

UPLIFT LGBT CAREWORK IN THE AMERICAN JOBS PLAN



movement advancement project ►

INTRODUCTION

The recently announced American Jobs Plan creates a unique opportunity to lift-up the care workforce and to provide vital services and protections for LGBT older people—two populations that too often feel invisible. Nearly one-quarter of the nation’s LGBT population are ages 50 and older.¹ These LGBT older people—the so-called “Stonewall Generation”—fought their entire lives to escape from the closet. Yet too often they feel compelled to go back into the closet to get the care that they need as they age.

The Americans Jobs Plan and its substantial investment in workforce development, increased funding for home and community-based care for older people and those living with disabilities, and stronger job supports for care workers, is critical for LGBT older adults and their caregivers. By investing in LGBT cultural competency training for the care workforce, care workers will be empowered with the tools they need to treat all of those in their care with the dignity and respect that they deserve. With these investments in workforce development and training plus increased pay, benefits, and job security for caregivers, LGBT older people won’t feel compelled to return to the closet to get the culturally-competent care that they need to remain independent and stay in their communities. And the American taxpayer will ultimately save money when we can obviate Medicaid’s need to pay for premature or unnecessary institutionalization.



THE AMERICANS JOBS PLAN

In March 2021, President Biden proposed an ambitious and much-needed infrastructure plan called The American Jobs Plan. In addition to vital physical infrastructure needs that have long been neglected, the plan also addresses the gaps in our nation’s caregiving infrastructure. Among the key components:

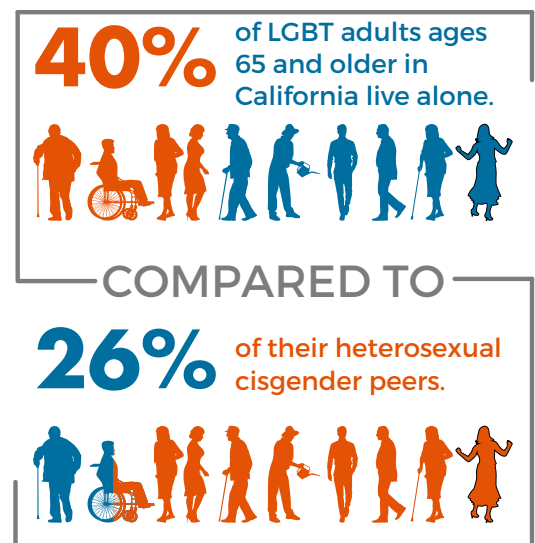
¹ [LGBT Demographic Data Interactive](#). (January 2019). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

- It would invest \$400 billion to expand access to home and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities.
- The plan also boosts Medicaid’s “Money Follows the Person” program to support people in transitioning from facilities such as skilled nursing facilities to home and community-based services.
- \$100 billion would be invested in workforce development programs that can provide supports for older adults including wraparound services, counseling, case management, and high-quality training.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the extent to which caregivers are often underpaid, undervalued, and not given essential training opportunities and the ways in which millions of families rely on such caregiving, often provided by women of color. This new plan recognizes both the needs of families across the country and the valuable services that caregivers are providing at great risk to themselves, especially during COVID-19.

IMPORTANCE OF THE AMERICANS JOBS PLAN FOR LGBT OLDER PEOPLE

LGBT older people are more likely than their non-LGBT peers to be single or living alone and less likely to have children to care for them². In California, for example, 40% of LGBT adults ages 65 and older lived alone compared to 26% of straight older adults³. As a result, they may be more likely to rely on paid caregivers. Especially given that discrimination against LGBT people remains an issue and, in many states and under federal law, discrimination by a caregiver, even one that is paid by federal or state funds such as Medicaid or Medicare, such discrimination is not illegal. Several studies have found that LGBT older people are fearful of discrimination from social services agencies and may delay care. What’s more, many LGBT older people report experiencing discrimination in care settings such as nursing homes. Nearly one-third of lesbian and gay older adults in a survey said their greatest concern about aging was discrimination related to their sexual orientation. These fears are likely heightened for those LGBT older people seeking in-home caregiving assistance where they may solely be dependent on one person and mistreatment may not be witnessed by anyone else who could help or intervene.



² Choi, S.K. & Meyer, I.H. (2016). [LGBT Aging: A Review of Research Findings, Needs, and Policy Implications](#). Los Angeles: The Williams Institute.

³ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/aging-lgbt-adults-ca/>

⁴ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Aging-Aug-2016.pdf>

SPOTLIGHT: SAGECARE & TRAINING FOR CAREGIVERS

SAGECare is the only national LGBT aging cultural competency training and credentialing program. The SAGECare training program engages in-home caregivers, long-term care and skilled nursing staff, and all other professionals who work with older adults in both in-person and online trainings to build the skills and sensitivities they need to provide person-directed care to LGBT people.

Many LGBT people are afraid to reach out for care because they do not trust that providers will treat them with compassion and respect. In fact, because of a history of discrimination, many believe that care providers will hurt, abuse, or neglect them. That is why training is so important. The SAGECare program focuses on helping to build empathy and awareness about the unique needs of LGBT older people, and give providers skills to have affirming interactions.

All SAGECare trainings are evaluated for their effectiveness and impact. Researchers at the Silberman School of Aging at Hunter College review evaluation data, showing statistically significant improvements in learner attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to LGBT older adults. These evidence-informed trainings make a clear, positive impact on quality of care. Agencies that participate also earn the SAGECare credential, which allows them to publicly communicate their commitment to training and inclusion, providing LGBT people with a way to evaluate and seek out affirming care providers.

CONCLUSION

As part of the American Jobs Plan's investment in the care economy and the millions of workers who help LGBT older people and those living with disabilities, investments in cultural competency trainings is key. Through workforce development trainings, programs like SAGECARE can provide caregivers with the tools they need to navigate diverse clients and families, to increase familiarity with LGBT people and other populations that often experience discrimination in these settings. As articulated in the plan, "Aging relatives and people with disabilities deserve better. They deserve high-quality services and support that meet their unique needs and personal choices."⁵ Caregivers deserve fair wages, stronger benefits, job protections, and the tools they need to meet the needs of all elders in their care.

⁵ The White House, Briefing Room. (March 31, 2021). [Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Plan.](#)