



Why the Need for Special Housing for LGBT Elders?

All over America, including here in Sacramento, LGBT elders who led the fight for future generations to be “gay, out and proud” are being forced back into the closet.

In a demoralizing and heart-breaking turn for the LGBT movement, our elders who move into senior independent living and assisted care communities are being harassed, bullied, or simply made invisible.

Homophobic staff and residents of senior housing facilities are turning the autumn of our lives – the years we are at our most vulnerable – into lonely isolation. Why is this happening and how can we help ensure our elders are able to age in grace and pride?

Older LGBT adults are more likely than other elders to live out their final years alone. We are less likely to have children and are often estranged from our families of origin. We are less likely to be married.

Being alone often means older LGBT adults have less money than the general population and at the same time, fewer family members to provide care as we age. A recent study of LGBT seniors in San Diego reported that 45

percent had difficulty paying rent or mortgage.

Since LGBT people often create their own unique family through friends and neighbors, moving can be a significant burden. LGBT seniors often face discrimination in housing.

A study by Services and Advocacy for LGBT Elders (SAGE) found that when it comes to housing:

1. 13 percent of LGBT seniors had been discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation when searching for housing;
2. 25 percent of transgender older people had experienced housing discrimination because of gender identity;
3. 24 percent of older LGBT people of color experienced housing discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, compared to 18 percent of older non-LGBT people of color.



A rendering of Mutual Housing California's proposed affordable LGBT-welcoming senior housing at 16th and F Streets in Sacramento that could become home to 53 households whose occupants are age 62 and older.

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

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The bottom line is, we have few choices when it is time to move to senior housing due to a need for increased support or financial issues resulting in the loss of our homes. We are forced to compromise as we age. LGBT seniors face harassment in senior living environments and often live in fear at a vulnerable point in our lives.

That is why building affordable housing like Lavender Courtyard by Mutual Housing—that welcomes LGBT seniors—is so essential. This planned apartment community, to be constructed at the corner of 16th and F Streets, will be open to all seniors age 62 and older, and will have a special sensitivity to LGBT elders. There will be deep connections to LGBT service providers and support groups. Staff will be trained in the challenges of all seniors, and specifically, LGBT seniors.

In recent years, several housing properties targeted to LGBT elders have opened across the nation — only a handful are affordable to seniors living on modest fixed incomes.

Lavender Courtyard by Mutual Housing will be one such community.

These LGBT-friendly senior housing communities, while groundbreaking and critical to the well-being of our elders, can't be our only response. There just aren't enough resources to build specialty housing for the three million LGBT elders who will be part of the population in the next few decades.

As such, it is essential to:

1. Work with local senior housing owners and managers to educate them on LGBT issues;
2. Explore other approaches, such as innovative “home-sharing” programs.
3. Connect older LGBT adults with supportive housing resources in their community.
4. Train volunteer advocates to support elders who are victimized in senior housing communities.

As importantly, LGBT seniors need to learn about the law so they can protect themselves from discrimination in housing.

Rachel Iskow is the Executive Director of Mutual Housing California. She has been an affordable housing developer and advocate for over 25 years. Information about the upcoming LGBT-friendly senior housing can be found at www.mutualhousing.com/LavenderCourtyard.

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