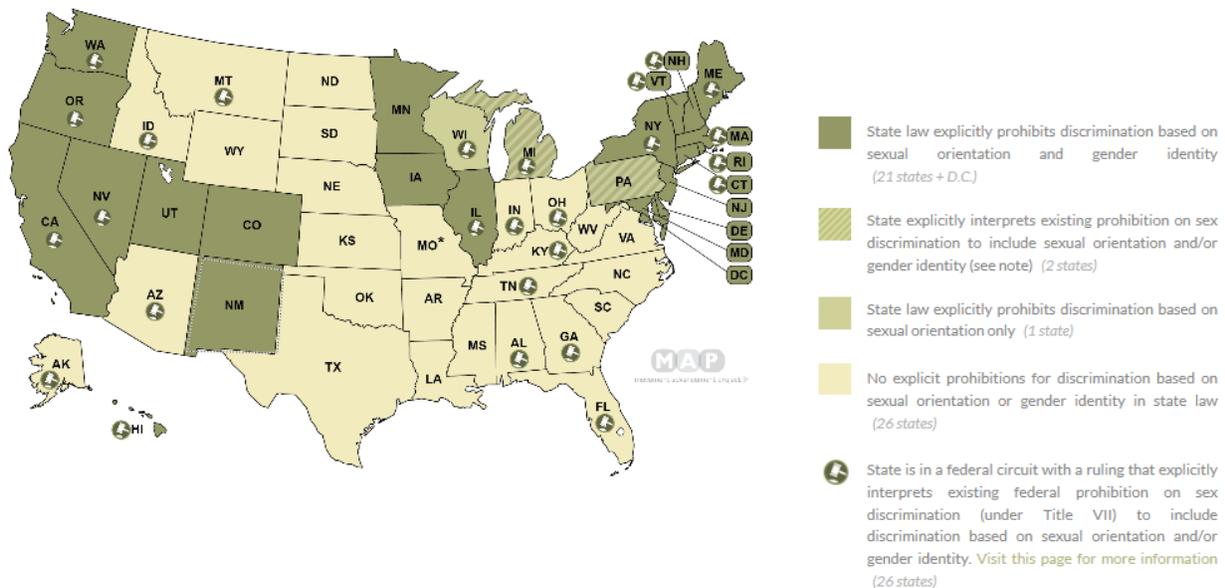
LGBT people are 2.5 times more likely to be depressed, anxious, and to abuse drugs than people who are not LGBT.⁴ They are also more likely to have serious health problems like a heart attack or stroke.⁵ Older LGBT adults are two times more likely to live alone than older adults who are not LGBT, and this increases the risk of depression.⁶ In a 2011 national survey, only 22% of LGBT older adults said they could talk about their sexual orientation with staff of long-term care (LTC) facility, like nursing homes and assisted living facilities.⁷ In another survey from 2017, 1,762 LGBT adults had similar concerns.⁸

The concerns about LTC facilities from 1,762 LGBT adults over 45 in the United States

60%+ concerned about long-term care

When thinking about long-term care facilities...

- **67% concerned about neglect**
- **62% concerned about abuse**
- **61% concerned about limited access to services**
- **60% concerned about verbal or physical harassment**



WHAT'S IN THE LAW?

A just society treats all of its members as equals, but right now, no federal laws protect people based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This means LGBT people can't do anything about the unfair treatment they face in LTC and other health settings. The Equality Act of 2019 would add sexual orientation and gender identity to a list of protected traits like race and religion that are already protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Only 24 states and Washington D.C. have laws that ban unfair treatment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

WHAT'S THE DEBATE?

The main debate over laws that ban unfair treatment based on sexual orientation or gender identity is based on religious beliefs. Some people believe they should have the right to refuse service to LGBT people based on freedom of religion.

Others believe that unfair treatment based on sexual orientation or gender identity violates basic human rights. This side of the debate argues that sexual orientation and gender identity should be included in the traits protected under a national law.

WHAT'S NEEDED?

The Equality Act is necessary for improving the health of 10 million Americans. Our country is made up of disagreeing laws in states that protect LGBT rights or allow unfair treatment to continue. Here are some ways the Equality Act will improve the lives of LGBT people:

- There will be a clear and consistent law against LGBT discrimination in every state. LGBT people won't have to worry about being fired, denied housing, or refused service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity when traveling or moving to other states.
- It is likely that less discrimination will lead to better health for LGBT people and will reduced health care costs for everyone.
- LGBT older adults will be protected under the guaranteed rights and protections as a person with Medicare. These rights and protections include being free from discrimination, abuse and neglect. LGBT older adults will also have the right to be treated with respect and get proper medical care. LGBT older adults in nursing homes or other LTC facilities will be able to make complaints about discrimination.⁹

-
- ¹ Gates, G. J (2017, January 11). *In U.S, more adults identifying as LGBT*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallop.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx>
- ² Blosnich, J. R., Farmer, G. W., Lee, J. G., Silenzio, V. M., & Bowen, D. J. (2014). Health inequalities among sexual minority adults: evidence from ten US states, 2010. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 46(4), 337-349.
- ³ Hoy-Ellis, C. P., & Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I. (2016). Lesbian, gay, & bisexual older adults: Linking internal minority stressors, chronic health conditions, and depression. *Aging & mental health*, 20(11), 1119-1130.
- ⁴ Ranji, U., Beamesderfer, A., Kates, J., & Salganicoff, A. (2014, January). Health and access to care and coverage for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals in the U.S. *Kaiser Family Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/8539-health-and-access-to-care-and-coverage-for-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-individuals-in-the-u-s.pdf>
- ⁵ Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., & Kim, H. J. (2017). The science of conducting research with LGBT older adults- an introduction to *Aging with Pride: National Health, Aging, and Sexuality/Gender Study (NHAS)*. *Gerontologist*, 57(S1), S1-S14. doi:10.1093/geront/gnw212
- ⁶ Social isolation (2018). *Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Elders*. Retrieved from <https://www.sageusa.org/your-rights-resources/social-isolation/>
- ⁷ National Senior Citizens Law Center (NSCLC). (2011). *LGBT older adults in long-term care facilities: Stories from the field*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Center on LGBT Aging. Retrieved from https://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/resources/pdfs/NSCLC_LGBT_report.pdf
- ⁸ AARP. (2018). *maintaining dignity: Understanding and responding to the challenges facing older LGBT Americans*. Retrieved from https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/life-leisure/2018/maintaining-dignity-lgbt.doi.10.26419%252Fres.00217.001.pdf
- ⁹ <https://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/what-part-a-covers/rights-protections-in-a-nursing-home>