



Finding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affirming Care Services As You Age

As you age you may find that meeting your health care needs becomes increasingly important and challenging. Finding service providers who are knowledgeable about LGBT issues and are open and affirming when delivering care services can become a priority for you or a loved one you care for. When seeking home care services or looking for a care facility to meet longer term needs, you will want to consider what information is helpful to know as you make choices about aging care services.

Questions to Ask Service Providers

It is important that you interview care service providers to find one that best meets your needs and one with whom you feel comfortable. You might use the following list of questions during the interview process to gauge a provider's commitment to serving LGBT older adults, their families, friends and caregivers.

1. Do you ask all clients about their sexual orientation and gender identities?

Making sure a service provider asks these questions of everyone prevents them from ONLY asking those they perceive are LGBT. These questions should be asked in a private setting and no individual should be forced to answer these questions. Providers shouldn't assume that everyone is out in every aspect of their lives. Confidentiality is important!

2. Do you explain how and why gathered information will be used? How is client confidentiality explained and protected? Service providers should be clear about their confidentiality policies before beginning any intake process. This practice gives you a clear picture as to who has access to your personal information, as well as how and why this information might be shared.

3. Do your forms include relationship options such as "partner" or "significant other?" The inclusion of these fields on the forms shows that a provider understands relationships that fall outside of mainstream norms.

4. Do your forms include more than two choices for identifying sex/gender? Providing more choices for personal identification shows that the provider has a good working understanding that sexual and gender identities can be fluid and multi-faceted identities.

5. What training do you provide your staff on LGBT identity and affirming care? It is of great importance that the staff have training and a working knowledge with regard to communicating with you and meeting your care needs. It's a way for the organization to show that they are enacting their policies to be open and supportive of everyone.

6. How do you display and market your care services to potentially everyone? Do you belong to or support LGBT organizations? Open and affirming service providers value and are supportive of LGBT people. Look for:

LGBT-inclusive images within their office space and in their marketing materials and website.
Posting their non-discrimination policy in a readily available format and location such as their lobby.
Displaying partnerships with LGBT community organizations.

7. What programming is available that supports LGBT-identified clients and community?

A major way of assessing how respectful the organization will be to individuals accessing services is through the programs that they offer or through the services they provide.

8. How welcome are LGBT clients and/or family members to your facility or agency? Does your residential or nursing facility allow same-sex and/or non-married couples to live together? Do you help place transgender older adults with roommates? Are staff members knowledgeable of the varied needs of those within the LGBT community? Do staff members have access to and understand the various supportive services available to LGBT clients? Do you maintain a list of LGBT affirming providers to whom you refer?

9. What is your experience working with LGBT older adults or families? Do you work to incorporate community members/ non-traditional family members into care plans when and where necessary? I wish for my partner and/or friends to be part of my support team. How will you work with them and keep them informed? For LGBT community members, it's not always possible to have blood family support for a number of reasons. It's important that the provider you're working with be able to recognize the importance of community support when helping an individual plan for care. How will the provider engage/ communicate with your support team regardless of the nature of their relationship? What experiences have they had with this process?

10. How do you maintain an environment where overall cultural competency/ accessibility/resiliency is encouraged, supported and continually improved? Is the facility readily accessible in all public areas to people of all abilities? Are forms offered in large print and a number of languages? Are interpreters available when staff language capacity does not include the language of clients? Are meal plans offered to meet the diverse needs of multiple cultures and different dietary preferences? What is your grievance policy for handling complaints from clients?

Asking these questions helps you decide whether a given care provider is appropriate for your specific needs. No one can make those decisions for you. Interviewing multiple providers helps put you in control and empowers you to get what you need from agencies serving you. While an agency may not specifically cater to the LGBT community, it may still be welcoming and supportive. Asking these questions can help inform you about how the provider agency works and how they will support you and your community.

(Primary Source: seniorservices.org; Senior Services of Seattle Washington)