

Creating community, battling loneliness among LGBTQ seniors

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Karen Fredriksen Goldsen. Credit: Dennis Wise/U. of Washington

Research shows that LGBTQ older adults are at higher risk for many chronic medical conditions, yet are also resilient and proactive when it comes to taking care of their health.

But one burden for LGBTQ older adults is more subtle and pervasive: [social isolation](#).

A [health hazard](#) of its own, loneliness has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, early onset of disability, greater risk of cognitive decline and premature mortality. And while accessing affordable, stable housing is an issue for the [aging population](#) at large, LGBTQ seniors are particularly vulnerable to difficulties securing housing and finding supportive communities, said Karen Fredriksen Goldsen, a University of Washington professor of social work and principal investigator of the landmark [longitudinal study](#), "[Aging with Pride: National Health, Aging, and Sexuality/Gender Study](#)."

Launched in 2010, the National Institute on Aging, recently awarded nearly \$3 million to Aging with Pride for the next five years. Researchers are following over 2,400 LGBTQ adults, ranging in age from 50 to over 100, in every census division throughout the United States.

Aging with Pride, launched in 2010, has examined specific health conditions as well as [subpopulations](#) and behaviors that contribute to [quality of life](#). Its data show that 55% of LGBTQ older adults live alone, and more than one-third are socially isolated.

In Seattle, the GenPride Center, founded by Fredriksen Goldsen, is working to combat that.

Located on Capitol Hill and established with the help of Fredriksen Goldsen's research, the GenPride Center provides classes, activities and services for LGBTQ seniors. It's the first multipurpose LGBTQ senior center in Seattle and King County.

"The goal of GenPride is to create community, to provide specialized

services and connect LGBTQ [older adults](#), their families and their communities to resources," Fredriksen Goldsen said. "It's a place for people to call home. It's a community center, and the goal is to be able to embrace LGBTQ elders and their allies."

"Social isolation can affect anyone of any generation," Fredriksen Goldsen added. But research focused on the LGBTQ community, which has historically experienced significant social exclusion, provides proven and practical pathways to building strong social networks for all generations experiencing debilitating loneliness, she said.

"It's really important for people to age in community, because they need to stay connected. They need to have a community that supports them and ensures they are connected to three or more people," Fredriksen Goldsen said. "Much of what we're learning here supports the well-being of all elders and is responsive to our increasingly diverse society."

Provided by University of Washington

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