



## AGING PROGRAM DIRECTIVE

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**Subject** Recognition of LGBTQ Older Adults Under Classification of “Greatest Social Need” in Older Americans Act

**To** Pennsylvania Department of Aging  
Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
Area Agencies on Aging  
Pennsylvania Council on Aging  
Administration for Community Living

**From** \_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Torres  
Secretary

**Purpose** The purpose of this Aging Program Directive is to recognize and designate LGBTQ older adults as a population of “greatest social need” as defined in the Older Americans Act, in addition to those populations already included in the Act, and to provide guidance on responsive service delivery for LGBTQ older adults.

**Legislative/Regulatory Reference** Older Americans Act of 1965, as amended in 2020, P.L. 89-73 referred to in this policy as the OAA.

## **Background**

The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging estimates that nationwide there are 1.5 million adults age 65 or older who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. By 2030, these figures are expected to rise to nearly 3 million. Although there is a lack of precise data, it is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of transgender older adults nationwide and this number is also expected to grow over the next few decades. According to the LGBT Movement Advancement Project, nearly 420,000 or 4.1% of Pennsylvania adults are part of the LGBTQ community and 8% of these individuals are adults 65 or older.

LGBTQ older adults have endured a history of discrimination, prejudice and social stigma. In addition, some LGBT older adults may have experienced rejection from their families or in the community, resulting in a lack of informal supports needed to help care for them as they age. As a result, LGBTQ older adults are also less likely to seek out or access aging services or programs, as many fear discrimination or harassment if their sexual orientation or gender identity becomes known.

The national organization SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) notes that older LGBTQ individuals are twice as likely to be single, twice as likely to live alone, and four times less likely to have children than heterosexual older adults. A U.S. health survey of older adults reported that 59% of older LGBTQ adults feel that they lack companionship, 53% feel isolated from others, and 53% feel left out (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011). By comparison, a national survey done by AARP found that approximately one third of Americans over age 45 were lonely (AARP, 2010). These considerations can be compounded when considering matters of race, ethnicity and disability; making the disparities experienced by LGBTQ older adults truly unique.

## **Directives**

The OAA governs the use of federal funds allocated under the Act by making specific programmatic requirements of State Units on Aging. The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA), serving as the State Unit on Aging, is required to provide assurance that outreach and services will be targeted to older individuals with greatest economic need and individuals with greatest social need.

The term “greatest economic need” is defined as the need resulting from an income level at or below the poverty line. The term “greatest social need” is defined as the need caused by noneconomic factors, which include physical and mental disabilities; language barriers; and cultural, social, or geographical isolation, including isolation caused by racial or ethnic status, that restricts the ability of an individual to perform normal daily tasks; or threatens the capacity of an individual to live independently.

In 2012, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, clarified that the definition of the term “greatest social need” in the OAA can include “individuals isolated due to sexual orientation or gender identity” depending upon the needs of each planning and service area (PSA). Each PSA area must assess their particular environment to determine those populations best targeted based on “greatest social need.”

PDA and the aging network acknowledge that LGBTQ older adults face unique and pronounced challenges. Therefore, this Aging Program Directive recognizes LGBTQ older adults as a community that can be classified of “greatest social need” as defined by the U.S. Health and Human Services for the Administration for Community Living. As a result, PDA, in collaboration with Area Agencies on Aging, will work to:

- Ensure culturally affirming service to LGBTQ older adults by providing staff with LGBTQ cultural competency training and ongoing education
- Conduct effective targeted outreach to LGBTQ older individuals to promote aging services
- Evaluate the needs of the LGBTQ older adult population within each PSA
- Collect sexual orientation and gender identity data as determined by the Department when data collection tools become available or utilize existing data from reliable sources
- Provide written and web-based resources specific to and for the support of LGBTQ older adults
- Engage older members of the LGBTQ community to solicit input and feedback on programs and services

**Attachments**

None