

As LGBT seniors age, they face a multitude of challenges and barriers within the seniors housing and health care systems. Fear of discrimination and victimization, based on historical prejudice and hate, is a primary concern. LGBT seniors generally have a difficult time finding welcoming housing because of discrimination. Given this environment the OSPN Housing committee realized that to address the issues of housing for LGBT seniors we need to have solid information about the senior LGBT community in Ottawa. To that end, we partnered with Ipsos Reid an independent market research agency to conduct a survey of LGBT seniors in Ottawa.

### **Methodology**

The OSPN Seniors Housing committee developed an on-line survey with help from Ipsos. The survey incorporated questions posed by Ipsos to national and local seniors populations to examine the similarities or differences between them and the LGBT population.

The request to complete the on-line survey was sent to several seniors groups in Ottawa and to an email list maintained by OSPN. The invitation included a suggestion to share the survey with friends and family and pass the invitation on. The survey was conducted between October 2014 and April 2015.

A conservative approach to estimating the size of the LGBT population in the Ottawa area was used in the survey results. Based on the city's projected estimates of people 65+, we have estimated that LGBT seniors represent approximately 5 percent of the city's population. There were a total of 582 responses of which 381 were complete with an average time of 27 minutes to complete the survey.

### **Survey Findings**

The following information is a snapshot of the respondents' answers to the key questions in the survey. In some cases, we have provided the comparison to data from a National Seniors Survey<sup>1</sup> and a survey among the broader population of Ottawa seniors. The complete report, which provides more detail about these issues, can be found on the OSPN and Ipsos websites. The sections listed below cover demographics, current housing, future housing needs, caregiving, health, and community resources/planning.

The major finding of the survey is that it is important for LGBT seniors to be living in communities and care facilities that are LGBT friendly. LGBT seniors do not want to go "back in the closet" to receive care at home, or in the community or institutions. There was only minimal interest in LGBT-only housing; rather, respondents wanted options that included friends, family and allies.

#### **Current Housing:**

- 69% of those surveyed owned their own homes (55+)
- the median spending on housing was \$1244.50/month
- 46% of those surveyed intend to stay in their homes at least 5 or more years

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<sup>1</sup> CMA 2014 Report Card on Healthcare [https://www.cma.ca/En/Lists/Medias/2014\\_Report\\_Card-e.pdf](https://www.cma.ca/En/Lists/Medias/2014_Report_Card-e.pdf)

## Future housing needs:

- LGBT seniors will leave their home for the same reasons as the general population (i.e. health deteriorated (43%), unable to care for themselves (33%), current home cost prohibitive (33%), too much work (32%) or was unsuitable to their physical condition (21%)
- 58% said they would do anything to avoid going into a facility due to issues of trust, affordability, cultural competency
- less than half of respondents (45%) feel they would be accepted by a care facility and their staff (reasons cited were cultural sensitivity, security, safety, homophobia, social integration)
- only 12% would want a housing community reserved for LGBT seniors only
- 44% would feel most comfortable in a housing community that is primarily for LGBT seniors but also welcomes friends, family and allies
- only about 50% would feel comfortable in being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in a facility
- 70% would feel uncomfortable moving into a non LGBT friendly facility/retirement community
- most respondents (86%) were more likely to use LGBT-Friendly services, and 3 in 5 (57%) feel community LGBT-friendliness is very important when considering moving

## Caregiving:

- 68% would use paid in-home care but 25% expressed concern about affordability and trust (21%), which included cultural sensitivity, homophobia, safety, abuse
- only 10% of respondents believe that family will care for them in their home
- very few respondents are giving or receiving care at this time

## Health:

- 14% of those surveyed have a physical disability (10% use a cane, walker or wheelchair)
- respondents were aware of the importance of keeping active and eating well to maintain good health and stay in their homes
- while most respondents believe that their mental and physical health is good or excellent, one in four (24%) believe their physical health needs attention, and 14% believe their mental health needs attention
- respondents who were in a relationship were more likely to identify as having good/excellent mental health (58%), than those who are single (42%)
- most respondents (80%) had health insurance to cover medical costs that the public health care system does not

## Community Resources/Planning:

- 3 in 10 respondents did not know about senior's services in the community
- only 63% of respondents have created a will or put in place a power of attorney
- only 45% of respondents think they will be able to die with dignity in a place of their choice (National senior 75%)
- 3 in 5 (63%) of respondents are at least somewhat familiar with OSPN
- 89% are most familiar with OSPN social activities

## Key issues for follow up with the LGBT senior community in Ottawa

1. A significant number of LGBT seniors are single, live alone, are low income and are not expecting family support as they age.

**Recommendation: OSPN consider how to build community support for cohort within the LGBT seniors community.**

2. Although 12% would like LGBT only housing options, most of the respondents wanted a more integrated housing community that included friends, family and allies.

**Recommendation: That LGBT community members be encouraged to explore a range of housing options that might include sharing a house, living in close proximity (same street, same apartment building), or be creative in developing other LGBT-friendly housing and community options.**

3. LGBT seniors want to stay in their own homes as long as possible. However, a significant number of respondents were not very aware of senior's services that could support them in this goal.

**Recommendation: Access public education on resources available to LGBT seniors to help them stay in their homes as long as possible, such as fall prevention and safety in the home seminars, assistive devices information, and programs available through senior's centres.**

4. Almost 40% of respondents do not have wills and powers of attorney in place.

**Messages should be sent to the LGBT seniors community outlining the advantages and benefits of having a will and power of attorney. Seminars on wills and powers of attorney be offered to LGBT seniors.**

5. LGBT-friendly communities and care facilities are very important to LGBT seniors. Many respondents expressed concern about how they would be treated by staff and residents in a care facility. Their comfort level in identifying their sexual orientation or gender identity within a care setting was also a concern.

**Recommendation: Training and policies must be put in place to ensure that everyone, from staff to peers, who work with seniors in the community and in care facilities, is exposed to a common understanding of a safe space for LGBT seniors. OSPN is fortunate to have received funding from United Way to continue its work in raising awareness and educating health care professionals this survey should be shared with United Way and other funding bodies as it supports the need for this kind of training.**

6. Only 45% of respondents think they will be able to die with dignity in a place of their choice. In the National Seniors Survey, 75% of seniors felt this would be possible. This is a significant difference and may reflect the LGBT community's experience with the AIDS crisis and the indifferent and

sometimes inhumane treatment they received and may still receive if they enter a long-term care facility that is not LGBT-friendly.

**Recommendation: OSPN has offered numerous workshops promoting end of life choices. The respondents may be reflecting the community's need to feel in control of their lives, something that was not always possible in the past when we were thought of as criminals, sinners or mentally ill. OSPN can continue to work with Hospice Ottawa and perhaps the AIDS Committee of Ottawa on the issue of end of life care for LGBT seniors.**

7. Respondents emphasized the importance of LGBT friendly communities. There is a need to define what is meant by the term "LGBT-friendly communities" to understand what this really means for LGBT seniors.

**Recommendation: Explore whether an LGBT-friendly list of resources such as service providers, facilities, professionals (everything from lawyers to plumbers and other trades, to handy person services) could be posted on the OSPN website, and if resources and demand merit, be produced in print.**

8. 37% of respondents who were unaware of or not familiar with OSPN. Those that did know about OSPN were mostly familiar with the social events, which are clearly meeting a need within the community.

**Recommendation: Continue to find ways to reach out to more isolated LGBT seniors and make them aware of the support available through OSPN. The need speaks to the efforts OSPN is making to find funding for a community development worker to help connect with isolated LGBT seniors.**



The Ottawa Senior Pride Network (OSPN) was formed in 2008 and is made up of professional service providers, representatives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community groups, and LGBT community members. OSPN is committed to creating safe, LGBT-friendly services and residential environments and building a strong, connected, and visible senior queer community in Ottawa. Web: <http://www.ospn-rfao.ca> – George Hartsgrove, 613-263-0609, [georgeis@rogers.com](mailto:georgeis@rogers.com)



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