



Introducing OUTSafe: The LGBTQ+ Older Adult Violence Prevention Program

THE NEED: Illinois seniors in the LGBTQ+ community face a troubling rise in violence, abuse, and too often, a disconnect in communication and access to services and support locally.

There are millions of LGBTQ+ seniors in Illinois and across America, and the number is growing. Even as our society becomes more welcoming, many older adults are afraid to identify themselves as LGBTQ+:

- Nearly 5 percent of Illinois' population is part of the LGBTQ+ community, yet records for this population as they reach age 50 and above are incomplete likely because of fears they will be treated differently in long-term care facilities once they are out.
- LGBTQ+ people are more likely to be victims because of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. Hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity have increased significantly in recent years, according to U.S. Department of Justice data.
- Nearly 80 percent of older LGBTQ+ adults surveyed felt they could not open up about their identity with staff at a long-term care facility. They may have experienced discrimination or felt they are invisible in their communities, forcing them to hide who they really are.
- Emotional abuse, financial exploitation, and physical abuse are the most frequent types reported here.

Because of these challenges, many older LGBTQ+ people do not trust caregivers, law enforcement or social service agencies whose help they need. A change in that fear-driven mindset is needed.

HERE TO HELP: A new state grant secured by State Sen. Doris Turner through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority aims to ease these burdens.

AgeLinc ([Area Agency on Aging for Lincolnland](#)) has led a collaborative effort over the past few months to develop the new LGBTQ+ Older Adult Violence Prevention Program called OUTSafe. The free competency training for those working with LGBTQ+ seniors helps these providers better understand the unique needs of those in the community and to offer a safe space for the seniors to seek the services and support they need without fear of discrimination or stigma.

The training is an introductory course, meant to provide stepping-stone continued education on violence prevention and improved competency on LGBTQ+ relations. It emphasizes treating these seniors with respect and dignity, regardless of their status, and offers insight into how best to show that respect to LGBTQ+ seniors who face being violence and abuse victims. Providers will learn more about inclusive language and will be charged with ensuring confidentiality of the seniors they engage with, because they might fear speaking up or speaking out without that necessary trust.

The supporting organizations hope to reach hundreds of service providers in the coming months to take the training and put it into practice in their communities.

Service providers interested in scheduling a training session can learn more at <https://agelinc.org/lgbt-support/>.