



Survey seeks input on LGBT assisted living



A survey hopes to capture what aging LGBT adults want in an assisted living center.
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In 2014, the Equal Rights Center sent New Jersey couples to seek housing in age-restricted communities, and found that in 40 percent of the tests, the same-sex couples were treated less favorably than the heterosexual couples. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) tester was told of fewer available apartments and additional required fees.

The New Jersey Law Against Discrimination prohibits discrimination on the basis of several characteristics, including gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation in all places of public accommodation.

“This means it would be illegal for a facility to deny access to a same-sex couple on that basis. However, discrimination still happens, and it can be difficult to prove,” said Aaron Potenza, attorney for Garden State Equality in Montclair.

For LGBT seniors who don’t have family or children to care for them in their golden years, finding assisted-living housing can be hard. Finding senior housing that is welcoming to same-sex couples who want to continue to co-habitate is even harder, said Bianca Mayes, Health and Wellness Coordinator of Garden State Equality.

AARP's recent survey on the LGBT's aging-related concern revealed older LGBT adults worry most about having adequate family and other social support to rely on as they age, discrimination in long-term care facilities and access to LGBT-sensitive services for seniors. Black and Latino LGBT adults report the greatest concern about future family and social supports, and greater worry about potential abuse in these facilities because of their race and sexual orientation/gender identity.

"Older LGBT adults often have serious concerns about aging with dignity, compounded primarily by fears of discrimination and lack of social support," said Nii-Quartelai Quartey, Ed.D., AARP Senior Advisor and LGBT Liaison.

The survey further concluded:

- Gay men are more likely than lesbians to be single, live alone, and have smaller support systems, which may put them at higher risk for isolation as they age;
- Transgender adults also report smaller support systems and are at an increased risk of isolation, while bisexuals are least likely to be "out" within health systems;
- 52 percent of LGBT adults said they fear discrimination in health care as they age. A majority are especially concerned about facing neglect, abuse, and verbal or physical harassment in facilities, with black LGBT adults reporting the highest level of concern;
- Most LGBT adults (88 percent) want providers in long-term facilities who are specifically trained to meet LGBT patient needs. They also want some providers or staff who are themselves LGBT; and
- Nearly one-third of older LGBT adults were at least somewhat worried about having to hide their LGBT identity in order to have access to suitable housing options.

"While education about the LGBT community is commonplace in schools and our youth is accepting, the older generation might not have been exposed to same-sex couples. We don't want these seniors to be driven back in the closet," Mayes said. "Many lie about their partners claiming they are brothers or cousins when they get into assisted care. They just don't want the stigma."

New Jersey is ranked 25th in the US for the number of residents (3.8 percent) that identify as LGBT, according to the Williams Institute. More of these residents are now in need of assisted-living care and at an affordable rate. The cost of home care in New Jersey costs \$4,500 a month on average.

Last week, Green Hill Senior Living and Garden State Equality launched a needs assessment regarding LGBT senior housing and care in Essex County. Survey results will be used by Garden State Equality as a benchmark to what the LGBT community is seeking in an assisted living facility.

Green Hill, a private assisted-living facility in South Orange, is the only residential senior care provider in the New York metro area certified with SAGECare Platinum Certification and Innovator Status for completing a comprehensive provider training program focused on LGBT older adults and their caregivers, and cultural competency training on subjects related to LGBT people. They received the certification last year and held a roundtable in October to discuss ideas about LGBT services including healthcare and becoming a more welcoming community.

"More people are out now. We want to provide a safe and accepting space for our older LGBT residents," said

Amy Simon of Green Hill.

The survey will assess what the LGBT community is looking for in environments, healthcare, programs and how they expect to interact with the staff and their neighbors.

The hope is that the results will be used by other facilities to welcome the LGBT residents. In the first three hours, 73 people took the survey, said Simon.

Ann Lippel, Chairman of the Montclair Senior Citizen Advisory Committee, said, "Anything that can make Montclair more inclusive is welcome."

Green Hill was started in 1866 as a senior living community for single women in Newark. In 1965, they moved purchased the Old Grand Hotel in South Orange, and began including men in the 1990s. They are still a 501(c)3.

The cost for room, meals, programs and medical is \$5,204 a month. The group is hoping to raise funds to subsidize the cost for low income LGBT. For now, they are educating the community on being a welcoming community and will be holding an expo in June.

The survey can be taken by going to surveymonkey.com/r/LGBTSeniorHousingandCare.