

A CALL TO ACTION FOR PERSON-CENTRED LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR 2SLGBTQQI+ ELDERS, SENIORS AND OLDER PERSONS

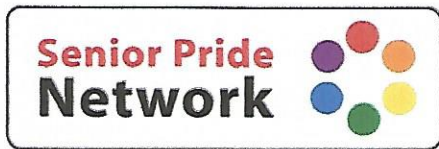
The Senior Pride Network (Toronto) asserts and advocates for the human, economic, social and cultural rights of 2 Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, intersex and other (2SLGBTQQI+) elders, seniors and older persons. We envision a series of communities of 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons that are affirming, supportive, safe and healthy. In keeping with that vision, the Senior Pride Network believes that person-centred models are the best options for long-term residential care for 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons. We set out below the specific issues and concerns of 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons in regard to long-term residential care and recommendations – a call to action – that we believe would be best addressed by embedding them in person-centred approaches to residential care in all types of care facility, whether government-run, not-for-profit or for-profit.

2SLGBTQQI+ Diversity and Intersectionality

2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons are an exceptionally diverse group. The life and aging experiences of 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons vary significantly because of their race, gender, sex and other identities. Many 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons, including 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of colour, lesbians, transgender and persons with disabilities, or who came to Canada as immigrants or refugees, live at the intersections of two or more of these identities. The life experiences and present realities of elders, seniors and older persons found under the broad, rainbow coloured umbrella of 2SLGBTQQI+ have been shaped not just by being 2SLGBTQQI+, but also by their other identities – as are their needs and concerns in regard to residential care and access to health and social services in general.

2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons face a number of issues that have impacted their lived experiences and may have affected their mental or physical health and their overall well-being. Gaining an understanding of those issues and addressing them by adopting an intersectional approach are critical to providing appropriate policies, programs and services, and positive, caring environments for older 2SLGBTQQI+ persons. Recognizing and positively responding to the diversity of 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons would be best addressed by adoption of intersectional, person-centred approaches to residential care.

Adopting intersectional, person-centred approaches requires shifting away from a strictly one-dimensional approach to 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons – one that has been focused on viewing them as a relatively homogenous group which differs from heterosexual seniors in respect of sexual orientation or gender identity and for whom the unique or particular needs, challenges and concerns are primarily or solely linked to the historical, sociocultural context of bias and discrimination against 2SLGBTQQI+ people. Intersectional, person-centred approaches, while continuing to recognize and address the effects of such bias and discrimination as significant factors in the lives of 2SLGBTQQI+ elders, seniors and older persons, also would take into account and address the multiple identities and experiences – not just being a member of the 2SLGBTQQI+ community – that have shaped their lives and that



influence their needs and concerns when in residential care and when accessing other aging services.

Life Experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ Elders, Seniors and Older Persons

Throughout their lives, 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have had to cope with stigma and discrimination in various forms that have negatively impacted their wellness and their economic and social well-being. Many have been or have risked being discriminated against in employment, housing and access to services, denied the right to have custody of their children, or denied legal and societal recognition of their same-sex spousal relationships. Some 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have been convicted of criminal offences, or perhaps even imprisoned, for engaging in consensual sex. Others have had treatment imposed on them for “sexual orientation disorder” or “gender identity disorder”, or otherwise have been subjected to therapies and treatments purported to cure, suppress or change their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Depression, anxiety, abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, and suicidal thoughts or attempts, are common among 2SLGBTQI+ populations because of discrimination, inequality, social stigma and social isolation. Many 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have experienced prolonged poverty or financial insecurity, especially lesbians, bisexual and trans women, 2 Spirit persons and LGBTQI+ people of colour. HIV positive 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons who survived the HIV/AIDS health crisis of earlier decades are now at high risk for HIV/AIDS-related co-morbidities and depression. More than a few older 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have experienced multiple losses and are coping with significant grief.

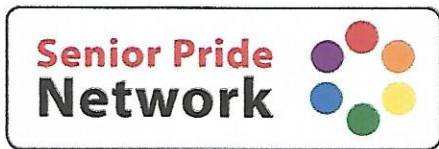
2 Spirit elders, like all Indigenous peoples, have experienced higher rates of personal trauma, such as assaults and abuse, incarceration and systemic racism. They have lived with the horrific legacy of colonization, attempts by Christian churches to deny or suppress Indigenous spiritualities and the residential school system in Canada.

2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older people, and their partners or spouses, often face discriminatory or inequitable treatment from medical, social service and home care providers and as residents of long-term care facilities. 2SLGBTQI+ seniors fearing discrimination or ill-treatment will often avoid seeking social services and healthcare support when they need them.

2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons, especially those experiencing dementia/Alzheimer’s, are often in vulnerable or risky situations because of their use of chosen names, preferred pronouns, how they express themselves or converse with other 2SLGBTQI+ persons, how they dress or accessorize, or how they act or interact (e.g. campy) with other people.

Social Isolation and 2SLGBTQI+ Elders, Seniors and Older Persons

Social isolation and lack of support systems are other significant factors that may negatively impact the health and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons. Opportunities to meet other older 2SLGBTQI+ people for social and cultural interaction are limited. Programs, activities and events specifically geared toward 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons are rare. Many 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have



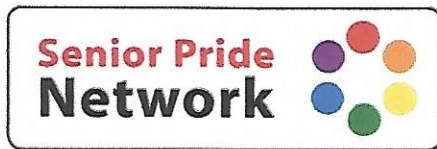
experienced rejection from family, spouses and children and increasingly rely on chosen families to provide care and nurturing relationships and to build support networks. In general, 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons are more likely to lack adequate social support, in particular emotional support, than elders, seniors and older persons who identify as heterosexual.

Specific 2SLGBTQI+ Issues and Concerns Regarding Long-Term Residential Care

Many older 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons lack access to 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive long-term care facilities and retirement homes. They may experience, or have a fear of experiencing, discrimination and harassment from residents and staff in homes. To avoid this, they may choose to conceal their sexuality, gender expression or gender identity. A concern expressed frequently by 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons is that they will have to go back into the closet when receiving care or when residing in long-term care facilities. Many 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons have reported a desire for inclusive housing environments, including long-term residential care facilities.

The specific issues identified by 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons in regard to long-term residential care are:

- Fear of being forced back into the closet
- Perception that long-term care facilities' approaches to care are based on assumptions that everyone is heterosexual and heterosexual norms and social interactions are applicable to and appropriate for everyone
- Perception that long-term care facilities are "illiterate about sexuality", and are ill-equipped to address sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and the particular needs and desires of diverse 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons
- Fear of being rejected, neglected, mistreated or abused by healthcare providers because of 2SLGBTQI+ identity/ies
- Anxiety about health care aides who assist with daily life activities who may not be comfortable with 2SLGBTQI+ people, have biases or negative attitudes (including homophobia, transphobia and biphobia) or whose behaviours and actions are motivated by judgmental or condemnatory religious beliefs
- Fear of being maltreated, ostracized, stigmatized, abused or rejected by roommates or other residents because of being 2SLGBTQI+
- Concerns about end-of-life decision-making rights
- Lack of guidance for the care of 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons experiencing dementia/Alzheimer's, especially transgender seniors
- Fear of being alone or isolated and/or not being able to talk about their lives, partners, life experiences, etc., or to display or express grief after loss of their partners
- Lack of residential care staff who are open about their own 2SLGBTQI+ identities
- Concerns about limited definition of "family" in legal and medical settings and lack of recognition and acceptance of surrogate families or chosen families (e.g. partners, close friends, other caregivers)



- Couples are often separated in long-term care facilities, especially couples who are 2SLGBTQ+.

Recommendations and Call to Action

Recent studies in Canada and internationally have identified various types of support that are important to 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons in residential care. The Senior Pride Network recommends that these supports be embedded in person-centred residential care in all types of long-term care homes.

- Policies against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity
- Develop and implement 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive policies and practices that recognize the diversity of 2SLGBTQI+ communities and individual residents and that adopt person-centred, intersectional approaches tailored to positively responding to the unique issues, needs and concerns of individual 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons
- Provide 2SLGBTQI+ intersectional inclusion/cultural competency training for staff, residents and community members in residential care
- Recognition and affirmation of, and respect for, 2SLGBTQI+ relationship status – whether partnered/coupled, single or polyamorous
- Respect for 2SLGBTQI+ partners showing or expressing affection/intimacy
- Recognition of and respect for same-sex partner(s)/spouse(s) as main caregiver(s)
- Recognition of and respect for surrogate or chosen families of 2SLGBTQI+ residents
- Recognition of and respect for powers of attorney held by others for 2SLGBTQI+ residents
- 2SLGBTQI+ resident allowed to share suite/room with partner/spouse or another 2SLGBTQI+ person
- Someone on staff to approach if 2SLGBTQI+ resident is feeling excluded, disrespected or mistreated
- Having support groups available for issues specific to or services provided for diverse 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons
- Social activities specifically for 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons or at least that make 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons feel welcome, safe and included
- Promotion of an environment in which there is not a presumption that every resident is heterosexual nor a presumption that gender identity and gender expression equate with the sex or gender assigned at birth
- Allow 2SLGBTQI+ residents to have and display photographs, decorations, mementoes, etc. that reflect or celebrate their identities and lived experiences
- Encourage intergenerational activities and interactions with 2SLGBTQI+ youth, including liaising with Gender and Sexuality Alliances in high schools to help address



the social isolation of 2SLGBTQI+ elders, seniors and older persons and provide 2SLGBTQI+ youth with role models

- Establish Gender and Sexuality Alliances within residential care homes
- Recognition of and respect for chosen names and preferred pronouns.

Senior Pride Network (Toronto), May 2019