



Advocacy &
Services for
LGBTQ+ Elders

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Testimony

New York State Senate and New York State Assembly
SFY27 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Health

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Submitted by:

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On behalf of SAGE and the LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV whom we serve, thank you to the members of the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today and providing a platform to speak on the FY27 State Budget priorities.

Founded in New York in 1978, SAGE is the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ older people. We have been serving LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV for over four decades. We provide comprehensive social services and community-building programs through our network of LGBTQ+ welcoming older adult centers across New York City – called “SAGE Centers” – and through our partners across the state, including in the Hudson Valley, Syracuse, and Rochester. SAGE has also worked with leading developers to open New York's first two LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing developments located in Brooklyn and the Bronx, each of which house a state-of-the-art, ground-floor SAGE Center that provides comprehensive LGBTQ+-centered aging services. Among the resident services SAGE provides are SAGE Center programming, wellness checks, grocery delivery, and care coordination with other providers and caregivers. Both developments are in neighborhoods with few services for the LGBTQ+ community, resulting in significant demand in services, especially among the low-income and formerly homeless elders living in and around these developments.

We also serve older veterans through our SAGEVets program, a statewide initiative created with support from the New York State Legislature to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ older veterans. The military's long history of enforcing anti-gay and anti-trans policies followed by the discriminatory “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” (DADT) law, has created many barriers between older LGBTQ+ veterans and their Federal VA benefits, increasing their reliance on state and local programs to meet their needs. Additionally, LGBTQ+ veterans are four times more likely to report finding it difficult to get by financially and more than twice as likely to report being unable to pay some bills over the past month, compared to non-LGBTQ+ veterans.¹ Through SAGEVets, we help LGBTQ+ older veterans navigate the VA to get the benefits they deserve and provide support with discharge upgrades for those who received an other than honorable discharge characterization due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Helping these LGBTQ+ older veterans gain access to all the Federal VA benefits and state-level benefits to which they are entitled can provide life-changing support. It ensures that all veterans, including LGBTQ+ veterans, can access all their federal benefits, instead of relying solely on State programs to address their housing and healthcare needs.

¹ Federal Reserve Board. (last accessed January 2026). "Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking". https://www.federalreserve.gov/consumerscommunities/shed_data.htm.

Finally, our SAGETrans program is an essential initiative designed to support and empower transgender and non-binary older adults. Considering the current political climate, where transgender rights are increasingly under scrutiny, and trans people are faced with increasingly draconian discriminatory laws and policies, the need for these services is more critical than ever. SAGETrans provides a safe space and vital resources for transgender and non-binary individuals over the age of 50, who often experience a compounded marginalization due to their age and gender identity. By offering services like healthcare support, social connection, legal assistance, and advocacy, the program helps to bridge gaps in resources that many older transgender individuals face, which is crucial in this political environment.

I'm here today to express concern along with other advocates that, despite New York being in a strong financial position, older adults are being left out of the state's FY27 budget priorities. Services for older New Yorkers are crucial as the population of New Yorkers aged 60 and older is growing five times faster than those under 18, with LGBTQ+ elders making up a significant part of this rapidly growing older population. New York is home to the fourth-largest population of older adults in the US with 3.2 million individuals (about 16% of the population) over age 65.

Additionally, people over 50 are acquiring HIV at increasing rates. In 2023, New York State reported 2,029 new HIV diagnoses, with 12.6% occurring among individuals aged 50 and older. This age group now comprises 57% of people living with diagnosed HIV in the state, with 74% of all cases occurring among those aged 40 and older. Furthermore, older adults are more likely to receive a concurrent AIDS diagnosis, with 36% of new HIV cases among those over 50 also being diagnosed with AIDS within 30 days of their initial diagnosis.² LGBTQ+ elders and older people living with HIV continue to be impacted by the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly expanding cost of living. This is not only because of their age, but also high levels of underlying health conditions, higher levels of poverty, food and housing insecurity, lower access to health care and supportive services, and mistrust of government and other institutions based on discrimination and mistreatment. All of these challenges are even further exacerbated for transgender elders and LGBTQ+ older people of color. These statistics highlight the growing need for targeted prevention, care, and support services for older adults, including transgender and non-binary individuals, to ensure equitable access to healthcare and resources.

SAGE's constituents—LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV—are often invisible, disconnected from services, and severely isolated. As they age and need more assistance and care, LGBTQ+ elders and people aging with HIV have fewer familial options than older people in general. They often cannot rely on children, spouses, or relatives for care, and rarely have the financial resources to pay for private in-home care. They also experience significant health disparities, including increased rates of disability, poor physical and mental health, and alcohol and tobacco use. About 14% of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers over 50 report frequent poor physical health and transgender New Yorkers of all ages are nearly 50% more likely to report being in fair or poor health when compared to non-transgender respondents, even when controlling for age and education. These health disparities are rooted in the lack of access to competent, inclusive, and affordable health care systems, and social isolation.

Because of the inconsistency and insufficient cultural competency of many mainstream, non-governmental supports in their work with LGBTQ+ older adults, the contributions of community service providers is absolutely essential. Nearly 60% of LGBTQ+ older adults report feeling a lack of companionship and 53 percent report feeling isolated from others, with transgender older adults reporting higher levels of loneliness than non-transgender older adults, even after controlling for socio-economic differences.³ Research has shown that social connectedness is an

² New York State Department of Health (December 2025). HIV/AIDS Statistics in New York State.

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/statistics/>

³ Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., Kim, H.-J., Emlet, C. A., Muraco, A., Erosheva, E. A., Hoy-Ellis, C. P., Goldsen, J., Petry, H. (2011). The Aging and Health Report: Disparities and Resilience among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults. Seattle: Institute for Multigenerational Health.

important factor in healthy aging and impacts happiness, health, and lifespan.⁴ Social isolation and loneliness are associated with poor health, with some researchers equating the health risks of prolonged isolation with smoking 15 cigarettes a day.⁵

Despite these growing needs, funding for critical aging services remains flat while 70,000 older adults outside of New York City alone languish on waitlists. The State took an excellent first step to help ensure that New Yorkers can age with dignity and independence by investing \$3 million to develop its Master Plan for Aging (MPA). No new money, however, has been granted to implement its recommendations. Among the MPA's recommendations is providing funding that will allow Area Agencies on Aging to expand both community-based aging services, like many of those provided by SAGE, and in-home care services, by hiring home health and personal care aides to reduce waitlists and reaffirm the State's commitment to helping older adults age in place in their own communities.

Additionally, investment in workforce recruitment, education, and training is needed to address current staffing shortages and to prepare for the anticipated rise in demand for personal care aides, which is expected to increase to 700,000 in 2028, compared to just 440,000 in 2018. Due to staff turnover, the MPA estimated that an additional one million job positions will need to be filled over that period in order to meet demand. By establishing scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, and tax incentives, the State can increase the number of nurse educators and incentivize care workers to enter fields like geriatrics and geriatric psychiatry. The MPA also recommends providing funding for the Department of Health to establish Regional Caregiver Support Hubs to provide support services for individuals training to become direct caregivers and Regional Direct Care Training Centers to increase availability and access to training.

Beyond the professionals providing care, there is also a growing need to support the many informal caregivers in the state. The New York State Office for the Aging estimates that there are currently 4.1 million informal caregivers providing over 2.6 billion hours of unpaid care each year. Among LGBTQ+ older adults, 21 percent have provided care to friends, compared to only 6 percent of non-LGBTQ+ older adults.⁶ Additionally, 54 percent of LGBTQ+ elder care recipients receive care from their partner.⁷ On average, informal caregivers are spending over \$7,000 each year on out-of-pocket expenses including medical equipment, home modifications, and other assistive technology.⁸ Following through on the MPA's recommendation to create a \$6,000 caregiver tax credit and a reimbursement program for caregiving expenses would go a long way in helping to alleviate the financial burden on the millions of family members, friends, and neighbors who help older adults in their daily living.

We urge the State Assembly and the Governor to follow through on the promise made by the MPA and New York's commitment to being an aging-friendly state by providing funding for some of the MPA's most important recommendations, including investment in training and workforce development, expanding and improving existing community-based programs, and providing support for informal caregivers and veterans.

In addition, as we shared at the top of the letter, SAGE provides a wealth of services and supports to LGBTQ+ older people and older people living with HIV, which are more important than ever in these trying times. To support the

⁴ Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2003). Social isolation and health, with an emphasis on underlying mechanisms. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 46(3 Suppl), S39-S52. PMID: 14563073.

⁵ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>

⁶ MetLife Mature Market Institute. (2010). Still OutStill Aging: The MetLife Study of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Baby Boomers [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://www.asaging.org/sites/default/files/files/mmi-still-out-still-aging.pdf>

⁷ Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. (2011). The Aging and Health Report: Disparities and Resilience among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults.

⁸ Skufca, L., Rainville, C. (2021, June 29). Caregiving Can Be Costly — Even Financially. AARP. <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/ltss/family-caregiving/family-caregivers-cost-survey/>

vital programming and services for LGBTQ+ older New Yorkers and New Yorkers living with HIV, SAGE respectfully requests the following designation in the SFY27 Budget, totaling \$850,000 in funding from the New York State Legislature. This includes \$650,000 of continued funding and \$200,000 to expand programming for the growing population of older LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, including veterans and the increasingly marginalized population of transgender and non-binary older New Yorkers:

- **\$350,000** (renewal/increase) to support residents in New York State's first LGBTQ+-welcoming elder housing developments. This includes care management and support services to low-income, predominantly LGBTQ+ elder residents in and around these developments, and in-person SAGE Center programming, general services, and expenses in operating the ground-floor SAGE Centers located in these buildings. (FY26 funded at 300K)
- **\$300,000** (renewal/increase) for our SAGEVets program, a statewide program that supports LGBTQ+ elders who are veterans by helping them navigate the VA to get the benefits they deserve; improving their overall health and wellness; and providing referrals to counsel regarding discharge status upgrades for those who received an other than honorable discharge characterization due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. (FY26 funded at 200K) Vet & OCFSs lined out \$100k each
- **\$200,000** (renewal/increase) to support SAGE's culturally competent care management services at SAGE Center Bronx and SAGE Center Brooklyn, located in Crotona Pride House and Stonewall House respectively. (FY26 funded at 150K) OTDA

Thank you so much to the New York State Legislature for its past and enduring support of SAGE's work and for providing me with this opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with you to address the needs of LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders in New York and answering any of your questions.

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