# University of Kent develops inclusive care guidance for older LGBTQ+ people



In a significant stride towards inclusive care provision, researchers at the University of Kent, in collaboration with Surrey and Hertfordshire universities, have unveiled new guidance aimed at supporting care homes in delivering better services for older LGBTQ+ individuals. This initiative is part of the 'Creating Inclusive Residential Care for LGBTQ+ Elders' (CIRCLE) project, which focuses on understanding and enhancing care practices for LGBTQ+ users.

These guidelines, now available for free download, come on the heels of research highlighting the unique challenges faced by older LGBTQ+ individuals within care settings. Lead researcher, Dr Jolie Keemink, emphasised the necessity of these improvements. "Research shows that the older LGBTQ+ population is expected to rely more heavily on social care than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts because they are less likely to have children and more likely to experience a lack of social support," Keemink noted. Additionally, older LGBTQ+ individuals often face distinct health risks, further elevating their need for inclusive care.

The urgency of this initiative is underscored by findings from a study conducted by Stonewall, revealing that 61% of LGB individuals lack confidence in the current social care and support services' ability to meet their needs. Moreover, 47% of LGB respondents expressed discomfort about being open regarding their sexuality with care home staff. This discomfort and lack of confidence have led many older LGBTQ+ individuals to consider 'going back in the closet' to ensure their safety in care environments.

Alarmingly, an increasing number of cases of homophobic abuse in care settings have been reported. The elderly abuse charity Compassion in Care registered over 400 complaints of such incidents via their helpline. These concerns were poignantly depicted in the short film Ted & Noel, which chronicles the experiences of Gay Liberation Front veteran Ted Brown. The film highlights the abuse suffered by his civil partner, Noel, in a Croydon care home in 2018.

Dr Keemink elaborated on the broader context affecting older LGBTQ+ individuals, noting that at least 1 million people over the age of 50 identify as LGBTQ+. "These generations have lived through decades of discriminatory policies and laws that have severely impacted their confidence in public services," Keemink wrote in a blog post. She explained that the cumulative trauma, stress, and internalised stigma stemming from these experiences have considerable health implications for the LGBTQ+ community. Hence, the need for explicitly inclusive services to foster an environment where individuals feel safe to express their true selves.

The newly developed guidance was formulated with input from older LGBTQ+ individuals and care home managers alike. It aims to offer practical, easily implementable steps to cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere within care homes. The hope is that these actionable measures will significantly improve the quality of life and care for LGBTQ+ elders, providing them with the dignity and respect they deserve in their later years.