

# EXPECT MORE

Everyone Deserves Good Health

7<sup>th</sup> Annual National LGBT Health Awareness Week

## LGBT AGING POLICY

By 2020, an estimated 54.6 million Americans will be 65 or older. More than 3 million of these Americans will be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

As LGBT people age, they face financial, personal and cultural barriers when attempting to access affordable housing, health care and social services. These barriers are further magnified by the social isolation and ageism that is endemic in the LGBT community itself. While LGBT seniors face many similar issues as their heterosexual counterparts, many are faced with the daunting prospect of having to go back “into the closet” at group homes and healthcare providers' offices, where they may be forced to fit within an inaccurate gender identity or expression or to separate from their partners.

Many LGBT elders have fewer support systems, in part because they may be estranged from biological families and have few children. As they age, LGBT people are more likely to live alone, not be partnered and to have to rely upon fragile social networks of friends for psychosocial and care giving needs. Developing innovative support networks is critical for them to age successfully.

Legal and policy frameworks deny LGBT people access to financial resources, including inheritance rights given by formal marriage and community support networks:

- Social Security does not pay survivor benefits to the same-sex life partner of someone who dies, equating to an estimated \$124 million a year in disallowed benefits to LGBT elders.
- Medicaid regulations fail to protect the assets and homes of same-sex partners when the one partner enters a nursing home or long-term care facility.
- The most basic rights, such as hospital visitation or living in the same nursing home or long-term care facility, are not guaranteed to same-sex partners.
- Couples where one or more partner is transgender may also face the invalidation of their identity, marriage, or inheritance rights when their partner becomes ill or dies.
- Older LGBT people are not only underserved, they are also understudied. In addition to changes in hurtful policies, a research agenda is urgently needed.

## EXPECT MORE: LGBT Health Is A Lifelong Issue

For more information, please see:

American Psychological Association ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org))

Mental Health Information Center (<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>)

National Association of LGBT Community Centers ([www.lgbtcenters.org](http://www.lgbtcenters.org))

[www.lgbthealth.net](http://www.lgbthealth.net)

 National Coalition  
for LGBT Health