Hello, and thank you for downloading this eGuide from A Place for Everybody.

As an organization committed to the well-being and happiness of all older adults, we are truly glad you’re concerned with finding the best possible environment for you or a loved one in the LGBT community.

This eGuide will share research-based information about factors that impact older adults who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender. Through research that includes in-facility interviews with staff and managers at Senior living facilities, we have identified a number of issues that specifically impact Seniors who identify as LGBT. We will present these concepts along with guidance on how to explore and address them in the following pages.

This guide is not all-encompassing and the guidance may apply differently for different people. Finding the right living environment for yourself or your loved one is highly personal and no two people's experiences, preferences, and needs will be the same. Nor will two care-givers or facilities have the same approach and understanding - caregivers are as unique as the individuals they care for. Therefore, in addition to reading this guide, we encourage you to reach out to one of our LGBT Senior Living Advisors who may provide specific advice based on your or your loved one’s personal circumstances.

With this in mind, please remember to approach conversations and decisions about caring for your loved one with openness, compassion, and care.
Contents

This eGuide contains three sections.

• LGBT experiences across generations
• Senior living facilities and sales staff
• Suggested interview questions and observations
Generations, Experiences, and Norms
The following anecdote is about real people whose names have been changed for anonymity.

Mark and Edward are a gay couple who have been in a loving relationship for more than 30 years. They first met in 1968 and their relationship developed over the following years as they became closer and more committed to each other. Although they have been together for five decades and have firmly decided to be partners for life, they have no plans to be formally married and they do not discuss their relationship in public, or even with some family members.

Mark has a nephew, Jason. A man in his late 20’s, Jason is also in a committed relationship with his partner who he married in 2016. Jason is a particularly curious person - he is fascinated by learning about people’s behavior, motivations, and decisions. Because of this personality trait, he has had several deep conversations with Mark about the similarities and differences in their relationship.

When Jason asked Mark whether he and Edward would consider marrying after gay marriage was fully recognized by their country in
2017, Mark was surprised by the question. “Why would I bring that kind of social pressure and scrutiny on my relationship?,” he asked. “Edward and I have the freedom to live our lives in peace and comfort, free to love each other as partners and enjoy our time together. If we started talking about our relationship, we’d have to deal with judgement, stigma, and goodness knows what else.”

While Jason understood where Mark was coming from, he knew that the reality of coming out would almost certainly be a brighter picture than Mark was painting. Acceptance of the LGBT community has rapidly improved in the United States and Europe. As a married gay man, Jason enjoys the freedom of presenting his authentic self to the world, even if it does remain an issue that he has to think about from time-to-time. Jason recognizes the prejudice that still colors nearly all aspects of western culture, but he also recognizes the changing climate and norms in society.

**But Mark lived through a very different time.** While Mark and Edward’s relationship was developing, homosexuality was literally illegal in their country. He watched as respected newsrooms and reporters covered the AIDS epidemic as “an outbreak of a gay disease,” and with that language, all the stigma, fear, and prejudice that was attached to the idea of being gay. He witnessed countless public figures discuss the concept of homosexuality as a decision and a sin, living through a period when public commentary about the ills of being gay was accepted and celebrated. This environment shaped his perception about society and himself in a fundamental way.

And it wasn’t just gay people that were impacted by this environment. All of Mark’s social peers grew up in this same culture. Both straight and gay members of Mark’s generation were exposed to the constant reinforcing of these norms and opinions, continually establishing discrimination as the appropriate and expected way of life. Mark is
smart enough to know that changing institutions and laws cannot undo decades of systematic prejudice. In his view, the most peaceful way to enjoy his relationship with Edward is to do so privately.

The difference in experience between Mark’s generation and Jason’s generation is critical to understand for younger loved ones of LGBT older adults. As a younger relative or loving friend of an older adult in the LGBT community, you likely had a very different experience with the social treatment of LGBT issues growing up. In fact, there are three distinct generational groups that might currently be involved in the care of an older adult with respect to LGBT social norms.

**Senior Citizens** - Older adults that grew up at a time when tolerance and understanding of non-traditional identification was extremely low. While everyone’s experience is different, many members of this demographic experienced open prejudice toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people during their social development.

**Children of Seniors** - Adults whose parents would be in the 65+ age group. This generation grew up during a time when norms were changing and understanding of non-traditional relationships began to spread. Members of this age group have a broad diversity of experience with social viewpoints on LGBT issues, ranging from outright prejudice to outright openness and acceptance.

**Younger Adults** - Adults from Generation X or the millennial generation are likely to have grown up during a time of general acceptance regarding LGBT issues. This age group is the most likely to be surprised when witnessing discrimination against gay or lesbian individuals and may find it difficult to understand the
strong hesitance of seniors to discuss their personal identification in the community.

Many senior staff members at care facilities for older adults are in the “Children of Seniors” age group while a large share of sales staff and caregivers are in the “Younger Adults” age group. This is significant, as the increased familiarity and openness with the LGBT community among younger groups can make it difficult for them to fully understand and appreciate the barriers that still face members of the Senior Citizens age group.

In our own interviews with sales and caregiving staff, we consistently find that younger people were less likely to understand the need for sensitivity around LGBT topics for older adults. When we ask questions about practices and policies to foster a comfortable environment for gay or lesbian residents, younger people are sometimes surprised by the question and only understand the vastly different intergenerational experience for seniors after careful consideration.
Facilities, Sales Staff, and Care Staff
While anyone who works at a senior care residence does represent that facility, there are many types of staff that are employed by senior living centers. The three main types of staff that you are likely to interact with as someone searching for a placement for a friend or relative are sales staff, caregiving staff, or management.

Caregiving staff are the most highly involved with the actual residents of the facility. They interact with residents on a daily basis in all sorts of situations. They are the most critical people for ensuring a comfortable and healthy environment, both in terms of physical health and in terms of the social environment for residents. We found that caregiving staff are often not a part of the up-front conversations and interviews that you may conduct at a facility. While you are likely to interact with caregiving staff briefly during a facility visit, it's not common to have a detailed conversation with them about the environment that residents experience when living there.

Sales staff, on the other hand, are the primary representatives that you will interact with during most facility visits. These people are the most familiar with the various parts of the process of selecting a senior living facility, signing a lease, and moving in a new resident. They are also the most knowledgeable about the costs and fees that the facility charges. In our experience, many sales staff have worked in the senior long-term care industry for quite some time and are familiar with many of the

Tip: Ask to speak with a caregiver or two in the facilities you visit. Ask them what makes their facility special and why they chose to work there. Often times, you’ll get a good sense of the energy in a facility through these conversations.
questions and issues facing families of seniors that need a residential care placement.

However, it can be difficult to obtain information about the environment for LGBT residents from sales staff. In most cases, the reason for this seems to be that they are unfamiliar with the nuances of daily interactions of residents and staff at the facility. In some cases, the sales staff will share worthwhile stories or examples of people who identify as LGBT in their facility, but most staff that we interview are unable to provide details about how the community within their facility handles LGBT issues specifically.

Our observation has been that most sales staff do demonstrate at least a superficial understanding of the differences between older and younger generations when it comes to points of view about LGBT issues. They understand that older individuals may have a much higher degree of prejudice and anxiety because of social norms and beliefs that were popular at the time they grew up. While staff and family members are largely accepting of LGBT residents, other residents may not be. Still, our experience has found that the understanding of this topic often stops there, with sales staff having very limited knowledge about how discrimination and prejudice among older aged residents should be handled.

You may benefit greatly from speaking directly to caregivers or management staff who have a stronger understanding of the daily environment (caregivers) and facility training programs (management) related to LGBT issues.

It is absolutely okay to ask for a follow-up conversation with a senior staff member, director, and/or front-line staff member to specifically discuss LGBT issues and concerns. In some cases, we found that these people could provide a better description of the actual
environment and types of attitudes that residents exhibit to one another in respect to a wide range of topics. When making a request for such a conversation, we found sales staff to be quite accommodating and generally happy to connect us with a senior manager or member of the caregiving staff. If a facility is reluctant to connect you with a member of the caregiving staff, this may be a red flag that indicates discomfort with the environment or what you might learn about the facility.

We encourage you to ask the senior living community if there has ever been an openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender resident in their facility, and if so, what their experience was like. Unless the community is relatively new, the community should know about LGBT residents that have lived in their facility. If not, it means one of two things. First, it could mean that the community has never had an LGBT resident living, which raises a red flag about why not. Or second, it means that no resident has ever been open about their differences, suggesting a low level of comfort in that particular environment.

One commonality among many facilities is an attitude that, while facility staff never exhibit prejudice or discrimination, they have very little influence over the opinions and behaviors of residents. While its true that residents are entitled to whatever opinions and attitudes they may have, this is no excuse for a facility tolerating descrimination in any circumstance. Situations where staff seem to fall back on saying “we can’t control our residents” should also be a red flag. Better alternatives to this approach include positions such as “while we cannot control our residents, we can be very active in identifying and addressing discrimination within our facility. We work hard to ensure all residents feel safe and welcome, and we take action when that is not the case.”
**Suggested Interview Questions**

To help you facilitate a high quality conversation and tease out additional information about the actual environment for LGBT residents, we have established a set of questions that we encourage you to ask during conversations with facility staff. Each question includes a discussion of what typical answers may include, and what these things might suggest about the facility.

**Are you LGBT friendly? Why?**

*Why it matters:* A facility’s official position on the treatment of LGBT issues sets the tone for all other conversations among management, staff, residents, and families of residents.

There is also opportunity to glean insights about the level of experience and understanding that the leadership team has based on the level of thoughtfulness, groundedness, and sincerity of the answer to this question.

**What percent of your resident population is LGBT?**

*Why it matters:* While there is not a right or wrong number of LGBT residents that a facility “should” have, the answer to this question can help you understand how much experience they have with residents in this community. It is also an important piece of information for determining whether the facility is a good fit for you or your loved one based on your preferences and needs regarding living in a community where people have shared experiences.

Lastly, this question can uncover the level of awareness that staff have with their own residents, based on whether they have any familiarity with residents who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender.

**What specific programs and routines do you have in place to serve LGBT residents?**
Why it matters: Although this is not common, facilities that have specific programs or routines that serve LGBT residents are clearly taking the issues they face seriously. This is likely an indicator that the staff and management have experience working with LGBT residents and the challenges they face. It also might be an indicator that there are several LGBT residents at the facility, which can create an environment where it is easier for you or your loved one to live authentically with comfort and ease.

Do you actively market to LGBT clients? If so, how?
Why it matters: While this is also not common, marketing to LGBT seniors indicates that a facility wants to be home to people in this community. Because all high quality service begins with awareness, there is a higher likelihood that facilities who specifically market themselves to LGBT residents will be invested in creating an environment for them to thrive.

Of course, simply marketing to the LGBT community does not necessarily mean that a facility will do a good job of fostering an open and vibrant community. To help you understand why they market to this group, and what it means about the facility, we recommend asking to see the marketing materials that they have developed for LGBT residents. Pay attention to the tone and language that the materials use. What promises do they make? Do the materials demonstrate an understanding of the challenges and needs of LGBT residents?

Do you partner with SAGE or any other nonprofits that serve LGBT older adults?
Why it matters: Partnering with an organization dedicated to LGBT adults is a great sign that the facility is serious and committed to creating an environment where all its residents can thrive. Creating the best environment for a diverse population of older adults is truly
difficult, and facilities that engage with experts and resources in their community are in a better position to do a great job.

If a facility is not engaged with organizations that serve LGBT older adults, it is a good idea to ask their management team if they would be willing and interested in doing so in the event that you or your loved one move in. If they are willing - or better yet, eager - to build a relationship with such an organization, it says something about their genuine concern with your experience. It will also support them in successfully fostering an inclusive environment.

Don’t forget, if you are having such a conversation with a facility that you or your loved one are considering, you can always ask them to reach out to one of our advisors at A Place for Everyone. We are happy to talk with them about organizations they can partner with to help create a community where LGBT residents can thrive.

What are some of the challenges that you have overcome in partnership with gay residents?

Why it matters: Creating a great environment for all residents is challenging, especially given the variety of experiences and norms that are found in a community where people lived through different times and come from a variety of backgrounds. There are always challenges that have to be navigated and facing challenges is not an indication that a facility’s staff or management has done anything wrong.

Working through challenges in partnership with residents is a sign that the staff are truly concerned with their experience. Of course, not all interpretations of “overcoming a challenge” are the same. Ask specific questions about the challenge, approach, and resolution that took place. Listen carefully for signs that the staff at the facility are grounded and truly invested in the resident’s experience. We find that facilities sometimes are primarily concerned with their own liability and
operations, which can make them more likely to push a resident toward silence and secrecy rather than openly expressing themselves.

**Do you ever lose potential residents because of your policies on LGBT members?**

*Why it matters:* While a facility is very much not responsible for the viewpoints and norms of residents and potential residents, the principles it upholds in facing different expectations are important.

A facility that is willing to lose out on rent and care fees from an intolerant prospective resident because it insists on acceptance and openness is clearly serious about the topics in this e-guide. On the other hand, facilities that have LGBT residents leave to seek a more inclusive community might be unable to create an environment where all residents can thrive. There can be many reasons for this, but it should raise concern about whether this facility is the best place for you or your loved one.

**What happens when there is descrimination against your LGBT residents?**

*Why it matters:* It is important that senior living communities have protocols in place if and when there is discrimination against any minority groups, including, but not exclusive to LGBT residents. If the senior living facility tells you that they have never dealt with any cases of discrimination, ask them what steps they *would* take in order to uphold justice, ensure that it doesn’t happen again, and make residents feel safe in their living environment.

*I know you mentioned that your facility staff openly accept LGBT residents, but what will other residents say/do/think when I or my loved one tell them about my orientation?*

*Why it matters:* This questions creates an excellent opportunity for facility staff to demonstrate an understanding of the nuanced issues
that face older adults in the LGBT community. This is a challenging issue and there are many different points of view. A facility should acknowledge this reality and demonstrate an understanding that not all residents may be accepting and free from prejudice. They should have a strong position on enforcing a safe environment for all residents to be themselves without claiming to have control over the opinions of residents.

In discussing this question, a staff member that claims the facility is free from any prejudice among residents, or insists that everything goes smoothly in all cases, is probably a red flag. While this may sometimes be true, we find that the vast majority of facilities will have diversity in the acceptance and openness of its residents - this is true in most communities and is no different in senior living facilities.

Conversely, if a staff member abdicates responsibility in this case, claiming that they cannot influence the environment because they have no control over residents’ opinions, this is also a serious red flag. Fostering an environment of inclusion and acceptance is not easy but it is important, and it is the responsibility of every employee of the facility - management, sales, and caregivers - to enforce tolerance and encourage residents to live their authentic selves.

The bottom line with this question is that there is no right or wrong answer. It is an opportunity for the staff to show you their understanding of the diversity in viewpoints among residents and to demonstrate their commitment to fostering a healthy and safe environment for LGBT residents to live.

_Do you ask specific questions about LGBT treatment and viewpoints in your hiring process for staff?_
Why it matters: Senior living communities should vet their staff members thoroughly along a number of social dimensions, including their attitudes toward minority groups (including LGBT residents).

Is it a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy -- i.e., you’re “tolerant”, or do you actively embrace a gay friendly environment?

Why it matters: “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policies didn’t work for the US military, and they certainly don’t work in senior living communities. It’s important that LGBT residents feel comfortable and safe being themselves. After all, this space will be their home. In our research speaking with staff members at senior living communities we occasionally see rainbow (“pride”) flags in subtle areas of the welcome reception or staff offices. To us, this is a powerful way for a community to say “Yes! We welcome you in our community!”

Key Assessment Observations
As you have conversations with facilities about your LGBT relative - whether or not they include any of the suggested questions in the last section - there are a few observations you can make to build a more complete understanding of the facility. Here are some things we suggest you pay attention to or evaluate.

Do they dive deeply into the question/topic, or do they move on quickly and/or deflect?

Why it matters: When asked about whether their community is LGBT-friendly, you should look for staff members that don’t seem rushed in their responses (vs giving pithy answers), as this is a sign that they are comfortable talking about such topics.
What is the emotional response of the staff member when the topic comes up - excitement, anxiety, caution, comfort, discomfort?

Why it matters: It is obvious when someone is uncomfortable talking about whether their community is LGBT-friendly. An LGBT-friendly facility should have staff members that are eager to talk about how all members of the community are welcome, and how differences between residents are celebrated.

Choice of words (homosexual vs gay vs LGBT) → synthetic comfort

Why it matters: When a staff member at a senior living community talks is asked whether their community is friendly for prospective LGBT residents, the words they use can indicate their level of comfort with the topic. We have found in our research that staff members who are less comfortable talking about their facility being friendly to LGBT residents tend to use more old-fashioned, less commonly used words and expressions such as “homosexuality”, “homosexuals”, “differences in lifestyles”, and the like.

Length of time the staff remain on the topic of LGBT acceptance

Why it matters: At this point, you will have clearly demonstrated your serious concern about LGBT issues in selecting a facility for you or your loved one. If staff members are comfortable remaining on this topic and having an earnest conversation, it suggests they are able to stay present and focused on addressing related issues in the facility. This conversation will likely be a little challenging and their willingness to stick with it says a lot.

On the other hand, a situation where staff acknowledge your questions but quickly change the topic to other aspects of the facility may indicate discomfort with the issue. This could be because they have struggled with LGBT issues in the facility and are concerned you will detect that. It may also be because they’re unsure of whether the community at the facility will be accepting of you or your loved one. In
any case, an inability to remain engaged with the topics that matter to you and your family should be seen as a red flag.

If the staff member you speak with continually changes the topic, we recommend asking to speak with more than one person in order to explore whether this is common throughout the facility or is simply an uncomfortable topic for one individual. In either case, however, consider this when making your assessment of whether this is a place where you or your loved one can thrive.

**Do they have some kind of LGBT symbol (e.g., a rainbow flag) displayed in their facility?**

*Why it matters:* As mentioned above, we have observed that the most LGBT friendly communities tend to have rainbow (or “pride”) flags in the main entrance or staff offices. A rainbow flag immediately tells prospective LGBT residents that they are welcome, and also sends a subtle message to prospective anti-LGBT residents that they must at least tolerate gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender residents.