



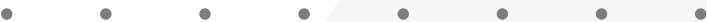
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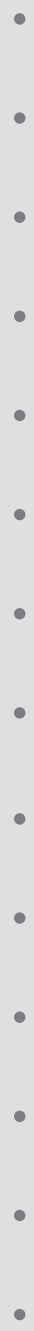
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Finding an **LGBTQ+ Inclusive** Long-Term Care Community



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Introduction

Moving into a long-term care community is a significant life change and requires someone to consider several factors when deciding where to live. When the time comes for extra support while aging, everyone deserves to feel welcome and safe accessing long-term care.

Sadly, many older LGBTQ+ people feel unsafe being themselves when they seek the care they need. This is partly due to the lack of federal protections for LGBTQ+ identities and fear they will face discrimination in long-term care settings. Due to this, it is important to be prepared with information to help you be sure the long-term care community you chose will be inclusive.

To help improve access to LGBTQ+ welcoming long-term care communities, the [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\) Foundation](#) and [SAGE](#) developed the [Long-Term Care Equality Index \(LEI\)](#). The LEI sets the first national standards for inclusive LGBTQ+ policies and practices for senior housing and residential long-term care communities. The LEI team supports participating communities by providing a self-assessment process, a comprehensive [LEI resource guide](#) of best practices, and educational presentations.



Pride flag flying outside the United Church Homes Trinity Community in Ohio.

LGBTQ+ people might have some common questions and concerns when choosing a long-term care community. This resource will guide how to get answers to those questions and concerns and help you select a long-term care community that is right for you or a loved one. Topics covered include LGBTQ+ welcoming policies, practices, and environments.



The Importance of LGBTQ+ Welcoming Policies and Practices

We deserve to feel safe and have our needs met when seeking care. A long-term care community's dedication to LGBTQ+ inclusivity must be rooted in inclusive policies and practices. Policies and practices that are inclusive of LGBTQ+ older adults shape an organization's culture and expectations. Here are some important questions you might have about your personal choices and rights in long-term care, along with policies and practices that address those concerns.



Pride celebration at Blue Bell Place, a Watermark community in Pennsylvania.

HOW DO I KNOW I WON'T FACE DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE I AM A MEMBER OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

Look for the resident non-discrimination policy. While we can't guarantee you won't face discrimination, LGBTQ+ inclusive non-discrimination policies show a stated commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. You may be able to find a resident non-discrimination statement on a community's website or in their marketing materials. If the statement is not publicly available, ask the community representative for a copy of their resident non-discrimination policy.

Why is the resident non-discrimination policy important? A community's LGBTQ+ inclusive resident non-discrimination policy is important because over half of US states do not have discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. An inclusive policy shows that the community takes a stance against discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people. Having an inclusive policy is foundational to a welcoming and inclusive environment.



Liz Clayman

What to look for: The non-discrimination policy includes LGBTQ+ identities if it mentions sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Here is an example of an LGBTQ+ inclusive statement found on an LEI participant's website.

SAMPLE LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

“United Church Homes, Inc. (UCH) complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate, exclude or treat people differently because of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, gender, **sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, age, disability, genetic information or ancestry....”**

Note: *There are no consistent or explicit federal non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. A non-discrimination policy that states that an organization complies with Federal civil rights laws without mentioning “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” does not guarantee legal protection for LGBTQ+ residents and staff.*

WILL MY PARTNER, SPOUSE, OR FRIENDS BE ABLE TO VISIT ME?

Look for an Equal Visitation Policy. An equal visitation policy states a resident's right to see any visitor of their choosing, at any time, and with privacy. Visitation policies are included in [Resident's Rights](#) (rights established by the Nursing Home Reform Act of 1987). You may find the visitation policy posted in the building, in a marketing packet, or online. If you do not see a visitation policy, ask the community representative for a written copy of the visitation policy.

Why is the Equal Visitation Policy Important? Moving into a long-term care community can be scary and isolating. Having the support of family and friends who visit is vital. Many LGBTQ+ people have a "family of choice." One's family of choice may consist of friends, former partners, and other LGBTQ+ community members. These relationships are often not recognized and given the same rights as spouses or blood relatives. An equal



visitation policy will ensure that residents can choose their visitors.

What to look for: For an LGBTQ+ inclusive visitation policy, the policy should make it clear that resident choice of visitors is protected. The policy should allow residents to choose visitors that are and are not biologically related to them. It should also prevent discrimination of visitors based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

SAMPLE LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE VISITATION POLICY

"All residents have the right to have visitors of their choosing. Visitors include but are not limited to a spouse, domestic partner (including a same-sex domestic partner), family member, or a friend for emotional support during the course of his/her stay...NYC Health + Hospitals/Gouverneur prohibits discrimination against visitors based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, or mental / physical disability, socioeconomic status, sex, **sexual orientation and gender identity or expression and ensures full and equal rights to all visitors."**

Note: Skilled nursing communities that receive Medicaid or Medicare funding **must** have an inclusive equal visitation policy. There is **no federal requirement** for assisted living communities to have a policy. Assisted living communities are encouraged to develop an equal visitation policy. Some housing options, such as an independent living community or affordable senior housing, may not have a visitation policy.

CAN I SHARE AN APARTMENT, ROOM AND A BED WITH MY SAME-SEX SPOUSE OR PARTNER?

WILL I BE ASSIGNED A ROOM BASED ON MY GENDER IDENTITY RATHER THAN MY BIRTH-ASSIGNED GENDER OR LEGAL SEX?

Look for the rooming policy. An LGBTQ+ inclusive rooming policy will ensure a resident can live with their same-sex partner and that residents will be placed in a room based on their gender identity. When touring a community, ask the staff for a copy of their rooming policy.

Why is the rooming policy important?

An inclusive rooming policy recognizes LGBTQ+ people's need to feel safe and respected in their homes within a long-term care community. An inclusive rooming policy makes sure LGBTQ+ people will receive equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

What to look for: The rooming policy should make clear a resident's right



Ari Seth Cohen/Advanced Style

to share a room with a loved one and receive a room assignment that affirms a resident's gender identity.

SAMPLE LGBTQ+-INCLUSIVE ROOMING POLICY

“Residents have **the right to share a room with their spouse, relative or partner** when the spouse, relative or partner lives in the same facility and both consent to the arrangement. Where room assignments are gender-based, **transgender residents will be assigned to rooms based on their self-identified gender**, regardless of whether this self-identified gender accords with their physical appearance, surgical history, genitalia, legal sex, sex assigned at birth, or name and sex as it appears in medical records.”

Note: If you are looking for skilled nursing or an assisted living community, inclusive rooming policies support the right of same-sex couples to share a room and the right of transgender and non-binary residents to be assigned a room based on their gender identity. An inclusive rooming policy in independent senior housing affords same-sex couples the same right to move in together as different-sex couples.



The Importance of LGBTQ+ Welcoming Environment and Culture

Policies are essential for addressing many concerns that LGBTQ+ people may have when moving into a long-term care community. However, there are other factors to consider if you are concerned about whether a long-term care community will have an inclusive culture for LGBTQ+ people. The LEI looks for inclusive foundational policies and also assesses if a facility has an inclusive environment. Below are some other things to consider when determining if the long-term care community you are looking at has an inclusive culture for LGBTQ+ people.

HOW CAN I TELL IF THE LONG-TERM CARE COMMUNITY HAS AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE?

LGBTQ+ OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

Does the community try to reach or support LGBTQ+ people?

Why is this important? The LEI checks if the community makes an effort to engage with the LGBTQ+ community and participate in LGBTQ+ events. Engaging with LGBTQ+ people and being involved in advocacy for LGBTQ+ causes shows that the community actively includes LGBTQ+ people.

Questions to ask include:

- Does this community work with any LGBTQ+ organizations?
- Does this community participate in local Pride events?

What to look for: Try to see if the community represents LGBTQ+ people in pictures or stories on their website, brochures, or marketing materials.

INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Does the community have programs or facilities that are inclusive of LGBTQ+ people?

Why is this important? Inclusive environments are another thing that the LEI checks for when looking at a long-term care community. Inclusive environments could mean that people are encouraged to use the restroom that matches their gender identity rather than their sex assigned at birth or legal sex, or that bathrooms in shared spaces are not gendered at all. Inclusive environments could also mean that events and programs allow people to participate regardless of gender. An inclusive environment is vital for LGBTQ+ people to feel safe, comfortable, and supported in long-term care.

Questions to ask include:

- Are programs split by gender? If so, can people choose to participate in activities that align with their interests and/or their gender identity?
- If there are couples' activities, are they inclusive of same-sex couples?
- Can I use the restroom that matches my gender identity rather than my assigned gender at birth or legal sex?

What to look for: Are bathrooms in shared areas gender-neutral or all-gender, rather than split by gender? This is important to see if facilities are inclusive of transgender and gender non-binary people.

LGBTQ+ TRAINING AND DIVERSITY EFFORTS

Does this community show its support for LGBTQ+ staff and residents?

Why is this important? Training and diversity efforts are another thing that the LEI looks at to determine if a long-term care community is doing its best to support LGBTQ+ people. Training is necessary because research shows that when staff members are given training on LGBTQ+ older adults, they are more accepting of LGBTQ+ identities and better prepared to provide care. Diversity efforts for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities directed toward both staff and residents are also important. This is because diversity efforts represent that the whole community is committed to recognizing and welcoming LGBTQ+ people.



Staff Pride celebration at Chaparral House in California.

Questions to ask include:

- Are there any diversity efforts for LGBTQ+ staff or residents?
- Are staff given training on LGBTQ+ older adults?

What to look for: Does the community display (online or in-person) anything that might represent their support for LGBTQ+ people, such as a representation of

LGBTQ+ older adults or rainbow symbols that show their support for LGBTQ+ identities.

You can see if the long-term care community completed LGBTQ+ training with SAGECare by looking up their name [on this website](#). You can check if the community is participating in the Long-Term Care Equality Index by searching for the community on the [LEI participant map](#).

Does this community make an effort to acknowledge LGBTQ+ identities?

Why is this important? The LEI also looks for LGBTQ+ identities being included on intake forms and registration forms for new residents of a community. An inclusive form could mean that forms ask about sexual orientation or gender identity, your pronouns, and for you to indicate the name you use if it is different from your legal name. Including gender-neutral options for power of attorney, spouse or partner, or visitors is also important for making sure that LGBTQ+ identities are acknowledged. When a community makes an effort to recognize they serve LGBTQ+ older adults, this often means that they are committed to creating an inclusive environment for all residents.

Questions to ask include:

- Do you know of any LGBTQ+ residents who live in the community?
- Do you ask residents about sexual orientation or gender identity along with other personal demographic information?



What to look for: Do any of the community's materials include gender-neutral language such as spouse or partner rather than words like husband and wife? Do intake or registration forms ask for the name you use, your pronouns, gender identity, and sexual orientation?



The Continued Path to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

HRC Foundation and SAGE believe that most long-term care housing providers want LGBTQ+ residents to feel comfortable and safe in their community. The LEI supports communities to assess, develop and put into place proactive policy and practice. We hope this guide empowers those seeking residential long-term care and senior housing to ask about LGBTQ+ foundational policies and practices. LGBTQ+ older adults and their loved ones deserve quality, informed, and respectful care.



Residents and staff participate in Pride celebrations at Prestige Post-Acute and Rehabilitation Center – Milwaukie in Oregon.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Resources

[Learn More About Long-Term Care and Resident's Rights](#)

[Find Your Local Area Agency on Aging and Resources](#)

[Find Your Local SAGE Affiliate](#)

[Find Your Local LGBTQ+ Community Center](#)

NRC Resources for Planning Ahead

[10 Tips for Finding LGBT-Affirming Services](#)

[Safe Spaces? The Need for Cultural Competency in Aging Services](#)

[Inclusive Services for LGBT Older Adults](#)

[My Personal Directions](#)

[Resident Rights and the LGBT Community](#)

What if you've found yourself somewhere unsafe?

[Find Your Local Ombudsman Office:](#) Report Resident's Rights issues to your local ombudsman, and they can help you resolve the issue.

[Adult protective services:](#) If you or someone you know is being abused, you can find your local adult protective services agency at this site.

Eldercare Locator line: 1-800-677-1116. Call this national hotline to find out about local services available to you.

SAGE National LGBT Hotline: 877-360-5428. Call this hotline to find services that are LGBTQ+ affirming in your area.

State and Municipal Laws

Not all states and cities have protections for LGBTQ+ people. Search HRC Foundation's maps and databases to determine if your [state](#) or [city](#) has protections.

Spread the Word

Request that your local long-term care communities participate in [the LEI](#) (see Appendix B) or [SAGECare](#) training.

Appendix A

GLOSSARY OF TYPES OF LONG-TERM CARE COMMUNITIES

There are many types of residential long-term care and senior housing options. The long-term care communities participating in the LEI represent the following levels of care:

Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs)

Skilled nursing facilities, also known as “nursing homes” provide a wide range of health and personal care options. SNFs assist residents with activities of daily living, such as eating, bathing and getting dressed. This higher level of care may include 24-hour medical care, three meals a day, social activities, and rehabilitation services (e.g., physical therapy, speech therapy).

Assisted Living Facilities (ALFs)

Assisted living facilities are for people who need help with daily care but are not as involved as skilled nursing care. Assisted living residents typically live independently in their apartment with on-site staff, housekeeping, security, social and recreational activities. There may be access to additional services (often for an additional fee) such as three meals a day, personal care assistance, and medication management.

Independent Living Communities

Independent living communities are age-restricted (~55+) communities. Housing options can vary from apartments, condos, townhomes, and duplexes. These residential communities provide an active environment with scheduled activities and commonly offer amenities such as a fitness center, hair salon, on-site entertainment, and dining services. Some communities may provide housekeeping and linen services, security, and transportation.

Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) or Life Plan Communities

Also known as life care communities or life plan communities, CCRCs offer different levels of care in one location. Most CCRCs offer independent housing, assisted living, and skilled nursing

care on a single campus. Where a resident lives depends on one’s necessary level of care. In a CCRC, if a resident in independent living experiences a change in health status, they can move into the assisted living facility on site. If a resident in assisted living develops more significant care needs, the resident is guaranteed placement in the skilled nursing community onsite.

Affordable Senior Housing

Affordable senior housing, sometimes known as low-income senior housing, is supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs such as Section 202 and Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance programs. Entry to these communities is income-based.

Memory Care Communities

Memory care communities provide long-term care services to individuals with cognitive decline and dementia. While memory care communities may offer similar services and support as assisted living communities, this housing type is staffed, structured, and equipped to meet the specific needs of individuals with dementia.

Free-Standing Hospice Inpatient/Residential Facility

Hospice care is commonly administered to where a patient lives. A free-standing hospice residential facility is considered a patient’s home and care is provided 24-hours a day. Free-standing hospice facilities offer an alternative route to care for those without at-home caregivers to support their end-of-life journey.

Appendix B

EMAIL TEMPLATE: IS YOUR COMMUNITY LGBTQ+ WELCOMING?

Hello,

I am currently looking at long-term care communities in the area.

A diverse and LGBTQ+ welcoming community is important to me. Does your community participate in [the Long-Term Care Equality Index \(LEI\)](#)?

The LEI is a tool and survey for communities like yours to determine their level of LGBTQ+ inclusion and be recognized for it. [Here is a map of current communities participating.](#) I hope to see your community [sign the “Commitment to Caring Pledge”](#) and serve as an inclusive option for LGBTQ+ people. Here is the [LEI resource guide](#) to learn more about inclusive policies and practices you can implement in your community.

Thank you,



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SAGE offers supportive services and consumer resources to LGBTQ+ older people and their caregivers, advocates for public policy changes that address the needs of LGBTQ+ elders, and provides education and technical assistance for aging providers and LGBTQ+ community organizations. sageusa.org



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The HRC Foundation is the educational arm of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization. The HRC Foundation works to build capacity and change policies, practices, hearts and minds in a range of institutions that shape LGBTQ+ people's daily lives. Learn more at hrc.org and thehrcfoundation.org.

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