

Ruthie and Connie LGBTQI Elder Americans Act

Reps. Suzanne Bonamici, Becca Balint, and Maxwell Alejandro Frost

Endorsements: Congressional Equality Caucus, SAGE, Human Rights Campaign, National Center for Transgender Equality, National Center for Lesbian Rights, interACT, AIDS United, National Minority AIDS Council, Justice in Aging, and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

The number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) older adults is estimated to increase to 7 million by 2030. As with other marginalized communities, LGBTQI+ older adults face significant barriers and profound disparities that put them in great social need. The available research shows that LGBTQI+ elders have fewer sources of support as compared to their heterosexual peers, face higher poverty rates, and experience poorer health care outcomes and access. In addition, many enter the aging system with the harmful physical and emotional health effects of having lived through a lifetime of discrimination. Because of these profound challenges, LGBTQI+ older adults require unique services and supports that are scarce and severely underfunded in every part of the country. Many live in areas that lack vital, LGBTQI+-affirming services that can improve their economic security, social support, and overall health and well-being. Although many Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are willing to offer LGBTQI+ cultural competence training to their staff, very few offer LGBTQI+-specific programs or outreach. Further, less than half of AAAs report they would be able to offer or fund LGBTQI+-specific services. Overall, there is insufficient research on the needs of LGBTQI+ older people, the programs that could reduce these disparities, and whether aging providers are effectively serving this vulnerable population.

As the country's leading vehicle for funding and delivering services to older adults nationwide, the Older Americans Act (OAA) holds enormous potential for LGBTQI+ elders. Through the OAA, Congress can decrease the isolation faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged LGBTQI+ older adults, improve their health, and increase their access to culturally competent services and supports. This bill does the following to achieve those outcomes:

1. Includes LGBTQ+ older adults as a "vulnerable population" with greatest economic and social need;
2. Permanently establishes and continues to fund the National Resource Center on LGBTQI+ Aging, the country's first and only technical assistance resource center aimed at improving the quality of services and supports offered to LGBTQI+ older adults. The National Resource Center on LGBTQI+ Aging will continue to provide critical information and tools on aging service providers, LGBTQI+ organizations, and LGBTQI+ older adults through: a comprehensive clearing house of online resources; a national in-person, cultural competence training program; and technical assistance that links service providers and older adults to available resources;
3. Requires the Assistant Secretary of Aging to oversee data collection on LGBTQI+ older adults and their service needs, mandates data collection and analysis on the effectiveness of the state agencies on aging and the AAAs in targeting services to LGBTQI+ older adults, and requires the state agencies to establish a reporting system to collect and analyze data on discrimination against LGBTQI+ older adults in long-term care facilities; and
4. Prioritizes research and development grants for organizations working to improve LGBTQI+ health, long-term care needs, and access to culturally responsive services.