

Senior Resources GUIDE

Seniors before Stonewall

December 1, 2022

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WashingtonJewishWeek



Jewish Council for the Aging
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It can be so comforting as we age to walk down memory lane with the family who has known us all our lives. These are the people who were there when we took that first step, started school, participated in extracurricular activities and began a career. They were right there for both the happy — and not so happy — memories. The struggles. The pain. The celebrations.

But what if that normally strong support system is no longer a part of our lives? What if the siblings we grew up with, the parents who helped form us and the once-tight community of friends from the church, synagogue or other religious institution we once held dear no longer call or visit once they learned you are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or transgender community?

Aging is hard enough. Now imagine going through it without those who used to be closest to us — or for that matter, alone. That is what is happening to some members of the LGBTQ+ community who were shunned and scorned after they came out.

Times have changed. Same-sex marriage is legal. Coworkers, friends and even family are more likely to be understanding. According to a Gallup poll that was released more than one year ago, support in the United States for legal same-sex marriage has been trending upward and stands at 70%.

But many senior adults were born during very different times. They were alive when President Dwight Eisenhower signed an executive order prohibiting homosexuals from working in the federal government in 1953. Many came of age around the time of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising.

The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in New York City, operating in a time when homosexuality was considered criminal. Police often raided it and nearby, similar establishments, culminating in six days of violent uprisings between police and members of the gay community.

Those both open or silent about their sexual orientation and gender identity were forced to deal with society's lack of acceptance for years. It wasn't until 1973 that homosexuality was no longer considered a mental illness, and the term was removed from the clinical definition of mental disorders.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community grew up in a world of AIDS and HIV, living in fear of and with the death of many friends.

They know all too well what it is like to be shunned, not invited to social gatherings and even work meetings and being whispered about. They often kept their social life secret as they listened to coworkers speak about dating and relationships.

Even today, as this guide is being prepared, the LGBTQ+ community again was victimized, this time at an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs. According to early reports, five people were killed and 25 were injured after a man walked in and opened fire. A suspect was taken into custody and hospitalized.

This senior resources guide, written by the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington, focuses on the LGBTQ+ community as its members age. While they share many of the same concerns as anyone reaching their senior years, they face other obstacles in a life already filled with extra hills to climb.



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According to Easy Living, which has senior facilities in Florida, about 2.5 million people who are 65 years and older identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. These seniors are sometimes known as GenSilent or the Silent Generation as they often kept their sexual identities a secret for fear of being shamed and harassed.

The UCLA Williams Institute School of Law estimates that number will double to more than five million by 2030. But without hard census numbers and the reliance on LGBTQ+ members to self-identify, the real numbers could be much higher.

According to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, at least 20 million adults are members of the LGBTQ+ community, which is nearly 8% of all adults. About 1%, or more than 2 million people in that group, identify as transgender. Bisexual adults represent about 4% and are the largest single group in the LGBTQ+ community.

One study estimated that there are 4 million LGBTQ+ adults who are at least 60 years old.

This population is more likely to live alone, be single and not have children. They have the same aches and pains that come with reaching one's sixth, seventh and eighth decades. They must confront the same issues of reduced mobility, disease and the loss of friends. While they no longer need fear arrest, the LGBTQ+ community closely follows proposed laws and possible U.S. Supreme Court decisions that could send them spiraling backward.

And many of them find themselves doing it with a lack of a strong support system.

FAMILY OF CHOICE

Without that sister, brother or cousin, some senior adults now turn to what is referred to as a family of choice. While members share no bloodlines or ancestors, they become family and provide a listening ear, an open heart and a welcoming attitude for each other.

Bill Amt, mental health and support group programs manager at Iona Senior Services in Washington, D.C., knows that in many ways, the issues of aging are similar for everyone. "They want to stay independent as long as possible. They want to have a good quality of life."

But then, he said, "there are some key differences among LGBTQ+ older adults. They wonder who is going to take care of me when I get older." They are less likely to have a spouse or children and more likely to be estranged from those who normally would play a key role in their older years.

"They may not have that relationship anymore," Amt said. "So instead, they turn to what's called a Family of Choice. They build a community of friends for support and interaction."

For many, "their social networks were decimated by the AIDS epidemic," he added. While AIDS still affects many in this community, it is not the death sentence it once was.

Together they share experiences about finding caregivers, medical professionals and senior living facilities that are sensitive to their needs and to their sexual orientation and gender identity. They often are more likely to need to obtain professional assistance, another problem with not having a spouse or partner and adult children and being estranged from family.

"They depend more on formal support," Amt said. And they may ponder whether it is right to come out to a caregiver or medical professional.

They may be leery and wonder if the person they turn to will be hostile or less willing to go the extra step for them if they know their patient is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. On the other hand, they also are leery of not coming out to someone caring for them medically as it may be an important factor in the care provided.

If they sense hostility or a lack of acceptance, they may hide their true selves, Amt said. "There is a risk of their going back into the closet."

They may choose to, as Amt called it, de-gay their living space, erasing all signs of their sexuality.

Imagine going into hiding or denial for the second time, especially when the first time proved to be so traumatic, Amt said.

Each person has a story about how they first broke the news to family and friends about being gay. For some it is still painful so many years later. It affects them to this day, he said. "For many years, it was illegal to be gay," Amt pointed out. "Those scars many linger."

Many in the transgender community are experiencing much of the same hatred, scorn and shunning that gay people did in the recent past.

To everyone going through this, Amt stresses the need to find community. That is what his support groups partially are for, he said, noting they are called Silver Circles and are offered in partnership with Whitman Walker Health. It's so important to have peers who understand what you are going through. It makes the journey just a bit easier, he noted.

Michael Mitchell, peer support coordinator at Whitman-Walker Health in D.C., works with Silver Circle groups along with Iona.

"We do face some of the same issues" when dealing with getting older, he said. There is the same need to feel vital, feel useful, he noted.

He, too, spoke of a lack of a strong support system as a major issue facing LGBTQ+ members as they age. "What do we do with our stories, our pasts, our triumphs?" he questioned. Who do the important papers and acquisitions

that have been accumulated get passed down to?

Aging in a silo, without family members nearby or close, forces some LGBTQ+ people to become isolated. Some people have not been in touch with their blood relatives for many years. Mitchell mentioned a 75-year-old man who only is in contact with a distant cousin. Once his mother died, he really had no one there.

"It's not so bad now, with marriage equality, but for older people, it's often too late to reconnect" as family members may have died or the gap too broad to close.

Finding support was hard during the social distancing and isolation of the pandemic, but Silver Circles support group meetings were held through Zoom. While it was a bit difficult at first, everyone caught on and eventually felt comfortable meeting virtually. "What we are finding now is they kind of prefer" support group meetings on Zoom.

No one has to be out after dark, there are no mad searches for parking spaces and no walking on ice and snow-covered streets. Therefore, these meetings are continuing virtually, he said.

When Mitchell trains new support group leaders, he makes sure they are "sex positive," meaning they enable participants to freely speak about their bodies and sex in a comfortable setting. "I find people want to talk about it."

The vast majority of participants are healthy, vibrant and engaged in the world, he said, adding that moving into senior living facilities doesn't often come up in conversation.

Instead, they choose to talk about what is going on in their lives. Recently a member spoke out about being

diagnosed with both cancer of the prostate and lung. His family of choice jumped in and vowed to be there for him, Mitchell recalled.

The man told them, "I beat AIDS. I have had AIDS for 35 years. I am going to beat this," Mitchell recalled, adding, "I felt that it was important for this participant not be alone."

Samantha Porter left her church and kept her lesbianism hidden from her parents, but she is not alone. Between her partner of more than four decades and a few nieces and nephews who love her, the 87-year-old Maryland resident is grateful for her support system.

Porter grew up in Utah in a family deeply embedded in the Mormon Church and its beliefs.

Her now-deceased mother "wanted me to be in the church. She wanted me to be married. That's what all her friends' children were doing," Porter said.

Instead, Porter chose to live what she called "a double life."

Porter met Mai Lundberg, who also was a Mormon, when they were teenagers. While Porter described herself as comfortable with her sexuality, Lundberg preferred to keep everything a secret and continue with the church.

"It's really hard when you are in a patriarchal religion, and you love your parents," she said. "I didn't come out when my parents were alive." To this day, this is a decision she would choose again, knowing the pain it would inflict upon her mother was much greater than Porter could bear.

Seeing how seriously her mother's heart was broken when Porter explained that she was leaving the church convinced

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her never to speak about her lesbianism, she said, saying, "I didn't want to rub her nose in it."

So, she lived one life that her parents were aware of and another with her partner and close friends. "We didn't even talk about ourselves like we were a couple."

"When I was a teenager, I never understood how girls liked boys. It wasn't like I wanted to be deviant. I was just being myself," she said. "I always felt like I was normal, but Mai didn't want anyone to know."

They never married. By the time the United States allowed same-sex marriage, Lundberg had passed away, after suffering for years with Alzheimer's disease.

One time when Porter was visiting Lundberg in her care facility, she watched as two people caringly helped their loved ones eat their dinners. She, too, was feeding her loved one, but she felt so different.

She recalled wanted to shout out, "We are a couple, and everyone acknowledges your relationship, but not mine. I am in the exact relationship as you are."

Her pain deepened when, at Lundberg's passing, a mortician wouldn't listen to her wishes about how Lundberg was to be taken care of in death. Instead, he told Porter, "I have to wait and talk to someone in the family."

There she was, grieving over the loss of someone she loved and had spent a lifetime with, and she was being told everything her and her partner talked about didn't even matter — after 43 years together.

Lundberg's sister, fortunately, told the mortician to follow all Porter's requests, something that doesn't always happen.

"We always called ourselves sisters, because Mai just wasn't able to be open."

Some religious institutions and organizations can be quite welcoming. For Jews in the D.C. area, Bet Mishpachah is known for its inclusive, egalitarian and mutually supportive community. It offers Shabbat services, educational events and offers opportunities for social justice community service.

Keshet is an organization that strives to ensure LGBTQ+ Jews are fully included in all parts of the Jewish community. Nationally, it offers support, training and resources to create a Jewish community that welcomes and affirms LGBTQ+ Jews.

The Edlavitch D.C. Jewish Community Center has a program to connect the LGBTQ+ community and is open to all ages. GLOE, the Kurlander Program for LGBTQ Outreach and Engagement, offers programming, community service, spirituality, social justice and social events.

It is important to find that welcoming

place. Porter's fear of being scorned and discriminated is not paranoia. It might happen less frequently than when Porter and Lundberg first got together, but it is around. Remember the baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple? How about all the news from local school boards on removing books that mention having two mommies or from state legislators who want to determine who can use which bathroom?

For Peter Burroughs and his husband, the pain came from not being able to assist each other simply because it was illegal for them to be married. When they needed legal assistance on a technical issue, they were not deemed eligible to help each other.

"I had no right to intervene on his behalf or to help him," Burroughs said. In the eyes of the law, they weren't family or even related.

That fear remained with Burroughs for years. What if either one of them was gravely injured or hospitalized and they couldn't visit or learn what was going on?

The couple met in the mid-1990s and had a marriage that they called a holy union. "We had a full wedding but it wasn't legal. We had a minister."

Twenty years later, they did marry legally. But, Burroughs still wonders, "With the present debate about marriage equality in the federal arena, we have concerns that if for any reason marriage equality is overturned, we will no longer have a voice in each other's aging."

He noted, "Certainly now, there is some concern with maintaining these rights."

Burroughs sings opera and is a teaching artist with Arts for the Aging. He frequently performs at senior facilities, including JCA's Kensington Clubs. "I have seen a lot more male older adults expressing affection to each other," he said, adding he doesn't know if they are gay or not.

"There are definitely inroads" about what is acceptable, he said.

According to an AARP study, LGBTQ+ Americans who are 45 years and older have concerns about how they are treated and wish their places of employment included training about inclusion.

Most of those participating in the study said they weren't sure they will have the necessary family or social supports to help see them through their later years. Without that support, the participants noted that social isolation was a very real concern for them. They often feel left out, alone or lonely.

"This is a population already at high risk for isolation and disconnection, and whatever social connections these individuals had evaporated literally overnight during the

pandemic," noted Steven Haden, chief executive officer of Envision: You, an organization in Denver devoted to improving LGBTQ+ mental health.

Of course, the LGBTQ+ community is diverse, with members having their own, unique histories. Some families welcomed their relative with open arms and accepting views. Others, not so much. Some were able to purchase homes without discrimination. Others were kept off their partner's health and insurance plans and suffered financially.

Some had such negative experiences with their doctors and other medical care professionals that they stopped going to appointments and didn't keep up with their recommended health screenings.

And their problems and issues clearly are not all in the past. The COVID-19 pandemic took quite a toll on all older adults, and especially the LGBTQ+ community, according to AARP. Many are having a hard time managing their negative emotions, with about half saying they have days when they are anxious.

Another third has trouble sleeping or getting pleasure from the things they used to enjoy. Almost one-third told AARP they do get depressed.

"Prior to the pandemic, the call rate to our National Elder Hotline was 30 to 40 calls a month," Sherrill Wayland, director of special initiatives at SAGE: Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ+ Elders, told AARP. "Now we're averaging 350." Anxiety, financial worries, lack of social support and housing insecurity were the most mentioned concerns.



HOUSING

According to AARP, 41% of LGBTQ+ people feel they need to hide their true identity to obtain the best housing. "We've seen cases during the pandemic of older adults who were denied housing support for long term care," Wayland told AARP. She pointed to a 79-year-old transgender woman from Maine who was denied residency at an assisted living facility after staff expressed discomfort with the fact that she would want to share a room with a female resident.

AARP and SAGE note that 20% of LGBTQ+ seniors in New York reported being turned away from long-term care

facilities because of their gender or sexuality, and nearly 25% experienced physical or verbal abuse from other residents.

This discrimination sometimes resulted in LGBTQ+ older adults stepping up to care for one and other. "Sometimes support circles became even closer, as people moved together to support one another," Wayland tells AARP. "But one concern we do have in caregiving is same-age peers. If two 80 year olds care for one another, that becomes a fragile support network."

While, obviously, members of the LGBTQ+ community do not all make the same amount of money or have the same amount of savings, most expressed concern about having enough funds for their retirement. And while many, many people share that same concern, members of the LGBTQ+ community have additional issues. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court banned employment discrimination based on sexual orientation in 2020, some employers or religious organizations have deliberate gaps in their protection.

SAGE offers a financial wellness platform specifically so LGBTQ+ senior adults may increase their financial stability and reduce economic stress. SAGECents, a free app and website designed to boost older LGBTQ+ adults' financial literacy and health, offers tools, information and resources to help those on its free platform make sound financial decisions. It includes information about Medicare benefits and shows how to set up health proxies and living wills.

Besides discrimination, senior adult members of the LGBTQ+ community appear to be more vulnerable to scams. The Federal Trade Commission tracks these crimes but

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does not ask the victims about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Still, according to AARP, senior adults in this community are more at risk.

The scammers know that there's an epidemic of loneliness and they're exploiting that," says Samuel Levine, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Take romance scams. Often, perpetrators go to particular online dating sites seeking to attract a lonely victim by first fostering trust and intimacy, often sharing explicit photos and eventually asking for money, gift cards or personal identification information.

Older members of the LGBTQ+ community can be particularly vulnerable if they haven't come out publicly and feel safer seeking romance through online platforms.

Romance scams in general are on the rise, and victims continue to lose money, even entire life savings, according to the FBI. The bureau received 24,299 reports of romance scams in 2021, a 25% increase from two years earlier, with losses jumping from \$475 million to \$956 million in that period. Nearly half of victims — 48 percent — were over 50.

According to AARP, some seeking relationships on Match.com, have lost a great deal of money to scammers posing as the perfect partner. Just because they say they love you and promise to forge a long-term relationship doesn't mean that any of what they say is true.

"Scammers are really zeroing in on and taking advantage of those who might be lonely and seeking companionship," says AARP's Mark Fetterhoff, an adviser in fraud victim support.

Grindr, an LGBTQ+ dating platform and the Federal Trade Commission offer tips to avoid being conned into romance scans. They include:

Do not create an account for anyone but yourself. Scammers may ask someone to create a Grindr account for them, which they then use to scam others.

Be careful not to share contact details right away, especially information you wouldn't want others to necessarily see. All scammers need is a phone number or a social media account to pressure you into giving them more information or money.

Don't send money. Think carefully about having contact with anyone asking you for money just to begin interacting with them.

Don't pay someone to destroy a photo. You won't know if they really did delete or tear it up. The FBI strongly advises against paying anyone online extortion demands.

Research a person's photo and profile online. Check if the image, name or details have been used elsewhere.

If you meet a prospective partner, go slowly and ask lots of questions.

Beware if the individual seems too perfect — or quickly asks you to leave a dating service or social media site to communicate directly.

Beware if the individual attempts to isolate you from friends and family or requests inappropriate photos or financial data that could be used to extort you.

Be suspicious if the person keeps promising to meet you in person but always has an excuse why they can't make it.



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Do not share your driver's license, bank account or social security numbers. No reputable person or company requests this information on the internet or telephone. When in doubt, assume the worst and end all contact right away. Report suspected sextortion attempts to the FTC and the FBI.

AARP offers Connect2Affect, which lists resources to



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RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ CAREGIVING

AARP AARP's LGBTQ Community Caregiving Guide offers practical guidance on developing and putting a caregiving plan in place for an LGBTQ loved ones or friends. It helps navigate through pertinent legal and financial issues.

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION The research and advocacy group includes resources for LGBTQ+ people living with dementia. AlzConnection is its online forum for LGBTQ+ users.

CENTERLINK CenterLink is an association of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community centers with more than 270 members nationwide.

FAMILY CAREGIVER ALLIANCE The Family Caregiver Alliance provides services for caregivers of adults with chronic physical and cognitive conditions. Its website contains fact sheets and frequently asked questions on LGBTQ caregiving. Its CareNav platform has information, support and resources tailored to registered users' individual needs.

GLMA GLMA, formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, a network of health care professionals working to advance equality in care, has a directory for LGBTQ patients to help find welcoming providers in their area. It also includes fact sheets on key health issues.

For instance, under care for lesbians, it suggests that patients ask their health care professionals about breast cancer, depression and anxiety, heart health, gynecological cancer, fitness, problems connected with use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, intimate partner violence and sexual health and diseases.

LGBT FAMILY LAW INSTITUTE A joint project of the LGBTQ+ Bar and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, it includes an online member directory of LGBTQ+ attorneys practicing family law in 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

LGBT Health Care Directory has a space to input your zip code. A list of nearby LGBTQ+-friendly medical professionals will appear.

LGBT NATIONAL HELP CENTER A resource hub for information, support and referrals with an online peer-support chat and a hotline (888-234-7243) for LGBTQ adults 50 and older to speak with a volunteer peer counselor.

LONG-TERM CARE EQUALITY INDEX Launched in 2021 by SAGE and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the Long-Term Care Equality Index shows how long-term care communities such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities adopt inclusive policies, practices and services.

SAGE SAGE's National Resources Center on LGBTQ+ Aging has a wealth of information on health, policy and legal information, including a state by state directory of support organizations and a library of caregiving resources, some of which are produced in partnership with AARP.

SAGE has an LGBTQ+ Elder Hotline that is available 24/7 to support LGBTQ+ senior adults, their families and care partners. It

is available in English and Spanish. When people call 877-360-5428, they will get to speak with responders who are eager to listen, are certified in crisis response, are non-judgmental and offer factual information confidentially.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS The VA website has information about health care and long-term care policies for LGBTQ veterans and their families, defined as "anyone whom the patient considers to be family." Each VA health system has an LGBTQ care coordinator.

WORLD PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH WPATH is a nonprofit professional and educational organization that uses evolving clinical and academic research to establish standards of care for treatment of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. It provides information on a spectrum of issues related to transgender health as well as a provider search engine.



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help with social isolation, including an assessment tool to determine risks and a chatbot to help make social connections.

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When living in your home gets to be too much or you no longer are able to care for yourself or your loved one, it is time to look into senior living facilities. Things to research are costs, activities, food provided and levels of care. Take a tour and imagine yourself living there.

For members of the LGBTQ+ community, there is one more thing that is crucial to determine: how welcoming and affirming is the facility? Are there out residents or employees? Do they have a nondiscrimination statement? And how do you determine which ones are LGBTQ+-friendly and which are not?

Determining the LGBTQ-friendliness of a senior living community requires some digging. The best way to really know is to ask. Find out if the staff is trained to be caring and nonjudgmental to all and whether they are familiar with the applicable terminology and pronoun usage.

Don't be afraid to ask although you may feel uncomfortable doing so. If you had food allergies, you wouldn't hesitate to find out if



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the meal plans could accommodate you.

Look for places where they welcome your questions and strive to allay your fears. If they only say that their staff is helpful to everyone and are no more specific than that, that could be a red flag.

Staff at a welcoming facility will assume they have LGBTQ+ residents and know how to ask them about their sexual orientations and gender identities in a safe and confidential manner. They will make it easy for their clients to talk about personal topics. The staff will be familiar with the correct pronoun usage and promote diversity and inclusion on all their programming and offerings.

It's hard enough moving to a new place, leaving behind your home, neighborhood and familiar restaurants. But it can be much more difficult if the new place makes you unwelcome, or worse, forces you back into the closet.

During a PBS Newshour interview, Anna Gorman of Kaiser Health News spoke of the discrimination LGBTQ+ senior adults face and the disturbing fact that some choose to go back in the closet rather than deal with the same issues and hurt all over again.

According to Gorman, because openly LGBTQ+ adults are more likely not to have children or other family to turn to, they are more likely to move into assisted living communities and nursing homes. Often, these facilities lack trained staff and policies concerning discrimination. Staff with traditional views on sexuality and marriage may, at worse, refuse to assist you, or at best help you only with the basics. That could result in them not mentioning to doctors or supervisors various issues or concerns that they usually would report.

It is important to make sure you check out the facility closely.

Only 20% of LGBTQ+ seniors in long-term care facilities are comfortable being open, according to a report from Justice in Aging, a national nonprofit legal advocacy group, it was noted in PBS Newshour.

According to Gorman, a 68-year-old woman moved into a facility after her

partner of 30 years had died of cancer. She was not welcome there, and residents called her names and physically assaulted her.

"I don't feel safe in my own home," she told Gorman. "I am scared constantly... What I am doing is about getting justice. I don't want other LGBT seniors to go through what I've gone through," she said of a lawsuit she filed.

The website SeniorAdvice.com recommends 15 LGBTQ+-friendly assisted living communities, but there are many more. JCA does not recommend any facilities and only urges you to check out your choices carefully.

Recommended by SeniorAdvice are The Palms of Manasota in Palmetto, Florida; The Resort on Carefree Boulevard in Fort Myers, Florida; Stonewall Gardens in Palm Springs, California; Fountaingrove Lodge in Santa Rosa, California; Triangle Square in Hollywood, California; Rainbow Vista in Gresham, Oregon; Discovery Bay Resort in Washington State; The Residences at Seashore Point in Providence, Massachusetts; Birds of a Feather in Pecos, New Mexico; A Place for Us in Cleveland, Ohio; Carefree Cove in Boone, North Carolina; John C. Anderson Apartments in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; The Pueblo in Apache Junction, Arizona; Spirit on Lake in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Townhall Apartments in Chicago, Illinois. **WJW**

This guide was written by Suzanne Pollak, senior writer/editor at the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington. Learn more about JCA at www.accessJCA.org or call us at 301-255-4200. Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AccessJCA> or Twitter at <https://twitter.com/AccessJCA.LGBTQ+> community?

Do any forms you need to fill out give you the option of stating your gender identity and enable you to list your chosen name?

As we have noted throughout this guide, growing old is hard, and it often is even harder for members of the LGBTQ+ community. But, in the often-sung words of Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A Changin'." Keep up with the latest laws, form lasting friendships and speak out for what you want and need.



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