



Equality for LGBT Seniors

LGBT seniors deserve equal access to the healthcare benefits, protections, services and institutions available to any other senior - and they should be able to access these resources without discrimination, without shame or fear, and without having to go "back into the closet" to get the sort of care they deserve.

Working with the [LGBT Aging Project](#), MassEquality supports these 2008 initiatives:

- **Pass the MassHealth Equality Bill (H4107), which will grant married same-sex couples in MA the same access to Medicaid benefits as heterosexual couples.**

Currently, federal DOMA regulations prohibit same-sex couples legally married in Massachusetts from being treated as each other's spouses for the purposes of federal benefits programs, including Medicaid.

What does that mean? It means that if a married, same-sex couple owns a house together and one of them has to go into a nursing home, the other could lose the home once all the medical bills are paid. It means that a couple who lived together and made financial decisions together for decades are suddenly, for the purposes of the law, treated like legal strangers to each other. It means that LGBT seniors are far more vulnerable to homelessness and poverty than their heterosexual counterparts.

In short, it means that even though we have won marriage equality in Massachusetts, married same-sex couples still face unequal treatment under the law in the Bay State. That's why it's so important that we pass H4107 this year.

- **Increase state funding for the LGBT Aging Project, which educates mainstream health and long-term care providers about the special challenges LGBT seniors face.**

Today's LGBT elders are a generation that came of age before the gay civil rights movement. They grew up facing open discrimination - and to survive many learned to remain invisible and secretive.

As a result, many LGBT seniors are wary of revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity to helping professionals and would rather go without, even when sick, rather than turning to elder service providers for help.

Additionally, many elder service providers are not adequately prepared to deal with the needs of LGBT seniors. Fearing discrimination from other patients, staff and healthcare professionals, many LGBT elders - even those who are part of a married, same-sex couple - end up going "back into the closet" when they enter long-term care facilities.

The LGBT Aging Project is the only organization tackling this problem head on, working with elder service providers in Massachusetts to improve the accessibility and quality of care available to the LGBT senior population - but they need increased state funding to continue this important work.

Note: to view the online version of this document, please visit:

<http://www.massequality.org/ourwork/equality/seniors/>