

Embracing Diversity in Senior Living

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The Rise of LGBTQ Senior Housing

As our society progresses towards greater inclusivity, the needs of the aging LGBTQ community have gained significant and deserved attention. One crucial aspect is the development of LGBTQ-specific senior housing, which offers a supportive and understanding environment for older adults who identify as LGBTQ. The importance of focusing on housing for the aging LGBTQ population cannot be overstated, as the challenges faced by this senior community often go unnoticed. Therefore, during this Pride Month, I am glad to shed light on why such communities are vital for fostering dignity and well-being among LGBTQ seniors.

Understanding the Need for LGBTQ-Specific Senior Housing

Historical Discrimination and Isolation: Over 800,000 elders reside in senior housing in the United States, with almost 8% identifying as LGBTQ. The number is likely higher, as many older LGBTQ seniors do not identify openly for a myriad of reasons. Most LGBTQ seniors have faced lifelong discrimination; one study indicated that 33% of seniors felt that they had to hide their sexual identity if they moved to senior housing. [SAGE](#) reports that a staggering 48% of same-sex older couples applying for senior housing faced discrimination. In addition to discrimination, SAGE also reports that LGBTQ seniors are twice as likely to live and age alone compared to their cis-gender peers. According to [AARP](#), this isolation is often because LGBTQ seniors are twice as likely to live and age alone and four times less likely to have children, an essential support network for seniors. Dedicated LGBTQ housing helps mitigate these concerns by providing a space where residents can live openly and authentically, preventing the isolation that forces many back into the proverbial closet as they age.

Health Disparities: [The American Psychology Association](#) has found that LGBTQ seniors are disproportionately affected by physical and mental health conditions due to a lifetime of unique stressors associated with being a minority. The cost of healthcare for LGBTQ seniors is also more costly as they do not enjoy the same health insurance opportunities as their cis-gender married peers. As a result, health insurance is more expensive. Additionally, the lack of cultural competency in the healthcare system means that LGBTQ elders are more likely to delay getting the necessary care, treatment, and prescriptions, often resorting to emergency rooms more frequently than the general population. These factors, combined with a lack of familial support, can significantly impact the health of LGBTQ seniors.

LGBTQ-specific housing with built-in care, which is the model for all senior housing, helps to even the playing field and mitigate these disparities. It provides LGBTQ seniors with access to healthcare providers who are properly trained and familiar with the unique issues that impact LGBTQ seniors at a greater rate.

Safety and Comfort: Members of the LGBTQ population often create families of “choice” rather than blood relation due to historical discrimination and rejection by their families of origin. As a result, LGBTQ seniors heavily rely on aging friends and non-biologically related caregivers. Additionally, LGBTQ seniors are more likely than their cis counterparts to be HIV positive and have complicated medical histories, particularly as they age.

According to a recent study published in the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#), the combination of non-biologically related caregivers and complex medical needs places LGBTQ seniors at a significantly increased risk for mistreatment in later life. As their health and capacity decline, their partners and chosen family pass away, and the complications of HIV status (including HIV-related dementia) or neglected health issues increase. This study pointed out that even with limited information available, 22.1% of LGBTQ adults over age 60 reported being harmed, hurt, or neglected by a caregiver, 25.7% reported knowing someone who had been mistreated, and over 60% had experienced psychological abuse. The figures are startling and understandably cause concern among LGBTQ seniors about encountering prejudice from both staff and fellow residents.

Having an LGBTQ-focused senior facility will ensure that residents feel and are safe, even if they lack the capacity to advocate for themselves. Properly trained staff will create a safe and welcoming atmosphere where all residents can feel respected and valued.

The Good News in LGBTQ Senior Housing

Thankfully, LGBTQ senior housing developments are incorporating inclusive design principles and services tailored to the

needs of LGBTQ seniors. These facilities feature gender-neutral bathrooms, staff trained in LGBTQ competency, and events celebrating LGBTQ culture and history. SAGE has spearheaded this movement with its National LGBTQ Housing Initiative, which helps identify safe housing options for the LGBTQ population.

Prominent Examples of LGBTQ Senior Housing:

New York City:

Stonewall House in Brooklyn, named after the historic Stonewall riots in Manhattan's West Village, is known as a "beacon of inclusivity." This development provides affordable senior housing in NYC, with a mission to offer a strong sense of community for LGBTQ seniors.

Los Angeles:

The Triangle Square Apartments, the first affordable housing project for LGBTQ seniors in the U.S., is a unique and pioneering initiative. It offers a variety of amenities and support services tailored to the LGBTQ community, exemplifying societal progress and inclusivity. Recently taken over by the Los Angeles LGBTQ Center, its commitment to the community has been further enhanced.

Philadelphia:

The John C. Anderson Apartments in Center City is an affordable housing development that provides not only housing but also integrates social services and community activities designed to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ seniors.

Senior housing is more than just a place to live; it is a haven of acceptance, dignity, and support. As awareness of the specific needs of LGBTQ seniors grows, so too will the number and quality of housing options available to them. By continuing to advocate for and invest in these communities, we can ensure that LGBTQ seniors enjoy their golden years with the respect and care they deserve. Embracing diversity in senior living not only enriches the lives of LGBTQ individuals but also strengthens our society as a whole.