

# Aging in the LGBT+ Community: Housing Needs Assessment

## Fostering a Culture of Respect & Inclusion

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

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“I am very concerned for the future, as my partner and I age, about what our long-term care options will be with respect to gay friendly housing and care”

Seniors **fear or have concern about facing discrimination or stigma** related to sexual or gender identity in the context of a seniors’ residence or care facility.

- Fear of discrimination and/or the desire for safety is a top concern of survey respondents, followed by general concerns around cost, comfort
- Fear is perpetuated by first and second-hand stories of individuals having to go ‘back in the closet’
- Discrimination could come from caregivers or other residents
- There is uncertainty about whether processes are in place to protect human rights
- **53% have had positive or very positive experiences in housing**; however, this number lowers for individuals who are living in a seniors’ residence or a collective environment, such as an apartment building or condominium

“There is a general lore in the LGBT+ community about people having to return to the closet.”

“My current experience with seniors’ facilities (visiting a family member) is one of the GLBTQ+ community ignored or of actively hostile residents and care-givers.”

There is important **generational context** to the meaning and experience of being a member of the LGBT+ community.

- Many individuals have directly experienced discrimination, stigma, and/or criminalization – and may be estranged from family or
- Lived experience of AIDS crisis and potential unaddressed trauma

“Many of us are survivors of the AIDS epidemic. We lost so many of our community  
“When I was growing up, transgender as a word didn’t even exist”

- Many have come out late in life or are still closeted, or selectively closeted

#### Key considerations

- Diversity within LGBT+ population
- Multiple generations within ‘senior’ population
- Seniors remain sexually active

“I am still sexually active and I expect to be so for the next 10 years”

- Lack of immediate family support: 38% of sample single, 39% living alone, 68% without biological or step-children (for those with children, 70% said they could not support with housing or finances)
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) are at heightened risk of contracting HIV
  - HIV status (10% of survey sample positive or undetectable)
- Aging population is increasingly culturally diverse
- Women may lack pension income, due to unpaid ‘pink collar’ employment

**Being ‘open’ is complex:** whether one discloses or is asked to disclose their gender or sexual orientation is **personal, situational, and continuous.**

- 12% of survey respondents are not open to their family doctor; 23% are not open to any of their neighbours

“None of my neighbours know I am a lesbian although I am sure they have thought it. I have never felt the need to voice my lifestyle but if asked I am comfortable discussing it”

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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➤ While **there is no one size fits all approach**, there is strong interest in **LGBT+ focussed housing** as an option to ensure safety and inclusion

- 58% of survey respondents would most prefer seniors housing that is LGBT+ focussed but inclusive of allies; another 16% prefer LGBT+ exclusive housing (as compared to mainstream)
- 62% and 66% of survey respondents say it is important or extremely important to be 'open' about gender identity or sexual expression, respectively, in the context of housing

"We want when people move in for the housing to say 'this is inclusive, no hate and no bullying'"

➤ Strategies to create inclusion in housing environments should be met with strategies to **foster inclusion in communities**, supporting people to age safely in place and community.

- 76% ranked living in their own private residence as their top choice for housing as they age
- 78% of survey respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with their current housing (most living independently)
- 84% are satisfied with their neighbourhood or community
- Change in finances is the main reason survey respondents would move (68%), even if they don't want to

"I would like to be closer to others like myself, [but] I cannot afford the rents. I travel every day to be with my people...it's very expensive."

➤ To feel included, most survey respondents (73%) want inclusive on-site activities and/or to have their relationship status respected (93%)

➤ "It's not about special treatment, [it's] about equal [treatment]"

Although Calgary does not have dedicated housing or supports for LGBT+ seniors there are a number of **emergent initiatives from housing and healthcare providers** to address

issues of inclusion and to ensure staff and residents are prepared to respond with respect. Including:

- Seniors housing providers who have LGBT+ inclusion as a strategic priority
- Organizational audits and staff training opportunities
- Toolkits and learning resources

➤ Stakeholder interviews suggest a **readiness for action**, from community members and service providers.

- Most are already thinking about, acting on, or interested in discussing inclusion for LGBT+ seniors and were aware of concerns coming from the community and through media
- However, few had dedicated strategies to ensure inclusion or to respond to an issue of gender/sexuality-based discrimination
- None could identify openly gay or trans seniors in their residence / community; through some had staff from the community

➤ **Reciprocal knowledge exchange** across LGBT+ generations and the **inclusion of LGBT+ community members** in decision-making, program design, and implementation are promising approaches to raising awareness of LGBT+ issues and experiences.

➤ "I hope we can establish nice, affordable, inclusive seniors' residences that can accommodate a range of people"

Strategies to identify and include LGBT+ persons require **sensitivity to the complexity of 'openness', safety, and previous trauma**

"For some of us, secrecy is still very important."

## Methods

The aim of this project was to better understand the profile of LGBT+ Seniors in Calgary and area and to foster discussion and action to respond to housing related needs and wants.

- **Survey** of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and other gender or sexual minority (LGBT+) seniors (50+)
  - N=118; January – March 2019
- **Interviews** with various stakeholders working in or representing the intersection of housing, seniors, and/or LGBT+; N=15
- Guidance from lived experience advisory and team of Peer Researchers
- Project support from Mount Royal University (ethics and peer training), The SHARP Foundation (fiscal agent & organizational lead), Centre for Sexuality (project support), Rainbow Elders Calgary (community lead), Calgary Homeless Foundation (funder), and Habitus Collective (Project Coordination)

## Survey Respondents - Demographics

### Age & Geography

- 56% between the ages of 55-64 years; 29% 65 years or older
- 85% in Calgary, 8% Cochrane; and 7% from another surrounding community
- Within Calgary, 32 of a possible 35 postal code prefixes were represented

### Gender, Sexuality, & Ethnicity

- 48% of respondents self-identified as women; 45% self-identified as men (this may include trans persons)
- 11% of respondents identified as trans, pansexual, asexual, inter-sexed, two-spirit, or non-binary
- 71% self-identified as Caucasian or European in origin; 27% self-identified as Canadian, and 10% identified as either Aboriginal, Metis, Jewish, Latino, or Asian.

### Employment & Education

- 61% undergraduate degree or higher
- 44% employed full-time; 8% working part-time or seasonally;
  - For those who are 65 years or older, 6% are employed full-time and 3%, work part-time or seasonally

## Income & Retirement Plans

- The majority of respondents rely on employment income as one of their main sources of income (59%); followed by pension (43%)
  - For those 65+, 97% rely on pension and 49% rely on retirement savings
- Other sources of income – such as rental income, family support, or investments – are also an important income source for 16% of the sample, and 21% of those who are over 65 years
- The majority of those who are not already retired are of working age and will be retiring in the next 5-10 years

## Relationship Status & Living arrangement

- 41% Married or common-law; 38% Single

## Current Housing

- 59% own their primary residence
  - 75% of whom have a mortgage or line of credit remaining
- 41% rent
- 39% are living alone; 43% with a partner
  
- 60% live in a private dwelling (house, townhouse, duplex, row house)
- 34% live in an apartment or condo
- 6% in a senior's residence, apartment complex or care facility

## Housing Costs

- 58% spend 30% or more of gross income on housing related costs
- 55% say their housing is affordable
- 68% identified a change in finances as the primary reason they would move, even if they didn't want to

## Physical and Mental Health

- 48% of respondents are currently living with a long-term or chronic mental or physical health condition
  - For those 65+ this rises to 55%
- 10% are HIV positive or undetectable
  
- 25% say their current health impacts their housing needs in some way
  - 44% say they require physical accommodations
  - 33% want housing that will accept their use of drugs or alcohol

- 26% currently require in-home care or access to health services
- 44% say their physical health is very good
- 39% rate their mental health as very good