

# LGBT Elders and US Health Care Systems: Experiences & Unmet Needs



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## BACKGROUND

- About **2.7 million US adults over 50 self-identify as LGBT** or sexual minority.
- Many have been unable to live authentically—or be openly “out.”
- Little targeted, supportive health care for LGBT elders is available.
- A 2014 study found that **36% of LGBT elders’ healthcare providers were unaware of patients’ sexual orientation.**
- 20% of LGBT & 44% of transgender elders felt that relationships with healthcare providers (i.e. hospital, nursing home staff) would be **negatively affected** if sexual orientation/gender identity were known.

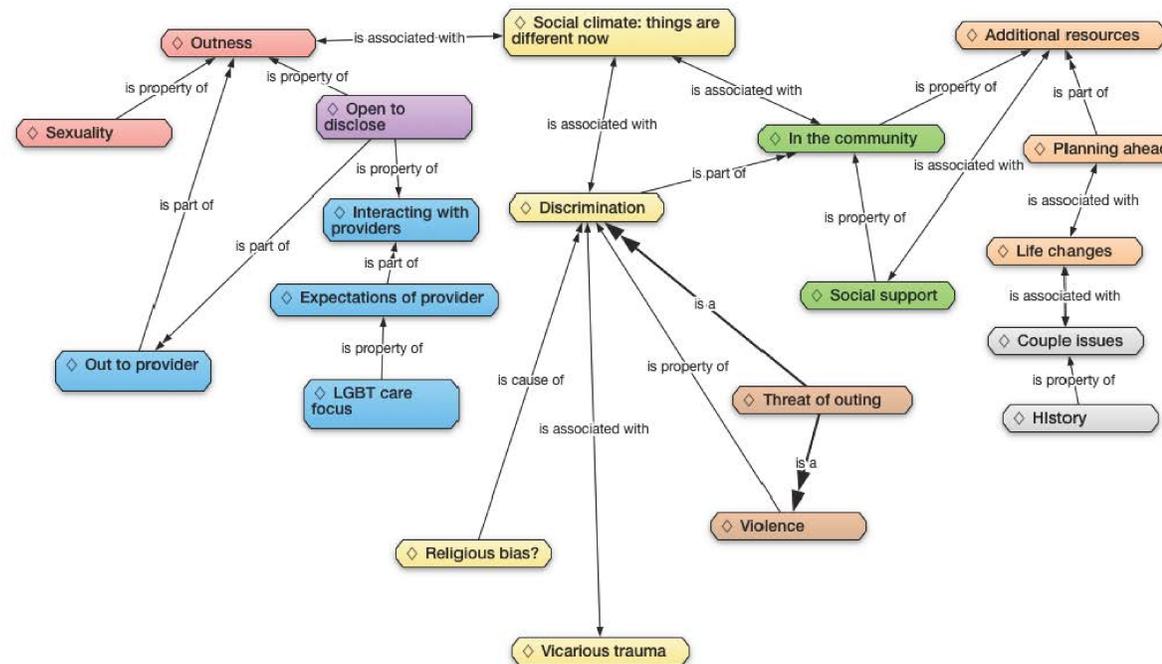
## STUDY PURPOSE

- To develop increased understanding of the attitudes toward and experiences of aging and accessing elder-specific services among LGBT elders.

## METHODS

- Focus group study conducted in Orange County, California.
- 10 individual semi-structured interviews with local **LGBT elders 65 and older.**
- Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.
- Transcripts were analyzed via **thematic analysis** using *ATLAS.ti* software.
- Initial open codes were clustered into families, then broader themes.
- Results are being used to develop educational programs for geriatric workforce & healthcare professionals, creating a responsive, compassionate healthcare system for LGBT elders.

Figure 1. Thematic Coding Scheme



Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
<b>Outness</b>	<b>Things are Different Now</b>	<b>Additional Resources</b>
<p><i>“I mean it’s not something I’ll say: ‘Oh some kind of... Exodus or hi, I’m gay.’ (Laughs) I mean it’s just like...we are just like everybody else, so it’s not like what you say, ‘Hi, I’m (name). And I’m white.’ .... no I guess I don’t explain it. If it comes up, I mean it comes up.”</i></p>	<p><i>“So, they sent him to some kind of... Exodus or something like that. I don’t know what it was but ..., they were hooking up electrodes to his testicles and showing him pictures of nude women and nude men. And if he responded to the nude men, he would be shocked.”</i></p>	<p><i>“And then, we went and got powers of attorney for each other. So that we could show those and get access that way. One of the reasons we decided on California, as opposed to Texas, is because there genuinely is a difference in attitude out here, generally speaking.”</i></p>

## RESULTS

- Identified major themes were **“Outness,” “Things are Different Now,”** and **“Additional Resources.”**
- These describe: participants’ comfort being “out” in community and with health care providers; perceptions of how the treatment LGBT persons received had changed in their lifetimes, and things they felt were helpful or were lacking in the community.
- Uniquely, **“Things are Different Now,”** encompassed **“Vicarious trauma:”** codes identifying participant reports of negative or violent experiences they attributed to others’ reactions to LGBT identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Findings highlight strengths & remaining challenges in LGBT health care, particularly provision of **elder-specific resources.**
- Many **LGBT elders are accustomed to navigating social mores to avoid violence** or negative experiences relating to their LGBT status.
- It is vital that health care and social service systems seek ways to **meet the unique needs of LGBT elders.**

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- This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.